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## THE JOURNAL

International Journal of Arts, Languages, Linguistics and Literary Studies is a referred journal published by the Editorial Board, Imo State University, Faculty of Humanities, Department of French, Owerri, Imo State, Nigeria. All views on conclusions contained in the journal are those of the authors of the articles. JOLLS prioritises dissemination of original research works of academics in Nigeria and international tertiary institutions. The Editorial Board hopes that the journal will serve as an effective medium for rapid communication among researches on language, linguistics and literary studies, in Nigeria and beyond.

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## NATIONAL CONSCIOUSNESS, COMMITMENT, AND THE CONSTRUCTION OF A ROBUST MULTIRACIAL DEMOCRACY: A CRITICAL ANALYSIS OF NICHOLAS MHONGO'S DOG EAT DOG AND AFTER TEARS

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### Abstract

Emerging from the historic 1994 elections that dismantled apartheid, post-apartheid South Africa continues to grapple with profound socio-economic and political challenges that threaten the consolidation of its multiracial democracy. This article critically examines Nicholas Mhongo's *Dog Eat Dog* (2004) and *After Tears* (2007), exploring how the novels articulate national consciousness, individual and collective responsibility, and the moral obligations required to strengthen the nation's democratic project. Through a postcolonial lens, drawing on concepts such as the centre/margin dynamic, the Self/Other binary, hybridity, irony, and civic responsibility, the study argues that Mhongo positions both citizens and the ANC-led political leadership as co-architects of a robust multiracial democracy. The analysis demonstrates that national consciousness, rooted in ethical conduct, attitudinal transformation, and civic engagement, is essential for addressing the intertwined challenges of crime, corruption, poverty, racial chauvinism, and youth mediocrity. Ultimately, the paper contends that the sustainability of South Africa's democratic aspirations depends on the reciprocal commitments of both citizens and political elites to uphold the constitutional values that define the Rainbow Nation.

**Keywords:** **Keywords:** post-apartheid, national consciousness, individual and collective commitment, nation(hood)

### Introduction

Despite the formal end of apartheid and the establishment of democratic governance in 1994, South Africa continues to grapple with persistent racial tensions, socio-economic inequalities, corruption, crime, and civic disengagement. These challenges undermine national cohesion and complicate the country's efforts to build a truly integrated multiracial democracy. While sociological and political scholarship has extensively explored these issues, relatively little attention has been devoted to how contemporary South African fiction, particularly the works of Nicholas Mhongo articulates pathways toward democratic consolidation through national consciousness, civic responsibility, and ethical citizenship. This gap provides the impetus for the present study.

The establishment of a multiracial democracy in 1994 marked a watershed moment in

South Africa's political history. Yet, three decades after apartheid, the nation continues to confront entrenched racial tensions, pervasive poverty, endemic corruption, rampant crime, and widespread socio-economic disparities. These challenges expose persistent fractures within the national fabric, raising questions about the extent to which South Africa has realised the aspirations of the Rainbow Nation. As scholars such as Anne-Marie Singh (2008) argue, that:

'Post-apartheid' does not so much refer to the end of apartheid and the beginning of a new liberal democratic era. It did not begin with the release of Nelson Mandela from prison in February 1990 or with the first democratic elections in April 1994. Instead, 'post-apartheid' is [...] the emergence of new ways of thinking about how to organize and administer

political, economic and everyday life'.

(p.4)

In the opinion of the political analyst, the significance of post-apartheid extends beyond the formal termination of the system of apartheid, the advent of liberal democracy, the release of Nelson Mandela, or even the country's first democratic elections. While these landmark events undeniably constitute the foundational basis of South Africa's ongoing socio-economic and political evolution, they do not, in themselves, capture the full import of the concept. Annie-Marie Singh's (2008) argues that the successful crystallization of the Rainbow Nation is contingent upon "[...] new ways of thinking about how to organize and administer [the current] political, economic and everyday life" (p. 4) in contemporary South Africa. At this point, a notable convergence becomes apparent between Singh's indication of the way forward for the nation and Mhlongo's implicit authorial propositions regarding how post-apartheid South Africa might consolidate the political aspirations and ideological project of the Rainbow Nation already set in motion.

Nicholas Mhlongo's *Dog Eat Dog* (2004) and *After Tears* (2007) provide incisive fictional reflections on the challenges confronting post-apartheid nation-building. Through vivid portrayals of township life, youth disillusionment, racial tension, and political expectation, Mhlongo offers a critique of the socio-political contradictions that complicate South Africa's democratic consolidation. His novels foreground the need for both individual and collective commitment to the values of responsibility, civic duty, and social cohesion. They also draw attention to the indispensable role of the ANC-led political leadership in reinforcing constitutional rights, promoting accountability, and shaping a culture of democratic participation.

Building on postcolonial theoretical perspectives including Bhabha's ideas on hybridity, centre/margin relations, civic responsibility, and recognition this paper argues that Mhlongo conceptualises national consciousness as a transformative ethos essential to the construction of a robust multiracial democracy. His works illuminate the importance

of moral consciousness, attitudinal change, and shared responsibility in addressing pressing national concerns, ranging from racialised hostility and poverty to corruption, crime, and HIV/AIDS. Accordingly, this study examines how Mhlongo's narratives propose pathways towards national unity and the deepening of democratic culture in post-apartheid South Africa.

The objectives of this study are fourfold. First, it seeks to examine how Mhlongo employs fictional characters to articulate the meaning of national consciousness within the post-apartheid context. Second, it analyses the interplay between individual responsibility, collective commitment, and the broader processes of democratic nation-building as depicted in *Dog Eat Dog* and *After Tears*. Third, the study investigates the relationship between civic behaviour and political accountability in Mhlongo's imaginative reconstruction of post-apartheid society. Finally, it highlights the socio-political relevance of the novels by identifying the remedies they propose for South Africa's contemporary challenges, including racial tension, corruption, poverty, crime, and moral decline.

### **Methodology**

This study employs close textual analysis, contextual interpretation, and postcolonial reading strategies. Passages from *Dog Eat Dog* and *After Tears* are examined for their narrative techniques, symbolic structures, characterisation, and thematic engagements with democratic citizenship, racial integration, crime, corruption, youth identity, and moral responsibility. The method is interpretive, qualitative, and grounded in socio-political literary criticism.

### **National Consciousness and Post-apartheid Public Sphere**

Within the context of contemporary South Africa, national consciousness in the public sphere denotes both individual and collective awareness of citizens, alongside their commitment to fulfilling civic responsibility in the nation's reconstruction process. Actually, the latter finds expression in the recommendation proposed by Singh (2008) when the analyst talks about the intrinsic meaning of post-apartheid. Accordingly, many of the challenges threatening the

consolidation of the country's multiracial democracy may be mitigated if South Africans cultivate a stronger sense of civic duty and actively uphold values foundational to their new nation. Mhlongo, in this regard, emphasizes the necessity of active citizen participation in nation-building, irrespective of their race, ethnicity, and political affiliation, or social class. The post-apartheid dispensation has created the conditions for an inclusive public sphere – an ideal to which every democratic society aspires. Yet, the consolidation of this achievement rests on the conscientious engagement of the citizenry. As Yul Derek Davids (2010) aptly notes:

[...] South Africa's democratic Constitution is characterised by a range of independent watchdog agencies and commissions all guaranteeing citizens political and socio-economic rights. However, a constitution, relatively well-run elections and stable elected representative institutions are not sufficient as enablers of democracy. Sustainable and consolidated democracies require people who are willing to support, defend and sustain it. (p.68)

Building on Davids' observation, one may argue that South Africa's attainment of an inclusive multiracial character constitutes one of the most prized values that citizens are obliged to safeguard, for it embodies the outcome of decades of struggle. Consolidating this achievement, however, requires the eradication of the persistent racial chauvinism that continues to shape interpersonal and social relations within the country. This position, upheld by Mhlongo (2004), highlights the imperative of collective commitment among all South Africans determined to forge a more cohesive identity that transcends diverse racial backgrounds within a unified socio-political entity. The centrality of commitment becomes particularly evident in Njomane's report, where he observes that:

The call to vote had drawn people from all walks of life. There were teachers and pupils, lecturers and students, sex hawkers and street vendors, business people and laymen, employed and unemployed, unemployables and hobos,

secretaries and housemaids, taxi drivers and sportspeople. It was the moment that most of us had been waiting for years to experience. (p.58)

Njomane's observation captures the collective resolve of South Africans to break free from the oppressive grip of apartheid regimes. This determination is symbolised by the diverse groups portrayed by the narrator, whose participation in the country's first democratic and multiracial elections expressed a shared commitment to forging a united socio-political identity - the 'rainbow nation'. By foregrounding this moment, Njomane's highlights South Africans' willingness to embrace the principles of a multiracial democracy founded on the respect of the rights of all citizens, irrespective of their race or social classes. The inaugural multiracial elections, which marked the reinvention of South Africa's contemporary identity after decades of division and violence, becomes not only a symbol of collective engagement but also the realisation of the hopes and aspirations of a people long oppressed yet determined to reconstruct a just society. This vision is most powerfully described by Njomane, who while reflecting on the election, observes:

[...] we all came there for different reasons. Our Big Brothers had promised beautiful things to those who lived a life of poverty, and I guess that the two homeless gentlemen ahead of me came to vote because of the promise of proper housing and employment. Some came to vote because of the promise of welfare grants, some because of the promise of free medical care; pensioners had come because of the promise of an increase in their grants so that it equalled that of their white counterparts. I was standing in that queue because we had been promised access to a better education. I wanted to vote for whoever claimed to have fought tooth and nail to overthrow the apartheid government so that I now found myself admitted to a formerly

whites-only institution. (Mhlongo, 2004, p. 61)

Njomane noted that the commitment of South African voters reflects a conscious awareness of the transformative significance of multiracial democracy. For the impoverished groups that constitute the various strata of a society in transition, democracy signifies the prospect of tangible socio-political change. This awareness underlies the unity of purpose evident in their collective resolve to support leaders who embody such change - metaphorically described as 'big Brothers.' For a populace long subjected and historically reduced from majority to minority status (Lowe, 1997; O'Reilly, 2001; Waldmeir, 1997; Frueh, 2003), this moment represented the first genuine opportunity to express civic aspirations and exercise democratic agency.

From a historical standpoint, the symbolism of the country's first multiracial elections as described by Mhlongo, can be likened to Tutu's (2000) assertion that these events marked not only a political transition but also a profound moral and spiritual renewal for the nation:

Those long hours helped us South Africans to find one another. People shared newspapers, sandwiches, umbrellas, and the scales began to fall from their eyes. South Africans found fellow South Africans - they realized what we had been at such pains to tell them, that they shared a common humanity, that race, ethnicity, skin color were really irrelevances. (p.7)

Similar to Mhlongo's description of citizens' commitment during the democratic elections, Tutu's view articulates the underlying spirit of nationhood within the South African context. Both viewpoints underscore the heightened awareness and collective commitment of all South Africans who are determined to reconstruct themselves as members of a unified political community. In indeed, Mhlongo's observation may be interpreted as a proposed solution to the persistent problem of racial chauvinism - one that could be overcome through collective commitment demonstrated in the citizens' determination to construct a new South Africa. The profound enthusiasm with

which South Africans participated in the country's first democratic, multiracial elections testifies to their refusal to remain a fragmented people. If a comparable determination were consistently applied to the challenge of racial tensions, such divisions could ultimately be eliminated from the nation's public and political spheres.

Mhlongo's (2004) stance is exemplified in the character of Dunga, who embodies the spirit of individual awareness and commitment essential to South Africa's nation-building process. Unlike the majority of South Africans who took to the street to celebrate the advent of multiracial democracy after the first democratic elections, Dunga remains focused on his professional responsibilities. As Njomane observes, even though a public holiday, Dunga insists on returning to the office, declaring "I have a lot of work to catch up on at the office and I'll probably work my arse off the whole bloody day [...] But I have to do it. I'm snowed under" (p.64) and cannot afford to neglect his duties. This look exposed his recognition that the consolidation of democracy requires more than symbolic celebration; it demands sustained commitment to the effective functioning of the state. By prioritising his work over the festivities, Dunga illustrates the values of responsibility, discipline, and civic duty that must guide South Africans in the ongoing project of nation-building. Thus, the distinctive element of Dunga's attitude lies in his conviction that the emergence of multiracial democracy is not an end in itself but rather the beginning of the greater task for which South Africans struggled throughout the long years of apartheid.

Mhlongo (2004) portrays Dunga as the epitome of a committed South African who has recognized his responsibility towards the needs of the emerging multiracial democracy. The symbolism of this character, within the broader scope of Mhlongo's vision of the nation-building process, is vividly delineated by Njomane. To justify his friend's seemingly unusual outlook Njomane recalls in a flashback that Dunga, who is two years his senior, had graduated from the University of the North in Turfloop with a B Juris degree in 1993, and by 1994 "[...] had started serving his articles at the Blackheath law firm

downtown in February" (p.66). The significance of this flashback in highlighting the character's commitment to the reconstruction of the new nation is further emphasized when Njomane explains that:

When I failed to get an exemption at my first attempt in standard ten, he had passed his. I think the reason Dunga got his matric exemption in 1990 when most of us failed was his determination to become a lawyer. His mother [...] encouraged him, and while we were sitting at home celebrating the release of political prisoners, Dunga often went to the Lenasia library to study. He also didn't involve himself much in the student protests that came with angry slogans like 'pass one - pass all' which some of us thought were the perfect way to get our exemptions. Because of that belief I had to go back and redo my matric the following year in order to get an exemption. (Mhlongo, 2004, p. 66)

In essence, Dunga's commitment to the needs of the new South Africa is evident in his response to the historic events of the 1990s, culminating in the country's first democratic elections. His maturity expressed through a strong sense of responsibility, assumes symbolic significance when his determination to be a lawyer emerges as the driving force behind his desire to participate in nation-building. For him, studying law is a way of preparing to join the country's future decision-makers, and what is most commendable about this outlook is his awareness that only hard work can enable him to fulfil this aspiration. This awareness explains his disinterest in the commonplace celebrations of his community, such as the release of political prisoners. In his view, the present - already secured by the advent of multiracial democracy – requires less celebration than preparation for the future. It is on this basis that he distances himself from the unrealistic students' protest marches of the early 1990s. The second basis for his commitment lies in his family fate as victims of the apartheid regimes. As Njomane recounts, "Dunga's father had disappeared in the

early 1970s when he was only a year old and it was still a mystery as to whether he was alive or dead. The authorities refused to presume him dead without any evidence, so his mother was still married to his ghost" (Mhlongo, 2004, p.66). His determination to become a lawyer thus reflects not only personal ambition but also a deep desire to contribute to justice in the new democracy, ensuring that the racially induced injustices of the past are never repeated.

Mhlongo (2004) exposes the persistence of racial, ethnic, and cultural chauvinism as a major obstacle to South Africa's nation-building process, stressing that such division can only be overcome through awareness of their irrelevance. His call is particularly directed at the black population, some of whom still harbour resentment towards the Afrikaner community despite the reconciliatory foundations of inclusive democracy. The controversy over renaming of national public holidays exemplifies this fragile reconciliation: while Dworkin's resistance highlights the lingering division, Babes' defence of the new leadership's decision reflects Mhlongo's stance that black South Africans must embrace such initiatives as essential to sustaining the peace and unity for which they had fought for decades. For Babes, Dworkin - like most blacks - is expected to view the government's decision as a positive gesture towards fostering reconciliation and a shared national purpose. The renaming of previously offensive public holidays is a necessary step to dismantle notions of cultural superiority and the Self/Other divide in democratic South Africa. Thus, Babes' call for black South Africans to uphold the new ethos of reconciliation is timely, as she tells Dworkin "[...] we cannot afford another war of hatred. We are tired and need peace and unity" (Mhlongo, 2004, p.213). Her outcry emphasizes the needed collective involvement in promoting peace and unity through symbolic changes that once evoked division.

Babes asserts that the symbolic erasure of historically ambiguous or offensive names, replaced by designations grounded in reconciliation, constitutes necessary measure for the consolidation of post-apartheid South Africa – a process that demands the active endorsement of

all citizens, particularly the black community. In her view, any stance falling short of this imperative, as exemplified by Dworkin, represents a retrogressive re-inscription of the racialized violence and antagonisms from which the nation has emerged as a multiracial democratic polity. This call for collective commitment is further reinforced by Njomane, who elucidates to Dworkin the broader socio-political significance of these transformations:

[...] I think the present name is best because there are no ambiguities about it [...] when the holiday was called Dingane's Day blacks and whites celebrated it differently. On the one hand whites celebrated their bravery in defeating Dingane. They dedicated this day to Dingane in order to fool black people into believing that the contribution that their troublesome hero had made to the history of South Africa was being honoured. The paradox was that as whites celebrated the death of the troublesome 'Kaffir King' [...] 'blacks mourned his death'. (Mhlongo, 2004, p. 214)

Like Babes, Njomane explains to his friend that the renaming of formerly offensive public holidays, such as Dingane's Day, serves as a symbolic act of burying the man-made divisions and constructs that separated blacks and whites for over four decades. Expounding on the significance of these changes, Njomane draws his friend's attention to the broader implications, which signal a new culture of peaceful coexistence, in which blacks and whites no longer perceive each other as victor and vanquished, but as a people sharing a common history and united by a common purpose. To Njomane, as to Babes, it is this vision that Dworkin - and symbolically, all blacks - should endorse, for it underpins the freedom they now enjoy as citizens with equal rights to those of whites.

Babes' and Njomane's calls for awareness and commitment, premised on the responsibility of black South Africans towards the new democracy, parallel Hannah Arendt's conception of civic responsibility, as noted by Bhabha (2003) who echoes her assertion, "we are

not born equal; we become equal as members of a group on the strength of our decision to guarantee ourselves mutual equal rights" (p.169). For her, legitimacy arises when individuals recognize their responsibility to the political entity that ensures equal rights for all. This view aligns with Babes' and Njomane's appeal to the Black community to accept aspects of the political settlement adopted by the new leadership. The future of South Africa, they crave for, depends on citizens' collective willingness to transcend the past, since only through such reconciliation can be the relevance and legitimacy of its multiracial democracy be secured.

Furthermore, Mhlongo's (2007) suggested solution to the persistent upsurge of racial tension is reflected in the argument between Bafana and his mother over the irrelevance of cultural and ethnic chauvinism, which still characterises the attitudes of many black South Africans. The significance of this debate lies in its symbolism, particularly in Bafana's call for collective awareness directed towards the black community, whose members are not yet prepared to embrace the multiracial and multicultural nature of their democracy. This becomes evident when he tells his mother, who represents the unforgiving blacks:

[...] the only black people that are preserving their culture are those that find it difficult to rise above the yoke of poverty [...] They're the ones selling fruit and vegetables in spaza shops and chicken feet on the pavements [...] You can't think big in African languages [...] and you can't move out of the township either. I don't want to be trapped in Soweto forever [...] when I enter our family house in Chi I can smell the poverty inside. (p. 175)

Bafana's defence of cultural pluralism constitute a clear appeal to black South Africans, symbolised by his mother, who remain reluctant to embrace the country's entrenched multiculturalism within a multiracial democracy. His stance acquires symbolic significance in the broader context of a new South Africa striving to transcend long-standing binaries of Self/Other, centre/margin

imposed by apartheid. In essence, Bafana's position may thus be read as Mhlongo's opinion of how post-apartheid South Africa can overcome the enduring legacy of racism and foster a prosperity that is mutually beneficial, particularly for the black population. This view becomes most apparent when Bafana insists to his mother that poverty in their community can only be alleviated if she and others renounce the ethnic and cultural chauvinism that continue to shape their worldview. Bafana calls on black South Africans to reject the ethno-cultural mindset that perpetuates the enduring effects of apartheid-imposed poverty. He contends that meaningful engagement with other races – symbolically represented by whites – and with the English Language and its associated cultural outlooks is essential for accessing the opportunities afforded by a democratic, multiracial South Africa.

In the light of the above, Mhlongo's characters, Babes, Njomane, and Bafana, exemplify Ernest Renan's assertion that "[...] the essence of a nation is that all individuals have many things in common, and also that they have forgotten many things" (Bhabha, 1995, p.19). Their calls underscore the imperative for South Africans to acknowledge a shared history of suffering on both sides of the former racial divide and to convert its legacies into the basis for constructing a cohesive, multiracial polity. By urging Dworkin – and, symbolically, the wider black community - to accept the renaming of public holidays, they advance the necessity of embracing whites as compatriots with whom they share a complex but unifying historical experience.

Similarly, Bafana's critique of black racial and ethnic chauvinism constitutes a call – symbolised through his mother – for the black community to embrace and commit to a new South African way of life ingrained in multiracialism and multiculturalism. For him, these represent the only viable pathways forward for black youths trapped in the vicious circle of township poverty. Against this backdrop, Bafana suggests that figures such as his mother and Dworkin must recognize the necessity of integrating into the emerging multicultural and multiracial order, which alone can improve their welfare after decades of

systemic deprivation. To conclude Mhlongo's position on the racial question, it can be argued that his characters advocate for a genuine hybridization of the South African public sphere – as the essential condition for enabling black South Africans to fully benefit from the opportunities of multiracial democracy. As Smith and Lindeman (1951) observe, "Persons striving to adapt themselves to the democratic way of life are required to discipline themselves to one variety of unity, namely unity which is achieved through the creative use of diversity" (p.91). This vision is reflected in the characters' actions: Dunga's awareness and commitment, Babes' and Njomane's views on the symbolic renaming of public holidays, and Bafana's endorsement of cultural pluralism, collectively portray Mhlongo's stance on overcoming racial and cultural chauvinism, a challenge that continues to hinder South Africa's transition into a fully realized multiracial democracy. In fact, the characters' calls for commitment align with Boyce's (1999) assertion that "nationhood is achieved within a state when the citizens of that particular country perceive themselves as belonging to a specific territory, actively identify themselves with the state institutions, and feel a sense of shared values" (p.236).

Mhlongo's critique of affirmative action and its detrimental effects in the townships reinforces, and runs parallel to, his broad perspective on racial tension. In line with the perspectives of Dunga, Babes, Njomane, and Bafana, Sis Zinhle's condemns the Sowetans' protest against the government's policy of prepaid water and electricity bills, dismissing their claims as unfounded while questioning the rationale behind the protest march:

Why? [...] I mean, the government has promised to write off all their debts if the people agree on the installation. Isn't that a good thing, chomza, huh? [...] You said that you owe R14000 in unpaid services. Imagine what that could do for someone experiencing financial problems [...] nothing is for free in this world, Chomza, and the people must learn. I heard the

government is willing to give six kilolitres of water and fifty kilowatts of electricity per month to those who allow the prepaid water and electricity meters to be installed. Is that not generous? (Mhlongo, 2007, pp. 161-62)

To Sis Zinhle, the Sowetans must support the new government, which is already addressing poverty in the townships through the subsidised basic services. She argues to Bafana's mother that their claims are unfounded, since government measures are to ensure that black communities now access essential amenities at reduced costs. Her rhetorical questions, directed to both her friend and symbolically to all black South Africans, show her position as a call for collective commitment to the ANC-led nation-building project. Crucially, she reminds her community that no democracy offers free services. In fact, Multiracial democracy and affirmative action, she insists, do not exempt blacks from contributing to national growth; rather, they provide an opportunity to join the leadership in promoting the welfare of all citizens. Through Sis Zinhle's stance, Mhlongo suggests that the success of nation-building depends on black South Africans recognising the self-defeating consequences of certain entrenched attitudes and ways of life.

So far, Mhlongo's position on the racial question and the way forward clearly reflects Njabulo Ndebele's view as to the responsibility of the post-apartheid writer, who must write with an awareness of the irony that surrounds the country's history of protest, since this provides a pathway towards attaining nationhood. As Ndebele argues, the post-apartheid writer's attempt to "moving 'beyond protest' [...] can only work if the writer genuinely believes in the oppressed, in the first instance, as makers of the future – a future that has today arrived or, is now arriving" (Geertsema, 2004, p.760). A critical analysis of Mhlongo's stance, in relation to South Africans' commitment during the first democratic elections, Dunga's sense of awareness and commitment, Babes' and Njomane's calls for responsibility from blacks, Bafana's defence of cultural pluralism, and Sis Zinhle's criticism of the protesting Sowetans,

provide apt illustrations of his use of irony. Mhlongo positions himself and the formerly oppressed - symbolised by his black characters - as agents in the reconstruction of a non-racial and democratic South Africa. This vision aligns with Ndebele's understanding of the writer's duty, namely to "[...] genuinely believes in the oppressed, in the first instance, as makers of the future – a future that has today arrived or, is now arriving" (Geertsema, 2004, p.760).

### Attitudinal Transformation and the Consolidation of Multiracial Democracy

In addition to the imperative of black South Africans' commitment to sustaining the reconciliatory foundation of their democracy by rejecting racial and cultural chauvinism, a change in attitude is crucial to consolidating of the nation's path to prosperity. Refraining from the regressive attitudes of the past is therefore central to addressing many of the country's challenges, including the misappropriation of affirmative action. Mhlongo (2004) argues that an attitudinal shift is essential for curbing violent crime, which persist in the townships partly because of a tacit tolerance of practices that encourage it. This view is delineated through Dunga's character, who calls for a collective commitment to values necessary for nation-building. His warning to Themba against purchasing stolen goods illustrates how such behaviour perpetuates social disorder and undermines reconstruction. The symbolic force of Dunga's stance is further revealed when Njomane recounts their encounter with two youths who are selling stolen musical equipment. While his friends consider the purchase as an opportunity to own such equipment, Dunga rebukes them, "Those goods might have been stolen from your relative or even from your own home, do you know that? [...]" ( p.97). For Dunga, buying stolen property indirectly sustains the cycle of robbery and violent crime, exposing the buyers themselves to potential victimization. From a broader symbolic perspective, Dunga's disapproval of Themba's attitude constitutes a call for black South Africans generally to confront the consequences of condoning crime and recognize that they risk becoming its ultimate victims. This is evident when Dunga, responding to Themba's reminder -

“Since when have you become a saint? [...] Have you forgotten that you bought the speakers for your musical system from the same people?” – replies, “That was two years ago” (Mhlongo, 2004, p. 97). This pertinent exchange highlights Dunga’s conviction that, with the advent of multiracial democracy, blacks such as Themba need to abandon the protest-oriented outlook that shaped their actions during apartheid and adopt a more constructive disposition aimed at fostering the unity now present in the country. Protest-driven acts of theft and violence, once endorsed by blacks such as Dunga as legitimate resistance against the apartheid state – where any action that could harm the white community was celebrated – are, in his view, no longer compatible with the contemporary socio-political ethos founded on reconciliation between blacks and whites. The symbolic significance of Dunga’s call for awareness and commitment, directed at Themba and others still trapped in the past, achieves its intended effect of awakening national consciousness when Njomane admits, in the midst of the argument between his friends, “I never uttered a word, but in a way I sided with Dunga” (Mhlongo, 2004, p. 97).

This indispensable need for national consciousness, inherent in Dunga’s stance, becomes clearer when Mhlongo (2004) deliberately creates a scene that symbolically reinforces the character’s position, which may also be read as reflective of the authors. This occurs when Njomane and Dunga witness a mob action on the streets of Johannesburg, where two black youths are lynched for stealing. The significance of the episode lies in Njomane’s shock when he declares:

[...] I caught a glimpse of one of the victims’ bloodstained face. My heart sank as I realised that his damaged face was familiar to me. He was one of the guys who had come to my house on the day of the national elections to negotiate the sale of some sound equipment. I looked at Dunga to see whether he had also recognised the man. (pp.184-85)

Njomane’s display of shock is significant because it emphasizes the relevance of Dunga’s call for awareness of the dangers of promoting crime. It

dawns on Njomane that the fatal end of these boys represents the destructive consequences of crime, which Dunga had previously tried to draw his friends’ attention to. If Njomane’s shock at the scene is important, Dunga’s remark to him - “so crime indeed pays [...] Remember what I was telling Themba the day he bought those stolen goods” (Mhlongo, 2004, p.185) - is even more symbolic, as he explicitly apportions blame to Themba and others like him for the loss of lives that could have been prevented if they had not condoned or promoted crime. Dunga’s outlook represents Mhlongo’s proposed solution to the recent upsurge in violent crimes in the country, though it carries a racial undertone. In other words, the author appears more concerned with what black South Africans can do to curb crimes than with what all South Africans collectively can do to arrest its spread. Nevertheless, if his racial group takes heed of the solution he propounds, then crimes of all kinds in the country could be considerably reduced.

In a manner similar to his treatment of crimes, Mhlongo (2007) indicates that the pervasive corruption existing in South Africa can only be mitigated through a heightened collective awareness of its destructive consequences and a resolute commitment to denouncing those who perpetuate it. This solution finds expression in the collective legal intervention of a group of lawyers who represent victims of corruption in the dispute between Bafana’s family and Mr Sekoto. The narrator indicated that Mr. Sekoto’s legal representatives have instituted charges against members of the narrator’s family, accusing them of fraudulently acquiring RDP houses in Slovovalley and Snake Park:

Those RDP houses originally belonged to Linda Motaung from Orlando East and Gugulethu Marumo from Meadowlands Zone 7 respectively [...] it seems Mr Sekoto’s lawyers have blown the whistle on the corrupt officials and contacted these people to lodge a claim against your brothers. (pp.73-74)

The actions of Mr Sekoto’s lawyers exemplify the necessity of collective commitment in the fight

against corruption in South Africa. Their defence of the victims of corrupt practices, and their opposition to perpetrators such as Bafana's uncles and the housing officials, symbolically underscores the imperative for those entrusted with upholding the laws to ensure the protection of the rights of the less privileged. From a postcolonial perspective, this group of lawyers, much like the protesting lesbians and gays, can be viewed as representatives of conscious South African citizenry whose interventions create spaces for speaking, (borrowing from Spivak (1995)), on behalf of marginalised groups who, by virtue of their silenced condition, risk becoming a new class of subalterns within a democratic, multiracial South Africa. From a political standpoint, these examples of collective actions reflect Steven Friedman's (2008) conception of the real meaning of democracy in the African perspective. This parallel between the fictional representations and Friedman's argument becomes evident when he contends that:

[...] understanding of democracy locates collective action by citizens at the core of the democratic project because it is through collective action that citizens both achieve and sustain democracy. Democratic broadening and deepening depend on the degree to which ever greater numbers of citizens enjoy the capacity to act increasingly effectively in concert to hold power-holders to account. (p.5)

From this critical standpoint, it may be argued that the actions of the gay and lesbian community, together with those of the lawyers representing Mr Sekoto, constitute significant efforts aimed at achieving, consolidating, and sustaining the foundational principles of South Africa's multiracial democracy. These instances, as previously discussed, may thus be read as Mhlongo's proposals for charting the way forward in the post-apartheid dispensation. Borrowing from Friedman (2008), such proposals emphasize the need for citizens to continually hold the custodians of state power accountable if they are to preserve and extend the freedom ushered in by multiracial democracy.

From a slightly different yet related angle on the discourse of crime, the episode involving Njomane and Thek's resistance to forgery and piracy illustrate symbolic rejection of the culture of illegality that undermines South Africa's economic integrity. Their refusal to succumb to the temptation of purchasing counterfeit Nike sports shoes, despite the appeal of a lower price, foregrounds an ethical stance against practices that perpetuate economic sabotage and normalize criminality in everyday life. In this regard, Njomane's intervention to dissuade Thek from acquiring the counterfeit item is not merely a moment of personal integrity but a microcosmic gesture toward safeguarding the values of authenticity, accountability, and collective economic responsibility in post-apartheid dispensation:

[...] I examined the shoe. It was different from other Nike shoes I knew. The logo on this particular shoe pointed in the opposite direction. Suspiciously I looked again: the logo started with a letter M instead of the usual N. Because of our over-familiarity with Nike logo, we had nearly bought a fake product. We were about to buy a Mike shoe. (Mhlongo, 2004, p.70)

One notices that the characters' rejection of the fake goods stems from their awareness of the destructive consequences of forgery and piracy on the economic growth of their country – a growth upon which the process of nation-building depends. This ill has a particularly negative impact on the local businesses that trade in authentic brands of both foreign and locally produced goods. Thus, when Njomane declares "[...] we negotiated our way through the crowded stalls on the pavement. We were no longer interested in buying anything. We were too busy trying to figure out whether everything sold by those vendors was a fake" (Mhlongo, 2004, p.71), it becomes a significant indication of the way forward in a country plagued by the undesirable consequences of fraud, forgery and even corruption. The symbolism of this incident lies in the fact that Mhlongo, through his main characters, advocates a boycott of counterfeit goods, which have become

a major obstacle to the nation's economic prosperity.

Apart from the above, post-apartheid South Africa is also a country plagued by the alarming prevalence of HIV/AIDS, and Mhlongo (2004) suggests that the solution to this crisis lies in a change of sexual habits among citizens. This is evident through Njomane and his cycle of friends - Dworkin, Babes, Themba and Thek – who emphasize the crucial need to raise awareness among young black South Africans, the group most severely affected by the pandemic. The author's concern for this vulnerable group is illustrated in a bar scene where the narrator and his friends encounter two provocatively dressed coloured girls. When Dworkin openly admires them, Babes warns him and the others: "Ho! Guys, you must be careful nowadays [...] because AIDS kills [...]" (p.119). In this moment, Babes issues a wake-up call not only to her male friends but also symbolically to all young black South Africans, underscoring the fatal consequence of reckless sexual behaviour. She draws their attention to the reality that the disease exists in their country and indiscriminately claims the lives of its victims. Thus, her warning stresses the urgent necessity for responsible sexual conduct among the youths.

The author's call for awareness among the black youths becomes particularly striking when Mhlongo presents Njomane as contracting a venereal disease. Far from being a mere subplot, this episode functions as a symbolic warning and an ironic commentary on the complacency of South African youths in the face of a health crisis of national proportions. Njomane's infection exposes the urgency of adopting responsible sexual behaviour as a prerequisite for curbing the spread of HIV/AIDS, a reality to which he had previously remained oblivious. Mhlongo's strategy here is deliberately ironic. Njomane only becomes conscious of the dangers of reckless sexual conduct after he has already fallen victim to its consequences. His visit to the university hospital, initially to treat what he considers a minor sexually transmitted infection, becomes a moment of reluctant self-awareness. The irony is deepened when he suddenly notices the HIV/AIDS awareness campaigns plastered on street

billboards – signs that had always been in his environment but that he had consistently ignored. This belated recognition mirrors the broader attitude of many youths who live amidst constant warnings but fail to internalize them until personal experience compels them. In this way, Mhlongo uses Njomane's personal lapse as a synecdoche for a generational crisis: the tendency of young people to disregard preventative messages until it is too late. This episode critiques not only individual irresponsibility but also a wider cultural negligence that normalizes risky sexual behaviour. By dramatizing Njomane's belated awareness, Mhlongo positions early consciousness and behavioural change as urgent conditions for survival, while simultaneously exposing the irony of a society saturated with warnings that remain largely unheeded:

I always ignored the big billboard at the end of the street, even though I passed it on my way to campus every day. However, that particular Monday it got my attention. There was a red ribbon on it and a hand holding a condom. The inscription read: DON'T BE SORRY, BE CAREFUL. AIDS KILLS. BE WISE AND ALWAYS USE A CONDOM. DON'T BECOME ANOTHER STATISTIC. I became very scared. The thought of the HIV and AIDS overwhelmed me as I limped my way towards the clinic.

(Mhlongo, 2004, p.140)

The billboard message epitomises the government's endeavour to foster public awareness, even though significant portion of the population, exemplified by Njomane, tends to disregard such initiatives. Njomane's case acquires symbolic proportion precisely because of the profound sense of guilt that overwhelms him as he passes the billboard, already afflicted by a venereal disease. His fearful reaction upon reading the message may be seen as evidence that the government's awareness campaign has achieved a measure of success, insofar as it suggests his future rejection of irresponsible sexual practice. Nevertheless, Njomane's belated realisation also highlights a broader social tragedy: unlike him,

many (black)South Africans are confronted with the devastating consequences of AIDS before recognizing that preventative measures were always within their reach. It is at this juncture that Mhlongo's call for awareness assumes critical significance. Through Njomane's experience, Mhlongo appeals to South Africans to embrace responsible sexual behaviour, emphasizing the misfortune of only acknowledging one's negligence after succumbing to its destructive outcomes.

Mhlongo (2007) equally advocates collective awareness as the most effective remedy against the pervasiveness of AIDS. Like Babes, Thek, and Njomane, Zero emerges as the central figure in the author's campaign against the pandemic. He adopts the position of a moralist when he advises the youths, symbolised by Bafana, on the importance of adopting responsible sexual behaviour. This is evident when he tells Bafana that Buju was once his girlfriend, but he ended the relationship when she chose to become a prostitute. Zero further cautions Bafana - who might be tempted to admire girls such as Buju - to be vigilant, since Buju like many other young women today:

[...] behave like those motor mechanics that you see in the Midway scrap yards [...] she's always lying on her back for men to screw her for money. She's a puff and pass, man. You can have her if you're curious to know about what's hiding under those panties, but I'm telling you now that those nice curves of hers are dangerous. She's a social worker. (p.49)

Zero's humorous comparison of Buju's behaviour - and by extension, that of other young women represented through her figure - to the repetitive labour of mechanics functions as a pointed rhetorical strategy that underlines the pervasive threat of the AIDS pandemic. The analogy, which juxtaposes Buju's sexual availability with the image of mechanics lying on their backs daily to repair vehicles, demonstrates the dangers of transactional sexuality in contemporary South Africa. Whereas the mechanic's posture serves a productive and socially constructive purposes,

Buju's posture is depicted as destructive, associated with the commodification of female sexuality and the risks of disease transmission. This representation renders her body a site of potential contagion, emblematic of broad social anxiety about the spread of HIV/AIDS. In this way, Zero emerges less as a mere moralist than as a narrative instrument through which the author advances an awareness campaign. His counsel to Bafana - and, symbolically, all black South African youth more generally - functions as an allegorical critique of sexual irresponsibility, situating Buju as a cautionary figure within the socio-political discourse on health and morality. Rather than advocating individual condemnation, the episode dramatizes the entanglement of gender, sexuality, and disease in the post-apartheid landscape, indicating the urgency of collective awareness as a strategy of resistance against the pandemic.

Mhlongo's position – articulated through Njomane's example as well as through the calls for collective awareness voiced by Babes and Zero – is further reinforced by Thek's incisive critique of the dangerous misconceptions surrounding circumcision. Specifically, she challenges the widespread belief that circumcised men are immune to AIDS and highlights the hazardous practices associated with numerous circumcision schools in the townships. Thek denounces Dworkin's uncritical endorsement of these practices, exposing the short sightedness of his conviction that circumcision provides immunity from the disease. For Thek, both the ritualization of circumcision in these schools and the myth of post-circumcision immunity constitute serious threats, a concern that she emphasizes when she confronts Dworkin:

[...] That old-fashioned tradition of yours is still creeping in the heart of darkness and should be brought to the light of modernity [...] it's doing more harm than good in the community nowadays [...] Look! I mean nowadays there is the question of HIV and AIDS. Just imagine the illiterate traditional doctors, who use

unsterilised razor blade to amputate the foreskins of hundreds of people.  
(Mhlongo, 2004, p.120)

According to Thek, the black communities persisting in the practice of traditional practices of circumcision must be sensitised to the dangers that now define this age-old custom. The unhygienic conditions and questionable practices in circumcision schools, she argues, have transformed them into potential sites for the transmission of HIV/AIDS. For this reason, she insists that elders who conduct these rites of passage should to be stopped, since they are often unaware of the existence of AIDS and its modes of transmission. Thek's position is radical, for she goes as far as proposing the outright abolition of the practice, contending that it is partly responsible for the continued spread of the pandemic in these black communities. This uncompromising view, however, contrasts with Njomane's more pragmatic and reformist approach. Rather than abolishing the practice, Njomane calls for its medical improvement, asserting that "What the bush schools need to improve on is their medical training. The traditional doctors need to be armed with knowledge about the spread of HIV virus" (Mhlongo, 2004, p.121). While Thek dismisses the practice as irredeemably dangerous, Njomane suggests that it can be adapted and aligned with modern medical standards. Taken together, these divergent perspectives appear to reflect Mhlongo's broader concern with reconciling cultural traditions and public health imperatives. Thek embodies a radical critique that problematises tradition as a site of danger, whereas Njomane articulates a reformist solution that points to state intervention through education and medical training. In this sense, Mhlongo's narrative not only exposes the cultural dimensions of the HIV/AIDS crisis but also implicitly directs the government to engage critically with tradition, balancing the preservation of cultural identity with the urgent need to stem the spread of the disease.

Beyond the issue of the pandemic, Mhlongo is also concerned with poverty and its possible remedies as illustrated through the efforts of Babes and her male friends in assisting the destitute, notably Stomachache. Their gesture of

solidarity can be read as the author's suggestion of a communal response to the widespread poverty afflicting the nation. This perspective becomes particularly evident when Njomane recalls that Stomachache, a week earlier, had confided in Babes that the 16<sup>th</sup> December was his birthday, to which she promised to offer him a present. To honour this promise, as Njomane narrates, "[...] She had asked all her male friends to donate their old clothes, not mentioning that she was going to donate them to Stomachache. Themba, T-man, Mohammed, Dworkin, Dunga and myself all contributed our old rags" (Mhlongo, 2004, p.215). Babes' initiative thus demonstrates the value of collective action in alleviating poverty within her community.

Given the centrality of these characters to the author's social vision, her gesture towards Stomachache may be interpreted as Mhlongo's endorsement of grassroots solidarity as short-term solution to the poverty crisis. In this sense, the example suggests that poverty, while a structural national problem, can be tackled at the communal level through the willingness of ordinary South Africans to mobilise their limited resources in support of the most vulnerable. Such interventions, though modest, point to the necessity of concerted, collective effort at the grassroots as essential complement to broader systemic change. The attitude of this group of friends towards the poor in their community reflects the lesson which K.Anthony Appiah (2003) says he learnt from his father. Appiah in "Citizen of the World" points out that: "the notion of leaving somewhere better than you found it was a larger part of what my father understood by citizenship. It wasn't just a matter of belonging to a community; it was a matter of taking responsibility with that Community for its destiny" (p.189). According to Appiah, belonging to society means one must be ready to sacrifice anything for the betterment of the latter. In this sense, the group of friends towards Stomachache as a poor in their immediate community is a way of assisting the post-apartheid leadership to reconstruct their society.

Bafana's belated self-awareness regarding his failure to exploit and maximise the opportunities available to black youths may be

cited as a closing observation on Mhlongo's position concerning the country's predominant challenges. His case serves as a striking illustration of the problem of mediocrity among school-going black youths in the country. To contextualise the symbolism of Bafana's self-realisation, it is worth noting that he drops out of the University of Cape Town without completing a Law Degree, while continuing to deceive his family and friends into believing otherwise. It is only when his friends, Vee, informs him of her successful graduation from the said institution that he fully grasps the extent of his failure and the disappointment he has caused his family, community, and, by extension, his country:

As I closed the conversation with Vee, a feeling of guilt and regret seized me. Regret over all the lies that I had told Vee and my family, and guilt over how I had missed my opportunity to be the first in my family to have a university degree. While thinking about all this, I smelled the smoke from a zol. When I turned around, I saw that my uncle was smoking next to his stall.

(Mhlongo, 2007, p.59)

Bafana's reaction is analytically significant in the light of Mhlongo's proposed solutions, precisely because it is characterised by regret and guilt. His self-awareness exposes the failure not only of a personal trajectory but also of a generational responsibility, as he recognises that he has let down his family, peers, and even the post-apartheid state that opened avenues for black youths to secure an education and contribute to national reconstruction. The force of realisation is heightened through the juxtaposition with Nyawana's image as a marijuana smoker. This contrast is symbolic: Nyawana embodies the stagnation and decay of township life, while Bafana's missed educational opportunity exposes the fragility of the escape routes made available in the new dispensation. In this regard, Bafana's belated recognition becomes an indictment of his own nonchalance and a commentary on the persistence of mediocrity and wasted potential. The pathos of his condition lies not in individual misfortune but in its similitude with the broader

social condition of black youths unable – or unwilling – to seize the means of transcendence from the township's cycle of misery and hopelessness.

When Bafana's family and friends uncover his deceitful behaviour, his only response is to flee the shame of having disappointed them. His departure to Durban represents, for him, the sole opportunity to begin afresh "[...] I was hoping that Durban was going to offer me a new lease of life [...] As the train left Germiston Station, at half past seven in the evening [...] Through the window, I stared out into the fading evening light, thinking of my bad fortune, which was unquestionably well deserved" (Mhlongo, 2007, pp.216-17). This expression of self-reproach is significant as it marks his belated recognition of failure and acts as a point of departure in his search for new avenues. Yet these avenues, symbolised by his self-imposed exile, cannot equal the comfort and security that a legitimate university degree in Law would secure, particularly in a society that requires educated black youths for the process of nation-building. Through Bafana's case, Mhlongo emphasizes the need for South Africa's black youths - such as those portrayed in Dog Eat Dog (2004) frequenting bars like the Drop Out Bar (pp.114-16) – to take full advantage of the opportunities opened by multiracial democracy.

#### **The Collective Commitment of the ANC Political Class**

Mhlongo's (2004; 2007) suggest that the challenges facing post-apartheid South Africa - ranging from the legacy of racial inequality to crime, corruption, HIV/AIDS, poverty, and youth mediocrity – can be mitigated through national consciousness entrenched in individual and collective responsibility. Such awareness, transcending racial and political divisions, must be reinforced by the political will of the ANC-led leadership if the nation-building project is to succeed. According to Mhlongo, the political commitment of the ANC-led leadership together with that of the wider political class, is indispensable for the consolidation of a robust multiracial democracy that can sustain socio-economic and political development in post-apartheid South Africa. Such leadership is not only

tasked with safeguarding fundamental liberties and freedoms, but also with cultivating a culture of responsible citizenship, both within the governing elite and across the broader population. Furthermore, it must establish inclusive channels of dialogue between institutions and citizens in order to enhance accountability and trust in governance. Equally crucial is the obligation to place the welfare of the populace above the self-serving financial interests of influential elites, whose unchecked pursuit of power and wealth threatens to undermine the very foundations of democratic consolidation.

Discussing the government's responsibility to safeguard basic liberties and freedoms, Mhlongo (2004) invokes the example of the gay and lesbian protest march to illustrate the need for enforcing the rights of minority groups. He argues that this can best be achieved through strict adherence to the constitutional provisions that guarantee such rights. Upholding these protections would not only affirm the dignity of sexual minorities but also raise broader public awareness of the diverse individual differences that characterise South African society. The collective action embodied in the protest march acts as a symbolic mechanism for holding the government accountable to its constitutional commitments, particularly with respect to a new type of minority whose rights must be respected in the context of a predominantly heterosexual population. More significantly, by taking to the streets of Johannesburg, this minority group is demanding both social recognition from fellow citizens and governmental accountability to the

constitutional order that affirms their right to exist - first as citizens, and secondly as a sexual minority whose identity is enshrined within democratic principles (p.165). In this sense, the protest march becomes not merely a call for respect, but a tangible manifestation of the need for the state to actively uphold and enforce the democratic values that protect the rights and freedoms of all within the nation. This example affirms Charles Taylor's concept of cultural identity which is the cornerstone of minority groups in any nation. As Bhabha (2003) notes, Taylor's perspective on nation-building is particularly relevant in contexts where he emphasizes "on the importance of 'recognition' as a central issue in the creation of a just society" (p. 165). Recognition, in this context, requires minority groups—such as the homosexual community discussed above—to acknowledge their belonging to the wider national community

### Conclusion

In sum, Mhlongo underscores the positive role of national consciousness, grounded in individual and collective awareness, in fostering South Africa's socio-political and economic progress. His analysis ultimately offers constructive suggestions to ANC-led government as it strives to consolidate a united, multiracial nation. For Mhlongo, the key to overcoming persistent challenges – particularly debates over the strength of South Africa's multiracial democracy – lies in the sustained commitment of all citizens, with the government bearing responsibility for safeguarding the constitutional principles that serve as the foundation of national unity.

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## LEXICAL RELATIONS IN ADAMAWA FULFULDE

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### Abstract

This paper investigates lexical relations in Adamawa Fulfulde. Lexical relations play a crucial role in understanding the structure and meaning of words in any language. The study explores the various lexical relationships in Adamawa Fulfulde, a dialect of the Fulfulde language spoken primarily in the Adamawa region. The research examines key semantic relationships such as synonymy, antonymy, hyponymy, highlighting their significance in linguistic comprehension and communication among Adamawa Fulfulde speakers. The study adopted a descriptive research design. Data were elicited from competent bilingual native speakers of Adamawa Fulfulde, particularly in Girei Local Government Area of Adamawa State. The data were collated through interviews of the native speakers. It was discovered that synonymy, antonymy and hyponymy are the most productive lexical relations in Adamawa Fulfulde. By analyzing lexical data through a descriptive approach, this research provides insights into the unique semantic patterns of Adamawa Fulfulde and their implications for linguistic studies and language preservation.

**Keywords:** Synonymy, Antonymy, Hyponymy, Lexical relations, Fulfulde.

### Introduction

African languages have been receiving substantial scholarly attention in recent decades. Compared to other Nigerian languages, such as Igbo, Hausa and Yoruba, Adamawa Fulfulde has received less scholarly attention. There are, however, a considerable number of scholarly works on Fulfulde especially on the formal levels of linguistic analysis. It is recorded that the first grammar of the language was written by Faidherbe in 1875 and in 1876; another grammar was written again by Reichardt and McIntosh (2017). From the last century to recent times, several works have been done, for example, Owens (1983), Pearson (2006) and Dendo (2012) worked on Fulfulde phonology. Carlson (1975) and Finnegan (2012) focused on Fulfulde morphology while Rehg (1984), McIntyre (1995) and Will (2013) are on Fulfulde syntax. On the semantics of the language, Dobrushina (1979) and Rappaport (2012) are some works. Most of these works, focused on other dialects of Fulfulde. Thus, to the best of the researcher's knowledge, few studies have addressed lexical relations of the Adamawa Fulfulde. Although efforts to document and

preserve Fulfulde Adamawa have increased in recent years, with linguistic studies, literacy programs, and the development of written materials aimed at sustaining the language for future generations. It is because of this gap in Adamawa Fulfulde scholarship that the researcher sets to explore the lexical relations in this dialect of the language.

### Adamawa Fulfulde

Adamawa Fulfulde refers to the variety of Fulfulde spoken in the Adamawa region of Nigeria, and neighboring parts of Cameroon and Central Africa. "Fulfulde" is the name of the language used by the Fulbe (Fulani) people across West and Central Africa. Thus, Adamawa Fulfulde is a dialect of the Fulfulde language, spoken predominantly in the Adamawa region of Nigeria, as well as parts of Cameroon, Chad, and the Central African Republic. The Adamawa dialect is one of the recognized major dialects of Fulfulde, alongside others like Maasina, Pulaar, and Borgu. The name "Adamawa Fulfulde" is used in contrast to other Fulfulde varieties to denote, linguistic features (phonological, lexical, and grammatical distinctions) (Taylor, 1953). It belongs to the

larger Atlantic branch of the Niger-Congo language family and is one of the major dialects of Fulfulde, alongside other regional varieties spoken across West and Central Africa.

The historical development of Fulfulde Adamawa is closely linked to the migration and expansion of the Fulani people (Fulbe), who are traditionally pastoralists. The Fulani began migrating across the Sahel and West Africa over a thousand years ago, spreading their language and culture across vast regions. By the 18th and 19th centuries, Fulfulde Adamawa gained prominence during the Fulani jihads led by Modibo Adama, a Fulani scholar and warrior who established the Adamawa Emirate under the Sokoto Caliphate. This period marked the formalization of Fulfulde as an administrative and cultural language in the region. The term "Adamawa Fulfulde" was not coined by a single person, but rather emerged through linguistic classification and description efforts by scholars of African languages (Ahmad, 2014; Aminu, 2019).

Over time, Fulfulde Adamawa has interacted with other local languages such as Hausa, Kanuri, and Arabic, leading to lexical borrowing and linguistic adaptations. Despite these influences, it has maintained its distinct phonological, morphological, and syntactic characteristics. Today, Fulfulde Adamawa serves as a lingua franca in the region, facilitating communication between diverse ethnic groups and playing a vital role in trade, governance, and social interactions. Adamawa Fulfulde as it is spoken in Girei Local Government, which is the area with arguably the purest form of Adamawa Fulfulde due to limited influence from surrounding languages.

### **Conceptual Review**

#### **Lexical Relations**

Lexical relations refer to the systematic relationships between words in a language, which contribute to meaning, structure, and linguistic organization. These relationships are fundamental to semantics, enabling language users to establish connections between words and their meanings. This review explores key types of lexical relations, their theoretical foundations, and their relevance in linguistic studies, with references from scholarly

works.

According to Khoo and Na (2006: 2), Lexical relations are meaningful associations between two or more lexemes, entities or sets of entities. They can be viewed as directional links between the lexemes, concepts/entities that participate in the relation. They are an integral part of relationship, as a relation cannot exist by itself but has to relate two things. Associations between lexemes, concepts/entities can be categorized into different types, abstracted, conceptualized and distinguished from other associations, and can thus be assigned meaning. The meaning or type of an association can sometimes but not always be derived from the meanings of the participant lexemes and concepts.

Linguists in the structuralist tradition (Lyons, 1977: Saussure, 1959) assert that lexemes and concepts cannot be defined on their own but only in relation to other concepts. Lexical relations appear to reflect a logical structure in the fundamental nature of thought (Caplan & Herrmann, 1993). Green, Bean & Myaeng (2002) noted that lexical relations play a critical role in how we represent knowledge psychologically, linguistically and computationally, and that many systems of knowledge representation start with a basic distinction between entities and relations. Green (2001:8) argues that "relationships are involved as we combine simple entities to form more complex entities, as we compare entities, as we group entities, as one entity performs a process on another entity, and so forth

#### **Synonymy**

Synonymy deals with the semantic relationship which holds between two or more words that have the same or nearly the same meaning and belong to the same part of speech but have different spelling forms. Synonymy is in other words the semantic equivalence that exists between lexical items (Atadoga, 2013). The pairs of words that have this form of semantic relationship are called synonyms or are said to be synonymous. Stanojevic (2009) posits that, it would be imprecise to define synonymy as identity of meaning since there are no two terms with completely identical meaning. Therefore, other definitions have emerged.

Generally speaking, synonymy denotes the phenomenon of two or more different linguistic forms with the same meaning. Those linguistic forms are called synonyms, for example, peace and tranquility can be substituted with each other in certain contexts.

What defines synonymy is precisely the possibility of substituting words in given contexts without altering the objective and affective meaning. Inversely, the irreducible character of the phenomenon of synonymy is confirmed by the possibility of providing synonyms for the various acceptance of a single word. The idea of 'sameness of meaning' that is used in discussing synonymy is not necessarily 'total sameness.' There are many occasions when one word is appropriate in a sentence, but its synonym would be odd. In short, we can say that there are no absolute synonyms, that is., pairs of words that have the same meaning or share the same semantic features in all the

situational and syntactic contexts in which they can appear.

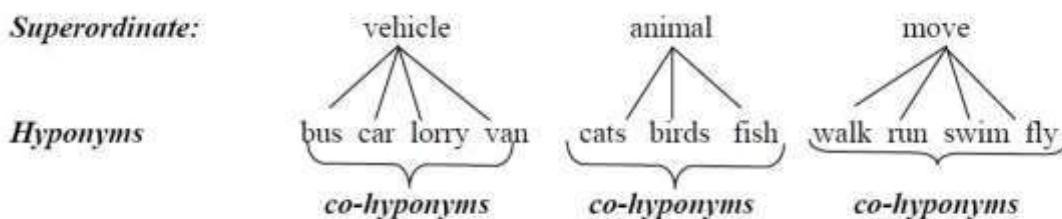
#### Antonymy

Antonymy, according to Ullman (1977) and Saeed (2001) in Atadoga (2013), deals with the semantic relationships that exist between two or more words that have opposite meanings. The pair of items which contrast in meanings are termed antonyms. These pairs, according to Zapata (2000) belong to the same grammatical category – both elements may be nouns, adjectives, verbs, and so on. Besides, according to Fromkin and Rodman (1998), antonyms are said to share almost all their semantic features except one.

Atadoga, (2013) also asserts that the semantic feature that antonyms do not share is present in one member of the pair and absent in the other.

#### Hyponymy

Hyponymy or inclusion is the semantic relationship that exists between two or more words in such a way that the meaning of one word includes the meaning of other words. We say that the term whose meaning is included in the meaning of the other terms is the general term; linguists usually refer to it as a **superordinate**. The term whose meaning includes the meaning of the other terms is the specific term; linguists usually refer to it as a **hyponym** or **hyernym**. If the meaning of a superordinate term is included in the meaning of several other more specific words, the set of specific terms which are hyponyms of the same superordinate term are called **co-hyponyms**. Examples are illustrated below:



**Fig. 1: Hyponymy**

Source: Zapata (2000:55)

In general, there are a number of hyponyms for each superordinate. For example, 'boar' and 'piglet' are also hyponyms of the superordinate 'pig', since the meaning of each of the three words 'sow', 'boar', and 'piglet' 'contains' the meaning of the word 'pig'. Thus, it is not surprising that hyponymy is sometimes referred to as inclusion. The superordinate is the included word and the hyponym is the including one. A superordinate at a given level can itself be a hyponym at a higher level. House is a hyponym of the superordinate building, but building is in turn, a hyponym of the superordinate structure, and, in its turn, structure is a hyponym of the superordinate thing.

### Empirical Review

Udemmadu and Ogwudile (2017) describe antonymy in the Igbo language. They adopt the descriptive method for their analysis. Among other things, they discovered that Igbo, just like other languages, attests antonymy. Antonymy in Igbo, according to them attests in the form of gradable and non-gradable antonyms. They further note that antonymy in this language world come in the form of reversives and conversives. They give the following examples to further illustrate antonymy:

- i. *rie* 'eat' - *erila* 'do not eat'
- ii. *sie* 'cook' - *esila* 'do not cook'
- iii. *taa* 'chew' - *atala* 'do not chew'

Source: Udemmadu and Ogwudile (2017:155)

Although the work gives a vivid description of the antonyms, it fails to apply any tone marks to the data. This, therefore, confuses non-native speakers of the language, since it is a tone language. Again, there is no indication as to whether the data is based on a particular dialect of Igbo or simply on the central dialect. The work is related to the present study in that it has taken into account the analysis of antonyms at the sentence level, especially imperative sentences.

Akase (2019) x-rays lexico-semantic relations in Tiv. The method of analysis has not spelt out, but it is descriptive in nature. The study employed the interviews of competent native speakers of the language for data collection. It explores semantic relations, such as synonymy, antonymy, and hyponymy. It was discovered, among other things, that Tiv antonyms could be gradable, relational and complementary. Reversible, according to him, are a type of antonyms in Tiv. He gave the following examples to illustrate the attestation of antonymy and its types in this language:

### Antonyms

	Tiv	Gloss
i.	<i>tér/ngó</i>	father/mother
ii.	<i>shá/shin</i>	up/down
iii.	<i>vá/yém</i>	come/go
iv.	<i>kú/úmá</i>	death/life
v.	<i>túgh/sév</i>	night/day

Source: Akase (2019:75)

It can be seen that in each of the above pairs, the two (2) words contrast with respect to at least one aspect of their meaning. For instance, the meaning of *tér* "father" and *ngó* "mother" are opposites with respect to gender, although they are alike in other respects (both human). Similarly, *vá* "come" and *yém* "go" are opposites but both of them involve (movement).

For the gradable antonyms, he gave the following examples:

	Tiv	Gloss
i.	<i>táv/tiòn</i>	tall/short
ii.	<i>cùkúú/kèhé</i>	small/big
iii.	<i>shágبà/ícàn</i>	rich/poor
iv.	<i>íkyôr/cín</i>	fat/thin
v.	<i>kpìshí/kpèghèr</i>	much/small

Source: Akase (2019:76)

As for relational antonyms, he illustrates with the following copious examples:

	Tiv	Gloss
i.	<i>òrmàréñ/wán</i>	parent/child
ii.	<i>ímpín/mlúmùn</i>	question/answer
iii.	<i>húròr/órhíòm</i>	friend/enemy

iv.	<i>mítéè/mýám</i>	sale/purchase
v.	<i>òrtésén/òrhénén</i>	teacher/student

Source: Akase (2019:76)

Al-Omari (2016) discusses synonymy in English and Arabic, with reference to the Holy Qur'an. The work is contrastive in approach. The author adopts a qualitative method, and elicits data from scholarly publications as well as the Holy Qur'an. The work highlights the controversy that surrounds synonymy as debated by classical and modern Arabic scholars. He discovers that the idea of absolute synonymy in the Holy Qur'an is an illusion. Although this work has a strong conceptual review, it fails to give concrete data to buttress the points explained. This makes the work prose-like rather than with adequate data. Its qualitative methodology is, however, related to the approach of the present study.

### Methodology

This study adopted a descriptive and qualitative research design for the analysis of the data, to explore the features, functions, and levels of usage of the lexical relations in Adamawa Fulfulde; thus, data were collected and collated for the analysis from primary and secondary sources. The primary sources include oral interviews of the native speakers of Fulfulde from four areas of Yola South Local Government Area, Adamawa state, as well as the native introspection of the researcher as a native speaker, which also helped in the data collection; while the secondary sources include: the internet, textbooks, and journals on lexical relation in language, as well as some published and unpublished materials on the Fulfulde and other languages. The researcher used both male and female native speakers with a minimum of secondary school education as informants to get data for the study. Informants from the age range of 25-70 years who are still very vibrant in the usage of the language were consulted. The native speakers provided the interpretation of the meanings of words or lexical items. The study made use of research instruments, such as Roger Blench's wordlist, to elicit data. A Digital Voice Recorder was used to record the interviews. This helped the researcher to go back to the recorded interview to elicit relevant data. Notebooks and pens were also used to take down relevant information during the interview. However, the data used in this study cuts across different socio-cultural backgrounds and sociolinguistic relations in the selected Fulfulde-speaking areas of Adamawa state, while the researcher analyzed the data using a descriptive method. The data were appropriately glossed using the Leipzig glossing rule; that is, there is interlinearization of every morpheme used in the data. English is the meta-language; that is, the language in which the gloss was rendered. The Lexical Pragmatic Theory was used as the tool for analysis in the study. The theory provides for the proper identification, presentation, and interpretation of word meanings to identify their lexical relations.

### Data Presentation and Analysis

#### Synonymy

This semantic relationship suggests nearness in meaning synonymy of Fulfulde Adamawa. Examples are shown below:

#### Examples 1:

	<b>Fulfulde</b>	<b>Gloss</b>
i.	<i>fartugo/Riwugo</i>	'chase/pursue'
ii.	<i>nyukkugo/Resugo</i>	'keep/hide'
iii.	<i>ganyo/ngaingu</i>	'enemy/foe'
iv.	<i>booful/aibe</i>	'sin/offence'
v.	<i>caddum/cattudum</i>	'difficult/hard'
vi.	<i>woodi/buddum</i>	'nice/good'

In the synonym relationship in Fulfulde, the extent of sameness depends on the number of semantic properties that they share. A notable feature of Fulfulde synonyms is their ability to mostly substitute one another. However, this does not happen in all instances.

## Antonymy

These are words that mean the opposite of each other. This semantic relationship that emphasizes oppositeness abounds in Fulfulde.

### Examples 2:

	Fulfulde	Gloss
i.	<i>nyako/dada or inna</i>	‘father/mother’
ii.	<i>derekejo/nayejo</i>	‘young/old’
iii.	<i>manga/petel</i>	‘big/small’
iv.	<i>diggodum/cattudum</i>	‘smooth/rough’
v.	<i>beldum/mettuddum</i>	‘sweet/bitter’

From the above examples, it can be seen that the antonyms appear in pairs. For each pair, there is what sharply distinguishes a word from its counterpart. For example, although *baba* ‘father’ and *dada* ‘mother’ share vastly similar qualities, especially as both are humans; they differ semantically with respect to one major quality-gender. On example 2(ii) above, the distinguishing semantic feature is that of age. Example 2 iii illustrates oppositeness in terms of size, while example 2 (iv) shows oppositeness in terms of texture.

## Gradable Antonyms

As one of the types of antonyms, gradable antonyms seek to show oppositeness in terms of comparison. Below are some examples of this semantic feature:

### Examples 3:

	Fulfulde	Gloss
i.	<i>tekkudum/ceudum</i>	‘fat/slim’
ii.	<i>duddum/sedda</i>	‘plenty/small’
iii.	<i>soinde/maral</i>	‘poverty/wealth’
iv.	<i>jurdum/keccum</i>	‘dry/wet’
v.	<i>surugo/sodugo</i>	‘sell/purchase’

From the examples above, it is shown that the majority of the gradable antonyms in Fulfulde are adjectives, as can be seen in examples 3(i-iv) above. Example 3 v is, however, a pair of nouns, as can be seen in example 3(v) *soinde* ‘poverty’ and *maral* ‘wealth’.

## Relational Antonyms

In this type of semantic oppositeness, a pair of words shows how they are related. Such relationship can be seen in the following:

### Examples 4:

	Fulfulde	Gloss
i.	<i>Saroo/bingel</i>	‘parent/child’
ii.	<i>yamol/jabadee</i>	‘question/answer’
iii.	<i>sobaajo/ganyo</i>	‘friend/enemy’
iv.	<i>jannginoowo/pukaraajo</i>	‘teacher/student’
v.	<i>nyaundowo/nyaudio</i>	‘doctor/patient’

In the above examples, each pair clearly demonstrates the oppositeness in terms of the relationship. For instance, in example 4(i), it is always ideal that every child has a parent, and vice versa. Thus, parent-child oppositeness illustrates such relational antonymy. In example 4(ii), it can be noticed that one exists because of the other, as there may not be an answer without a question and a question without an answer. The same applies to other examples. Therefore, it may be said that in relationship antonymy, in most cases, have the tendency of interdependence, such that the existence of one may depend on the existence of its counterpart.

### Complementary Antonyms

#### Examples 5:

	<b>Fulfulde</b>	<b>Gloss</b>
i.	<i>fudduki/timoki</i>	‘begin/end’
ii.	<i>nguurdam/maayde</i>	‘life/death’
iii.	<i>mabbutu/mabbu</i>	‘open/close’
iv.	<i>majji/hefti</i>	‘lost/found’
v.	<i>gorko/debbo</i>	‘male/female’
vi.	<i>maunirawo/Addirawo</i>	‘brother/sister’
vii.	<i>mamaainna/dada/mamaanyako</i>	‘grandmother/grandfather’
viii.	<i>kawo/yapendo</i>	‘uncle/aunt’

#### Hyponymy

This semantic relationship presupposes that the meaning of one thing is included in the meaning of the other thing. In essence, it deals with the relationship of inclusiveness. The following examples illustrate this feature:

#### Examples 6:

##### *Dabbaji*      Animal

	<b>Fulfulde</b>	<b>Gloss</b>
i.	<i>mbewa</i>	‘goat’
ii.	<i>nagge</i>	‘cow’
iii.	<i>babaladde</i>	‘lion’
iv.	<i>busaru</i>	‘dog’
v.	<i>mbala</i>	‘sheep’

#### Examples 7:

##### *Kowowe*      Insect

	<b>Fulfulde</b>	<b>Gloss</b>
i.	<i>cuffi</i>	‘mosquito’
ii.	<i>kowowe</i>	‘ant’
iii.	<i>kurbanani</i>	‘grasshopper’
iv.	<i>mbuburu</i>	‘housefly’
v.	<i>nyakuro</i>	‘bee’

#### Examples 8:

##### *Kusel*      Meat

	<b>Fulfulde</b>	<b>Gloss</b>
i.	<i>tayre</i>	‘beef’
ii.	<i>gaduru</i>	‘pork’
iii.	<i>gertugal</i>	‘chicken’
iv.	<i>jaungal</i>	‘guinea fowl’
v.	<i>poola</i>	‘parrot’

#### Examples 9:

##### *Bibbeleddebeldé*      Fruit

	<b>Fulfulde</b>	<b>Gloss</b>
i.	<i>cabbule</i>	‘orange’
ii.	<i>kuitaaje</i>	‘garden egg’
iii.	<i>dukuje</i>	‘pawpaw’
iv.	<i>gerfe</i>	‘mango’
v.	<i>kodong</i>	‘banana’

In hyponymy relationship, the meaning of one or more things is included in the meaning of a larger unit. For

example, the words: *mbewwa*‘goat’, *nagge*‘cow’, *babaladde*‘lion’ necessarily presupposes that they are subsumed under a larger unit. This larger unit is *dabbaji* ‘animal’. In such relationship, on the one hand, the down liners, that is, the smaller units, are technically referred to as co-hyponyms. On the other hand, the unit under which other units are subsumed is called hypernym.

### Discussion of Findings

This paper has unraveled that the lexical relations that exist in Adamawa Fulfulde include: synonymy, antonymy, and hyponymy. This is in accordance with Akase (2019) who also found synonymy, antonymy, and hyponymy to exist in Tiv. Although several subclasses of semantic relations further categorize how words and concepts relate to each other. These subclasses of semantic relations help linguists and language researchers analyze and understand the complex network of meanings and connections between words in a language. The synonyms of Adamawa Fulfulde can readily substitute each other. This is also revealed by Al-Omari (2016) who indicated that the idea of absolute synonymy is an illusion. With respect to antonymy, it was discovered that antonyms are usually in pairs, and just as many languages, they are categorized into gradable, complimentary and relational antonyms. This is also indicated by Udemadu and Ogwudile (2017) and Akase (2019) who categorized antonymy into gradable, complimentary and relational antonyms. Thus, it was discovered that most gradable antonyms in Fulfulde are adjectives; but there are a few that are nouns. In Adamawa Fulfulde, relational antonyms, just as in other languages, rely on interdependence of the variables involved (words involved); and as for complementary antonyms in Adamawa Fulfulde, there is total mutual exclusiveness of the variables (words). Furthermore, hyponymy is a productive semantic feature in Adamawa Fulfulde, and works in like manner as in other languages, where the meaning of many things is included in the meaning of that generic term. Akase (2019) and Tiav, Tanimu, and Amende (2021) made similar conclusion in terms of hyponymy in Tiv. However, lexical relations are productive and vary

depending on the specific context or words being considered, and by exploring these relationships, we can gain insights into how language conveys information and how speakers interpret and make sense of the world around them, including their dependence on the context of the words or sentences.

### Conclusion

This study examines lexical relations, specifically synonymy, antonymy, and hyponymy in Adamawa Fulfulde, a dialect spoken in parts of Nigeria and neighboring countries. While Fulfulde has been studied extensively, little attention has been given to its lexical semantics, particularly in the Adamawa variety. Using interviews with native speakers in Girei Local Government, the research identifies examples of synonyms (e.g., *fartugo/riwugo* ‘chase/pursue’), antonyms (e.g., *nyako/inna* ‘father/mother’), and hyponyms (e.g., *mbewwa* ‘goat’ and *nagge* ‘cow’ under *dabbaji* ‘animal’). The study reveals that Adamawa Fulfulde exhibits rich lexical relationships similar to other languages. These semantic patterns enhance understanding of meaning and structure in the language. The research fills a gap in Fulfulde studies and contributes to the documentation and preservation of the Adamawa dialect. This study contributes to linguistic knowledge by documenting and analyzing lexical relations, synonymy, antonymy, and hyponymy, in the Adamawa dialect of Fulfulde, an area previously underexplored. It provides insights into the semantic structure of the dialect, enriching descriptive studies of Fulfulde and advancing the understanding of African language semantics. The findings also support efforts in language preservation and further research in Fulfulde linguistics.

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## WOMEN AND HEGEMONY IN SELECTED AFRICAN FEMALE NOVELS

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### Abstract

Women's writings have increasingly focused more on equality, intersectionality, sexual violence and reproductive rights. Women, hegemony and the survival strategies that they deploy amidst hegemonic institutions have not been given significant attention in contemporary African literature. While previous studies have written on hegemony, there is still a dearth of research on the various forms of hegemony and the survival strategies they deploy in combating such structures. This research used a qualitative content analysis to investigate how selected African female writers depict their female characters as victims of hegemony, and demonstrates how the characters eventually overcome the hegemonic structures that dominate them. Three novels were selected owing to their thematic relevance: Panashe Chigumadzi's *Sweet Medicine*, Abi Dare's, *The Girl with the Louding Voice*, and Chika Unigwe's *on Black Sisters's Street*. The various survival strategies that the female characters adopt made it necessary for the research to adopt an eclectic theoretical framework which comprises: radical feminism, snail-sense, feminism, and nego-feminism. The textual analysis reveals that the economy, patriarchy, western hegemony, culture, and family were the hegemonic institutions that the female characters battled with. Women were also found to dominate other women. In Chigumadzi's *Sweet Medicine*, Tsitsi's survival strategies are sexual compromise and syncretism. In Dare's *The Girl with the Louding Voice*, Adunni adopts resilience, defiance, escape and violence as her survival strategies. Unigwe's *On Black Sisters' Street* presents four major female characters who are Efe, Ama, Alek and Sisi, who deploy various survival strategies. Efe's strategy is hard work followed by Ama who deploy soliloquy. Sisi's strategy, as well as the others, culminated into emigration to Europe. However, Sisi fails to adopt loyalty as a strategy, which leads to her death. The others eventually succeed because they were loyal. Overall, the study demonstrates that despite the pervasive and multifaceted nature of hegemonic structures, African female characters develop diverse, context-specific strategies that enable them to reclaim agency, assert identity, and navigate oppressive socio-economic and cultural systems

**Keywords:** Agency; Feminism; Hegemony; Survival Strategies; Women's Writing

### Introduction

The concept of hegemony, especially as it concerns women in African literature, has over time focused primarily on patriarchy. Mostly, when African literary scholars examine women and hegemony in African societies as depicted in literary works, the emphasis has always been on patriarchy or male hegemony, even in contemporary literary criticism. Many contemporary literary scholars (such as Fondze-Fombele 497-509; Istifadah & Rohama 383-394; Nutsukpo 28-40; Metu 129-144; Toker 167-180; Were et al 1992-2003; and Wosu 929-937) focused their explorations of hegemony in African literature on patriarchy,

particularly.

Istifadah & Rohama claim that patriarchal hegemony in El Saadawi's *Women at Point Zero* manifests in the form of physical abuse, verbal abuse, sexual abuse and marginalization. They assert that the patriarchal hegemony in the novel corelates with Islamic teachings that place men ahead of women (383-394). Similarly, Nutsukpo asserts that patriarchal oppression, even in 21<sup>st</sup> century Africa, places women at "the lower end of power relations in the African society", making them vulnerable to various forms of abuse and exploitation (28-40). Similarly, Metu is of the view that patriarchy creates the conditions for

hegemonic masculinity to thrive. Metu observes that in Onuobia's *The Son of the House*, women also enable male hegemony. Were et al opine that Ahdaf Soueif and Mariama Ba subvert patriarchy in their novels *The Map of Love* and *So Long a Letter*, respectively (67-86). A similar argument is projected in the works of Toker, Were et al, and Wosu. The focus, as observed earlier, has always been on patriarchy or male hegemony without recourse to other hegemonic structures and systems that subjugate women.

However, Hadjitheodorou (111) and Yimbu (71-80) go beyond hegemonic masculinity and patriarchy to examine cultural hegemony as it affects women in Africa, though theirs are still limited in scope because as a matter of fact, there are more hegemonic structures and systems that subjugate African women than patriarchy and culture. The exploration of hegemony as it concerns African women that is closest to the present work is Olumati's sociological study (108-110), due to its multifaceted approach. Olumati's work breaks away from the trend to explore cultural hegemony, patriarchy, women against women and other various forms of hegemony which African women encounter, albeit his work is sociologically-inclined, not a literary analysis.

Though some contemporary female writers (such as Ayobami Adebayo and Aiwanose Odafen) still portray women characters as weak, subservient and static in such dispositions, there are many who go beyond such portrayals to demonstrate the strategies that women in their works adopt against hegemonic structures. Although it is true that the motive of writers who portray female characters as weak, subservient and static might be to demonstrate the realities of African women, our argument is that beyond demonstrating the realities of the African woman, it is still possible to show how the typical African woman that is faced with hegemony is able to survive its clutches. It is also possible to broaden the exploration of the concept of hegemony in African literature beyond patriarchy or hegemonic masculinity. It is against this background that the present work investigates the strategies that women characters in African female-authored novels employ to survive various hegemonic structures

in Panashe Chigumadzi's *Sweet Medicine*, Chika Unigwe's *On Black Sisters' Street* and Abi Dare's *The Girl with the Louding Voice*. Panashe Chigumadzi is Zimbabwean, while Chika Unigwe and Abi Dare are Nigerians.

### **The Concept of Hegemony**

Houssay-Holzschuch claims that the concept 'hegemony' originated in Ancient Greece. It is mostly associated with the work of the Italian Marxist, Antonio Gramsci (357). Hegemony is the name that Gramsci used to refer to an ideological system where the ruling class dominates all forms of production. At the core of Gramsci's theory of hegemony is the Marxist philosophy that the ruling ideas of each age are the ideas of its ruling class.

Apart from Gramsci's theorization of the concept of hegemony, various scholars interpret it differently. Chase-Dunn regards hegemony as domination (362). Arrighi regards hegemony not as domination or supremacy but as leadership; when a state or an individual creates a path for development and leads others. Such a state or hegemon leads through consent, not coercion (365). According to Cox, hegemony is more than dominance; dominance is only a part of the whole. He goes further to suggest that hegemony, contrary to Arrighi's view, is coerced, when he states that "hegemony is an internalized coherence which has most probably arisen from an externally imposed order but has been transformed into an intersubjectively constituted reality" (366). The word 'imposed' makes hegemony in this view coercive. So, hegemony, seen from the perspective of Cox, is a kind of dominance that is exerted on groups and individuals, which may have devastating effects on such persons. Due to the various conceptualizations of hegemony, this study adopts the definition of hegemony as dominance by either consent or coercion. There are different types or forms of hegemony, which include cultural hegemony, patriarchy, hegemonic masculinity, socio-political hegemony, economic hegemony etc.

### **Empirical Review**

There are a number of publications which examine various themes in the novels chosen for this paper, though most of such publications have little or nothing to do with the interaction between women and hegemonic structures in the novels.

*Sweet Medicine* is among the four novels analyzed by Gawas in a thesis entitled *Transactional Sex Relationships in Fiction: The Disintegration of Women's Emancipation Through the Blesser Blessee Culture in Selected African Novels*. Gawas argues that poverty is one of the causes of transactional sex relationships in the novels (13). This is especially true in the case of Tsitsi in Chigumadzi's *Sweet Medicine*.

A study on Dare's *The Girl with the Louding Voice* by Ibanga Grace, entitled *Interrogating Gender Injustice in Selected Nigerian Fictions* lays emphasis on patriarchy. Though Ibanga acknowledges that women also dominate other women, the prevailing argument in her work is that the novel is replete with instances of patriarchal hegemony. Ibanga's work is different from the present one in its selection of primary texts and its conceptual scope; it has a smaller conceptual scope. According to Firgiawaty and Nurcahyani, *The Girl with the Louding Voice* is a novel of empowerment, as it depicts how Adunni, Big Madam and some other female characters empowered themselves through self-definition, self-valuation, and self-reliance (Firgiawaty and Nurcahyani 96). However, the claim of the researchers that Adunni empowered others is contestable, as the novel's plot does not include any such instance. Except if what they mean is that Adunni's resilience has the potential to empower female readers. This observable dearth of literary studies on Panashe Chigumadzi's novel and that of Abi Dare, especially as it concerns hegemony constitutes a research gap that the present study aims to fill.

Most of the literary studies on *Chika Unigwe's On Black Sisters Street* are centered on the thematic concerns of migration, sexuality, trafficking, prostitution, and diasporic concerns such as multiculturalism and identity crises. For instance, Gabsa examines the myths that are being projected about Europe and how Africans go there with high hopes only to be disappointed and end up in shameful lifestyles. He also examines the efforts that the women in the novel employ towards redemption (1-71).

Again, Unigwe's *On Black Sisters Street*, Habila's *Travellers*, and Ndibe's

*Foreign Gods Inc* are considered to be reinventions of the West by Terhemba Shija. Shija claims that the three novels present a failed attempt by Nigerian immigrants to meaningfully integrate into Western society (2030). True, Habila's *Travellers* and Ndibe's *Foreign Gods Inc* reflect such migrant realities, but this is not entirely the case for the characters in Unigwe's *On Black Sisters Street*, because one can rightly claim that since Ama, Efe and Joyce eventually became successful entrepreneurs, they were successful.

However, Umezurike conducted a study using *On Black Sisters' Street* and *Beyond the Horizon* as primary sources of data. However, his focus was on how the female characters employed resistance against the hegemonic structures that subdued them. By using Gramscian conceptualization of hegemony, which could be coercive or non-coercive, Umezurike's study is similar to the present one in conceptual framework, but different in general scope and primary sources of data.

So far, the review above indicates that very few studies examined Panashe Chigumadzi's *Sweet Medicine*, a few examined Abi Dare's *The Girl with the Louding Voice* but it is observable that Chika Unigwe's *On Black Sisters' Street* has been given more critical attention. Also, quite a number of the studies reviewed above, including several others not mentioned here, examined the subjugation of women in African literary works without considering whether or not the experiences of the women transcend hegemony to demonstrate how these women show strength by adopting certain survival strategies. The present study finds it expedient to not only demonstrate the hegemonic experiences of women in the selected literary texts as portrayed by female African authors, but to also examine how these women survive some of the experiences. It is not enough to only analyze the negative experiences that women go through especially in patriarchal societies, as depicted by creative writers. Though such narratives are most probably intended to demonstrate the realities of these women, it is of utmost importance to also observe that not all these women allow themselves to remain subjugated all through their lives. This approach thus makes the

present study transcendental.

### Theoretical Framework

This paper is eclectic in its analytical approach. It adopts three strands of feminism for analysis. It adopts radical feminism, snail-sense feminism and nego-feminism. Radical feminism is largely believed to be a Western ideology, especially an American movement, whose frontiers were pushed forward by groups of individuals in America known such as: Redstockings, Cell 16, The Feminists, and New York Radical Feminists (NYRF). These groups marked the formal beginning of radical feminism as a movement in America. Radical feminism holds the belief that all forms of social hegemony originate from male domination, and seeks to fight for equal rights and justice for women. Radical feminism is one out of the four dominant strands of Western feminism; others are: socialist feminism, Marxist feminism and liberal feminism.

Snail-sense feminism is another theory applied in the present study. It is an African alternative to feminist criticism developed by Adimora-Ezeigbo. The theory uses the metaphor of the snail to suggest that women in hegemonic (particularly patriarchal) societies should behave like the snail which does not confront obstacles, but negotiates its way around them. The snail, though slow, eventually reaches its destination without having to experience the pain of unnecessary battle scars because it is very sensitive to danger, and avoids it. One of the tenets of snail-sense feminism is individualism.

Also applied in this study is nego-feminism, which is very similar to Snail-sense feminism. It was propounded by Obioma Nnaemeka. It is, like Snail-sense feminism, a homegrown model of feminism/ feminist criticism that is based on African indigenous cultures, worldviews, and it draws inspiration from African proverbs. For instance, in a work entitled *Nego-Feminism: Theorizing, Practising, and Pruning Africa's Way*, Obioma Nnaemeka hinged her discourse on African proverbs, some of which are: "When something stands, something stands beside it" (Igbo proverb), "A person is a person because of other people!" (Sotho proverb), "One head cannot go into counsel" (Ashanti proverb). Nego-feminism is a feminism of negotiation,

also known as no ego feminism (Nnaemeka 356). Negotiation involves mutual compromise. It has to do with letting go of or ignoring certain rights, beliefs and principles for the greater good.

### Methodology

This study adopts qualitative content analysis. The primary data consist of excerpts from three African female-authored novels. These texts were purposively selected based on their conceptual relevance to the study, particularly their engagement with the interface between women and hegemonic structures. Although African women's writing has increasingly focused on themes such as equality, intersectionality, reproductive rights, and sexual violence, the specific area of women, hegemony, and survival strategies remains underexplored. While several studies have examined hegemony in African literature, there is still a notable gap in scholarship that interrogates the multiple forms of hegemony and the varied strategies female characters employ to confront, negotiate, or transcend such oppressive structures. This research therefore seeks to fill part of that gap by examining how selected African female writers portray their characters as both victims of and agents resisting hegemonic power.

The novels selected for analysis, Panashe Chigumadzi's *Sweet Medicine*, Abi Daré's *The Girl with the Louding Voice*, and Chika Unigwe's *On Black Sisters' Street*—were chosen because of their strong thematic resonance with the issues under investigation. Each text engages with different but interrelated manifestations of hegemony, including economic marginalisation, patriarchal domination, Western cultural influence, family hierarchies, and cultural expectations. The narratives further demonstrate that women can also participate in structures of domination, thereby complicating the binary opposition between oppressors and the oppressed.

Through the systematic application of qualitative content analysis, this study demonstrates how African female writers' articulate women's experiences of hegemonic oppression and the diverse strategies they employ in response. The selected texts provide a rich corpus for examining the interplay between domination and agency, thereby

contributing to broader feminist literary scholarship.

### **Interface of Women and Hegemonic Structures**

#### **Socioeconomic/Sociopolitical Hegemony and its Impact in Chigumadzi's *Sweet Medicine***

The types of hegemony that are most prevalent in this novel are socioeconomic and sociopolitical hegemony. Tsitsi finds herself in a difficult situation, subjugated by socioeconomic forces which make it impossible for her to get a well-paying job, a job that could enable her to take care of herself, her widowed mother and uncle. Despite her diligence and good grades in school (both secondary and university), and her pious upbringing (Chigumadzi 28, 33, 34), Tsitsi graduates and cannot get a lucrative job. She gets a job as a secretary, but her salary lasts only two days (87). Such is the fate of many graduates in Zimbabwe as depicted in the novel. The struggle for survival amidst endemic poverty is real and pervasive. To escape the troubles imposed on her by socioeconomic hegemony, she takes the option of seducing her boss, becoming his mistress, and eventually becoming his wife after he obtained a divorce from his first wife. Tsitsi was not the only one who monetized her sexuality as a survival strategy; her friend, Chiedza too.

#### **Women, Afro-cultural and Western Hegemony in Chigumadzi's *Sweet Medicine***

Women, due to their deep immersion in Western religion, also serve as agents of hegemony against their fellow African women. Mama believes her daughter is living in sin, going against her catholic faith, yet she cannot reject what her daughter brings courtesy of the man she is living with. The woman would not forgive her daughter for not doing a white wedding, showing coldness towards the young woman, yet lacking the courage to reject the gifts from her. White wedding is foreign to Africans; it is a borrowed culture, perpetuated by western hegemony. Tsisi's mother presents us with a case of an intersection between socioeconomic, Afro-cultural and Western hegemony. The woman is torn between conforming to the dominance of western culture and rejecting the benefit she is getting from her daughter's 'sinful life'. If she rejects the help she is getting from her daughter, she would

starve. Yet her mind has been programmed to believe that traditional wedding is not enough; anything less than a church wedding is insufficient to guarantee cohabitation. She thus, illtreats Tsitsi.

At the end of the story, the psychological conflict that is finally resolved, the denouement of the story, is that Tsitsi chooses to seek help from an African traditional spiritualist. Although Tsitsi's act of consulting the *N'anga* is idolatry and it is a sin, it is a sin only within the context of Christianity, a Western religion that was imposed on Africans. Christianity is perhaps the strongest influence, the strongest legacy of Western sociocultural hegemony in the African continent. Chigumadzi's act of portraying Tsitsi as a victor after consulting the *N'anga* could be interpreted as a way of either disparaging Western hegemony or showing the potency of African ways of doing things. However, the question remains why she resorts to traditional medicine just to get the validation of a Christian mother.

#### **Hegemonic Masculinity, Culture, Patriarchy and Family as Hegemonic Structures in Chigumadzi's *Sweet Medicine*, Chika Unigwe's *On Black Sisters' Street* and Abi Dare's *The Girl with the Louding Voice***

Though Tsitsi gets what she wants by becoming Zvobgo's wife, she has to continually subject herself to Zvobgo's hegemonic masculinity in order to remain in his good books, even when he treats her like she doesn't matter outside domestic matters. She isn't particularly happy with the way he treats her as though her opinion doesn't count, but then she has to be careful not to be like Mrs. Zvobgo who openly challenged him (120 – 121). Not only Chiedza and Tsitsi are portrayed as victims of hegemony by Chigumadzi. Even Tsitsi's mother is portrayed as a victim here.

Chapter twenty-two of the novel reveals that it was Zvobgo who actually introduced Tsitsi to the option of spiritual consultations, long before this desperate situation she found herself in. Zvobgo was in dire need of protection from his political enemies and coerced her to accompany him (Chigumadzi 186).

Mama is first portrayed as a devoted catholic who would never compromise or mix

her faith with heathen or traditional practices that she believed to be contrary to Christianity, but later succumbs. Here is a woman who had demonstrated strength by refusing to allow *Tsikamutanda*, a witchdoctor who had paid a visit to their village to help identify witches, to enter her house; she had openly denounced him. She had demonstrated strength by refusing to see the *N'anga* when she had difficulty in getting pregnant, despite pressures from in-laws. She had stood her ground and decided that she was not going to make any more efforts at childbearing after she had three miscarriages, despite the pressure from in-laws, despite the fact that they were calling her a witch. But the same woman finally demonstrates weakness by agreeing to follow her late husband's brothers to the *N'anga* for the harsh treatment usually meted out to women upon the death of their husbands. It is a society where women can only prove their innocence or lack of involvement in their late husband's death by partaking in some traditional practices at the *n'anga*'s shrine. Instead of Mama to fight for her religious and personal beliefs, she succumbs to cultural practices.

Mrs. Zvobgo stands out in the experiences of female characters in this novel. She is depicted as strong-willed and intellectually independent, though she is given a minor role in the novel. This woman, unlike many typical African women, had the temerity to divorce her husband, a very important personality in Zimbabwe. But no active role is given to her in the novel. In fact, nothing much is said about her even before the divorce, except that she openly disagreed with her husband in public, debating with him (Chigumadzi 96 - 98), and even undermining him (Chigumadzi 101). Not much active role is given to her, except an exposition on her qualities of self-will, self-sufficiency, and the ability to value herself and place herself above patriarchal societal expectations of submission (Chigumadzi 125-126). That she is able to uphold her womanhood, her dignity, even going as far as fighting for and winning some of the properties from her marriage with Zvobgo (Chigumadzi 139), portrays her as a victor, not a victim, over hegemony.

Adunni's story in *The Girl with the Louding Voice* is one of great pathos. It is a

story that is capable of forcing countless drops of tears from even the stoniest hearts. She suffers from the severe effects of hegemony when her father calls her one morning and tells her that she will be married off to Morufu, a taxi driver in their village who already has two wives and four children. While it is true to admit that her father exercised dominance over her because of his power as her father, it is also important to note that he did that due to poverty. Dare presents the fact that the man could not pay his community rent of thirty thousand naira, and that they would be kicked out of their house for failing to pay, as a motive for the man's decision to marry off his teenage daughter (Dare 10). Thus, it is possible to argue that this is a case of hegemonic masculinity. It is also possible to argue that this is a case of socioeconomic hegemony; perhaps her father wouldn't have considered pushing her into marriage if he wasn't poor. It is however noteworthy that Adunni's father is neither an old man nor a disabled. Why couldn't he make something of himself? Why couldn't he think of other alternatives, other ways out of poverty? Well, her father collected thirty thousand for the rent from Morufu as part of her bride and shamelessly tells her afterwards (Dare 10).

The women that Adunni eventually becomes co-wives with in Morufu's house, Labake and Khadija, are also victims of Morufu's hegemonic masculinity. He beats them up (Dare 33). Again, he asserts absolute authority; no one questions his authority or talks back at him in that house. Moreso, Khadija was married because Labake couldn't conceive again after giving birth to Kike, who Morufu doesn't consider as a blessing because she is a girl.

Labake is a victim of hegemonic masculinity not only because she gets beaten by her husband, but also because she is made to live with the distress caused by polygamous marriage simply because she couldn't give birth again, and the child she has is not a boy. She is victimized by a culture that gives males upper hand over females. This causes her to find every available opportunity to assault her co-wives, a kind of transferred aggression (Dare 60). She had once forced Adunni out of the bathroom and poured sand on her while beating her naked (Dare 47). Khadija is also made a victim of

having to share a husband because, according to Morufu's irrational mind, she failed to give birth to a boy; all her three children are girls (Dare 37).

Adunni's troubles did not begin with her. The troubles were passed from her mother to her. Her troubles were a direct consequence of the troubles her mother, Idowu, went through as a young girl. Idowu was once in love with Ade, a boy from a rich family. Ade had come to Ikati from Lagos to spend the holiday with his grandmother when he eventually fell in love with Adunni's mother. He had bought puff-puff from Adunni's mother, and then fallen in love with her. He had wanted to marry her, but because she wasn't educated, his family said no to it. To forestall further interactions between them, Ade's family flew him abroad. Adunni's mother was eventually forced to marry papa (23) who, presently, cannot think of a better solution to his poverty than selling his teenage daughter to an old polygamous man. Adunni's mother is clearly another victim of hegemony. First, Ade's parents victimize her because of her poor educational background. Then, her parents use their power as parents to compel her into marrying a man she never loved.

Albeit it is observed elsewhere that Tia was a victim of her mother-in-law's hegemony, the fact that Tia's husband eventually confesses his infertility to Tia after her horrible experience with the fake prophet (Dare 250) makes that assertion not completely true. Tia was actually a victim of her husband, a victim of hegemonic masculinity. He knew all the while that he can't get a woman pregnant, yet he kept quiet when his mother was harassing his wife, making her miserable even to the extent of taking her to a psychopathic prophet! In a typical African marriage, the first person to be accused of infertility when children are not forthcoming is usually the woman. This demonstrates the bias, the injustice against women in African societies. Apart from being a victim of her husband, Tia was a victim of patriarchy as a system; her mother-in-law was only an agent.

Similarly, In Chika Unigwe's *On Black Sisters' Street*, Efe, one of the four girls who traveled to Belgium for prostitution, is an innocent virgin in Nigeria who yearned for luxury after her mother's death. The eldest of

four children, her father has money which is only enough for food, and she wants more. Thus, it is not difficult for Titus, a man rumored to be a very rich businessman, to seduce her with money.

Chika Unigwe portrayed Efe in a completely negative light without giving any compelling justification as to why she preferred a life of prostitution abroad to finding better means of sustenance in Nigeria. First, we are made to understand that although her mother is late, her father, despite the devastation he suffered as a result of the mother's demise (Unigwe 52, 54), provided the basic needs of the family (Unigwe 54). Yet, she chose to go about frolicking with Titus (Unigwe 52-54). Here, the motive of her decision to become the sex toy of Titus was simply that she craved a life of luxury (Unigwe 49-50, 54). Efe is portrayed as a victim of Titus, a forty-five years old business man who used his riches to entice her, get her pregnant, and abandon her. Titus dominates Efe, having sex with her every day for months. And as Unigwe puts it:

Every night for the next four months, Efe saw Titus at his insistence. He said she had taken possession of him, that he had never wanted a woman as much as he wanted her. (Unigwe 53)

Ama, one of the four ladies who travelled to Belgium for prostitution, was first a victim of her pedophile step-father. Who would have thought that a man who was an assistant pastor (Dare 109), a man who always put up an appearance of righteousness, always wearing white to signify holiness, was a pedophile, a rapist?

Chika Unigwe does not only stop at portraying Ama as a victim of rape, she goes further to put her in a position where her step-father gets a justification to send her out of the house (Unigwe 123). Because the man insults Ama for failing her JAMB exams once again, she explodes and tells her mum a secret she had never wanted anyone to know, the fact that the man had raped her multiple times when she was little. Her step-father, Brother Cyril, retaliates by revealing to her that he is not her biological father, he only wanted to save her from being a bastard, and that she should leave his house. Here's another case of victimhood,

psychological torture, that for twenty-one years, information as important as a girl's paternity is kept away from the girl, only to be revealed in the heat of an argument. And to make things worse, her mother did not believe her when she said the man was raping her when she was little.

Not only Ama is portrayed as a victim here. Even her mother is portrayed as a docile victim of hegemony. Brother Cyril, who likes to put up a fake appearance of piety by wearing a glowing white apparel, usually beats her anytime she fails to thoroughly wash his whites clean (Unigwe 121). Also, as a single mother who gets 'saved' by Brother Cyril after she got pregnant for another man, she didn't know, and still does not believe that Brother Cyril, her savior, eventually began to rape her daughter in exchange for taking her in with her daughter. When her daughter tries again to tell her about the rape, she reacts in a manner that no responsible mother would, as seen in the following excerpt:

"Just shut up. Shut up, Ama, before I am thrown out of my husband's house because of you. Mechie onu kita." (Unigwe 125)

Here, the woman is portrayed as docile, servile and selfish. Such a reaction from a mother is due to the fact that she has been completely subjugated by Brother Cyril, so much that she couldn't imagine a life outside his house. Her daughter's life and mental health does not matter to her.

Alek, who is later to be given a new identity, later to be known as Joyce, was actually a teenage girl from Sudan whose family got wiped out of existence by the Janjaweed militia. Even more disgusting was the manner with which the soldiers defiled her. "One by one the other men thrust themselves into her, pulling out to come on her face. Telling her to ingest it; it was protein. Good food. Fit for African slaves" (Unigwe 159).

To what end were they exerting such baseless dominance on an innocent teenager? As the other refugees at the camp that Joyce found company after her gory experience narrate theirs too, it becomes clear that hers was not the worst case of hegemonic victimhood. While most of the people who were killed were men, the women who were left to tell the stories

had suffered various forms of sexual abuse and trauma. A certain woman's fourteen-year-old son was forced to have sexual intercourse with her (Unigwe 161).

As though her pains have finally come to an end, Joyce meets Polycarp, a good and jovial Nigerian soldier, an Igbo guy, at the refugee camp. She falls in love with him, and begins to cohabit with him, only to be disappointed when he succumbs to his parents' demand that he should marry a fellow igbo.

When he says later that he knew this would happen that's why he tried to avoid his parents, one sees clearly how terrible a person Polycarp is. It is despicable to see that he knew about his parents, about Igbo culture and his parents' loyalty to the culture, yet he kept cohabiting with the innocent girl, giving her hopes of a happy future with him.

Not all men do this, giving false hopes to women as a ploy to keep getting sexual satisfaction, but it is very common among men. Joyce was thus not only a victim of cultural hegemony, a victim of Igbo ways of life, but also a victim of hegemonic masculinity. The Igbo culture literally provided a bullet and a gun, but the person who pulled the trigger was the one man whom she thought meant the whole world to her.

Polycarp's way of compensating her was to connect her to Oga Dele, the man who could take her to Europe or America. What a compensation! A travel ticket for prostitution! Alek's fate was to be decided by a man. Her vocation, her future was to be decided by the man who betrayed her. Such is the fate of a woman who is a total victim of hegemony!

Segun, a man who lived in the same flat with the ladies and had a deceptive appearance of laziness (Unigwe 92) and imbecility, a man whose actual job none of them knew (Unigwe 92), except that he ran errands for Madam and was very good with a hammer, was the man who eventually killed Sisi. Luc, a European who falls deeply in love with her, successfully convinces her to leave prostitution, report Madam and Dele to the police, and get married to him. It is not easy making that decision as she believes it would put the other girls in danger. She goes ahead to leave, anyway, and that costs her life.

Though it is not explicitly stated who

was behind Segun's act, it is clear that Dele and Madam had a hand in it. In fact, Unigwe suggests this when she observes that Dele who lives far in Nigeria, has a tattoo of a hammer on his neck (Unigwe 34), and he had threatened Sisi (Unigwe 42). As for Madam's complicity in the act, it can't be forgotten that she had also threatened Sisi when Sisi arrived Belgium (Unigwe 152).

Without any doubt, Chika Unigwe can be placed within the same spectrum as other African feminists who claim that the singular most prominent problem of the African woman is patriarchy or the failure of men. This is because a careful consideration of the novel reveals that the male characters are either cruel perpetrators of evil dominance against women or simply weak.

Though there are female characters in *On Black Sisters' Street* who were cruel to their fellow women, they succeeded in their cruelty because they were enabled by men. Titus' wife succeeded in pushing Efe out of the house when Efe took Titus' son to him because Titus enabled her to do so. Efe wasn't the first to get pregnant for the man. It was a norm that anytime any girl showed up with a baby for Titus, the wife did the chasing while the man showed absolutely no concern. It was an unwritten rule (63-64, 66). Clearly, Polycarp's mother couldn't have come to exert evil dominance over Joyce if she wasn't enabled by Igbo culture, which is largely patriarchal. The only woman in this novel whose cruelty can hardly be explained or linked to a man is Madam, the business partner of Dele who sublet her flat for all the girls, receiving a rent from each of them every month.

Like Abi Dare, Chika Unigwe misrepresents nego-feminism by portraying all her male characters in a bad light. It is a bias kind of gender portrayal that does not align with the principle of gender equality and is against nego-feminism's tenet of inclusiveness, as opposed to man-hating. This interpretation of Chika Unigwe's plot and characterization is in consonance with Ugwanyi's (1-17) claim that Ama Darko's novels subvert patriarchy by depicting female characters as strong, and independent on the one hand, while depicting male characters as either weak or irresponsible.

### **Hegemony: Women against Women in Panashe Chigumadzi's *Sweet Medicine*, Chika Unigwe's *On Black Sisters' Street*, and Abi Dare's *The Girl with the Louding Voice***

It is important to observe that the hegemonic structures and entities that women interface with in the novels under study are not always outside womanhood. Mrs. Zvobgo was a victim of Tsitsi, a fellow woman. Tsitsi had gone unhindered to the woman's husband, telling him that she could be a better wife, and eventually succeeded in seducing and taking the man away from his wife.

In Chika Unigwe's *On Black Sisters' Street*, as soon as Sisi arrives Belgium, she is dominated by Madam, the Nigerian woman at the other end who was in the business of trading prostitutes with Dele. First, Tsitsi is made to understand that her place is an inferior one in the house. The following excerpt illustrates this:

“Why?” Madam echoed, her voice mocking and lilted by a laugh.  
“My dear … what’s your name?”  
“Sisi.” “My dear Sisi, it’s not your place to ask questions here.  
You just do as you are told, and you’ll have an easy ride. I talk, you listen. You understand?  
Three days ago I gave Joyce the same instruction. She did not ask me questions. She just listened and did as she was told. I expect the same of you. Silence and total obedience.  
That’s the rule of the house. Be seen, not heard. Capisce?” (Unigwe 102)

Sisi gets this response from Madam when she asks why she is told to go to the ministry of external affairs for registration (101). She later realizes that Madam's expression of hegemony was more than mere words, when she tries to escape from the business without completely paying her dues.

To consolidate her hegemony over Sisi, Madam tells her, after a failed mission at the ministry of external affairs, that Sisi belongs to her. In her words, she says to Sisi:

“Now you belong to me. It cost us a lot of money to organize all this for you...Until you have paid up every single kobo ...every single cent of what you owe us, you shall

not have your passport back...  
Every month you go to the Western  
union and transfer money to Dele.  
Any month you do not pay up... “  
(Unigwe 152)

The last linguistic unit in the excerpt above was a threat left to hang. Upon her failure to pay up and her disappearance due to her decision to quit, Sisi would later realize that Madam's threat was not an empty threat. Sisi's first day at work was not only repulsive; it was painful. It was not easy allowing a complete stranger to touch her and have sexual intercourse with her. But she had already come thus far, there was no going back especially as she thought of all the things that the money could do for her.

Under the dominance of Big Madam in *The Girl with the Louding Voice*, Adunni suffocates. The woman wants absolute respect. In fact, she wants to be worshipped. “Don't stand and ‘yes, ma’ me, “When I am talking to you, I expect you to be on your knees” is what Big Madam tells Adunni the first time she talks to her.

Adunni soon begins to experience another level of Big Madam's hegemonic tendency when she is told by Kofi that Big Madam says she can only give her food once a day (Dare 132). For a woman with so much wealth, this is unbelievable! Kofi, being a good person, will sometimes call Adunni in the morning and give her food before Big Madam wakes up. But it so happens one morning that they aren't careful enough. Adunni is eating right inside the kitchen. Big Madam wakes up, finds her seated, eating in the kitchen and gives her the beating of her life. More beatings follow, almost every day (Dare 133). It is disturbing how Adunni is subjected to so much violence by another woman. However, an opportunity for deliverance presents itself when Adunni wins a scholarship exam after being tutored by Ms. Tia.

As observed in the case of Chika Unigwe, Abi Dare also consciously and intentionally aligns herself with feminist scholars who claim that the foremost problem of the African woman is patriarchy (see Aboye 11), when she relates every misfortune that happens to her female characters to a man. Every unfortunate experience that her female characters went through can be traced to a man.

This is against the principle of gender equality, and against the tenets of nego-feminism which advocates for inclusiveness in social transformation. Exactly what early male African writers such as Chinua Achebe, J.P Clark, Wole Soyinka etc. have been accused of doing to their female characters (see Methuselah, 151-164; Ebimobowei, 77-82) is what Abi Dare has done.

#### **Survival Strategies in Chigumadzi's *Sweet Medicine*, Chika Unigwe's *On Black Sisters' Street* and Abi Dare's *The Girl with the Louding Voice***

Chiedza's survival strategy in Panashe Chigumadzi's *Sweet Medicine* may be described as sexual compromise (Chigumadzi 73, 75). This was not her original ambition in life. Like Tsitsi, she is a graduate of Economics who had great plans for herself, but is eventually dominated by the socioeconomic woes of her country. The economy is in a terrible state and it renders her unemployed. Before her moral degradation however, she is portrayed as a hardworking and wealthy lady who made lots of money “after burning money on the black market” owning landed properties and working with an NGO (Chigumadzi 106). But things change for her when the government begins shutting down NGOs. Thus, she goes about having multiple boyfriends and sugar daddies.

In a similar way, though in a more restrictive sense, seduction/sexual compromise is the survival strategy that Tsitsi adopts when she can no longer handle the challenges she faces as a grossly underpaid civil servant. She works most hours of the day, five days a week. Yet her salary doesn't last beyond two days! Thus, she adopts the strategy of compromise and negotiation. She compromises her religious beliefs, her catholic upbringing, and negotiates a sexual relationship with her boss, telling him that she could be a better wife. This act is in tandem with Nego-feminism's tenets of compromise and negotiation.

Nevertheless, when Zvogbo has had enough of her and is no longer attracted to her body, she observes that seduction and sexual compromise won't work any longer (Chigumadzi 72-73, 78-80), so she adopts syncretism as a new survival strategy. She needed to survive the cold treatment she got

from her mother (Chigumadzi 33-34, 132-133) who was a devout catholic, for living with a man she was not yet married to, in fact Mama had once called her a whore for this reason (Chigumadzi 132), and also maintain her stay in Zvogbo's household as his wife by getting wedded in church. Thus, she remains a Christian, paying her tithes, even as she was being fetish, consulting a witch doctor. Chigumadzi puts it thus:

Tsitsi struggles to her feet and thrusts US\$500, half her weekly allowance – a tenth of which had gone to her tithe – into the *n'anga*'s hands. The woman licks her finger and flips through the notes, counting them twice before snapping an elastic band around them and planting them behind the fabric of her bra (Chigumadzi 16).

Mama's survival strategy against the onslights from her late husband's family was initially that of resistance (Chigumadzi 172-173), then religious compromise and obeisance (Chigumadzi 173-174), and then resistance (Chigumadzi 175). A woman who was known to be vehemently intolerant of mixing her catholic faith with traditional customs, now had to compromise and in an act of obedience, participate in traditional funeral rites which involved consulting the *n'anga*, something she would never have accepted in her youth. But when the in-laws who had subjected her to the funeral rites returned a year later for another traditional custom to mark the one-year anniversary of their late son's passing, and tried to subject her to another traditional custom, she resisted. For that, they called her a witch (Chigumadzi 175)! Mama's survival strategy can thus be described as that of flexibility which is also in tandem with the tenets of nego-feminism; knowing when to detonate patriarchal landmines and knowing when to negotiate your way around them.

All through her novel, Chika Unigwe portrays the ladies in *On Black Sisters' Street* as victims of hegemony, but they are not portrayed as completely unaware of the potent viable alternatives to their circumstances. Before she gets to Belgium, Efe works two jobs to enable her overcome the circumstance that Titus pushed her into. To cater for herself and her

baby, she had to work very hard. Her survival strategy therefore, was hard work. It was her determination to earn more by taking a third job that led her into the waiting arms of Dele Senghor. She took the cleaning job from Dele, then months later he asked her if she wanted a job in Europe (Unigwe 71).

It was not easy living with a pedophile as a step dad. Ama found herself in a very difficult situation, living with her mother, who was married to Brother Cyril, the seemingly righteous man who had no qualms being a pedophile. Ama couldn't speak to anyone about what was happening to her, as she was little, ignorant and naïve. So, she resorts to talking to the pink walls in her bedroom. She finds solace in soliloquy, or as Unigwe would put it:

Ama told the walls how he held her nipple between his fingers and squeezed. She told the walls of the pain of the squeezing and the coldness of her father's hands. Over the next days the walls heard how he ignored her when she said that he was hurting her inside. They heard of how she tried to push him away when he lay on top of her, but he was a mountain and she did not have the strength in her to move a mountain (Unigwe 112).

Sisi was a victim of the lethal poverty and unemployment that continually pervade most African societies, a kind of poverty and unemployment that are mostly engendered by corruption and weak systems of governance. Schoolmates who knew less than Sisi and were clearly less competent got jobs but she kept seeking for a job for years (Unigwe 25-26). Corruption and poverty have become deeply entrenched in the African socioeconomic and political sphere, and it has become a culture. Thus, Sisi could be described as a victim of cultural hegemony, dominated and destroyed by the corruption and poverty around her which had become a way of life. To survive the harsh socioeconomic/sociopolitical condition she is faced with, she succumbs to the idea of emigration, when providence brings Dele her way (Unigwe 33-36, 42-43). The only way she could see out of her trouble was to travel to a foreign country; it doesn't matter the kind of job she would be going there to do.

Beyond expressing hegemony, and stating clearly the kind of relationship that was to exist between her and the ladies, Madam makes it clear that their survival depends on their loyalty, absolute loyalty! The phrase *total obedience* says it all. It takes Efe thirteen years of loyalty to Dele and Madam (Unigwe 74) before she becomes free from hegemony. Ama was loyal for over nine years before she gained her freedom. Joyce had the least number of years under Dele and Madam's dominance, most probably because she was greatly assisted by Polycarp who was paying into Dele's account back home in Nigeria. Thus, the survival strategy that Efe, Ama and Joyce adopted was loyalty. Efe went into the trade she learned from Madam, having her own girls. Joyce returned to Nigeria and established a school named after Sisi. Ama also returned to Nigeria and opened a boutique (Unigwe 229). But for their loyalty, Efe, Joyce and Ama would have ended up like Sisi who was brutally killed by Segun, the seemingly lazy guy whom they all took for an imbecile. Sis had survived socioeconomic hegemony from her father's household in Nigeria, the dominance of poverty and unemployment through determination. She had survived through emigration and sexual compromise. But she had failed to be loyal to Dele and Madam to the end.

The death of Sisi bonds the ladies. First, they see how untouched Madam was about the fact that one of their close colleagues had just been murdered. And then they realize that it could happen to any of them. As they mourn Sisi, they soon begin to tell stories of their past. Efe is the first among the ladies to tell the story of her past. As the story is being told, they bonded. None of them can say how long they have been sitting there, huddled together on the couch as if seeking the heat of one another's bodies, listening to Efe's story usurp the silence. Their arms touch, and the fight of before is all but forgotten (Unigwe 81).

Ama and Joyce also tell their stories to the group, one after the other. They encourage one another as well (147). The act of telling their stories to each other was what they needed to ease the traumatizing experience of losing a housemate and a colleague with whom they had shared moments. What they did was similar to what Joyce had experienced in the refugee

camp where she lived after her family was killed by the Janjaweed militia. At the camp, women were encouraged by aid workers to tell their stories to one another in the belief that sharing such stories was therapeutic (Unigwe 162-163). Bonding is thus a survival strategy in Unigwe's novel.

In Abi Dare's *The Girl with the Louding Voice*, Adunni's journey through life and her survival strategy through dominance of various kinds has been one of resilience. First, she loses her mum at a very tender age, the woman who wouldn't have rested until Adunni got proper and advanced education. It wasn't an easy one, as Adunni always remembers her mother anytime she finds herself in a difficult situation, though she eventually recovers from the loss. After the loss of her mother came a forced marriage imposed on her by her father.

Also, there comes a time in Adunni's experience of hegemony that the only way she could survive is to escape. When Bamidele abandons Khadija and Adunni at the bank of the river, saying he would go and return with the special soap used in bathing pregnant women for a safe delivery, and Khadija eventually dies waiting in vain, Adunni goes to Bamidele's house which Khadija had shown her earlier. Adunni's aim was to confront Bamidele. There, a pregnant woman who was most probably Bamidele's wife threatens to call a mob against Adunni, and the woman made her threat a reality by actually shouting 'ole' (Dare 78-79). At that point, seeing death face-to-face, Adunni runs for her life to her father's house. She has to run away again when she is convinced that her father, instead of protecting her, would hand her over to the village chief and she would be blamed and killed (Dare 82-84). Adunni escapes to Iya's house. When her father follows her to Iya's house, she has to escape again with the help of Iya. That's how she finds herself under the evil dominance of Big Madam and Big Daddy in Lagos.

In compliance with Tia's advice, Adunni resorts to violence as a survival strategy when Big Daddy makes a real attempt to rape her. While he is pressing her on the floor, almost having his way, she remembers Ms. Tia's council and takes action. Tia had advised her to fight whenever the man comes to her room with a bad intention.

Big Madam is no less violent. She also seeks a way out of her troubles, out of her abusive marriage by openly confronting her husband, getting terribly beaten, and then transferring her anger and frustrations to Adunni. The way she goes about constantly beating Adunni for the slightest reasons leaves many questions unanswered, until one realizes through a conversation, she had with Adunni that it was all a transfer of aggression. Out of fear, the fear of Big Madam, Adunni observes that Big Daddy is responsible for all the aggression that Big Madam exerted on her domestic staff. She said:

It is Big Dady ma. He is a bad man. Very wicked... He beats you nearly every time and fills you up with so much anger and sadness that when you see me and Kofi, you pour all of the anger out on us, on me most of all. Your husband, he makes you sad and ... (Dare 267).

Abi Dare uses the character of Adunni to tell us that Big Madam's cruelty is all transferred aggression. The excerpt above reveals Abi Dare's intention, which is to tell the reader that Adunni was indirectly a victim of Big Daddy; that all the pain, all the cruelty she got from Big Madam originates from Big Daddy.

Big Madam's act of openly confronting her husband and locking him out of the house for three days after the fight between them reveals her radical feminist inclinations. Like Labake, Morufu's first wife, Big Madam does not subscribe to any African model of feminism which advocates for non-confrontation, negotiation and non-combative approaches to solving problems of hegemony. She is always confronting her husband, even when she knew very well that she isn't good at karate, which is something Cell 16, the radical feminist group known for physical combat, advocates. She always gets terribly beaten by her husband, but her feminist inclination isn't radical enough to encourage separatism. Big Madam was radical to the extent that she had the nerves to lock her husband out after the gruesome fight they had because he was cheating on her with her best friend. The man had to gather his relatives to

come and beg on his behalf.

Other female characters in the novel adopted strategies other than radicalism; strategies that align with the tenets of African alternatives to feminism. For instance, Adunni, though she had a sharp mouth, always knew when to adopt negotiation, avoidance or escape to overcome her problems and survive. Adimora-Ezeigbo made use of the snail to illustrate the intellectual underpinning of her theory. The snail, according to her, senses danger and avoids it. It negotiates its way out of trouble or finds an escape route around it, rather than challenging or confronting it. And that's exactly what Adunni always did, though she was not sluggish like a snail.

### Conclusion

The major characters in *Sweet medicine* were found to be dominated primarily by economic hardship, patriarchy and western religion, and they chose sexual compromise, syncretism, resistance and flexibility as survival strategies. In *On Black Sisters' Street*, women were found to be dominated primarily by economic hardship caused by unemployment, and hegemonic masculinity. Their survival strategies are emigration, sexual compromise and loyalty. The prevalent hegemonic structures against women in *The Girl with the Louding Voice* are hegemonic masculinity and patriarchy, and the survival strategies are defiance, escape, violence and resilience. One thing that is common between *Sweet Medicine* and *On Black Sisters' Street* is the idea that most young ladies in Africa are plagued with hardship and they seek to survive through sexual compromise.

This paper demonstrates that hegemony occurs in various forms; some tangible and some abstract. It reveals, contrary to popular feminist opinion, that men are not the only hegemonic force against women in Africa; that the economy is also the problem of women in Africa; even women too are problems to other women. It also reveals some of the survival strategies that women in African literature deploy against the hegemonic structures that dominate them.

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## INTEGRATING NIGERIAN ORAL LITERATURE INTO FRENCH CLASS: A BRIDGE BETWEEN INDIGENOUS PRACTICES AND MODERN LANGUAGE TEACHING

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### Abstract

This study explored how Nigerian oral literature can be meaningfully integrated into the teaching of French as a foreign language to improve students' linguistic performance and cultural engagement. The research was based on the findings that language learning becomes more effective when rooted in the learner's immediate environment. Using a classroom-based qualitative approach, the study examined how proverbs, folktales, songs, and idiomatic expressions drawn from Nigerian traditions can be employed to teach key aspects of grammar, vocabulary, and communicative competence in French. The participants were junior school students in a Nigerian French class who engaged in storytelling, translation, and role-play activities. The findings revealed that students demonstrated higher levels of comprehension, confidence, and retention when lessons were connected to familiar cultural materials. Oral narratives and proverbs provided a contextual foundation for grasping grammatical structures such as tense and agreement, while performance-based tasks fostered fluency and collaboration. The study concludes that integrating indigenous oral literature into French pedagogy does not dilute linguistic accuracy but rather strengthens it by grounding the foreign language in the learner's lived experience. It recommends curriculum reforms, teacher training, and the development of bilingual instructional materials to sustain this culturally responsive approach. This model not only supports linguistic competence but also contributes to the decolonisation of foreign language education in Nigeria.

**Keywords:** oral literature, French language teaching, cultural relevance, contextual learning, Nigeria, FLE pedagogy

### Introduction

Language is more than a system of sounds and symbols; it is the living expression of a people's identity, culture, and worldview (Green, 2023). In multilingual countries such as Nigeria, where over 500 languages coexist, the teaching of a foreign language like French cannot be detached from the learners' linguistic and cultural realities (Eneremadu et al., 2024). For decades, French language instruction in Nigerian schools has followed models imported from Europe, focusing heavily on grammar drills, memorisation, and standardised cultural content from France or Francophone countries. While this approach has produced some success, it has also alienated many learners who find little connection between the French language and their lived experiences. This

disconnection has contributed to low motivation, slow language acquisition, and a perception of French as a foreign and abstract subject rather than a living, meaningful tool of communication (Kramsch, 1993).

Recent discussions on decolonising pedagogy and contextualising foreign language education have gained momentum in Africa and other postcolonial societies. Gay (2018) emphasises that culturally responsive teaching draws upon students' prior experiences and cultural knowledge makes learning more relevant and effective. For the French classroom in Nigeria, this means creating pedagogical bridges between the language of instruction and the learners' socio-cultural environment. Oral literature encompassing folktales, proverbs, riddles, and

songs offers a powerful medium for building those bridges. It embodies the wisdom, rhythm, and linguistic creativity of Nigerian communities while providing a rich source of authentic communicative material.

The rationale for this study is based on the conviction that integrating Nigerian oral literature into French language teaching can enhance learners' comprehension, motivation, and cultural identity. Oral traditions naturally appeal to learners' imagination, promote critical thinking, and encourage participation, all of which are central to effective language acquisition. According to Vygotsky (1978), learning occurs through social interaction within the learner's "zone of proximal development," where knowledge is co-constructed through meaningful communication. When students retell familiar folktales or translate local proverbs into French, they are not merely learning vocabulary but actively negotiating meaning, drawing parallels between languages, and internalising structures through interaction. Similarly, Krashen's (1982) input hypothesis asserts that learners acquire language most effectively when exposed to comprehensible input that is slightly beyond their current level. Nigerian oral narratives, when adapted into French, provide a source of linguistic and culturally enrichment, balancing familiarity with intellectual challenge.

This research is therefore essential in the field of French as a Foreign Language (FLE), because it seeks to bridge the gap between foreign linguistic content and indigenous cognitive frameworks. By positioning oral literature as both a cultural and linguistic resource, it contributes to global conversations on inclusive, context-based language pedagogy. It also responds to the persistent challenge of low proficiency and engagement among Nigerian FLE learners. Previous studies (Canagarajah, 1999; Gardner, 1983) suggest that when learners see their identity and culture reflected in educational contents, their motivation and retention significantly improve. The objectives of this research are threefold: firstly, to explore how Nigerian oral literature can be systematically integrated into French language instruction at the secondary and tertiary levels;

secondly, to examine the effects of this integration on students' linguistic performance, comprehension, and engagement; finally, to propose culturally responsive strategies for FLE teachers in multilingual settings such as Nigeria. Based on these objectives, the study is guided by the following research questions: How does the use of Nigerian oral literature influence students' understanding and use of French language structures? In what ways do incorporating indigenous oral forms affect learner motivation and classroom participation? What practical methods can teachers adopt to align oral literature with existing FLE curriculum objectives?

This study employed a qualitative classroom-based design, combining direct observation, student participation, and reflective analysis. It draws from the researcher's classroom experience in teaching French through local oral forms and evaluates student engagement and language performance. Through this exploratory framework, the study demonstrates that culturally grounded teaching does not compromise academic rigour; rather, it reinforces linguistic and cognitive development by situating learning in familiar cultural contexts.

As this research addresses a crucial pedagogical gap in the Nigerian educational landscape, the theoretical framework of this study is rooted in Socio-constructivism and Decolonial Pedagogy. By weaving together indigenous oral traditions and modern FLE methodology, it seeks to contribute to a more inclusive and human-centred approach to language education, one that values both linguistic mastery and cultural identity.

### **Background Research and Theoretical Framework**

The teaching of French as a Foreign Language (FLE) in Nigeria has long been shaped by imported pedagogical models, many of which prioritise structural mastery over contextual relevance (Ogunbiyi et al., 2024). However, contemporary scholarship increasingly recognises that language learning is not a neutral cognitive activity but a deeply cultural and social process (Byram, 1997; Kramsch, 1993). This section reviews key theoretical and empirical works that

illuminate the relationship between language, culture, and identity, particularly as they relate to the integration of oral literature into foreign language pedagogy. It also outlines the theoretical framework underpinning this study, drawing from socio-constructivist, culturally responsive, and postcolonial perspectives.

### **Language, Culture, and Identity in Foreign Language Education**

Language teaching is inseparable from the cultural narratives it carries. Byram (1997) asserts that language learners must develop *intercultural communicative competence*, which enables them to interpret and mediate meaning across cultures. Similarly, Kramsch (1993) argues that language instruction should move beyond grammar and vocabulary to include cultural symbolism and social interaction. Within the Nigerian context, these views suggest that learners must be allowed to construct meaning through the prism of their cultural background. When French lessons include indigenous oral forms, they promote a dynamic interaction between the learner's linguistic heritage and the target language, creating a culturally resonant learning experience.

Oral literature serves as a repository of collective wisdom, values, and linguistic creativity (Mpumuje et al., 2024). Finnegan (2012) describes African oral traditions as "a living art form" that carries the moral and aesthetic codes of the community. Through proverbs, folktales, and songs, learners engage with language in ways that are emotionally and cognitively stimulating. This aligns with Hymes's (1972) notion of *communicative competence*, where effective language use extends beyond grammatical accuracy to social and cultural appropriateness. Consequently, incorporating oral literature into French instruction allows learners to communicate meaningfully, not merely to recite memorised forms.

### **Theoretical Foundations: From Socio-constructivism to Decolonial Pedagogy**

The theoretical backbone of this research rests on socio-constructivist and decolonial paradigms. According to Vygotsky (1978), learning occurs through interaction within a *Zone of Proximal Development* (ZPD), where the

learner's potential is activated through collaboration and social engagement. The use of oral literature naturally lends itself to this principle: learners negotiate meaning, exchange interpretations, and co-construct understanding through storytelling, dramatization, and discussion.

Complementing this is Krashen's (1982) *Input Hypothesis*, which posits that learners acquire language when they are exposed to comprehensible input that slightly exceeds their current level of competence. Nigerian oral tales, when rendered in French, provide familiar contexts that reduce affective barriers while stretching linguistic ability. In this sense, oral literature serves as a "bridge input," making the foreign language both accessible and challenging. From a culturally responsive teaching perspective, Gay (2018) maintains that effective pedagogy draws on students' cultural experiences to promote learning. Teachers who understand and respect learners' cultural backgrounds can design more inclusive and motivating classrooms. In Nigeria, where learners are immersed in vibrant oral traditions, drawing from local proverbs or folk narratives is a natural way to affirm their identity while teaching a foreign tongue. This approach transforms learning from a top-down process into a co-creative experience between teacher and student.

Postcolonial theorists extend this idea further by critiquing the Eurocentric bias of conventional language education. Ngũgĩ wa Thiong'o (1986) and Canagarajah (1999) argue that education systems in postcolonial societies often perpetuate dependency by privileging foreign languages and epistemologies over indigenous forms of knowledge. Integrating Nigerian oral literature into French teaching thus represents an act of pedagogical decolonisation — reclaiming the learner's voice and validating local narratives within academic discourse. Such integration challenges linguistic hierarchies and promotes a more equitable exchange of cultural knowledge.

### **Empirical Studies on Oral Literature and Language Learning**

Empirical studies on language teaching in

African contexts support the argument that culturally grounded materials enhance learner engagement and performance. Adeyemi and Adejumo (2020) found that students who participated in storytelling-based language lessons demonstrated stronger retention and communicative ability than those who followed purely grammatical instruction. Similarly, Obiegbu (2018) observed that the use of indigenous songs and proverbs in FLE classrooms fostered a sense of ownership and pride among learners, resulting in improved pronunciation and vocabulary acquisition. These findings echo Gardner's (1983) theory of *Multiple Intelligences*, which highlights the role of cultural and emotional factors in learning. By engaging learners through artistic and narrative forms, teachers activate linguistic, interpersonal, and intrapersonal intelligences that conventional textbooks often neglect.

Despite these positive indications, many Nigerian classrooms still rely on foreign-authored materials that marginalise local realities. This gap underscores the urgency of developing bilingual teaching resources that connect French instruction to the learners' socio-cultural environment. As Emenyonu (2019) notes, oral literature is not a static cultural artefact but a dynamic pedagogical tool capable of transforming classroom interaction. Its inclusion in FLE teaching aligns with modern calls for experiential learning and holistic education.

The reviewed literature reveals a convergence between socio-constructivist theories, culturally responsive pedagogy, and decolonial thought. Together, they affirm that language acquisition flourishes when learners connect new linguistic knowledge to familiar cultural frameworks. The next section will describe the methodological approach adopted in this study.

### Methodology

#### Research Design

This study adopted a qualitative, classroom-based research design grounded in action research principles. Action research is particularly appropriate for educational contexts where the researcher seeks to understand and improve teaching practice through systematic

reflection (Kemmis & McTaggart, 2005). The study was interpretive in nature, focusing on meaning-making processes rather than statistical generalisation. This design enabled the exploration of how Nigerian oral literature could be used as a pedagogical resource for improving students' engagement and language acquisition in French. As Creswell and Poth (2018) observe, qualitative inquiry is best suited for studies that seek to capture classroom interactions, student perspectives, and contextual realities. The research therefore relied on observation, written tasks, and reflective journals to generate data that reflected both linguistic and cultural learning.

#### Setting and Participants

The research was conducted at Deeper Life High School, Port Harcourt Campus, a private secondary school known for its strong academic and moral standards. The school's student population is multilingual and multicultural, drawing learners from different Nigerian ethnic groups including Yoruba, Igbo, Hausa, and Annang-Ibibio. The French department at the school offers instruction from Junior Secondary School (JSS) to Senior Secondary School (SSS). For this study, one class — JSS3 — was purposively selected because the students were at an intermediate stage of French acquisition, able to understand basic grammatical structures but still developing oral fluency.

The JSS3 cohort at the time of research comprised six arms: *Diamond*, *Gold*, *Emerald*, *Jasper*, *Topaz*, and *Onyx*, with an average of 17–18 students per class. The study engaged all six classes to ensure diversity of linguistic and cultural backgrounds, resulting in a total of 106 students. The school maintained a rigorous academic calendar, and the French curriculum followed the national standards set by the Nigerian Educational Research and Development Council (NERDC). The internal assessment structure consisted of continuous assessment (40%) and end-of-term examinations (60%), together accounting for the final grade.

#### Data Collection Procedures

Data collection occurred over a twelve-week term and involved three main instruments: classroom observation, and written tasks.

### a. Classroom Observation

Observation provided a direct view of student participation and interaction. Each class period lasted 40 minutes, and lessons were observed twice weekly. The researcher maintained a structured observation guide focusing on participation rate, response to oral tasks, use of target language, and signs of engagement such as volunteering answers or initiating discussion. Field notes were written after each lesson, capturing both descriptive and interpretive comments.

### b. Written Tasks

Students completed weekly written exercises that included translation, story writing, and short dialogues in French. Each task was linked to oral materials drawn from Nigerian traditions. For example, students wrote short French narratives based on familiar folktales such as *"Why the Tortoise Has a Cracked Shell"*. The written tasks were assessed using the school's established criteria for language work — grammatical accuracy, vocabulary range, creativity, and coherence.

### Data Analysis

Thematic analysis, as proposed by Braun and Clarke (2006), guided the analysis of the collected data. The process involved reading and observation notes, students' written outputs. Codes were developed around three core themes: *linguistic comprehension, learner motivation, and cultural identity*. These were then grouped into

broader categories that illustrated how oral literature contributed to learning outcomes.

### Ethical Considerations

Since the study took place in the researcher's own class within a controlled institutional environment, formal ethical clearance was not required. Nevertheless, professional and moral responsibility guided the research. The activities were conducted within normal classroom instruction, and no student was singled out or disadvantaged.

### Researcher's Role and Reflexivity

As a teacher-researcher, the investigator occupied a dual role — facilitating instruction and documenting findings. While this position offered privileged insight into classroom processes, it also carried the potential for bias. To address this, conscious efforts were made to maintain objectivity by distinguishing between teaching and analysing roles. Field notes were written immediately after each session to avoid retrospective distortion, and reflective memos were used to record the researcher's evolving perspectives. The insider status, however, proved advantageous, allowing authentic interaction with students and a nuanced understanding of their responses to culturally grounded pedagogy. This reflexive engagement aligns with Merriam and Tisdell's (2016) assertion that in qualitative research, awareness of one's positionality enhances, rather than undermines, credibility.

## Practical Classroom Applications and findings

This section presents the practical application of Nigerian oral literature in French language instruction and the outcomes observed in the Junior Secondary School (JSS3) classes. The instructional approach aimed to evaluate how folktales, proverbs, idioms, and songs drawn from local cultures could facilitate students' comprehension, participation, and retention in French lessons.

Throughout a twelve-week term, the integration of oral literature into French teaching generated observable linguistic and attitudinal changes among students. Learners became more expressive, confident, and eager to participate in discussions. The findings summarised here are based on structured observation notes, students' written tasks, and classroom assessments.

### Classroom implementation

The integration of oral literature was achieved through four main types of activities: storytelling, proverb translation, song adaptation, and short drama performances all of which were conducted in French.

### Animal Naming and Sound Activity

During a lesson on *Les animaux*, the students of JSS3 were asked to list animals in their local dialects and provide their French equivalents. The next day, an animal sound was imitated for instance, the bark of a dog

or the crow of a cock and a question was thus asked in French, “*Quel est cet animal en français et dans votre langue maternelle ?*”

The class responded with lively excitement. Students raised their hands to answer:

- “*Dog! — Chien* en français, *Nkita* en Igbo.”
- “*Goat! — Chèvre* en français, *Ewe* en Yoruba.”
- “*Hen! — Poule* en français, *Unen* en Annang-Ibibio.”

The room filled with laughter and energy. This single exercise did more than teach vocabulary; it built a bridge between sound, meaning, and identity. As Krashen (1982) suggests, language acquisition occurs best when input is meaningful and emotionally engaging. The familiar setting of local animal names made the French words easier to remember and pronounce.

### Folktale Narration in French

Building on this activity, **storytelling sessions** were introduced. Students were asked to narrate simple animal folktales in French. Interestingly; all the folktales were drawn from their moonlight tales, stories they had heard from parents or grandparents. One student recounted “*Comment la tortue a perdu sa carapace*” (How the Tortoise Lost His Shell), while another narrated “*Pourquoi le chien et le chat ne sont plus amis*” (Why the Dog and the Cat Are No Longer Friends).

In translation and retelling, they learnt to use narrative tenses (passé composé) and connectors such as *puis*, *ensuite*, *finalement*. The learners also discovered that French, like their mother tongues, uses rhythm and repetition to structure stories. This aligns with Vygotsky’s (1978) view that cognitive growth occurs when learners manipulate familiar cultural material in new linguistic forms.

### Proverbs as Grammar Anchors

Proverbs served as effective grammar lessons. Proverbs were selected from major Nigerian languages and asked students to translate and discuss them in French. This not only taught new structures but also provoked reflection on meaning and morality.

Examples included:

- **Yoruba:** “*Bi omode ba we owo, a ba agba jeun.*”  
→ “*Quand un enfant lave ses mains, il peut manger avec les anciens.*”  
(Taught conditional tense and moral humility.)
- **Hausa:** “*Komai nisan jifa, kasa zai fādī.*”  
→ “*Peu importe la distance du lancer, la pierre tombera toujours au sol.*”  
(Used to explain logical connectors and future tense.)
- **Igbo:** “*A sì na ihe onye metere, o na-efe ya azu.*”  
→ “*On dit que les actions d'un homme le suivent toujours.*”  
(Taught reflexive and impersonal constructions.)
- **Efik:** “*Ekpa mme atim, owo iset idem.*”  
→ “*Si tu ne fais pas d'effort, tu resteras le même.*”  
(Illustrated modal verbs and the notion of perseverance.)
- **Annang-Ibibio:** “*Ndito k'uyo odot ikpo isong.*”  
→ “*Les enfants apprennent à parler en écoutant la terre.*”  
(Used to teach indirect speech and the verb écouter.)

Through these examples, learners realised that proverbs across languages share moral universals. The translation process encouraged comparative thinking and grammatical precision. Gay (2018) notes that when instruction recognises cultural knowledge, learners become more self-confident and academically motivated.

### Performance-Based Projects

To conclude the term, students worked in groups to stage mini-dramas in French based on local tales. One group dramatized *La tortue et le roi de la forêt*. Another enacted *Pourquoi le lézard hache toujours la tête*. These performances integrated speaking, listening, reading, and writing skills.

Students wrote short scripts (we translated them together), practised dialogues, and performed before the class. The activity promoted collaboration, pronunciation accuracy, and spontaneous expression. As Byram (1997) emphasises, intercultural communicative competence is achieved when learners not only know a language but can perform meaningfully within its cultural frame.

### **Observed Outcomes**

From the classroom observations and written exercises conducted during the study, three major outcomes emerged which significantly demonstrate the impact of integrating Nigerian oral literature into French language teaching. First, there was a remarkable improvement in students' comprehension of grammatical structures and sentence formation. Learners found it easier to grasp complex concepts such as conjugation of verbs, and sentence agreement when the lessons were linked to familiar cultural contexts. For instance, when a local proverb or folktale was used to explain tense usage, students were able to reproduce correct grammatical forms more consistently in both oral and written work. Their written assessments reflected fewer errors in verb usage and better sentence coherence compared to previous terms where conventional examples were used. This confirms that comprehension deepens when learning is rooted in the learner's lived experience.

Second, students' participation levels rose considerably. Classroom interaction became lively as learners volunteered responses, narrated stories, and engaged in group discussions with visible enthusiasm. These observations reinforce Gay's (2018) assertion that culturally responsive teaching stimulates learners' motivation and strengthens their sense of belonging in the learning environment. When students perceive the classroom as an extension of their own cultural world, learning becomes a shared and meaningful activity rather than a distant academic task.

Third, and perhaps most importantly, there was a noticeable increase in students' confidence and retention. Learners became more at ease using French expressions in conversation, especially when retelling familiar tales or describing community events. The fear of speaking a foreign language diminished as they began to view French as a tool for expressing their own realities rather than merely imitating foreign contexts. End-of-term assessments provided quantitative support for these observations, as 88% of the students scored above the class average, a significant improvement compared to earlier evaluations conducted before the oral literature integration. Overall, the success recorded here suggests that language pedagogy rooted in indigenous knowledge systems can transform classrooms into vibrant spaces of creativity, understanding, and self-confidence.

### **Discussion of Findings**

The findings affirm that contextualised learning through oral literature fosters both cognitive and affective engagement. The use of culturally familiar material provided learners with a sense of ownership and relevance. In line with Gardner's (1983) theory of multiple intelligences, students demonstrated linguistic, interpersonal, and intrapersonal growth as they related personally to classroom content.

Moreover, the results validate the socio-constructivist framework outlined earlier. The interactive nature of oral literature enabled students to learn through collaboration and peer dialogue, supporting Vygotsky's (1978) emphasis on social mediation. At the same time, the positive

response to the cultural materials reflects Ngũgĩ wa Thiong'o's (1986) assertion that education grounded in indigenous values fosters intellectual liberation.

The success of these activities demonstrates that French language instruction in Nigeria can be transformed when rooted in the learner's environment. Rather than viewing oral literature as an extracurricular element, it can serve as the linguistic and cultural core of a communicative, human-centred pedagogy.

### **Challenges in Integrating Oral Literature into French Language Teaching**

While the use of Nigerian oral literature in French classrooms has shown remarkable promise, the process is not without challenges. These

difficulties reflect both structural and pedagogical realities within Nigeria's educational system.

#### **a. Inadequate Instructional Resources**

One of the main challenges lies in the scarcity of teaching materials that blend French language content with Nigerian oral traditions. Most approved French textbooks are imported and designed for Francophone or European contexts, offering little connection to African realities. Teachers therefore have to rely on their creativity to adapt or translate local folktales, songs, and proverbs into French. This task, though rewarding, is time-consuming and demands a high level of linguistic competence and cultural sensitivity.

#### **b. Limited Teacher Preparation and Training**

Many French language teachers have received traditional, grammar-oriented training that prioritises accuracy over cultural responsiveness. As Gay (2018) points out, effective culturally responsive teaching requires deliberate professional preparation. Without exposure to participatory or context-based pedagogy, teachers may find it difficult to integrate oral literature confidently into their lessons. The lack of professional development programmes tailored to this purpose further compounds the problem.

#### **c. Curriculum and Assessment Constraints**

The official curriculum and examination systems, such as those of WAEC and NECO, remain largely prescriptive. They focus on written grammar, comprehension, and translation, leaving little room for oral or creative expression. This rigid structure discourages teachers from experimenting with interactive methods such as storytelling or performance-based learning. Consequently, lessons that should foster creativity and communication often revert to rote memorisation.

#### **d. Time and Class Size Limitations**

Large class sizes and limited instructional time also pose practical barriers. Oral literature activities, such as group performances or storytelling sessions, require more time for preparation, participation, and feedback than conventional exercises. Teachers working under pressure to complete the syllabus may therefore abandon these culturally enriching strategies for faster but less engaging alternatives.

#### **e. Attitudinal Resistance**

A subtle yet important challenge is the perception among some educators and administrators that the inclusion of indigenous materials might reduce the "standard" of foreign language learning. Such attitudes reflect the lingering colonial mindset that values European models of education over indigenous knowledge systems (Ngũgĩ wa Thiong'o, 1986). Overcoming this bias requires sustained advocacy and awareness about the pedagogical value of integrating local content into global language instruction.

### **Recommendations**

Addressing these challenges demands coordinated action at the levels of policy, pedagogy, and professional training. The following recommendations offer practical steps for strengthening the integration of oral literature into French language teaching across Nigeria.

#### **a. Development of Culturally Relevant Teaching Materials**

There is an urgent need for the creation of textbooks and multimedia resources that incorporate Nigerian oral literature in bilingual form. Educational publishers and universities should collaborate with local storytellers, linguists, and French educators to develop accessible, contextually grounded teaching tools. This will ensure that students encounter French not as an imported subject but as a language that interacts meaningfully with their lived experiences.

#### **b. Teacher Capacity Building**

Teacher education programmes should integrate modules on culturally responsive and communicative language teaching. Regular workshops and refresher courses organised by bodies such as the University French Teachers' Association of Nigeria (UFTAN) can equip educators with the skills to use oral literature effectively. As Vygotsky (1978) emphasises, teachers themselves must engage in social learning processes that enhance their pedagogical creativity.

#### **c. Curriculum Reform and Assessment Innovation**

Policy reform is essential for sustaining change. Curriculum designers should revise French syllabi to include learning outcomes related to oral

expression, cultural awareness, and creative use of language. Assessment bodies should also expand their evaluation criteria to include oral storytelling, dramatization, and project-based assignments. Such reforms will align assessment with communicative competence rather than mere grammatical accuracy.

#### **d. Institutional and Community Collaboration**

Partnerships between schools, cultural centres, and local communities can strengthen the resource base for teaching. Community elders and artists can serve as cultural informants, helping to document and interpret oral texts in ways that enrich the classroom. Such collaboration not only validates indigenous knowledge but also promotes intergenerational learning.

#### **e. Research and Continuous Evaluation**

Further research is needed to document the long-term effects of integrating oral literature in language education. Longitudinal studies could assess how students who learn through culturally responsive methods perform in national and international examinations compared to those taught through conventional means. Regular evaluation will ensure that practice evolves with evidence and experience.

#### **Conclusion**

This study has explored how the integration of Nigerian oral literature into French language teaching can transform the learning experience from mechanical repetition to meaningful communication. Through stories, proverbs, and songs drawn from students' cultural backgrounds, learning French became a familiar and engaging process. The approach provided learners with a voice, a way to connect their everyday experiences with the foreign language to learning and affirming identity.

The research demonstrated that oral literature is not simply a cultural ornament but a pedagogical bridge that connects cognition and culture. When learners used French to retell local stories or translate proverbs, they developed a deeper sense of ownership of the language. This study supports Gay's (2018) argument that culturally responsive pedagogy validates students' lived experiences.

The findings contribute to the ongoing discourse on decolonising foreign language education in Africa. They reveal that contextualising French teaching within Nigerian oral traditions strengthens both linguistic accuracy and intercultural competence. This model, developed from authentic classroom practice, illustrates how teachers can indigenise foreign language pedagogy without compromising academic rigour. It offers a framework adaptable to other multilingual settings across the continent.

The results of this study suggest several implications for policy, practice, and research. At the policy level, curriculum planners should formally incorporate oral literature into the French syllabus, recognising it as a valuable linguistic and cultural resource. Teacher training programmes should include modules on integrating indigenous materials into FLE classrooms, equipping educators with both linguistic and cultural competence.

At the classroom level, teachers should view learners' cultures not as external references but as starting points for instruction. Using folktales, songs, and proverbs in French lessons can encourage participation, reduce anxiety, and strengthen intercultural dialogue. Furthermore, assessment models should balance accuracy with creativity acknowledging that communication and cultural understanding are central to language mastery.

Future research could expand this study by exploring how culturally grounded instruction affects specific linguistic skills such as pronunciation or writing, or by comparing outcomes across public and private institutions. Such research would provide empirical depth and further validate the model proposed here.

Ultimately, this study reinforces the idea that the teaching of French in Nigeria can and should evolve beyond imitation of native-speaker norms. By integrating oral literature, educators affirm the richness of African culture while opening students to global communication. This pedagogical shift transforms the classroom into a space where languages meet, cultures converse, and learning becomes both intellectually rigorous and emotionally meaningful.

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Generative AI tools, specifically ChatGPT (OpenAI, 2025), were used solely for language refinement. All conceptual, analytical, and interpretive aspects of the research were conducted by the author. The content, data analysis, and conclusions reflect the author's independent scholarly work.

## SOCIOLINGUISTIC ANALYSIS OF HAUSA EXPRESSIVE TABOOS

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### Abstract

This paper focused on the Sociolinguistic Analysis of Hausa Taboos. The paper adopted qualitative method of data gathering which includes primary and secondary data. The primary data were collected based on administering structured interview with the Hausa native speakers and the secondary data were gathered from the examination of the existing Hausa literature, online sources, journals, seminars and dissertations. This paper classified Hausa taboos investigated, into the following: disability taboos, profanity taboos, scatological/obscenity/sexual taboos, abuse/insult taboos and death taboos. It was discovered that taboo words exist in Hausa communities and the Hausa speakers express taboo words in their socio-cultural interactions. The findings reveal that taboo words expressed among Hausa speakers are considered offensive, prohibited, restricted, disallowed, unlawful, embarrassing, provocative, shameful, shocking, traumatizing and hurtful. Also, the paper revealed that Hausa taboos are products of Hausa culture, traditional religion, belief and tradition of the people in their socio-cultural interactions.

**Keywords:** Sociolinguistics, Taboo and Hausa.

### Introduction

Language is a concept that is universally recognized as a system that identifies the ethnic background of people who emanate from different spheres of life as inhabitants of a particular community in an organized society. No one can separate language and society. It is the society that ensures the particular environment or an ecosystem where people inhabit to interact with one another through communication. It is language that symbolizes the art of communication between a speaker and respondent.

One of the best gifts man is endowed with is that of language, which is used to communicate with one another in a community (David & David, 2020). Without language, communication is threatened and without communication, life becomes tasteless and meaningless. The study of language, otherwise known as linguistics, has evolved significantly from ancient philosophical discussions about the nature of language to contemporary approaches that use scientific methods (Shadwy, 2023).

The primary uses of language are informative, expressive and directive in nature. Language is used to reason, to express ideas, argue

a point, provide directions and much more (Sasha and Summer, 2023:2). However, Levinson (2016:10) states that “most language usage is interactive, involving rapid turn-taking. The turn-taking system has a number of striking properties: turns are short and responses remarkably rapid, but turns are varying in length and often of very complex construction such that the underlying cognitive processing is highly compressed. Language is also a tool fashioned by man. Given the nature of his innate endowment, it is one of his most sophisticated tools. Parikh (2001:1), states “we use language to do various things, like giving command and asking questions and expressing feelings, but we use it mostly to communicate information about the world. Language use is central to our social interaction; in the view of Evans (2014:6), “language is central to all our lives and is unarguably the tool that set humans apart from any other species. And on some accounts, language is the symbolic behavior that allows human singularities – art, religion and science – to occur”. Evans (2014), reiterates that we use language to buy groceries in the supermarket, to get a job, to hire or fire an employee, to buy train tickets and to compose an email. We use language

to make a telephone call, to flirt, to invite someone out on a date, to propose marriage, to get married, to quarrel and to make up afterwards. Language use allows us to make friends and enemies, to pass the time of the day, and so on. In our everyday lives, we produce and comprehend language with such apparent ease that we take it for granted.

Al-HeijEid (2020:5), states that “the term ‘sociolinguistics’ refers to the study of language regarding the social context used in society.” Sociolinguistics emerged as a sub-field of Linguistics in the mid-20th century, emphasizing the importance of social and cultural factors in shaping language use and variation. This approach highlighted the role of social context, power dynamics, and identity in language, and has had a significant impact on our understanding of language change, language policy, and language planning. Sociolinguistics is a study of language where linguistic factors are related to the factors beyond the language, such as ‘language use’ by its speakers in a certain speech community. It is concerned with the relationship between language and the context in which it is used. In other words, it studies the relationship between language and society. It discusses the social functions of language and the ways it is used to convey social meaning and the way people signal aspects of their social identity through their language.

In the opinion of Sulpizio, et al., (2024:1), “the use of taboo words represents one of the most common and arguably universal linguistic behaviors, fulfilling a wide range of psychological and social functions.” Taboos are among the few cultural phenomena that have withstood the test of time, as all tribes and ethnic groups of the world have their taboos which are drawn from their cultural environments. This study is based on the speakers of Hausa society and the context in which Hausa speakers use taboo expressions to communicate and interact with each other. Hausa is one of the major languages in Nigeria. It is spoken in the Northern states which include: Kano, Katsina, Kaduna, Jigawa, Bauchi, Sokoto, Zamfara and so on (Alkali, 2024). Thus, the term “context” as used here, depicts the situations that determine the use of taboo language to communicate effectively among Hausa speakers.

This study is therefore, concerned with carrying out a sociolinguistic analysis of Hausa Taboos.

### **Conceptual Explication**

#### **Sociolinguistics**

Sociolinguistics is the study of language and society. It is important to know that there is a relationship between society and language. Society is concerned with the environment where people live, socialize, interact and communicate. Based on this fact therefore, (Wardhaugh 2006:13) states:

Sociolinguistics is concerned with investigating the relationship between language and society with the goal being a better understanding of the structure of language and how language functions in communication; the equivalent goal in the sociology of language is trying to discover how social structure can be better understood through the study of language, for example; How certain linguistic features serve to characterize particular social arrangement.

According to Hudson (1996) as cited in Wardhaugh (2006:13), sociolinguistics is the study of, “language in relation to society; whereas the sociology of language is the study of society in relation to language.”

Sociolinguistics as rightly described above, is an integral element of linguistic research, though not part of the formal linguistics; being phonology, morphology, syntax and semantics. It is an area of theoretical linguistics that is critically concerned with how language is conceived and communicated among speakers of given speech communities. If you talk of speech community, the researcher is optimistic that language is an instrument that symbolizes identified culture and practice of speakers; and the society is a reflection and mirror of language. So intrinsically, speakers of language must have liberty to exist within their communities, interact and interrelate with one another.

#### **Language Use**

Language use is an aspect of sociolinguistics. It is remarkable to say that language is

used to express ideas, feelings, emotions and desire by the speakers. It is through the use of language that speakers were able to interact with each other in order to achieve certain goals set out in their society. In Agustine, Luardini and Asi, (2021:1), “the use of language can be part of the ethnographic discourse of communication to examine the relationship between language and society, and how multi-lingual speakers use language in their discourse community environment.” Having expressed some discourse about language use however, Kashima (2024), posits that “humans have the capacity to use complex language far more than any other species on earth.” We cooperate with each other to use language for communication; language is often used to communicate about and even construct and maintain our social world.

Language use and human sociality are inseparable parts of Homosapiens as a biological species. Levinson (2016) states, “most language usage is interactive, involving rapid turn-taking. The turn-taking system has a number of striking properties. Turns are short and responses are remarkably rapid, but turns are of varying length and often of very complex construction such that the underlying cognitive processing is highly compressed.” In a more clarification about language use, Hastings (2006), states that, “what seems clear is that language usage in non-literate societies is far more fluid than might be imagined. It is less a matter of guiding the right word than of making it right by regular usage. Existing words had the flexibility of all languages.

### **Language and Society**

Language in relation to society is a subfield of sociolinguistics that is concerned with sociology and language. It is an area of theoretical linguistics that critically examines speakers' use of language and the extent that community and people exist, communicates between one speaker to another and postulates an active involvement of communicative competence and performance which formed the foundation that ensured interaction, interrelationship among people in their domain, following the proposition that preceded this. However, (Satria, Juralhan, Wahab, & Permatasari 2014:1), states that:

So like we knew that function of language in general as social communicative; while in a quest to infer more about language and society as an umbrella variable of sociolinguistic approach.

Language and society as interpreted by (Australian National University, 2022) categorically stated that:

As important for anyone who wants to understand the ways in which languages function in their social context. It provides students with skills for carrying out research in sociolinguistics, including collecting, describing and interpreting sociolinguistic data and ethnographic participant observation.

Reporting and describing research findings will also be covered. It may however interest you to know that language and society intensify as a primary level or segment of sociolinguistic research where it lays a basic structure that subsequent researches on sociolinguistics would be built on; it is most relevant of the perspectives that concerns this subject of investigation where its help interprets some issues that would be translated in due course.

### **Taboo**

According to Khairullina, Fatkullina, So, and Lin (2020:2), “taboo is a system of ancient prohibition of religious and ceremonial attitudes that characterize a certain stage of social development of people. The system of sacred prohibitions from ancient centuries was widespread not only among the people of Polynesia, but also India, North America, China and Egypt. Later it was formed among the people of the ancient world - in ancient Greece and ancient Rome. As world religion have arisen, the sacred prohibitions were developed by theologians in Islam, Judaism, Christianity, Confucianism and Buddhism.” Ullman, (1970:9), cited in Khairullina et al, (2020:3), posits that “language taboos arise mainly for the following reasons: firstly, it is necessary to note the cases of taboos which owe their appearance to a sense of fear or ‘sacred horror’...religious restrictions on

the mention of the name of God; the cases when superstition avoids calling by their names, the dead, devil, evil spirits and widespread taboos relating to the meaning of animals.

Tapu is practiced in various forms across Polynesia, from new Zealand to Hawaii, and is believed to be the origin of the English word ‘taboo,’ while according Johanson, (2020), the British explorer, James Cook, “first noting the concept on a visit to Tonga in 1777; while tapu is a divine mandate controlling a society’s access to certain people, places or things (with potentially dire consequences for those who transgressed in historical times.” Taboo is similarly used in English to describe practices that are either forbidden or restricted by social or religious customs. On Eastern Islands, the respect locals have for their archeological sites is a noticeable example of tapu. However, other forms of tapu – including prohibitions on fishing during spawning seasons have been lost over the last 50 years as the Island adapted to meet the needs of international tourists. On the other hand, the origin and cultural evolution of taboos in human societies has been clearly stated by Hong (2024), “Taboos are ubiquitous in human social life, and play a particular prominent role in traditional small-scale societies, where they serve as powerful tools to regulate human action.

Rahmayani and Fitrawati (2018), state that there are many experts who have done research about taboo words. For example, the research from Jay (1996) and Battistella (2005), who have proposed about types of taboo words. According to Battistella (2005), “there are four types of taboo words; they are: epithets, profanity, vulgarity, and obscenity.” In addition, Jay (1996) also states that there are nine types of taboo words; they are: “obscenity, profanity, vulgarity, epithets, blasphemy, cursing, slander, insult and slur, and scatology.”

## Data Presentation and Analysis

### Taboos expressing disability

i.	<i>kur ma</i>	<i>wandabayajinmagana</i>	‘deaf person’
ii.	<i>bebe</i>	<i>wandabayafadinmagana</i>	‘dumb’
iii.	<i>makaho</i>	<i>maragani</i>	‘blind person’
iv.	<i>gurgu</i>	<i>nakasa she</i>	‘cripple’
v.	<i>kuturu</i>	<i>cutarhanu da kafa</i>	‘leprosy’

## Research Methodology

The study is descriptive and employs qualitative research design. Two principal sources were adopted for data collections which include: primary sources and secondary sources. For the primary sources, an oral interview was conducted with the Hausa native speakers as well as the researcher’s intuition which helped in obtaining data for the study. Participant observations were also used in the course of gathering of the Hausa native speakers’ expressive taboos at the mosques, marriage ceremonies, family unit activities, motor parks, hospital setting, grave yards, school setting, cultural festival, naming of newborn baby ceremony, religious festival, and so on. The population of the study comprised of the entire Hausa speakers of Northern States and the researcher selected participants that are relevant to this study from Kano, Katsina, and Sokoto States in North West, Nigeria. The researcher made use of an OPPO A3x Android Device to record the interview interaction with the native speakers, and a notebook to write all expressed taboos from the expressions of the Hausa native speakers.

Other primary sources include: Mutumma’auinal’adagadanfedeal’ada Hausa textbook, Za:r – English-Hausa Dictionary, and Kamus Hausa Dictionary. The secondary sources of data collection include: online research sources, dissertations, journals, seminar papers, and theses. However, the researcher collected five hundred (500) Hausa expressive taboos from the native speakers which are then classified based on the sociolinguistic and pragmatic context of language use in the Hausa communities. The interactional sociolinguistic theory developed by Gumperz, (1982) and the linguistic politeness theory by Brown and Levinson (1987) were descriptively used in the analysis and interpretation of data generated from the taboos language of Hausa.

*kur ma* ‘deaf’, refers to a taboo expression where a Hausa speaker is socially impaired in which the person cannot hear communication extended to him. It is a disability that affects the Hausa people which may be congenital or accidental. Uttering this taboo word between a speaker and responder in a sociolinguistic context of communication is considered offensive and epithet and should be avoided.

*bebe* ‘dumb’, refers to a taboo expression which is a social impairment affecting the Hausa speaker. The disability could be of natural cause or accidental where a person cannot be able to express himself in the course of interaction with another. Uttering this taboo expression between an addresser and addressee in a sociolinguistic context of communication is considered offensive and epithet and should be avoided.

*makaho* ‘blind’, refers to a taboo expression which is a social impairment affecting a Hausa speaker where the affected person is unable to sight things around him. The disability could be of natural cause or accidental. Uttering this taboo expression between an addresser and addressee in a sociolinguistic context of communication is considered offensive and epithet and should be avoided.

*gurgu* ‘crippled person’, refers to someone who cannot walk; could be of natural or accidental cause. Uttering such taboo words between a speaker and listener in a sociolinguistic context of communication is considered offensive and epithet and should be discouraged.

*kuturu* ‘leper”, refers to a chronic disease of the skin, nerves and mucous membrane.. The disability could be of natural cause or accidental. Uttering this taboo expression between an addresser and addressee in a sociolinguistic context of communication is considered offensive and epithet and should be avoided.

*urma* ‘deaf’: one can replace it with (i) *wandabayajinmaganam* ‘someone with hearing deficiency’ among Hausa speakers. It is a disability that occurs naturally or by accident. Uttering this taboo word between a speaker and responder in a pragmatic context of communication is considered offensive and euphemism should be used to mitigate the taboo expression and ensure that communication is used politely and seamlessly in the Hausa community.

*bebe* ‘dumb’: can be replaced with (ii) *wandabayafadinmagana* ‘someone with speech impairment’ among Hausa speakers. It is a disability that occurs in people naturally and constitutes a social impairment which renders the speaker to be very vulnerable in terms of social interaction. Uttering the taboo word between addresser and addressee in a pragmatic context of communication is considered offensive and euphemism should be used to replace the taboo expression and ensure that communication is polite and smooth in the Hausa community.

*makaho* ‘blind’: can be replaced with (iii) *maragani* ‘a person with sight impairment’ among the Hausa speakers. It is a disability that affects the Hausa speaker as a result of natural cause or accidental. The social impairment of this nature usually renders the victim vulnerable and creates social segregation. Uttering the said taboo word between an addresser and addressee in a pragmatic context of communication is considered offensive and euphemism should be used to replace the said taboo expression in order to mitigate the offensiveness and ensure that communication is channeled successfully among the Hausa speakers in their community.

*gurgu* ‘crippled person’: can be replaced with (iv) *nakasashe* ‘disabled person’ among Hausa speakers. It is a social disability that renders the person unable to walk in order to meet up with social challenges; as such, the affected speaker is rendered vulnerable and faces social inequality among Hausa speakers in the Hausa community. Uttering the said taboo word between addresser and addressee in a pragmatic context of communication is considered offensive and euphemism should be used to cushion the effect of the said taboo expression and ensure that polite and soft expression is communicated among the speakers in the Hausa community.

*kuturu* ‘leper’: can be replaced with (v) *cutar ‘hanu da kafa* ‘someone affected by disease of the skin, nerves & mucous membrane’ among the Hausa speakers. This social impairment constitutes a social distance between the affected person and others. The disability usually renders the victim vulnerable due to the stigma which causes the victim to resorts to begging in most cases in the Hausa community. Uttering the said taboo word between addresser and addressee in a pragmatic context of communication is considered offensive and

euphemism should be used to cushion the effect of the said taboo expression and ensure that polite and soft expression is communicated among the speakers in the Hausa community.

### Taboos expressing profanity

i.	<i>kwa ran</i>	<i>kwasan aradu</i>	‘thunder’
ii.	<i>saddabaru</i>	<i>dabarazamba</i>	‘sorcery’
iii.	<i>tsum bur bura</i>	<i>shamus laljani</i>	‘idol / statue’
iv.	<i>bori</i>	<i>iskoki</i>	‘animistic spirit possession religion’
v.	<i>sur kulle</i>	<i>sirrinmagani</i>	‘incantation’

*kwa ran kwasan* ‘thunder.’ It is a rumbling sound with lightening that usually occurs when rain is falling. Hausa speakers believe in their traditional religion that when there is thunder, it means that something is wrong in the community. For a Hausa speaker to swear with thunder therefore, is considered a taboo when it is expressed by the speakers in their social interaction with each other.

*saddabaru* ‘sorcery.’ It is a diabolic power acquired among the traditional herbal Hausa speakers. This kind of diabolic power is used by some speakers to perpetuate evil against others which the community voids an act of sorcery and prohibits expressing such utterances among the Hausa speakers who are engaged in social interaction between a speaker and responder.

*tsum bur bura* ‘idol/statue.’ It is a spirit that resides on top of ‘gorondutse’ rock, which the traditional Hausa speakers believe in, as well as worship as their god. In the light of this, the Hausa community considers it as blasphemy for a Hausa speaker to call the name of their god disrespectfully in the course of social interaction between an encoder and a decoder.

*bori* ‘animistic spirit possession religion.’ It is an ancient traditional religious practice of the Hausa speakers. In the Hausa community, some Hausa speakers are spiritually devoted in worshipping a spirit using the act of ‘Bori’ to appease their lord. Those Hausa speakers who believe in that traditional religion consider any Hausa speaker who expresses unremarkable statement on their belief as a taboo and the religious followers restrict and prohibit such utterances in the course of social interaction between a speaker and a listener.

*sur kulle* ‘incantation’. Some Hausa speakers who believe in traditional medicine practice in the Hausa community usually prohibit and disallow communicating about spiritual healing done for some speakers. They consider it as taboo, revealing the secret spiritual issues in a public discuss between a speaker and responder.

*kwa ran kwasan* ‘thunder,’ can be replaced with (i) *aradu*: The pragmatic context of this expression is euphemism, since “thunder” is not a polite expression that is acceptable among the Hausa speakers the needs to cushion the effect of the taboo harshness in order to make communication to be seamless between the speaker and the listener.

*saddabaru* ‘sorcery,’ can be replaced with (vi) *dabarazamba*: This taboo expression has been replaced with euphemism in a pragmatic context. This symbolizes that “sorcery” as a taboo is a magical and diabolic means expressed by Hausa speakers, but the euphemism cushions the effect of the taboo expressed against the law of the community and perhaps enhances a seamless communication between encoder and decoder in the community.

*tsum bur bura* ‘idol/statue’ (xii) *shamus laljani*: This Hausa taboo expression has been replaced by a euphemism in a pragmatic contest. The euphemism, “Shamus laljani” implies that the Hausa speakers should express the name of the spirit which the community is serving as spiritual lord; mentioning its name must be respected as sanctity of a secret.

*bori* ‘animistic spirit possession religion,’ can be replaced with (vii) *iskoki*: The Hausa expressive taboo here is replaced with a euphemism in a sociolinguistic context. The expressive taboo implies practice of Hausa speakers’ cultural and religious devotion. The use of the euphemism replaced the harshness of the taboo expressed.

*sur kulle* ‘incantation,’ can be replaced with (ii) *sirrinmagani*: The Hausa expressive taboo here has been replaced with euphemism, pragmatically. The taboo expressed indicates mystical practice of the Hausa tradition. For a Hausa speaker to express such kind of taboo is against the cultural law and practice. But replacing such expression with euphemism has refined communication between the speaker and the responder.

#### Taboos expressing scatological/obscenity/sexual

i.	<i>zuwànkáì</i>	<i>kawowa</i>	‘discharge’
ii.	<i>kazanta</i>	<i>datti</i>	‘trash’
iii.	<i>jinibiki</i>	<i>jininaihuwa</i>	‘maternity blood’
iv.	<i>wadiyi</i>	<i>farinruwa</i>	‘white fluid from man private part’
v.	<i>luwadi</i>	<i>saduwannamiji da namiji</i>	‘gay’

*zuwànkáì* ‘discharge.’ The Hausa expressive taboo here has been expressed by the Hausa speakers in a sociolinguistic context of language use. The taboo word is a product of communication intensified in the course of social interaction between addresser and addressee. The taboo implies that a man having sexual satisfaction, releases sperm which the community considered such expression to be offensive in a public discussion.

*kazanta* ‘trash.’ This Hausa expressive taboo is a taboo that has been expressed by the speakers in a social interaction between a speaker and a listener, observing sociolinguistic context of language use. The taboo clearly implies filthy things which are considered offensive when expressed by Hausa speakers in the course of their social interaction.

*jinibiki* ‘maternity blood.’ The Hausa expressivetaboo presented here is a taboo expressed by Hausa speakers in a social interaction between an encoder and decoder, which has been spoken sociolinguistically. The taboo expressed symbolizes obscenity in the sense that a woman who delivers a newborn baby, the blood that flows with the delivery where the Hausa speakers prohibit and disallow expression of such kind of taboo word in a public communication domain.

*wadiyi* ‘white fluid from man private part.’ The Hausa expressive taboo is expressed by the Hausa speakers based on sociolinguistic context of language use. This intensifies a social interaction between an addresser and addressee in expressing the above taboo. In the Hausa community, this expressed taboo implies that a man who is aroused sexually usually discharge such fluid in a quest for satisfaction; as such, the Hausa community considers expressing such taboo word as offensive and unlawful in the course of social interaction in the community.

*luwadi* ‘gay.’ This Hausa expressive taboo is associated with men having sexual affairs with fellow men. The taboo has been expressed in a social interaction between an addresser and addressee, which observes sociolinguistic context in expressing such taboo, and the Hausa community dastardly condemns the expression of such topic and consider it offensive since it has conflicted with the community acceptable norms and values.

*zuwànkáì* ‘discharge,’ can be replaced with (iv) *kawowa*: This euphemism has replaced the taboo expressed by the Hausa speaker in a pragmatic context. The taboo expressed indicates that a man is aroused sexually and discharges sperm on top of a woman. In this regard, the community disapproves the above taboo expression; therefore euphemism has been used to replace the taboo word expressed in order to mitigate the offensiveness of the taboo word expressed by the speakers in the Hausa community.

*kazanta* ‘trash,’ can be replaced with (ix) *datti*: This Hausa expressive taboo is replaced with a euphemism in a pragmatic context of the Hausa language use. The taboo expressed by Hausa speaker explicitly indicate that the taboo is scatological and obscene in nature; therefore the communication that intensifies between a Hausa speaker and responder in a public discourse setting is offensive and prohibited since the utterance causes embarrassment.

*jinibiki* ‘maternity blood,’ can be replaced with (ii) *jininaihuwa*: This Hausa expressive taboo is replaced with euphemism in a pragmatic context of the Hausa language use. The taboo expressed by the Hausa speaker implies that a woman who has given birth to a baby releases blood profusely in the course of delivery. The Hausa community has prohibited and restricted the use of such taboo expression in social interaction between addresser and addressee, instead, they are encouraged to use the acceptable code which is euphemism in order to mitigate the harshness of the taboo expression.

*wadiyi* ‘white fluid from man private part,’ can be replaced with (v) *farinruwa*: This Hausa expressive taboo has been replaced with euphemism pragmatically. The taboo expression made by Hausa speakers communicate the fact that a matured man releases white fluid as a result of sexual arousal, which in turn, the Hausa community considers the use of such expression to be offensive in a social interaction between a speaker and responder; instead they are encouraged to use soft expressions to mitigate the use of taboo expressions in order to enhance face to face communication which is morally acceptable in the Hausa community.

*luwadi* ‘gay,’ can be replaced with (vii) *saduwannamiji da namiji*: This Hausa expressive taboo has been replaced with euphemism in a pragmatic context. The taboo expression represents a man having sexual affair with a fellow man. The Hausa community categorically considers expressing such taboo word unlawful and encourages the Hausa speakers when making expression in a public social interaction, should use euphemism in order to cushion the effect of the taboo expression to the listener, in order to ensure that communication is lawful and acceptable in the Hausa community.

## Discussion of Findings

The study established that the taboo expressions by the Hausa speakers are unlawful, disallowed and prohibited. The study equally revealed that sociocultural classifications of Hausa expressive taboos have been established since the Hausa people believe and adhere strictly to their cultural and traditional practices which govern their existence as people and their traditional religion. Such sociocultural classifications of Hausa people as reflected in this study include: *bori*, *tsumbumbura*, *kofi*, *iskoki*, *camfi*, *kunya*, *surkunle*, *tsafi*, *tada*, *kandun baka*, *asiri*, among others. All the sociocultural classifications of taboo expressions in Hausa mentioned above are categorized according to their usage among the Hausa speakers. Bori and tsumbumbura are the ancient traditional religious practices which the Hausa people practice; they are mainly spirits and statues which the Hausa speakers worship and others are majorly cultural beliefs and practices as captured in the daily lives and transactions of the Hausa people in their community.

The findings of this study agree with Garba, (2019) that asserts that taboo is avoided for the fear that both accidental breach and intentional defiance are frowned at in the society, hence, violations result to wide condemnation. The study

found out that the Hausa taboos are secret, prohibited, restrictive, offensive, epithet, embarrassing, shameful, hurting, shocking, curse, avoidable, void, evil and so on. The study equally found out that taboos in Hausa communities were expressed based on the traditional religious denotation. They are acts of traditional religious connotations interpreted to be beliefs of the Hausa. Any attempt whatsoever to default or contravene the secret belief of the community is considered a taboo, such acts as related to profanity, blasphemy, curse, epithets, carthasis, provocation, shock, trauma, hurtfulness, shame and embarrassment.

The study discovered that Hausa expressive taboos are culturally inclined. The taboos that were expressed through Hausa are those taboos that were indigenous, attached to behavior, customs and traditions of the Hausa people. Communities based on their cultural values usually restrict, prohibit some acts and conducts of the indigenous Hausa people. Such prohibitions and restrictions imply that they have committed taboos by violating the law as enshrined on the cultural norms, values of the Hausa community. Such types of taboos that amount to cultural implications include disability taboos, profanity taboos, scatological/obscenity/sexual taboos, abuse/insult taboos, evil/devilish taboos,

animal/reptile/plant/tree taboos, disease taboos, family/kinship taboos, and so on.

The study also revealed that taboos in Hausa communities were structured and orientated on the belief system of the Hausa society. Belief is an emotional feeling that has built in the people through traditional practices and behaviors of the people, especially the elders, youths, males, females and other category members of the community, it continues to transcend from one generation to another. Some section of the community may consider such beliefs to be superstitious, some may consider them to be traditional religion and some may reflect the beliefs as part of the customs and traditions of the fore-fathers. In this connection, there are taboos associated with the belief of the Hausa people in evil/devilish taboos, crime taboos, abuse/insult taboos and so on. The study found out explicitly that there are taboos practiced among the Hausa people in their communities which deal with obscenity taboos, sexual taboos and scatological taboos. All the above-mentioned taboos are found to be done unconditionally at the Hausa communities. The study also revealed that Hausa expressive taboos made by the Hausa speakers are found to be offensive, hurting and shocking, like death taboos are shock to people whenever death-related taboos were mentioned publicly.

However, in the critical analysis of the taboos in line with the interactional sociolinguistic principles, revealed that Hausa taboos were products of their culture, as these taboos were expressed through the culture of the Hausa people. The basic principle of the interactional sociolinguistic theory was meaningfully interpreted through the culture of the Hausa people in their communities which these notions of the interactional sociolinguistic rules has been

established in this study. On the other hand, the linguistic politeness theory revealed that context has played a critical role where euphemism was adopted to replace the negative face which threatens the listener or hearer in the face to face interaction where the taboo expression has been replaced with politeness which implies the positive face in line with the principle of politeness theory. The study finally revealed that politeness mitigated the offensive, prohibited, restrictive, hurting, shocking, provoking, embarrassment, shameful, disgusting and so on, use of Hausa taboo expressions. They were replaced with soft, polite, acceptable, unrestrictive, non-prohibited, non-shocking and so on expressions and ensure that communication among the Hausa speakers became seamless, appreciative, meaningful and respectful.

### Conclusion

The study indicated that Hausa taboo is a sociolinguistic phenomenon. It is imperative to note that taboo words are expressed in the culture of the Hausa people which shows that the taboo expression among Hausa people is a socio-cultural activity embedded in the customs, traditions and religious belief systems practiced in the Hausa communities. It is indispensable to reflect that in this paper, Hausa taboos are discovered to be unlawful acts which the Hausa communities consider as offensive, forbidden and provoking when sociologically used at the public domain where they are not supposed to be used. However, every language around the globe has its own peculiarity in the sociolinguistic context of taboo expression and use. The paper recommends that taboos can be studied pragmatically, that is, in terms of contexts by comparing taboos between different languages and understanding and expressing them in specific contexts.

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## THE RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN PSYCHOLOGICAL WELLBEING OF PEOPLE AND MUSIC: A PRAGMATIC ANALYSIS OF SELECTED YORUBA MUSIC

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### Abstract

This study examines the relationship between psychological well-being and music through a pragmatic analysis of selected Yoruba songs. Grounded in Jacob Mey's (2001) Pragmatic Acts theory, the research explores how music operates as a communicative act that consoles, advises, motivates, and regulates social behaviour within specific cultural contexts. Using purposive sampling, songs from Beautiful Nubia (*Seven Lives*, 1997; *Kurunmi*, 2017), Ebenezer Obey (*Aimasiko*, 1987; *The Man, the Horse and the Son*, 2006), and King Sunny Adé (*The Good Shepherd*, 1989; *Authority*, 1990) were analysed for their pragmatic functions and psychological implications. Findings reveal that Yoruba music serves as a psycho-therapeutic discourse that addresses anxiety, grief, uncertainty, and social pressure, while simultaneously fostering resilience, patience, hope, and spiritual reassurance. The analysis highlights how metaphor, presupposition, reference, and speech acts embedded in the lyrics function as tools for stress relief, moral guidance, identity reinforcement, and communal healing. For instance, Beautiful Nubia employs metaphor and cultural reference to instill hope and resilience, Obey uses proverbial wisdom to emphasize patience and authenticity, while Sunny Adé integrates spiritual imagery to provide comfort and faith-based assurance. Together, these artists demonstrate the enduring role of Yoruba music as a cultural medium that bridges entertainment, therapy, and social regulation. The study concludes that Yoruba music is not only an artistic expression but also a pragmatic instrument that contributes significantly to emotional balance, mental health, and collective well-being. These findings underscore the importance of indigenous music as a vital resource for psychological wellness in contemporary society.

**Keywords:** Psychological wellbeing, Pragmatics, Yoruba music, Emotional balance

**Word count:** 247

### Introduction

The World Health Organization (WHO, 1948: 100) defines health as "a state of complete physical, mental, and social well-being and not merely the absence of disease or infirmity" This definition seems not far-fetched from the construct of psychological wellbeing. Psychological well-being is a multifaceted and multi-dimensional construct that encompasses an individual's overall

happiness, satisfaction with life, and mental and emotional health. It includes key components such as positive emotions, autonomy, positive relationships, low levels of negative emotions, purpose in life, life satisfaction, and personal growth (Dhanabhakyan & Sarath, 2023).

The characteristics of music, such as genre, familiarity, and tempo, have been widely investigated in relation to their influence on human

cognition, behaviour, and psychological wellbeing. For example, it has been suggested that low-information music produces optimal arousal levels for task performance, as it creates sufficient stimulation without overburdening cognitive resources (Kiger, 1989). Conversely, research by Wolf and Weiner (1972) revealed that unfamiliar sounds tend to be more distracting than familiar ones, thereby interfering with concentration and reducing efficiency in task execution. Beyond familiarity, scholars have also examined the combined influence of music type, individual personality differences, and task context. Cassidy and McDonald (2007), for instance, explored how students classified as extroverts and introverts responded to different auditory conditions: high-arousal and low-affect music, low-arousal and positive-affect music, and basic background noise. Their findings demonstrated that performance declined in the presence of any background sound, whether music or noise, compared to silence. Furthermore, exposure to high-arousal music was found to be particularly detrimental, resulting in poorer recall and cognitive task performance compared to conditions involving low-arousal music or background noise.

Another crucial dimension of music's impact on behaviour and wellbeing lies in its genre and the language in which it is performed. These two characteristics: genre preference and linguistic familiarity, significantly shape the emotional and cognitive benefits derived from music (Balogun et al., 2013; 2022; 2023). Balogun et al. (2022) reported gendered differences in task performance depending on music genre: males performed better when listening to Fuji music, while females outperformed males when listening to gospel music. This finding suggests that music preference and cultural orientation can moderate the effectiveness of music as a facilitator of performance. Similarly, Balogun et al. (2013) highlighted the importance of linguistic familiarity, showing that individuals tend to perform better on cognitive tasks when the music is rendered in their native language rather than a foreign one. For instance, Botswana indigenes demonstrated enhanced task performance when listening to music in *Satswana* (their local

language) compared to music performed in French or English. These findings underscore the interplay between cultural identity, linguistic connection, and musical preference, emphasizing that music's role in psychological wellbeing and behavioural regulation is not universal but rather contextually bound.

### **Dimensions of Psychological wellbeing and Music**

Listening to or performing music fosters self-reflection and emotional expression, allowing individuals to confront and accept their emotions. Music therapy, for example, helps people process negative feelings and build self-acceptance by validating their inner experiences through sound and rhythm. The dimensions are thus reviewed below:

**Physical health and music:** Music benefits physical health by improving cardiovascular function (lowering blood pressure and heart rate), enhancing mood and motivation for exercise, reducing fatigue and pain perception, and boosting coordination and balance. *For example, Terry et al (2020) reported that exercise enthusiasts have long known that music enhances their physical performance.* It was confirmed that working out with music improves your mood, helps your body exercise more efficiently, and cuts down on your awareness of exertion. Working out with music also leads to longer workouts. From another (yet similar) perspective, 9ice and Wasiu Ayinde Marshal (two popular Nigerian musicians), through their single track song '*Ilera loro* (health is wealth)', informed Nigerians about the need to take healthcare seriously. Channeling this information through music is relevant because music is universal. Hence, 9ice and Wasiu Ayinde Marshal, in their lyrics believe Nigerians should not only rely on traditional medicine but always keep tab with certified medical doctors whose diagnosis and treatment are considered valued.

**Anxiety and Music:** Sometimes we all experience moments of anxiety about or for one thing or the other. When we are anxious, a lot of cortisol is released into our body system thereby raising our blood pressure and stress hormones. However, one source of mitigating against this is through music (Ferraro, 2021). As a way of using

music to suppress anxiety, Johnny Drille, in one of his records titled “How are you my friend?” encourages his listeners about the need not to be worrisome because of being neglected. The central theme is reaching out to a friend, checking in on their wellbeing, and reassuring them that they are remembered. The song buttresses that there will surely be someone who cares even when those around you seem not to care. Johnny Drille highlights how people often drift apart due to life’s pressures, yet bonds of friendship remain strong. This nostalgia evokes warmth and emotional reassurance.

**Life Goals and Music:** Music can assist in planning one’s life goals and achievement, Music sometimes reminds us of our responsibilities, our past and plan for our future. Music is indeed motivational because songs about achieving goals offer powerful motivation. No wonder Saheed Osupa in his song says:

<i>sare o, ko ma ba waye lasan,</i>	(continue to strive, so you don’t live a fruitless life,)
<i>ranti o pe Olorun o da e lasan,</i>	(remember God has not created you without a purpose,)
<i>ma duro, aye gan o duro lasan...</i>	(don’t be complacent, life itself doesn’t wait for anyone.)

This music excerpt is a catalyst to remind us of the need to keep hopes alive and never be tired of pushing forward to achieve one’s goal. Life Tree Planners (2025) writes that “Beautiful songs help you reflect on your past but focus on your future. When you feel low, music gives you rest and strength. It keeps you on course toward your goals, making sure you stand tall and keep going. Hence, songs about achieving goals offer powerful motivation.

**Love and Music:** Music and love are natural allies. Love can result in joy, sorrow, serenity, or exultation, and music is a natural expression of these feelings. Explore some of the ways people have connected with love through music (Smithsonian Music, 2025). Hendrix (2020) once wrote that “After having a long stressful day, the best feeling is coming home and getting in the bed with the coziest blanket and being able to listen to a playlist that can take you through all the emotions good and bad....That’s why music is the ultimate love language. Music has gotten me through some really dark times and listening to the perfect playlist can help you get through whatever you are going through. Emotions are like a rollercoaster and music can join you for the ride”.

**Music can improve cognitive benefit:** Music can increase cognitive functioning, particularly memory, attention, and spatial-temporal abilities (Gupta et al., 2018). Music has therapeutic applications, including mental health treatment, rehabilitation, and palliative care (Aluede et al., 2023). Music provides a relaxing comfort to kings of diverse tribes. According to the Bible, David was engaged to play the harp for King Saul. The calming tune of the music provided psychological relief for the King, making him feel better and alleviating his dread and depression (1 Sam 16:23).

In contrast, when using music to communicate, the two people involved would have added artistic elements that they can use. These include rhythm, dynamics, harmonic backdrop, expression and pitch to tune in to what the other is communicating. It is by enabling the human brain and ears to focus closely on added stimuli that the brains of the two individuals communicating via music begin to fire symmetrically. Thus, the interaction using music is a closer and more intimate one making it the real language of love (John, 2023).

Music and love have always shared a powerful connection. You can use music to improve your health and psychological wellbeing. This is because music makes you happy and even elated. The emotions generated increase the diameter of the blood vessels, which is good for an individual’s vascular health (Karin, 2025). This is evident in Beautiful Nubia’s songs such as “What a feeling”, “Awero”, and “Ololufe”.

**Emotional State (Loss of significant others) and Music:** Loss of a loved one can be very traumatic for someone with overwhelming confusion, shared memories and so on, and when this happens, music can assist in coping or overcoming this sorrowful

experience. Whether in lyrics, rhythm or the symphony no matter the genre. According to Saint Diamonds (2024) “Music has an extraordinary ability to connect with our emotions, making it a powerful tool in the grieving process. When words fail to express the depth of our sorrow, a song can capture the feelings we struggle to articulate” We can find a connect, and eventually healing, through the rhythm and melody, which helps us remember the times we had, validates our grief, and gently guides us toward acceptance and peace (Saint Diamonds (2024). Saint Diamonds went further to say that “Music has the power to transport us back in time. It triggers memories and emotions in ways few other mediums can. Celebrating a loved one with a playlist keeps their memory alive and helps us connect with our feelings, whether through tears, laughter, or quiet reflection”. The last track of Yinka Ayefele’s “Life After Death” corroborate this dynamism of music.

**Happiness and Music:** There is a connection between music and the level of happiness experienced by individuals. According to Tu & Fu (2024), music actually enhances one's subjective wellbeing. Previous studies have consistently indicated that music can play a beneficial role in enhancing mental well-being. This effect is largely attributed to music's unique ability to convey and regulate emotions, facilitate personal expression and self-development, and offer a form of psychological escapism or a mental break from daily stressors (Leung and Cheung 2020; Perkins et al. 2020; Fu and Tu 2023). Through both active engagement (e.g., playing an instrument, singing) and passive listening, individuals often use music as a tool for emotional coping, identity exploration, and mood enhancement. This perspective of music is evident in Adewale Ayuba's song where he says:

*We are happy people, we make you happy. We are H.A.P.P.Y, P.E.O.P.L.E;  
We are happy people, we make you happy.*

At the neural level, the impact of music on mental health becomes even more evident. Neuroimaging and neurochemical studies have demonstrated that music activates the brain's reward circuitry,

particularly areas such as the nucleus accumbens and ventral tegmental area, which are strongly linked to the release of dopamine; a neurotransmitter closely associated with feelings of pleasure and motivation (Koelsch 2014; Vuust et al. 2022). This neurochemical response helps explain why music can evoke such strong emotional experiences and why it often contributes to improved mood and increased feelings of happiness. Moreover, the emotional benefits of music appear to extend beyond mood enhancement to physiological responses. Research has shown that positive emotions elicited by music can modulate pain perception, effectively reducing the experience of physical discomfort. For instance, studies suggest that music-induced pleasure can activate endogenous opioid systems, which help suppress pain signals in the brain (Cheng et al. 2017). This suggests that music not only uplifts the mind but can also serve as a form of emotional analgesia. Taken together, this growing body of evidence from neuroscience and psychology highlights music's powerful and multifaceted contributions to subjective well-being. It underscores music's potential as an accessible, non-invasive intervention for promoting mental health and improving quality of life across various populations. In essence, music enhances social connections in communities and can foster community bonding and happiness, thereby giving a sense of belonging to individuals in the community (Aluede et al., 2023). In Africa, specific music is usually common to a particular sect or ethno-group, which reminds them of their heritage and where they come from. Fuji music, Juju music, omele sakara, and dadakuada are examples of music that connect people to their roots (Aluede et al., 2023).

**Task performance and Music:** Studies (such as Balogun et al 2013, 2023) have reported correlation between productivity (task performance) and music. Music is said to help focus, concentrate especially slow paced, slow tempo music (Levine Music, 2023). This view was confirmed by Balogun et al (2013) when they found that music, music genre and language used enhanced task performance (cognitive task) among selected University of Botswana students.

This was also confirmed by Balogun et al (2022, 2023) in their study which focused on students of a private university in Nigeria.

**Unemployment or loss of Job:** When one is out of job, it can be psychologically debilitating. There is loss of self-esteem, paranoia, fear and even suicidal ideation. Wani and Ahmed (2024) reported that unemployment causes youth to feel worthless, lose self-identity, feel shame, and experience stress. These are all symptoms of psychosocial ill-health. Notwithstanding, listening to some selected Yoruba songs such as Ebenezer Obey's *Evergreen Vol2*, Orlando Owoh's *E get as E be*, Sikiru Ayinde Barrister's *Reality and Questionnaire* etc. are sources of emotional strength to individuals who just lost their jobs.

### Pragmatics of Music

The concept of *pragmatics* within the field of linguistics refers to the study of how contextual factors influence the interpretation of meaning in communication. It extends beyond the literal or surface-level meaning of words to encompass how meaning is inferred based on various types of context; namely, socio-cultural, situational, and linguistic (Mey, 2001). These contexts are essential variables that help decode speaker intention, which is at the heart of pragmatic analysis. In this regard, communication is not merely a transfer of linguistic symbols, but a dynamic and contextually grounded process of meaning-making.

Building on this understanding, Akintaro et al. (2025:6) define music as an *artistic tool embedded with diverse pragmatic acts* aimed at addressing societal issues that affect individuals. This definition foregrounds the idea that music, much like spoken or written discourse, is a medium through which intentional communicative acts are performed. In other words, music is not merely for entertainment or aesthetic appreciation; it serves as a platform for conveying messages, evoking emotions, and negotiating meaning through carefully crafted lyrics and musical compositions. The musician becomes both a linguistic and artistic agent, combining tonal elements and verbal expressions to produce meaning-rich content that resonates with an audience. Consequently, music and language can

be viewed as universal human faculties, each with notable similarities in terms of their acoustic structures, cognitive processing, and social functionality (Brown & Jordania, 2013). These shared features justify a deeper scholarly inquiry into music not just as an artistic phenomenon, but also as a linguistic one. It follows, therefore, that music functions as an artistic channel through which pragmatic acts are performed, particularly those that address pressing social, cultural, and psychological concerns within a community.

Pragmatic acts, as defined by Mey (2001), are the communicative actions inferred from a speaker's (or in this case, a singer's) utterances. These acts may include, but are not limited to, informing, warning, advising, persuading, comforting, entertaining, and offering hope. Given that music is predominantly conveyed through language (whether spoken, sung, or chanted), it becomes a viable platform for performing these speech acts. Importantly, the meaning extracted from musical lyrics and performances is rarely self-contained. Instead, meaning is dynamically co-constructed by listeners based on an interplay of linguistic content, musical form, and contextual factors. These factors include the cultural background of the audience, the socio-political climate, the identity of the artist, and the particular situation in which the music is consumed. This focus on the interaction between linguistic choices and contextual cues allows for a more nuanced understanding of music as a communicative act with social and psychological implications.

Despite this, many existing linguistic studies of music have prioritized stylistic analysis, critical discourse studies, and comparative frameworks. While these methodologies offer valuable insights, they often neglect the pragmatic functions of musical discourse, especially how music operates as a therapeutic medium for emotional expression and social commentary. For instance, Oikelome (2012) undertakes a stylistic analysis of Nigerian hip-hop music, specifically exploring the works of Innocent Ujah Idibia (2Face). His study emphasizes how the fusion of African and Western musical elements creates a distinctive musical identity. However, the analysis remains largely descriptive, focusing on melody,

rhythm, harmony, and form, illustrated through conventional musical notation, with limited attention to the pragmatic functions of the lyrics or their communicative intent.

Similarly, Mosobalaje's (2018) study titled *Textual Migration in Ebenezer Obey's Juju Musics* focuses on the phenomenon of textual migration, the adaptation and re-use of lyrical content across musical performances. Rooted in Yoruba oral traditions, this process highlights a fluid approach to authorship and textuality. Yet, even this culturally rich analysis does not engage deeply with how these migrated texts perform pragmatic acts within new contexts or how they affect listener interpretation. Another relevant contribution is that of Ibitayo and Olusegun (2020), who examine the socialization functions of Saheed Osupa's songs within Yoruba cultural settings using a content exploration methodology. While the study alludes to the role of music in social communication, it does not explicitly address how pragmatic strategies embedded in the lyrics serve therapeutic or psychological purposes. Furthermore, the study by Akintaro et al. (2025) on Yinka Ayefele focuses primarily on the emotive relevance of his music. While this highlights the affective dimension of music, it does not fully consider its psychological impact or the specific pragmatic acts that structure his lyrical content.

These studies collectively highlight a significant gap in the literature: the underexplored pragmatic dimension of music, particularly how it functions as a therapeutic and communicative medium. Music does not merely entertain; it persuades, instructs, consoles, and empowers. These pragmatic functions are embedded in both the structure and performance of music and are crucial to understanding its impact on listeners. Music, like language, can be regarded as a universal medium of emotional and cognitive communication. Listeners across cultural boundaries can often intuitively detect emotional states in music through prosodic features such as pitch, tempo, and rhythm that mimic the emotional intonation of speech.

This deep connection between music and language is also supported by neurological research, which reveals that similar brain regions

are activated when processing both musical and linguistic stimuli. Such findings suggest a shared cognitive infrastructure for these two domains, further validating the view of music as a communicative system with structural and functional similarities to language. However, it is important to recognize that music, despite its expressive and affective power, does not operate as a language in the strictest linguistic sense. Unlike natural languages, music lacks the syntactic and semantic capacity to convey any arbitrary proposition to any listener. Nevertheless, the overlap between music and language especially in terms of structure, intention, and interpretation is significant enough to warrant more interdisciplinary research, particularly from a pragma-linguistic perspective.

It is within this theoretical and analytical framework that the current study is situated. By examining selected Yoruba musical texts, this research aims to investigate how music serves as a vehicle for addressing social and psychological well-being among individuals in Southwest Nigeria. The study pays close attention to how pragmatic acts such as consoling, advising, and encouraging are embedded in the lyrics and contextualized within cultural and social realities. Through this, the study seeks to contribute to a deeper understanding of music not just as a stylistic or artistic product, but as a potent communicative tool deeply rooted in human interaction and social experience.

#### **Purpose of the study**

The purpose of this study is to pragmatically analyse selected Yoruba songs in order to examine how they contribute to the overall psychological well-being of individuals. Specifically, it seeks to show how music by Beautiful Nubia, Ebenezer Obey, and King Sunny Adé functions as a communicative and therapeutic tool that consoles, advises, motivates, and regulates social behavior. By applying Jacob Mey's (2001) Pragmatic Acts theory, the study will demonstrate how the pragmatic features of these songs such as metaphor, presupposition, reference, and speech acts support emotional balance, resilience, stress reduction, cultural identity reinforcement, and social harmony.

## Method

Based on purposive selection, data were selected from two (2) Beautiful Nubia (*Seven Lives* – 1997; *Kurunmi* – 2017), Ebenezer Obey (*Aimasiko* – 1987; *The Horse, The Man And His Son* – 2006) and Sunny Ade's (*The Good Shepherd* – 1989 and *Authority* – 1990) musical albums. The choice of selection is based on the view these Yoruba songs are embedded with linguistic content that capture contemporary social issues dominant within the Nigerian socio-cultural context. Additionally, this study observes that the selected songs are evergreen musical renditions embedded with issues relevant within this modern period.

Segun Akinlolu whose stage name is Beautiful Nubia is a musician, a poet and university graduate. He is a cultural philosopher who uses music as a powerful tool for social discourse, moral reflection, and emotional connection. His rich narrative style, roots-driven melodies, and commitment to cultural authenticity make him a unique and transformative force in African music. Ebenezer Obey's life and career are a testament to innovation, tradition, and spiritual depth. From pioneering a new juju sound enriched with modern instrumentation to seamlessly integrating meaningful, philosophical, and spiritual messages into his music; he remains a defining figure in Africa's musical history. Sunny Ade is one of Nigeria's most celebrated musicians, globally recognized as the "King of Juju Music." His career spans over five decades, modernizing traditional Yoruba music by blending it with Western instruments like the pedal steel guitar and synthesizers. His lyrics are deeply rooted in Yoruba philosophy, proverbs, prayers, and moral lessons, which uplift listeners and serve as a source of psychological wellbeing. His music often emphasizes patience, destiny, hope, gratitude, communal values, and resilience. Jacob Mey's (2001) Pragmatic Acts theory served as the framework. The theory is context-based, making it suitable for this study. Hence, a descriptive design was adopted while the data were subjected to pragmatic analysis.

## Result and Discussion

Findings show that the selected songs of

Beautiful Nubia, Ebenezer Obey and Sunny Ade, from a pragmatic perspective, demonstrate the relationship between music and psychological wellbeing. The findings reveal that excerpts from the musical albums operate as a psycho-therapeutic discourses that console, encourage, motivate, and instruct. Through pragmatic devices such as metaphors, speech acts, presuppositions, and implicatures, the lyrics provide emotional healing and moral guidance. The analysis further shows that Yoruba music, both traditional and contemporary, plays a crucial role in maintaining mental health by reducing stress, strengthening resilience, and reinforcing cultural identity. By drawing from Yoruba indigenous psychology and global theories of wellbeing, the selected Yoruba musical renditions demonstrate the enduring power of music as a tool for emotional balance and social harmony. A further discussion is examined below:

### Music as a pragmatic stress reliever

Music, as it relates to different individuals, contributes to suppressing of socially induced stressors by regulating emotions, providing meaning, reinforcing identity, and creating communal support networks. This is evident in Beautiful Nubia's *Owuro Lojo eni ma rire o, eni ma rire o, ka se ba owuro o...* (Morning is a time when one can be blessed, hence, one should pay due homage to morning time). Here, 'morning' presupposes the passing of night (dark hour) which is not potent enough to bring blessing unlike the 'new dawn' – morning. This is a metaphorical (pragmatic MPH) expression which raises human hope of a better tomorrow thereby, mitigating human psychological stress of what 'tomorrow' would bring. Therefore, Beautiful Nubia pragmatically calls the attention of his listeners (the Youths as they symbolize morning) to judiciously make use of their youthful age which is the time that helps save the old from psychological stress.

### Music as a pragma-prosodic cue of hope

While the story of Kurunmi carries tragedy, Beautiful Nubia uses it as a hopeful reminder that communities can learn, grow, and thrive beyond past failures. Through pragmatic reference (REF), Beautiful Nubia preaches the

theme of hope – a better Nigeria (to his listeners) in a framed term of philosophical acceptance, cultural resilience, and the assurance that life's struggles are temporary. Explicitly, the song goes thus:

*Here comes the fire-spitting guy!  
Aare Kurunmi is on the way with his sword of justice*

*Warn all the liars and pretenders  
The day of reckoning is here, beware!  
Okunrin ogun ni Kurunmi...*

*The Land will not remain the same.*

Nubia highlights the ephemerality of power, suffering, and material conditions; the reminder that brings psychological comfort: today's hardship will not last forever. This is a subtle but strong form of hope and reassurance. By calling listeners back to their roots, Nubia gives them hope that collective wisdom and solidarity can heal present challenges (social, political, or economic). By invoking Kurunmi, Nubia reminds listeners that no matter how powerful or tragic a leader's life was, the community survived and continued. This implies that societies can overcome struggles and move forward — a hopeful outlook for present and future Yoruba people. In essence, it could be said that the song is part of Nubia's broader project of using music as a tool for collective psychological healing and cultural reawakening.

### Music as a metaphoric vehicle of patience

Patience is one of the emotional human attributes that counters anxiety (a psychological issue). Hence, Ebenezer Obey, in his song '*Aimasiko lo'damu eda o, oro mi lowo Oluwa lowa*' (which translates to 'uncertainty of time' or 'the unpredictability of life') emphasises the importance of patience to human psychological well-being. The song stresses patience (sùúrù), faith, and perseverance, because nobody knows what tomorrow will bring. It reminds listeners that destiny unfolds gradually, and one should not despair or be anxious about present struggles. No doubt, life's uncertainties can cause worry, depression, and hopelessness but then, Obey's message that "all things will happen at the right time" helps people calm their minds, reduce fear of the unknown, and accept life's rhythm. The song assures that today's suffering is temporary and that tomorrow may bring joy, wealth, or healing. This instills hope, which psychologists identify as a key factor in resilience and positive mental health. By urging listeners to wait patiently, Obey is teaching emotional self-control, which prevents impulsive decisions driven by frustration. Patience is a coping strategy that protects against psychological breakdowns during hardship. Thus, the song enhances psychological wellbeing by blending philosophy, spirituality, and music into a powerful message of hope, patience, and peace of mind.

### Music as a pragmatic tool for social regulation

In this context, *social regulation* refers to how music functions as a tool to guide, correct, or influence people's behavior within society. In Yoruba culture, songs are often used not only for entertainment but also for moral instruction, conflict management, and reinforcement of communal norms. While Yoruba culture values community, Obey reminds listeners that self-worth must not be surrendered to collective pressure. This regulates the tension between individual freedom and communal expectations. This view is corroborated in Obey's song which goes thus:

*Ko sogbon to le da,*

(there is nothing you can do,)

*Ko siwa to lewu to le fi taye lorun o...*

(there is no action you know how to perform that can please human beings...)

*Ile aye fun igba die ni o,*

(this life is just going to be for a while,)

*Omo araye, e sere re o...*

(human beings, endeavor to do the right thing.)

From this excerpt, resilience is emphasized by reinforcing the idea that one must focus on living well rather than chasing approval. Thus, becomes psychologically therapeutic for an individual who feels intimidated by social pressure. In essence, Obey's song has served as a social regulating tool which cannot be undermined

within the Nigerian socio context. Thus, Obey eventually corroborates this view when he (musically) gives the narration of "*The Man, the Horse and the Son*"; thus, performing a social regulatory function. He uses music to caution listeners against over-dependence on public validation, to promote authenticity, and to help balance societal norms with personal conviction. In doing so, the song contributes both to cultural order and to the psychological well-being of individuals navigating social pressure.

### **Music as a spiritual therapeutic enhancement**

In Sunny Ade's *The Good Shepherd*, he draws on the biblical metaphor of Jesus as the shepherd who protects, guides, and provides for his flock. The song is both devotional and philosophical, serving not just as entertainment but also as moral, spiritual, and psychological reinforcement. The song reassures listeners of safety and guidance under God's care, reducing fear and uncertainty. It encourages trust, obedience, and humility; virtues associated with being a "sheep" under divine guidance. 'The shepherd' is a metaphoric imagery which provides comfort for people dealing with life's struggles. Just as sheep are cared for, listeners are reminded that they are not abandoned. By extension, for Yoruba Christians especially, the song instills confidence that challenges will pass because of divine provision and guidance. The song promotes the belief that righteous living under divine guidance brings peace. This reduces moral anxiety and guilt. In essence, Sunny Ade reassures listeners, strengthens their faith, and encourage moral reliance on God's care. Through pragmatic acts of storytelling, metaphor, and music, the song directly contributes to the psychological well-being of people.

### **Conclusion**

This study has shown that Yoruba music transcends mere artistic performance; it is a profound communicative and therapeutic medium that significantly contributes to the psychological well-being of individuals and the collective harmony of society. By applying Jacob Mey's (2001) Pragmatic Acts Theory, the research revealed that Yoruba musicians such as Beautiful Nubia, Ebenezer Obey, and King Sunny Adé perform vital pragmatic acts: consoling, advising,

motivating, cautioning, and spiritually uplifting their listeners, through the intentional use of language, metaphor, and cultural symbolism in music. The analysis established that Yoruba songs serve as psycho-social instruments that help individuals manage stress, overcome anxiety, strengthen patience and resilience, and find meaning in challenging life circumstances. The lyrics analyzed demonstrate that music functions as both a mirror and a balm for human experience, reflecting communal struggles while offering comfort, guidance, and hope. Thus, the therapeutic power of music lies not only in its melody or rhythm but also in its linguistic and cultural pragmatics, which engage the listener's emotions, beliefs, and identity within a shared socio-cultural context.

Furthermore, the study highlights that Yoruba music continues to play an indispensable role in social regulation, moral education, and the preservation of indigenous psychological frameworks. Through its rich communicative and symbolic resources, it bridges the gap between tradition and modernity, addressing both personal and collective well-being. In essence, Yoruba music remains an invaluable cultural resource for fostering mental health, emotional balance, and social cohesion. Its pragmatic potency underscores the importance of integrating indigenous musical expressions into contemporary approaches to psychological and community wellness. Future studies may build on these findings by exploring how the therapeutic and communicative functions of indigenous music can be incorporated into formal mental health interventions, education, and intercultural dialogue, thereby sustaining the relevance of Yoruba music in promoting holistic well-being across generations.

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## KANNYWOOD ET LA TRANSFORMATION DES REPRESENTATIONS DES MARIAGE : CAS DE SOKOTO

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### **Abstract**

This study investigates the representations of marriage in Kannywood films and their impact on audience perceptions in Sokoto, Nigeria. The central problem of this study is the tension between traditional values and modern relationship dynamics as depicted in these films. The objectives are to analyze Kannywood's influence on marital perceptions and explore its implications. Grounded in socialization and communication theories, this research explores how media shape cultural norms. Employing a qualitative methodological approach, data were collected through surveys and focus group discussions with diverse participants from different age groups and backgrounds. The findings reveal a dual representation of marriage in Kannywood films, oscillating between traditional norms and modern ideals. While younger audiences express a preference for romantic and egalitarian relationships, older generations often perceive these portrayals as a threat to cultural values. This study highlights the role of Kannywood as a significant cultural influence, urging further exploration of its impact on societal norms regarding marriage.

**Keywords:** Kannywood, marriage representations, cultural values, socialization theory, audience perception.

### **Résumé**

Cette étude examine les représentations du mariage dans les films de Kannywood et leur influence sur les perceptions du public à Sokoto, au Nigeria. Le problème central abordé est la tension entre les valeurs traditionnelles et les dynamiques relationnelles modernes telles que décrites dans ces films. Les objectifs consistent à analyser comment Kannywood influence les perceptions sociétales du mariage et à explorer les implications de ces représentations sur les relations interpersonnelles. La recherche s'appuie sur des théories de la socialisation et de la communication, qui suggèrent que les médias peuvent façonner les normes et les attentes culturelles. Cette étude adopte une approche qualitative et de groupes de discussion ont également été organisés avec des participants de différents groupes d'âge et horizons. Les résultats révèlent la dualité des représentations du mariage dans les films de Kannywood, oscillant entre normes traditionnelles et idéaux modernes. Alors que les jeunes audiences expriment une préférence pour des relations romantiques et égalitaires, les générations plus âgées perçoivent souvent ces représentations comme une menace pour les valeurs culturelles. Cette étude souligne le rôle de Kannywood comme acteur culturel majeur, incitant à une exploration plus approfondie de son impact sur les normes sociétales concernant le mariage.

**Mots clés :** Kannywood, représentations du mariage, valeurs culturelles, théorie de la socialisation, perception du public.

## Introduction

Le cinéma nigérian, et en particulier Nollywood, émerge comme une force culturelle incontournable, influençant les pratiques sociales et les dynamiques familiales au sein de la société nigériane et au-delà. Comme l'indique Larkin (2008), Nollywood redéfinit le paysage médiatique en Afrique, en offrant des récits qui résonnent avec les expériences quotidiennes des Nigérians. Parmi les sous-industries du cinéma nigérian, Kannywood en langue hausa à Kano, joue un rôle crucial en touchant un public majoritairement musulman dans le nord du Nigeria (Adamu, 2007). Dans cette société hausa-musulmane, le mariage est un élément fondamental, représentant à la fois un acte sacré et un ciment social. Selon Krings (2015), le mariage est souvent considéré comme un pilier de la communauté, un moyen de perpétuer les traditions et de renforcer les liens familiaux.

La recherche sur Kannywood et la société hausa a considérablement évolué, elles éclairent les dynamiques culturelles et sociales de cette industrie. Abdullahi, Umar et Garba (2023) dans leur étude intitulée *Reception of Kannywood Films among Youth in Kano: Implications for Marriage Perceptions* explorent comment les films de Kannywood influencent les perceptions des jeunes concernant le mariage, révélant des attentes culturelles qui façonnent les comportements et les valeurs au sein de la société hausa. Leur recherche souligne l'importance des représentations médiatiques dans la formation des normes sociales et des perceptions de genre. D'autres études, comme celles de Fatima (2024) dans *Gender Representations in Kannywood Cinema: Shaping Expectations in Hausa Society*, examinent les représentations de genre dans les films de Kannywood et leur impact sur les attentes sociétales. Fatima met en évidence comment ces représentations peuvent à la fois refléter et transformer les perceptions de la masculinité et de la féminité dans le contexte hausa. La littérature sur le sujet indique également une attention croissante portée à la représentation des femmes dans le cinéma nigérian. Par exemple, des recherches sur Nollywood montrent des similitudes et des différences dans les

représentations de genre, soulignant les défis auxquels font face les femmes dans un secteur souvent dominé par des stéréotypes traditionnels (Chukwuka, 2024). En outre, des études sur l'impact socio-économique des films de Kannywood, telles que celle de Mbadugha et al. (2024), mettent en lumière comment ces films influencent les comportements économiques et les décisions des jeunes, reflétant une intersection entre culture et économie.

La ville de Sokoto, centre spirituel et intellectuel de l'islam en Afrique de l'Ouest, constitue un cadre d'étude idéal pour examiner l'impact de Kannywood sur les perceptions du mariage. La ville est renommée pour son attachement aux valeurs islamiques, ce qui la rend particulièrement sensible aux influences extérieures et aux représentations médiatiques. Les films produits par Kannywood jouent un rôle significatif dans la façon dont les habitants de Sokoto perçoivent et vivent le mariage, en véhiculant des modèles conjugaux qui peuvent à la fois refléter et transformer les attentes socioculturelles.

Cette étude identifie les principaux thèmes conjugaux présents dans les films de Kannywood, tout en analysant comment ces représentations sont reçues par les habitants de Sokoto et en évaluant leur influence sur les valeurs et pratiques conjugales. Le choix de Sokoto comme terrain d'étude est justifié par son statut de symbole de la tradition islamique et de la morale sociale, offrant un cadre pertinent pour explorer les tensions entre modernité médiatique et valeurs religieuses. L'étude s'appuie sur la théorie de la cultivation de Gerbner, qui souligne l'influence des médias sur la perception du réel, la théorie de l'apprentissage social de Bandura, qui évoque l'imitation de comportements médiatisés, et la théorie de la réception, qui met en avant la diversité des interprétations en fonction du contexte socioculturel. Ainsi, cette recherche éclaire l'impact de Kannywood sur les représentations du mariage et les dynamiques conjugales à Sokoto.

L'objectif principal de cette étude est d'explorer l'impact des films de Kannywood sur les perceptions et les pratiques conjugales à Sokoto. Pour atteindre cet objectif, il est essentiel

d'identifier les principaux thèmes conjugaux présents dans les films, ce qui permettra de déterminer les narrations et valeurs véhiculées à travers ces productions cinématographiques. Une attention particulière sera accordée à des éléments tels que l'amour, la polygamie, la fidélité, les conflits et le rôle des genres. En parallèle, l'étude analysera la réception de ces représentations auprès des habitants de Sokoto, afin d'explorer comment ces films sont perçus par différents segments de la population, en tenant compte des variables comme l'âge, le sexe, le niveau d'éducation et le degré de religiosité. Cette compréhension des réactions du public est cruciale pour évaluer l'impact des films sur les normes sociales. De plus, l'étude visera à évaluer l'influence des représentations médiatiques sur les valeurs, les rôles et les pratiques conjugales, en examinant les changements potentiels dans les attentes et les comportements au sein des couples, pour déterminer dans quelle mesure ces récits contribuent à façonner la réalité sociale à Sokoto.

### **Méthodologie**

Cette étude adopte une approche qualitative et descriptive, visant à explorer les perceptions et les pratiques conjugales influencées par les films de Kannywood dans la ville de Sokoto. Le type de recherche choisi est l'étude de cas, permettant d'examiner en profondeur les spécificités culturelles et sociales de cette région. Les méthodes de collecte des données comprennent plusieurs stratégies complémentaires. Tout d'abord, une analyse de contenu a été réalisée sur une sélection de cinq films récents de Kannywood abordant le thème du mariage : *Labarina*, *Gidan Sarauta*, *Jamilun Jidda*, *Garwashi* et *Manyan Mata*. Cette analyse a permis d'identifier les représentations des valeurs

conjugales, des rôles de genre et des dynamiques relationnelles présentées dans ces films.

Parallèlement, des entretiens semi-directifs ont été conduits avec divers groupes de participants, notamment des couples mariés, des jeunes célibataires et des leaders religieux. Ces entretiens ont fourni des perspectives variées sur la manière dont les films influencent les perceptions du mariage et les attentes conjugales au sein de la communauté. Des groupes de discussion ont également été organisés avec des femmes mariées, favorisant une discussion collective sur les thèmes abordés dans les films et leur résonance dans la vie quotidienne des participants. Cela a enrichi la compréhension des opinions et des expériences partagées, ainsi que des dynamiques sociales en jeu. L'échantillon de cette étude comprenait 40 participants (20 hommes et 20 femmes), répartis de manière équilibrée de différents quartiers de Sokoto. Cette diversité géographique et sociale a permis de refléter la pluralité des expériences et des points de vue au sein de la population locale. Une grille thématique a été élaborée pour analyser les données, se concentrant sur des catégories clés telles que l'amour, la polygamie, la fidélité, les conflits, le divorce, ainsi que les rôles attribués au mari et à la femme. Cette approche thématique a facilité une analyse systématique et approfondie des données recueillies. Cependant, cette étude présente certaines limites. L'accès limité aux cinéastes a restreint la compréhension de leurs intentions de représentation, tandis que la diversité des interprétations individuelles des participants a pu introduire des biais dans les résultats. De plus, l'influence d'autres médias sur les perceptions du mariage pourrait nuancer les conclusions tirées spécifiquement des films de Kannywood.

### **Présentation et analyse des résultats**

L'analyse révèle des thèmes significatifs et des dynamiques culturelles qui influencent les perceptions des spectateurs à Sokoto.

#### **1. Thèmes des films**

Tableau 1 :

Le tableau ci-dessous résume les principaux thèmes abordés dans chaque film :

Film	Modèle de mariage	Thèmes principaux
<i>Labarina</i>	Moderne	Amour romantique, lutte contre les obstacles
<i>Gidan Sarauta</i>	Traditionnel	Polygamie, jalousie, pouvoir masculin

<i>Jamilun Jidda</i>	Moderne	Relations basées sur la compréhension mutuelle et la jalousie
<i>Garwashi</i>	Traditionnel	Conflits liés à la polygamie
<i>Manyan Mata</i>	Traditionnel	Divorce, stigmates sociaux

**Labarina** est une série qui présente un modèle de mariage moderne, mettant l'accent sur l'amour romantique et la lutte des protagonistes pour surmonter des obstacles personnels et familiaux. Les personnages aspirent à des relations égalitaires, ce qui résonne particulièrement avec les jeunes spectateurs en quête de modèles relationnels basés sur le respect mutuel. **Gidan Sarauta**, en revanche, aborde un modèle de mariage traditionnel, explorant les complexités de la polygamie. Les thèmes de jalousie et de pouvoir masculin y sont centraux, mettant en lumière les tensions inhérentes à ces arrangements matrimoniaux. Le film illustre les luttes émotionnelles des femmes face à des dynamiques de pouvoir inégales, soulignant ainsi les défis que représente la polygamie dans la société contemporaine. **Jamilun Jidda**, également ancré dans un modèle moderne, traite des relations fondées sur la compréhension mutuelle. La jalousie y joue un rôle, montrant comment des

sentiments négatifs peuvent surgir même dans des relations qui aspirent à l'égalité. Cela reflète les défis auxquels les jeunes couples font face lorsqu'ils tentent de concilier tradition et modernité. **Garwashi** aborde les conflits liés à la polygamie, explorant les tensions entre les épouses et les déséquilibres de pouvoir qui en résultent. Il met en lumière les difficultés émotionnelles et psychologiques rencontrées par les femmes dans des arrangements conjugaux traditionnels, ouvrant un débat sur la nécessité de réévaluer ces structures. **Manyan Mata** enfin, traite du divorce et des stigmates sociaux qui en découlent. Il met en exergue la fragilité des unions face aux mutations sociales, où les attentes sociétales évoluent rapidement. Les représentations des conséquences du divorce incitent à réfléchir sur les normes sociales entourant le mariage et les défis contemporains, soulignant l'importance d'une discussion ouverte sur ces sujets.

### Perception du public à Sokoto

La perception du public varie considérablement en fonction de l'âge, du sexe et du niveau d'éducation des participants. Le tableau suivant présente les réactions des différents groupes de participants vis-à-vis des thèmes abordés dans les films :

Tableau 2 :

Groupe de participants	Réactions positives (en %)	Réactions négatives (en %)	Commentaires clés
Jeunes (18-30 ans)	75%	25%	Favorables aux relations modernes
Adultes (31-50 ans)	45%	55%	Préoccupés par la polygamie
Adultes (51 ans et +)	30%	70%	Défense des valeurs traditionnelles
Femmes mariées	40%	60%	Critiques sur les stéréotypes de genre
Hommes mariés	50%	50%	Appréciation des récits d'amour

Les résultats montrent que les jeunes (18-30 ans) affichent une forte tendance à adopter des attitudes positives envers les relations modernes, avec 75 % d'entre eux exprimant des réactions favorables. Cela peut être attribué à leur exposition accrue à des idéaux contemporains sur l'amour,

souvent véhiculés par les médias et les réseaux sociaux. Ces jeunes spectateurs aspirent à des modèles relationnels qui prônent l'égalité, la compréhension mutuelle et le respect, ce qui contraste avec les attentes plus traditionnelles qui prédominent dans d'autres groupes d'âge. En

revanche, les adultes âgés de 31 à 50 ans, avec 55 % de réactions négatives, semblent préoccupés par la représentation de la polygamie dans les films. Cette préoccupation peut découler d'une loyauté envers les valeurs familiales traditionnelles et d'une résistance au changement dans les normes matrimoniales. Cela reflète un désir de préserver des structures familiales perçues comme stables et respectables, face à ce qui est considéré comme des récits audacieux et déstabilisants. Les adultes de 51 ans et plus montrent une adhésion encore plus forte aux valeurs traditionnelles, avec 70 % d'opinions négatives. Ce groupe défend les normes traditionnelles de mariage, considérant souvent que les récits modernes menacent l'intégrité des institutions familiales établies. Leur perception peut être influencée par des croyances culturelles et religieuses profondément ancrées, qui valorisent la stabilité et la continuité des traditions.

Les femmes mariées critiquent les stéréotypes de genre véhiculés par ces films, avec 60 % de réactions négatives. Elles soulignent que les films véhiculent des représentations souvent réductrices des femmes, renforçant des rôles de genre inégaux. Ce groupe appelle à une représentation plus équilibrée des rôles masculins et féminins, mettant en avant la nécessité de raconter des histoires qui valorisent les expériences et les voix des femmes, tout en

dénonçant les stéréotypes nuisibles. Les hommes mariés affichent des réactions plus mitigées, avec 50 % d'avis positifs et 50 % négatifs. Leur appréciation des récits d'amour peut être liée à une identification avec les histoires romantiques, mais ils semblent également conscients des implications des stéréotypes de genre. Cela peut refléter une tension entre l'adoption de modèles modernes de romance et le respect des normes traditionnelles. En outre, les différences dans les réactions des participants sont étroitement liées à leur niveau d'éducation. Ceux ayant une formation supérieure tendent à critiquer les stéréotypes de genre véhiculés dans ces films, appelant à une représentation plus respectueuse et équilibrée des rôles. Cette éducation les rend plus sensibles aux problématiques de genre et aux dynamiques de pouvoir, leur permettant de remettre en question les normes culturelles établies. La religiosité joue également un rôle crucial dans la formation des opinions. Les individus plus religieux sont généralement plus enclins à soutenir les modèles traditionnels de mariage, indépendamment des récits contemporains. Cela souligne l'importance des croyances religieuses dans la façon dont le mariage et les relations sont perçus, renforçant les tensions entre tradition et modernité dans le contexte culturel de Sokoto.

### Effets observés sur la vie conjugale réelle

Les résultats montrent également des effets notables sur la vie conjugale réelle des participants. Le tableau ci-dessous résume les changements observés dans les comportements conjugaux.

Tableau 3 :

Comportement	Avant l'exposition aux films (%)	Après l'exposition aux films (%)
Communication ouverte	35%	65%
Discussion des conflits	30%	60%
Attentes de partenariat égalitaire	40%	70%
Acceptation de la polygamie	50%	30%

De nombreux couples rapportent une évolution de leurs attentes, inspirée par les représentations vues à l'écran. Les films comme *Labarina* mettent en avant des thèmes de communication et de résolution de conflits, ce qui a conduit certains couples à adopter des comportements plus ouverts et communicatifs. Par exemple, la hausse de la communication ouverte,

passant de 35 % à 65 %, indique que les couples sont désormais plus enclins à partager leurs pensées et sentiments, favorisant ainsi des dialogues constructifs.

De même, l'augmentation des discussions autour des conflits, qui est passée de 30 % à 60 %, montre un changement positif vers une gestion proactive des désaccords. Cela reflète une

tendance vers des relations plus saines, où les partenaires se sentent à l'aise d'aborder les problèmes au lieu de les éviter. Les attentes de partenariat égalitaire ont également considérablement évolué, passant de 40 % à 70 %. Cela témoigne d'un désir croissant parmi les couples d'établir des relations fondées sur l'égalité et le respect mutuel, en phase avec les thèmes modernes présentés dans les films. Cependant, ces changements ne se font pas sans tensions. Les participants peinent à concilier aspirations modernes et attentes religieuses à Sokoto. Par exemple, bien que l'acceptation de la polygamie ait diminué de 50 % à 30 %, certaines personnes continuent de ressentir la pression de normes traditionnelles qui valorisent la polygamie. Cela engendre un conflit intérieur pour de nombreux couples, qui aspirent à des relations modernes tout en naviguant dans un environnement culturellement conservateur.

### Discussion

Les résultats obtenus à partir de l'analyse des films de Kannywood et des perceptions des téléspectateurs à Sokoto mettent en évidence la coexistence d'idéaux conjugaux contrastés — traditionnels et modernes — qui traduisent une tension entre la continuité culturelle et les dynamiques de changement social.

#### 1. Les représentations filmiques comme miroir et agent de changement social

Les données recueillies montrent que les films de Kannywood, tout en s'ancrant dans un cadre culturel islamique, oscillent entre la valorisation des modèles matrimoniaux traditionnels — notamment la polygamie et la hiérarchie genrée — et la promotion de valeurs plus modernes telles que la romance, la communication et l'égalité dans le couple. Cette dualité illustre ce que Gerbner (1998) définit dans la théorie de la cultivation comme un processus de construction symbolique du réel : les médias n'imposent pas nécessairement des comportements, mais façonnent progressivement les perceptions et attentes sociales en matière de rôles conjugaux. Ainsi, les films tels que *Labarina* ou *Jamilun Jidda* contribuent à la « normalisation » de l'amour romantique et du dialogue conjugal dans une société où le mariage reste souvent perçu comme

une institution sociale plutôt que comme un choix individuel. Ce glissement symbolique, observable notamment chez les jeunes spectateurs, traduit une reconfiguration des imaginaires sociaux autour du mariage, où les idéaux d'égalité et de respect mutuel gagnent en légitimité. En revanche, les œuvres comme *Gidan Sarauta* ou *Garwashi* perpétuent des structures traditionnelles, valorisant la polygamie et la suprématie masculine, confirmant la persistance d'une idéologie patriarcale dominante.

#### 2. Réception différenciée et fractures générationnelles

Les réactions divergentes entre les jeunes et les adultes, voire entre les hommes et les femmes, confirment la pertinence de la théorie de la réception (Hall, 1980). Selon cette approche, le sens d'un texte médiatique n'est jamais fixe ; il est activement reconstruit par le public selon son contexte social, religieux et éducatif. À Sokoto, cette pluralité d'interprétations est manifeste. Les jeunes, davantage exposés aux médias numériques et aux discours globalisés sur les relations égalitaires, tendent à décoder les films selon une lecture « oppositionnelle », c'est-à-dire en faveur du changement social. À l'inverse, les générations plus âgées adoptent une lecture « dominante », interprétant les récits modernes comme une menace à l'ordre moral et religieux établi. Cette divergence générationnelle met en lumière une fracture culturelle : les jeunes voient dans Kannywood une plateforme d'expression et de modernité, tandis que les aînés y perçoivent un instrument d'érosion des valeurs traditionnelles. Cette tension est symptomatique d'un processus plus large de négociation identitaire au sein de la société hausa contemporaine, où la modernité médiatique entre en dialogue conflictuel avec la tradition religieuse et communautaire.

#### 3. Influence comportementale et apprentissage social

Les transformations observées dans les comportements conjugaux des participants, notamment l'amélioration de la communication et la montée du désir d'égalité dans le couple, peuvent être interprétées à travers la théorie de l'apprentissage social de Bandura (1977). Selon cette théorie, les individus apprennent en

observant et en imitant les comportements perçus comme valorisés dans les médias. Les films de Kannywood, en présentant des personnages féminins plus assertifs et des couples fondés sur le dialogue, offrent des modèles d'identification susceptibles de modifier les pratiques conjugales réelles. Les statistiques indiquant une augmentation de la communication ouverte (de 35 % à 65 %) et une diminution de l'acceptation de la polygamie (de 50 % à 30 %) traduisent l'impact de ces modèles médiatiques sur les représentations et pratiques quotidiennes. Néanmoins, ces évolutions demeurent ambivalentes. Si certains couples adoptent des comportements plus égalitaires, d'autres expriment des résistances liées aux pressions sociales et religieuses. Cette ambivalence illustre le caractère non linéaire du changement culturel, où la modernisation des mentalités coexiste avec une forte inertie normative.

#### 4. Le paradoxe de Kannywood : entre innovation narrative et contrainte culturelle

Kannywood se positionne ainsi à la croisée de deux impératifs contradictoires : répondre aux attentes d'un public jeune en quête de modernité, tout en préservant les sensibilités religieuses et culturelles d'une société conservatrice. Ce paradoxe crée un espace d'hybridité culturelle où les récits cinématographiques deviennent des lieux de médiation symbolique entre tradition et modernité. Ce double positionnement a des conséquences importantes. D'une part, il permet une forme de résistance douce aux normes patriarcales, en introduisant progressivement des modèles relationnels alternatifs dans le discours public. D'autre part, il limite la portée transformative de ces récits, car les cinéastes doivent composer avec la censure religieuse et les attentes morales du public. Comme le note Krings (2015), la légitimité culturelle de Kannywood dépend de sa capacité à ne pas franchir les frontières du « socialement acceptable ».

#### 5. Implications socioculturelles

Les résultats de cette étude soulignent que les représentations filmiques ne se contentent pas de refléter les valeurs de la société hausa : elles participent activement à leur redéfinition. Kannywood devient ainsi un laboratoire culturel

où s'expérimentent de nouvelles formes de conjugalité, de masculinité et de féminité. Toutefois, cette reconfiguration des imaginaires reste inégale et fragmentée. Si les jeunes citadins éduqués intègrent plus facilement les modèles modernes, les couches sociales plus traditionalistes demeurent attachées à une vision religieuse et communautaire du mariage. Ces constats invitent à une réflexion critique sur le rôle de la production audiovisuelle dans la transformation sociale au nord du Nigeria. Loin d'être un simple divertissement, le cinéma hausa fonctionne comme un instrument de socialisation secondaire, capable d'influencer les normes sociales, mais également de provoquer des débats et résistances au sein du corps social.

6. Vers une redéfinition des normes conjugales ?

En définitive, l'étude révèle que l'influence de Kannywood sur les perceptions du mariage à Sokoto participe d'un processus de transition culturelle où tradition et modernité ne s'opposent pas, mais se croisent et se réinventent mutuellement. Les représentations filmiques du mariage ne rejettent pas les normes islamiques et sociales établies ; elles les reformulent à la lumière des réalités contemporaines, notamment l'éducation des femmes, la mobilité sociale et la quête d'un bonheur conjugal fondé sur le dialogue et le respect mutuel. Cette tension entre continuité et changement crée un espace de négociation symbolique où les spectateurs, surtout les jeunes, repensent leurs attentes et leurs rôles au sein du couple. La « médiatisation de l'intimité » (Gershon, 2010) en constitue un des aspects majeurs : les films de Kannywood rendent visibles des formes d'affection, de choix amoureux et de communication auparavant confinées à la sphère privée, contribuant ainsi à redéfinir les normes conjugales dans un contexte islamique urbain en mutation.

#### Conclusion

Cette étude a montré que les films de Kannywood jouent un rôle central dans la construction et la transformation des représentations du mariage à Sokoto. En combinant tradition et modernité, ces films reflètent les tensions entre les normes islamiques

établies et les aspirations contemporaines des jeunes générations. Les résultats révèlent une représentation duale du mariage : d'un côté, la défense des modèles traditionnels tels que la polygamie et l'autorité masculine ; de l'autre, la promotion de valeurs modernes comme l'amour romantique, la communication et l'égalité dans le couple. Ces récits agissent différemment selon les publics: les jeunes y voient une ouverture vers des relations plus équilibrées, tandis que les générations plus âgées perçoivent ces modèles

comme une menace pour la stabilité culturelle et morale. Ainsi, Kannywood apparaît comme un espace de médiation entre tradition et modernité, où les normes sociales sont discutées, négociées et redéfinies. Son influence ne se limite pas au divertissement : elle agit sur les attitudes et les pratiques conjugales réelles, notamment en favorisant la communication, la compréhension mutuelle et la recherche d'égalité au sein du couple.

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## QUESTIONNAIRE SUR L'IMPACT DES FILMS DE KANNYWOOD SUR LES PERCEPTIONS DU MARIAGE

### A. Informations Générales

1. **Âge :**  Moins de 18 ans  18-30 ans  31-50 ans  Plus de 50 ans
2. **Sexe :**  Masculin  Féminin
3. **Niveau d'études :**  Aucun  Primaire  Secondaire  Supérieur
4. **Situation matrimoniale :**  Célibataire  Marié(e)  Divorcé(e)  Veuf(ve)

### B. Visionnage des Films

**5. Avez-vous regardé des films de Kannywood au cours des 12 derniers mois ?**

Oui  Non

**6. Si oui, quels films avez-vous regardés ? (cochez tout ce qui s'applique)**

Labarina  Gidan Sarauta  Jamilun Jidda  Garwashi  Manyan Mata  
 Autres : \_\_\_\_\_

### C. Représentations du Mariage

**7. Comment évalueriez-vous les représentations du mariage dans les films de Kannywood ?**

Très positives  Positives  Neutres  Négatives  Très négatives

**8. Quels thèmes liés au mariage vous semblent les plus fréquents dans ces films ? (cochez tout ce qui s'applique)**

Amour romantique  Polygamie  Jalousie  Conflits conjugaux  Divorce  
 Autres : \_\_\_\_\_

### D. Impact sur les Perceptions

**9. Dans quelle mesure les films de Kannywood influencent-ils vos attentes concernant le mariage ?**

Pas du tout  Un peu  Modérément  Beaucoup  Énormément

**10. Avez-vous discuté des thèmes abordés dans ces films avec votre partenaire ou vos amis ?**

Oui  Non

**11. Si oui, quels sujets avez-vous abordés ? (cochez tout ce qui s'applique)**

Communication dans le couple  Rôles de genre  Attentes conjugales  Autres : \_\_\_\_\_

### E. Opinions et Comportements

**12. Pensez-vous que les films de Kannywood encouragent des comportements relationnels positifs ?**

Oui  Non  Ne sais pas

**13. Quels changements, le cas échéant, avez-vous constatés dans votre propre vie conjugale ou vos attentes en matière de relations après avoir regardé ces films**

## METAPHORICAL MAPPINGS OF “PARENTS” AS KINSHIP CATEGORIES IN HAUSA LANGUAGE

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### Abstract

This study investigates the metaphorical mappings of parental kinship categories: *father*, *mother*, and *grandparents* in the Hausa language, using the Lakoff and Johnson’s (1980) Conceptual Metaphor Theory (CMT) as framework. The study collected data from 200 Hausa Native Speakers using Semantic Elicitation Task from naturally-occurring situations. The research reveals that these kinship terms extend far beyond their literal family references. The ‘*father*’ *Uba* is metaphorically conceptualized as a ‘shelter’, ‘wall’, and ‘pillar’, showing roles of strength, protection, and stability. The ‘*mother*’ *Uwa* is framed as ‘shade’, ‘coolness’, and ‘emotional centrality’, embodying care, nurturance, and moral significance. ‘*Grandparents*’ *Kakafor* both male and female are depicted as ‘friends’, ‘indulgent figures’, and ‘repositories of history’, signifying their roles in intergenerational bonding and cultural continuity. These metaphorical mappingsshow the cognitive and cultural dimensions of Hausa kinship expressions which illustrate how language encodes complex social values, emotional relationships, and communal identities. The study affirms that Hausa kinship metaphors are not arbitrary but culturally grounded cognitive tools that shape social interaction and cultural worldview. It contributes to African linguistics and cognitive semantics by offering deeper insights into the interplay between metaphor, language, and culture in an indigenous African context.

**Keywords:** Conceptual Metaphor, Extension, Metaphorical Mapping, Kinship Terms, Parental Metaphors, Semantic and Hausa.

### Introduction

The intricate relationship between language and culture has long been acknowledged in linguistic and anthropological scholarship. Scholars have consistently emphasized that language both reflects and reinforces cultural patterns, serving as a cognitive tool for organizing and interpreting human experience (Lakoff & Johnson, 1980; Sharifian, 2011; Barsalou, 2012; Casasanto, 2016). This interdependence is particularly evident in how metaphors operate within language not merely as rhetorical ornaments but as fundamental cognitive mechanisms that shape how speakers understand abstract concepts through familiar experiences. Conceptual Metaphor Theory (CMT), developed by Lakoff and Johnson (1980), provides a robust framework for understanding this phenomenon. According to CMT, metaphor involves the systematic mapping of knowledge from a concrete

or well-understood source domain onto an abstract or less familiar target domain. These mappings are deeply entrenched in our conceptual system and guide how we think, speak, and act.

Metaphorical mappings are thus cognitive projections where conceptual structure from one domain is transferred to another, allowing speakers to reason about complex social, emotional, or moral realities through simpler, embodied experiences (Lakoff, 1987; Kövecses, 2005). In many languages, including Hausa, kinship terms form a rich source domain for metaphorical reasoning. Kinship expressions like *father*, *mother*, and *grandparent* are frequently extended metaphorically to articulate ideas about leadership, authority, nurturance, and intergenerational knowledge. These metaphorical extensions are not random but are grounded in the cultural values, social structures, and interpersonal norms of the community (Sharifian et al., 2008; Kraska-Szlenk,

2014a, 2014b).

In Hausa, kinship terms carry significant semantic and cultural weight. While terms such as *Uba* (father), *Uwa* (mother), and *Kaka* (grandparent) denote biological relationships, they are also employed metaphorically in a variety of social contexts to express respect, hierarchy, emotional closeness, protection, and communal identity. For instance, a community leader may be called *Uban Kasa* ("father of the land") to invoke an image of guidance, authority, and provision, while *Uwa* may metaphorically refer to any nurturing or protective figure regardless of gender or biological connection. These metaphorical usages reflect key cultural principles such as age hierarchy, communal responsibility, and reverence for elders (Newman, 2000; Usman, 2015). The metaphorical mapping of kinship terms in Hausa illustrates how linguistic expressions are rooted in cultural cognition and play a critical role in social organization. This underscores the broader claim in cultural linguistics that metaphor is both a reflection of and a vehicle for transmitting cultural knowledge (Sharifian, 2011).

Despite the cultural richness of such metaphorical expressions, much of the existing scholarship on Hausa has focused on its phonological, grammatical, and syntactic structures, with limited attention paid to how metaphor functions in everyday language use (Newman, 2000). There remains a notable gap in understanding how Hausa speakers metaphorically map kinship categories onto broader social and cognitive domains. This study addresses this gap by exploring the metaphorical extensions of parental kinship terms *father*, *mother*, *grandfather*, and *grandmother* in Hausa, using the theoretical lens of Conceptual Metaphor Theory and Frame Semantics. The aim is to uncover how these metaphors not only enrich linguistic expression but also reflect deep-seated cultural beliefs, values, and interpersonal dynamics within Hausa-speaking communities.

Hausa is a Chadic language widely spoken in Nigeria and other parts of West Africa. It is spoken predominantly in Northern Nigeria and parts of West Africa. It is a major lingua franca with rich oral and written traditions. Hausa reflects

a strong Islamic influence, and its language practices are deeply intertwined with social hierarchies, gender roles, and cultural values (Newman, 2000; Jaggar, 2020).

## REVIEW OF RELATED LITERATURE

### Conceptual Review

**Semantics:** This review examines seminal contributions to the definition of semantics, highlighting key theoretical frameworks and their implications for understanding the complexities of linguistic meaning. Fillmore (1985: 225), an influential linguist, defined semantics as "the study of meaning in language." His work emphasized the role of meaning in relation to linguistic structures and usage. Lyons (1999) described semantics as the field that examines meaning within language, emphasizing how meanings are organized, conveyed, and interpreted in linguistic communication. Similarly, Hurford and Heasley (1983: 70) viewed semantics as the study of meaning expressed through linguistic forms such as words, phrases, sentences, and texts in human communication. Saeed (1997) also considered semantics as the analysis of meaning in language, encompassing various linguistic units from words to larger discourse structures.

**Semantic Extension:** Semantic extension is the process by which a word acquires additional meanings beyond its original or literal sense. In cognitive linguistics, this often occurs through metaphor or metonymy, allowing terms to apply in new conceptual or social domains (Geeraerts, 2018; Traugott & Dasher, 2020). In many African languages, semantic extension of kinship terms is a key mechanism for expressing social relationships and community structure.

**Kinship Terms:** Kinship terms are lexical items used to denote family relationships such as father, mother, sibling, or grandparent. However, in many languages, these terms are often extended metaphorically to describe non-familial roles, responsibilities, and social hierarchies (Parkin, 2022; Evans-Pritchard, 2020). Kinship terminology is essential in anthropological linguistics for understanding how language reflects social organization.

**Metaphorical Mapping:** Metaphorical mapping refers to the cognitive process by which features or

structures from a well-understood source domain are systematically projected onto a less familiar target domain. This mapping allows people to reason about abstract concepts through more concrete experiences (Lakoff & Johnson, 1980; Kövecses, 2020). It is a foundational mechanism within Conceptual Metaphor Theory (CMT), which posits that such metaphorical structures are not merely linguistic, but deeply embedded in cognition.

**Parental Metaphors:** Parental metaphors are metaphorical uses of the roles of father, mother, or grandparents to describe non-biological relationships or attributes. These metaphors typically draw on culturally salient ideas of protection, authority, guidance, and care (Kövecses, 2020; Yu & Jia, 2023). Such metaphors are prevalent in politics, religion, education, and traditional leadership, especially in collectivist societies.

### Conceptual Metaphor Theory

Conceptual Metaphor Theory, introduced by Lakoff and Johnson (1980), posits that metaphors are not just linguistic expressions but reflections of underlying conceptual structures. According to CMT, abstract concepts are understood through metaphorical projections from more tangible or embodied domains (Lakoff & Johnson, 2008; Kövecses, 2020). This theory provides a cognitive framework for analyzing how metaphors shape language and thought. The study of metaphorical language, particularly within the field of cognitive linguistics, has been significantly shaped by Conceptual Metaphor Theory (CMT), first proposed by Lakoff and Johnson (1980). CMT maintains that metaphors are not just stylistic devices used in language but are foundational to human cognition. They enable speakers to understand abstract, complex, or unfamiliar concepts by mapping them onto more concrete, familiar domains. In this cognitive framework, linguistic expressions involving metaphors reveal deep insights into how individuals conceptualize their experiences and realities.

Within the context of kinship categories, particularly parental roles such as *father*, *mother*, *grandfather*, and *grandmother*, metaphorical expressions serve as cognitive and cultural tools

through which social hierarchies, moral expectations, and relational dynamics are represented. These metaphorical mappings often extend beyond biological relationships and are employed in socio-cultural contexts to denote authority, wisdom, nurturance, leadership, or moral guidance.

### Empirical Review

A number of studies have been conducted on metaphorical mapping of kinship terms both within and outside the Nigerian and African context. Some of these studies are reviewed as they relate to metaphorical mapping of parental metaphors. Zhang and Zhuang(2018) examined kinship terms as metaphors in Mandarin: Cognitive and cultural analysis. The study analyzed how kinship terms in Mandarin Chinese are used metaphorically, drawing on cognitive linguistic and cultural analysis. It examined the metaphorical extensions of "father" (*fu*) and "mother" (*mu*), finding concluding that "mother" is more conventionally used metaphorically than "father". In Mandarin Chinese, kinship terms like *shūshu* (uncle) and *jiéjie* (elder sister) are widely used in non-familial contexts to signal social closeness, hierarchy, or endearment. The study suggests that the degree of metaphoricality for these terms is influenced by both universal biological experiences and cultural factors, particularly Confucianism.

In a study titled "Kinship metaphors and social interaction in Mandarin Chinese: A cognitive approach", Zhang & Zhuang (2018) examined metaphorical mappings across English and Mandarin political speeches. The focus was to identify how cognitive mappings influenced conceptualizations of leadership and authority. Using a corpus-based approach and qualitative analysis grounded in CMT, they found that metaphors such as "nation as family" or "leader as father" were recurrent. These mappings provided insight into how authority is constructed and legitimized culturally. Alshammari (2019) examined the metaphorical extension of kinship terms in Arabic: A cognitive linguistic perspective. This study explored how kinship terms in Arabic are used metaphorically, drawing on cognitive linguistics principles. It investigated how the

meanings of kinship terms, which typically denote family relationships, were extended to other domains, creating metaphorical extensions. The study revealed that, in Arabic, terms such as *umm* (mother) and *ab* (father) are metaphorically extended to describe respected leaders, religious figures, or protectors, showing entrenched cultural values about family, responsibility, and social order.

In their study "Kinship Terms and Social Hierarchies in Yoruba and Zulu", Chikere and Moyo, 2021) investigated the metaphorical and literal applications of kinship terms in African communities. Using ethnolinguistic interviews and narrative analysis, they found that kinship terms were frequently used to express social distance, politeness, and respect. For instance, older community members were often addressed as "father" or "mother," regardless of actual familial ties, revealing a socially embedded metaphor system. A parallel study by Dlamini (2021) titled "From Kinship to Leadership: Semantic Shift in Swazi Cultural Discourse" showed how the term for "father" (*baba*) shifted semantically to refer to chiefs and religious leaders. Through discourse analysis of royal speeches and church sermons, the study demonstrated how semantic extension aligns with community ideals of care and protection. These findings support the view that metaphor and semantic extension are deeply linked in expressing parental roles metaphorically.

In "Cultural Semantics in Hausa Proverbs: A Study of Kinship and Social Order", Aliyu and Sulaiman (2021) explored how proverbs use metaphorical kinship terms to communicate moral lessons and social norms. Analyzing over 150 proverbs, they identified frequent references to "mother" and "father" as symbols of care, authority, and historical continuity. Their methodology combined ethnographic interviews and text analysis, revealing the metaphorical richness of parental terms. Another relevant study is "Language, Identity, and Metaphor in Hausa Public Discourse" where Mohammed and Idris (2022) using discourse analysis of media and political speech found that metaphorical references to *Uba* (father) and *Uwa* (mother) were central in

reinforcing community leadership and social solidarity. These studies demonstrate that Hausa provides a culturally grounded and linguistically fertile terrain for studying metaphorical mappings of kinship.

Cross-linguistic studies support the prevalence and importance of metaphorical kinship mappings in diverse linguistic communities. While Hausa has received less attention in this regard, some studies have begun to highlight the metaphorical use of parental terms in traditional and modern communication contexts particularly in political rhetoric, religious sermons, and proverbs (Usman, 2015; Ibrahim, 2020). In the African context, these researches have shown that languages employ parental metaphors extensively in political and spiritual discourse, often to invoke familiarity, loyalty, and moral obligation. These metaphorical extensions serve pragmatic and rhetorical purposes, reinforcing societal values such as respect for elders, communal solidarity, and divine providence. However, few studies have specifically focused on the metaphorical mappings of *parents* and *grandparents* in Hausa from a CMT perspective. This study aims to fill that gap by analyzing how core kinship terms are metaphorically structured and what this reveals about the cognitive and cultural schemas of Hausa speakers.

### Theoretical Framework

The current study is anchored on Conceptual Metaphor Theory (CMT) by Lakoff and Johnson (1980), complemented by Fillmore's Frame Semantics (1976). According to CMT, metaphor operates through a process of conceptual mapping, whereby a *source domain* (e.g., family relationships) is projected onto a *target domain* (e.g., political leadership or moral authority). In this way, parental metaphors provide cognitive scaffolding for understanding abstract social roles. Frame Semantics, on the other hand, emphasizes the role of background knowledge and culturally embedded frames in meaning-making. Parental kinship terms evoke frames of nurturance, guidance, authority, and continuity, which are activated even in non-literal uses. When a Hausa speaker refers to a community leader as "ubangiji" (a revered paternal figure, sometimes used for

God), they activate a culturally specific frame that blends familial intimacy with divine or moral authority.

Together, these theories provide a robust foundation for analyzing the metaphorical extensions of kinship categories in Hausa. They guide the study in identifying the source-target mappings, cultural frames, and socio-cognitive functions of parental metaphors within Hausa discourse.

### Research Methodology

The research design for this study is a qualitative research design. The type of qualitative analysis employed is Merriam's (2008) descriptive interpretive method of data analysis. This study was conducted in the Northwestern part of Nigeria,

Jigawa (Dutse metropolis). The population for this study comprises more than 2 million people of ages from 25-45 years from where the sample of respondents was obtained. This research employed two main methods of data collection: Ethnographic Fieldwork and the use of Semantic Elicitation Task (SET) on 200 Hausa native speakers of diverse social status who served as subjects for the study. A qualitative analysis was employed by the researcher to code and tabulate the data obtained from the observation and SET. The findings were interpreted to gain insights into the metaphorical conceptualizations of kinship terms using Lakoff and Johnson's CMT as a framework for both the theory and analysis.

## Data Presentation And Analysis

### Identification of Hausa Kinship Categories

#### Kinship Terms of Parents

- i. Baba, Uba, Mahaifi
- ii. Mama, Uwa, Mahaifiya
- iii. Kaka

#### Translation

- ‘Father;
- ‘Mother’
- ‘Grandmother, Grandfather’

### 1. Father

- i. *uba ai rumfa ne*  
father.SBJ, EMPH shelter.COP  
‘The father is indeed a shelter’

In this metaphor, the ‘father’ is conceptualized as a protective structure or shelter, implying that fathers provide protection, support, and a safe space, similar to how a shelter protects from external threats.

- ii. *uba bango ne*  
father.SBJ wall.COP  
‘The father is a wall’

Here, the father is metaphorically understood as a wall, representing strength, stability, and impenetrable protection. A wall symbolizes something that shields and supports, which reflects the role of a father in the family.

- iii. *uba ai jigo ne*  
Father.EMPH pillar.COP  
‘The father is a pillar’

A father is metaphorically described as a pillar, symbolizing strength, support, and the foundation of the family. Just as a pillar holds up a structure, a father is seen as holding up the family.

Conceptual Metaphor	Mapping	Target Domain	Source Domain	Interpretation
<b>Father as a shelter</b>	Shelter - Refuge	Emotional refuge	Shelter	Reflects the father’s role as a safe haven in difficult times.
<b>Father as a wall</b>	Protection -	Physical and	Protector	Highlights the father’s role in

Conceptual Metaphor	Mapping	Target Domain	Source Domain	Interpretation
	Safety	emotional safety		shielding the family from harm.
<b>Father as a pillar of support</b>	Support-Stability	Emotional and financial care	Pillar	Emphasizes the father's foundational role in providing strength and support to the family.

## 2. Mother

i. *uwa inuwar gabas*

mother shade east

‘A mother is the shade of the East (sun rising from the East)’.

The metaphor here highlights the mother’s role as a source of protection and comfort, similar to the soothing shade in the morning sun.

ii. *uwa mafi uba koda uban sarki ne*

Mother surpasses father even king’s father. **COP**

‘A mother surpasses the father, even if he is the father of a king’

The metaphor also reflects the belief in the mother’s unparalleled role in nurturing and emotional support, even when compared to a father of high status.

iii. *uwa sanyin rai*

mother coolness life

‘A mother is the coolness of life’.

The metaphor emphasizes the mother’s role in bringing peace, solace, and emotional balance.

Conceptual Metaphor	Mapping	Target Domain	Source Domain	Interpretation
<b>Mother as protective shade</b>	Shade – Protection	Emotional and physical care	Shade	Highlights the mother’s role in providing comfort and safety.
<b>Mother as a superior parent</b>	Importance – Centrality	Family dynamics	Priority	Reflects the centrality of the mother in all life aspects.
<b>Mother as a life necessity</b>	Support – Vitality	Essential familial care	Necessity	Underscores the indispensable role of mothers.

## 3. Grandparent

i. *kaka abokin yara*

grandparent friend children

‘A grandparent is a friend to children’

The metaphor highlights the playful and nurturing relationship between grandparents and children.

ii. *kaka mai bata jika*

grandparent who spoils grandchild  
 ‘A grandparent who spoils the grandchild’

The metaphor reflects the tendency of grandparents to pamper and indulge their grandchildren.

iii. *kaka uwari tarihi a biki a gano tushe*

grandparent mother history in ceremony.3PL find roots

‘A grandparent is the source of history, and in ceremonies, the roots are traced through them’.

Conceptual Metaphor Mapping	Target Domain	Source Domain	Interpretation	
<b>Grandparent as a companion</b>	Friendship – Playfulness	Relationship with children	Companion	Highlights the nurturing and playful bond between grandparents and their grandchildren.
<b>Grandparent as a history archive</b>	Knowledge – Remembrance	Knowledge	Resources	Reflects the grandparent’s role as a steadfast figure in keeping family lineage
<b>Grandparent as an indulgent figure</b>	Indulgence – Pampering	Relationship with grandchildren	Indulgence	Highlights the tendency of grandparents to spoil their grandchildren.

### Discussion of Findings

The findings of this study reveal rich and culturally grounded metaphorical mappings of the parental kinship categories in Hausa specifically *father* (*uba*), *mother* (*uwa*), and *grandparent* (*kaka*). These metaphorical constructions not only represent family relationships but also function as cultural tools for framing authority, identity, nurturance, and intergenerational continuity.

The metaphorical mappings of *father* in Hausa indicate a conceptualization rooted in strength, stability, and protection. Metaphors such as “*uba ai rumfa ne*” (‘The father is a shelter’), “*uba bango ne*” (‘The father is a wall’), and “*uba ai jigo ne*” (‘The father is a pillar’) illustrate the multifaceted role of the father as a refuge, a defender, and a foundation of the family structure. These metaphors align with the *Conceptual Metaphor: “FATHER IS A STRUCTURAL SUPPORT”*, reinforcing values such as reliability, provision, and leadership. Beyond literal meaning, the term “father” is extended metaphorically in sociopolitical,

spiritual, and professional domains. This is similar findings that appear in Agyekum’s (2006) study of Akan kinship metaphors, where the father is framed as a “protector” and “support beam.” Expressions like *uban kasa* (father of the nation) or *uban sana’ a* (pioneer of a profession) elevate individuals to roles of foundational authority and expertise, reinforcing hierarchical structures within Hausa society. The metaphor reflects both emotional closeness and hierarchical respect, contributing to communal bonding and value transmission. This aligns with Strauss’ (2006) findings that in many societies, the father metaphor indexes hierarchy, leadership, and moral authority. In African societies, especially Hausa, such extensions also reflect a communal worldview where authority figures assume moral guardianship (Musa 2014; Dangana 2018).

The metaphors associated with *mother* emphasize emotional nurturing, protection, and centrality. For example, “*uwa inuwar gabas*” (‘A mother is the shade of the east’) projects the image of early morning shade, symbolic of comfort and

gentle care. This aligns with what Kövecses (2015) identified as the universal metaphor “MOTHER IS COMFORT/WARMTH,” which appears in cultures from the Arab world to East Asia. “*Uwa mafi uba koda uban sarki ne*” (‘A mother surpasses the father, even if he is the king’) underscores the perceived emotional supremacy and irreplaceable value of mothers in familial and moral development. Similarly, “*uwa sanyin rai*” (‘A mother is the coolness of life’) metaphorically captures emotional balance, peace, and the soothing essence of maternal care. It also aligns with Sharifian’s (2011) argument that in African and Middle Eastern societies, mothers are metaphorically linked to “coolness” a symbol of emotional balance, healing, and softness.

These metaphors position the mother as the emotional and psychological cornerstone of the household.

The **Conceptual Metaphor: “MOTHER IS COMFORT AND CENTRALITY”** shows that mothers are not just caregivers but symbolic figures of emotional stability, peace, and life-affirming support. In a culture where respect and gratitude for maternal care are deeply embedded, such metaphorical expressions validate the indispensable role of mothers.

The metaphorical mappings for *grandparents* reflect themes of intergenerational continuity, indulgence, and ancestral wisdom. In “*kaka abokin yara*” (‘A grandparent is a friend to children’), the grandparent is depicted as a playful companion, emphasizing their less disciplinary and more emotionally accessible role. In “*kaka mai bata jika*” (‘A grandparent who spoils the grandchild’), the metaphor portrays indulgence and unconditional affection. Perhaps most culturally profound is “*kaka uwari tarihi a biki a gano tushe*” (‘A grandparent is the mother of history; in ceremonies, the roots are traced through them’), which conceptualizes the grandparent as a living archive, a symbol of cultural origin and lineage. This aligns with the **Conceptual Metaphor: “GRANDPARENTS ARE CULTURAL ROOTS”**, illustrating their role in preserving family history, values, and

identity. This aligns with De León’s (2012) findings on Zapotec metaphors, where grandparents are framed as “play-mates” and emotional softeners in the household.

Across these metaphors, grandparents serve as bridges between past and present, between heritage and continuity. Their metaphorical representation conveys reverence, memory, and the foundational wisdom required for cultural survival.

### Conclusion

This study examined the metaphorical mappings of parental kinship categories: *father*, *mother*, and *grandparent* in the Hausa language, revealing how these kinship terms surpass biological reference and function as vital cognitive and cultural constructs. The analysis demonstrates that Hausa speakers conceptualize the *father* as a source of strength and protection, the *mother* as a symbol of emotional stability and centrality, and the *grandparent* as both a nurturing companion and a custodian of lineage and cultural memory.

These metaphorical mappings are deeply embedded in Hausa social discourse and reflect core cultural values such as hierarchy, nurturance, respect for elders, and the importance of family continuity. The metaphors are not random or decorative; they are systematically patterned and culturally motivated, supporting the Conceptual Metaphor Theory as a valid framework for understanding the interplay between language, thought, and culture. The study contributes significantly to the field of cognitive linguistics and African cultural semantics by highlighting how metaphor operates in an indigenous African language to express nuanced social meanings. It confirms that kinship terms in Hausa are not merely labels for biological relations but are dynamic, symbolic tools used to encode social, spiritual, and moral realities. Future research may extend this work by exploring metaphorical mappings in other kinship roles such as siblings (*brother*, *sister*), in-laws, or extended family terms, and by conducting comparative studies across Nigerian or West African languages to uncover broader cultural metaphor systems

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## FIGURATION FLASHBACK, TESTIMONIO ET COGNITIVE COMME TECHNIQUES NARRATIVES DU TRAUMATISME DANS DES TEXTES GRAPHIQUES DE LA GUERRE RWANDAISE

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### Résumé

Bien que les études sur les traumatismes aient examiné les flashbacks et les *testimonios* comme modes de représentation des conséquences de la violence, peu d'attention a été accordée à la manière dont ces techniques, ainsi que la métaphore conceptuelle et la métonymie, fonctionnent en synergie dans les récits graphiques de la guerre rwandaise. C'est pourquoi ce travail vise à étudier les retours en arrière dans *Déogratias* de Jean-Philippe Stassen et le *testimonio* dans *Le grand voyage d'Alice* de Gaspard Talmasse pour démontrer comment ces auteurs appliquent ces techniques narratives dans leurs récits graphiques. En s'appuyant sur les études du traumatisme, la métaphore conceptuelle et la métonymie conceptuelle avec la méthode qualitative de l'analyse multimodale dans les œuvres de notre corpus, cette étude vise à comprendre comment ces textes multimodaux utilisent des stratégies à la fois temporelles et figuratives pour représenter la mémoire traumatique et le témoignage éthique. Elle cherche donc à examiner comment l'interaction du flashback, du témoignage, de la métaphore conceptuelle et de la métonymie conceptuelle constitue une grammaire visuelle et narrative distincte du traumatisme dans les représentations graphiques de la guerre, en particulier dans le contexte du génocide rwandais. Cette étude soutient que les perturbations temporelles du flashback et le témoignage dialogique du testimonio articulent ensemble la tension entre le retour involontaire du souvenir traumatique et la nécessité éthique de témoigner.

**Mots-Clés :** Flashback, Testimonio, Traumatisme, Métaphore conceptuelle, Métonymie Conceptuelle

### Abstract

Although trauma studies have explored flashbacks and testimonios as modes of representing the consequences of violence, little attention has been paid to how these techniques, along with conceptual metaphor and metonymy, operate synergistically in Rwandan graphic war narratives. This study therefore examines the use of flashbacks in Jean-Philippe Stassen's *Déogratias* and testimonio in Gaspard Talmasse's *Le grand voyage d'Alice* to show how these authors deploy these narrative strategies in their graphic works. Drawing on trauma studies, conceptual metaphor theory, conceptual metonymy, and qualitative multimodal analysis, this research investigates how these multimodal texts employ both temporal and figurative strategies to represent traumatic memory and ethical testimony. It seeks to demonstrate how the interplay among flashback, testimony, conceptual metaphor, and conceptual metonymy constitutes a distinct visual and narrative grammar of trauma in graphic representations of war,

particularly within the context of the Rwandan genocide. The study thus argues that the temporal disruptions produced by flashbacks and the dialogic form of testimonio, together articulate the tension between the involuntary recurrence of traumatic memory and the ethical imperative to bear witness.

**Key-words:** Flashback, Testimonio, Trauma, Conceptual metaphor, Conceptual metonymy

## Introduction

En narratologie, un retour en arrière est un mouvement rétrospectif dans le temps – un retour à des événements antérieurs à partir d'un moment narratif ultérieur (Genette, 1980). Dans les récits de traumatismes, les retours en arrière ne sont pas de simples procédés stylistiques, mais des manifestations psychiques qui montrent le retour du refoulé, l'intrusion de l'horreur passée dans le présent. Ils reflètent la manière dont le traumatisme perturbe la temporalité linéaire, le sujet traumatisé perçoit le temps comme fragmenté, circulaire et répétitif. Cathy Caruth (1995) qualifie le traumatisme de « unclaimed experience (expérience non revendiquée) » qui ressurgit tardivement, le retour en arrière devenant le symptôme textuel de ce retour. Dori Laub (2016 ; 2013 ; 2002) note que la mémoire traumatique résiste à la cohérence narrative elle surgit sous forme de fragments ou de scènes revécues. Les retours en arrière peuvent être visualisés spatialement (par des changements de palette de couleurs, de mise en page ou de bordures de cases), rendant ainsi visible la rupture temporelle. Le flashback, en tant que technique narrative employée par Philippe Stassen dans *Déogratias*, montre comment le passé et le présent s'entremêlent visuellement. Déogratias apparaît dans différents états temporels au sein d'une même séquence d'images, illustrant la persistance du traumatisme.

Issu des contextes latino-américains, le testimonio est un mode de narration où le témoin s'exprime collectivement, témoignant d'un traumatisme ou d'une oppression historique. Il fusionne l'expérience personnelle et la mémoire collective, souvent médiatisée par une autre voix (éditeur, auditeur, traducteur). C'est un acte moral et politique, non seulement pour se souvenir, mais aussi pour faire entendre et valider le traumatisme. Shoshana Felman et Dori Laub soulignent que le

témoignage est un acte dialogique, nécessitant à la fois un narrateur et un auditeur pour que le traumatisme soit « témoigné » (Felman & Laub, 1992). C'est pourquoi Gaspard Talmasse, en tant qu'auditeur, narre et illustre l'expérience de sa femme quand elle est enfant, enfant survivante du génocide rwandais. L'auteur utilise le témoignage visuel (des images qui se substituent à un témoignage indicible). L'acte de dessiner lui-même devient une forme de témoignage, une tentative visuelle de réinscrire l'indicible.

Cependant, les récits graphiques de guerre utilisent un réseau de techniques narratives et figuratives pour représenter le traumatisme, non seulement en racontant des histoires de guerre, mais aussi en incarnant la temporalité, la voix et la cognition décousues du traumatisme à travers des structures visuelles et linguistiques. Le flashback est la manifestation formelle et temporelle du retour traumatique. Le testimonio est le mode éthique et dialogique du témoignage. La métaphore conceptuelle est la cartographie cognitive qui traduit le traumatisme indicible en un langage visuel et symbolique. La métonymie conceptuelle est la condensation du traumatisme par des associations partie-tout ou de proximité, souvent utilisée visuellement pour évoquer l'indicible en représentant la mémoire collective du traumatisme à travers le traumatisme individuel. Ensemble, ces techniques expriment la fragmentation psychique, le poids moral et les défis de représentation du traumatisme dans les récits de guerre. Donc, avec ces théories mentionnées, ce travail vise à étudier les retours en arrière dans *Déogratias* de Jean-Philippe Stassen et le testimonio dans *Le grand voyage d'Alice* de Gaspard Talmasse pour démontrer comment ces auteurs appliquent ces techniques narratives dans leurs récits graphiques

### Le présent narratif et le passé raconté : les retours en arrière dans *Déogratias* de Jean-Philippe Stassen.

Les histoires d'expériences traumatisantes se concentrent sur la reviviscence par le narrateur d'un événement passé et soulignent un écart qui ne peut être comblé entre le présent narratif et le passé raconté (Smith & Watson, 2010, p. 283). A cause de cette difficulté de raconter le passé traumatisant, il y a toujours ce va-et-vient dans l'histoire qui empêche la narration chronologique de l'histoire et, ainsi, il y a toujours le retour en arrière (le flashback). Les flashbacks des événements traumatisants sont des intrusions

bruyantes, dangereuses et douloureuses du passé qui naissent de la tension entre le désir d'oubli et la nécessité de se souvenir (Walker, 2014). Les auteurs utilisent fréquemment la méthode du flashback connu aussi comme l'analepse pour permettre aux personnages de revenir en arrière et de revisiter des souvenirs importants. (Jonnie, 2012). C'est ainsi que *Déogratias* qui est actuellement présent dans la période post-génocidaire commence à revisiter sa vie avant la guerre rwandaise. Dès la scène d'ouverture, *Déogratias* est déjà sale, épuisé et seul. On le voit errant et chassé à coups de canne par les passants.



Figure 1 (2000, p.3) Un exemple de la métaphore conceptuelle

La Figure 1 montre *Déogratias* dans sa saleté et chassé par un garçon avec la canne à la main. Cela donne la métaphore conceptuelle où DÉOGRATIAS EST UN PARIA. Dans cette métaphore dominée par l'image, « Un paria » est

le domaine cible alors que « *Déogratias* » est le domaine source. Les traits d'un paria (stigmatisation, discrimination, exclusion, marginalisation, déplacement, instabilité) sont mappés sur *Déogratias* (saleté, indésirable,

négligé, sans famille, poursuivi avec une canne, etc.). La saleté est comme un jardin négligé, envahi par les mauvaises herbes et étouffé par des vignes enchevêtrées. Il représente l'accumulation de négligence et de désarroi, où le chaos a pris racine. Déogratias dans sa situation de négligence (chiffons sales déchirés), étouffé par des vignes enchevêtrées (représenté par ses cheveux envahis et non entretenus) et pourchassé par des gens est comme un jardin négligé et en tant que tel un paria.

Le texte commence par un flashback qui nous montre la saleté de Déogratias dans la Figure 1 Mais l'histoire du texte remonte pour montrer la vie normale des gens, comment ils vivent paisiblement et vaquent à leurs occupations quotidiennes à la page suivante. Déogratias est représenté dans un tissu soigné, marchant joyeusement et avec de belles filles. Dans la scène suivante, il est de retour à son état anormal où il est hanté par l'image des chiens mangeant le corps des gens. À travers ses flashbacks, toutes les autres histoires enregistrées dans le texte sont racontées. On peut dire que Déogratias est un facteur d'introspection pour tous les personnages du roman (Ibiam, 2019) parce que c'est à travers lui que les mémoires des autres personnages sont racontées. Comme un facteur d'introspection qui est un terme psychologique, Déogratias exprime son histoire intérieure, il déverse tout ce qu'il a dans son esprit, les pensées et les sentiments. L'individualité de chaque personne transfère à ses images ou son image mentale (Heidarizadeh, 2015), c'est pourquoi il est capable de nous raconter tout ce qui arrive à Bénigne, Apollinaire, Vedette et les autres personnages dans le texte. Les souvenirs eux-mêmes servent de déclencheur pour les flashbacks parce que les flashbacks se nourrissent des souvenirs.

La mémoire et l'histoire s'entremêlent. Comme elles s'articulent dans une histoire de

guerre et de traumatismes, l'histoire n'est pas linéaire, elle devient disjointe parce que la mémoire elle-même est traumatisée » (Ibiam et Ajah, 2022, p. 60). C'est pourquoi Cathy Caruth indique que le retour du flashback comme une interruption, comme quelque chose avec une force ou un impact perturbateur, suggère qu'il ne peut pas être pensé simplement comme une représentation (Cité par Rodi-risberg, 2010), mais comme un traumatisme. Donc, le roman graphique, *Déogratias*, est une « traumatic reference (référence traumatique) » (Rodi-risberg, 2010, p. 38). Ce qui, avec tous ses flashbacks, indique une relation compliquée avec le souvenir du passé et la représentation temporelle. Leigh Weber est en accord avec cette assertion et c'est pourquoi il dit : « À un niveau symbolique, cette bifurcation du texte représente une dichotomie du passé et du présent » (2010, p. 35) et cette dichotomie du passé et du présent représentée dans le texte de Stassen montre le traumatisme du génocide au Rwanda sur Déogratias qui le trouve très difficile de mettre en ordre ses pensées et ses expériences.

Les retours en arrière nous font penser à une dissociation, qui est un bon ingrédient du traumatisme. Cette dissociation conduit à la répétition dans la narration des textes de traumatismes. Les flashbacks ne sont pas de nouvelles créations mais des rediffusions répétitives du passé, des souvenirs déplacés qui fracturent le présent, reproduisant des événements traumatisants pour tenter de maîtriser et d'intégrer le passé dans une « psychic economy, a symbolic order (économie psychique, un ordre symbolique) » (Foster, 1996, p.131). C'est dans cet état de l'ordre symbolique et de l'économie psychique que le protagoniste dans *Déogratias* de Stassen nous raconte comment les chiens mangent des cadavres des gens.



Figure 2 (2000, p. 7) Un exemple de la métaphore conceptuelle

Cette allusion à la scène où les chiens mangent des cadavres se répète tant de fois, car voir, par exemple, pp. 7, 28, 54 et 76. Cette image de la Figure 2 montre que Déogratias est psychologiquement et mentalement absent de son environnement, suggérant ainsi la métaphore conceptuelle : DÉOGRATIAS EST FOU. « Un fou » est le domaine cible et « Déogratias » et le domaine source. Il y a un mappage entre les éléments de « fou » (hallucinations, délires, troubles bipolaires, attaques de panique, engourdissement émotionnel, souvenirs intrusifs) et ceux de « Déogratias » (psychose, alcoolisme, isolation, confusion, image de soi déformée, etc.). Nous pouvons voir dans la Figure 2 que Déogratias est hanté par cette image qu'il se répète toujours. Il n'est pas présent avec l'homme avec qui il boit. L'homme est confus qu'il lui demande : « Ben...qu'est-ce qui te prend » (Stassen, 2000, p.7). Cela montre que Déogratias souffre de psychose ou de schizophrénie, il devient méconnaissable à lui-même et à l'homme avec qui il boit. Déogratias vit le flashback comme une interaction purement interne, un cycle de douleur intérieure sans fin et de fragments de tourments coupés, des secrets impossibles à

contenir, le séparant du reste des communautés et les communautés du reste du monde. C'est aussi l'état de toute personne traumatisée au Rwanda représentée métonymiquement par Déogratias. Donc, Déogratias qui se prend pour le chien est déconnecté de son environnement. Dans le contexte rwandais, cette esthétique artistique devient une métaphore car les chiens errants mangent les corps des morts et profanent leurs restes. Devenir un chien pour Déogratias, c'est montrer qu'il a perdu son humanité puisqu'il mange symboliquement d'autres gens (Marie, 2011). Comment un homme peut-il perdre son humanité et y survivre ? Le concept de micro-histoire appliqué à la bande dessinée se trouve ici (Marie, 2011, p. 198). À la suite de cette démarcation, un cadre narratif sophistiqué peut être mis en œuvre, et il est possible de comprendre un génocide dans toute sa complexité et ses nombreux régimes historiques.

Donc, cette répétition que Stassen utilise pour nous parler du traumatisme du génocide rwandais à travers Déogratias va jusqu'à nous dire que cette histoire de guerre est trop grande pour être articulée et racontée de façon directe. Comme il est difficile pour Déogratias d'accepter le

meurtre de ses concitoyens, et aussi en tant qu'auteur d'un acte de violence, il représente tant les victimes de ce génocide qui auront du mal à raconter leur traumatisme, à guérir et à reprendre leur vie normale. Eftihia Mihelakis est d'accord avec cela et c'est pourquoi il dit : « cette vision d'une mémoire cryptique se manifestant à partir de la compulsion de répétition laisse croire que le traumatisme s'oppose à tout acte de remémoration capable de retrouver le lieu originel de ce dernier » (Mihelakis, 2010, p. 17). La personne traumatisée est incapable de raconter son histoire de la façon dont elle est devenue ce qu'elle est et comment tous les événements qui ont conduit à son traumatisme se sont produits puisqu'elle ne se souvient pas de son origine. C'est ainsi parce que les événements traumatiques existent en dehors des structures temporelles, ils ne sont pas directement assimilés à la mémoire et échappent donc à la compréhension et au cadrage en tant qu'expériences situées dans le passé (Murazanova, 2018). C'est pourquoi le traumatisme retourne sous formes de flashbacks, de cauchemars et de reconstitution traumatique à revivre au présent.

Ainsi, les flashbacks sont les fantômes de l'événement traumatique ». Le flashback, en tant que fantôme, est souvent utilisé pour transmettre l'idée de quelque chose ou de quelqu'un qui est insaisissable, intangible ou d'une persistance obsédante. Un fantôme, comme un souvenir oublié, s'attarde dans les couloirs des esprits des gens, chuchotant sa présence dans de fugaces moments de silence. Il hante des pensées des gens, un spectre du passé qui refuse d'être oublié, en rappelant aux gens ce qui était autrefois mais ne pourra plus jamais être. Le fantôme représente une présence intangible qui reste avec nous, même lorsque nous essayons d'avancer. Il symbolise la persistance de souvenirs ou d'émotions qui continuent de nous influencer, même longtemps après leur apparition initiale. Tout comme un fantôme peut être ressenti mais pas vu, ces souvenirs ou émotions peuvent ne pas être physiquement présents mais affecter nos pensées, nos actions et notre expérience globale de la vie.

Le flashback comme un fantôme d'un

événement traumatique nous rappelle du passé également, ce n'est pas la totalité qui est évoqué, mais une partie de la totalité pour représenter le passé métonymiquement. Ce fantôme du génocide rwandais qui hante Déogratias est ce que Stassen représente dans son récit graphique. C'est pourquoi son histoire devient fragmentée, déconnectée et inarticulée.

#### **Le rôle du témoin oculaire et le *testimonio* dans *Le grand voyage d'Alice de Gaspard Talmasse***

Un témoin oculaire est une personne qui a directement observé un événement ou une situation et qui est en mesure de fournir un compte rendu de ce qu'il a vu. Le témoin est « celui que le Latin désignait justement par *superstes*, c'est-à-dire soit celui qui se tient sur la chose même, soit celui qui subsiste au-delà » (Benveniste, 1969, p. 376). L'importance d'un témoin oculaire peut varier en fonction de plusieurs facteurs. Tout d'abord, sa crédibilité est prise en compte, ce qui inclut sa capacité à observer et à se souvenir des détails de manière précise. La proximité du témoin par rapport à l'événement et les conditions dans lesquelles il a eu lieu peuvent également influencer la valeur de son témoignage. Dans la littérature, être témoin n'a ainsi jamais été ni une condition suffisante ni même une condition nécessaire pour être historien (Hartog, 2000). C'est pourquoi un témoin peut être différent de l'historien, comme nous allons voir dans ce cas. Alice est témoin de cette histoire barbare du génocide qui a tué des milliers de personnes au Rwanda, mais son mari qui est l'auteur du texte est l'historien et l'écrivain.

Gaspard Talmasse nous raconte l'histoire du génocide rwandais à travers les yeux de son épouse Alice quand elle était enfant. Alice a été témoin du génocide à l'âge de cinq ans. Cela nous amène à la crédibilité et à l'authenticité de la mémoire et du récit d'une enfant. C'est là qu'intervient le *testimonio* en tant que genre. Le *testimonio* est apparu spécifiquement à une époque de guerres civiles et de dictatures en Amérique latine. En Amérique latine, d'un côté il y avait l'oppression étatique, de l'autre il y avait la montée des mouvements de guérilla qui combattaient et élevaient des voix contre

l'injustice. (Thakkar, 2019). Les mouvements révolutionnaires latino-américains ont vu l'implication à la fois des élites et des masses. Cependant, le récit de la classe populaire, de sa lutte et de sa participation au processus n'a pas été correctement décrit de manière authentique dans les histoires racontées par les auteurs de la classe supérieure ou de l'élite. Ainsi, *testimonio* est venu à être considéré comme une forme de narration qui a capturé la voix du subalterne, créée par le subalterne. (Thakkar, 2019). Nous savons tous que certaines cultures et religions n'accepteront jamais le témoignage des femmes et des enfants, *Testimonio* devient ainsi un moyen de parole pour ces genres marginalisés.

John Beverley approuve cette affirmation et dit que *testimonio* existe pour représenter : « those subjects- the child, the « native », the woman, the insane, the criminal, the proletarian- excluded from authorized representation when it was a question of speaking and writing for themselves (ces sujets – l'enfant, le « natif », la femme, le fou, le criminel, le prolétaire - exclus de la représentation autorisée lorsqu'il s'agissait de parler et d'écrire pour eux-mêmes) » (Beverley, 1996, p. 25). Voilà, pourquoi nous classifions *Le grand Voyage d'Alice* comme un *Testimonio* qui représente la

voix d'un enfant dont on peut douter de l'authenticité. Le critique nord-américain John Beverley, considéré comme le lecteur le plus en vue du genre, définit le *Testimonio* comme :

A novel or novella -length narrative in book or pamphlet that is printed as opposed to acoustic form, told in the first person by a narrator who is also the real protagonist or witness of the events he or she recounts and whose unit of narration is usually a "life" or a significant life experience (Beverley, 1996, p. 24)

Un récit de roman ou de nouvelle dans un livre ou une brochure imprimée par opposition à une forme acoustique, raconté à la première personne par un narrateur qui est également le véritable protagoniste ou témoin des événements qu'il raconte et dont l'unité de narration est généralement une « vie » ou une expérience de vie significative

[Notre traduction]

Donc, *Le grand voyage d'Alice* est un récit graphique narré dans la première personne, par Alice qui est un véritable protagoniste et témoin oculaire des évènements du génocide rwandais qu'elle raconte.



Figure 3 (2021, p. 8) Un exemple de la métaphore conceptuelle

Avec cette innocence d'un enfant, elle nous raconte ce génocide, en suggérant la métaphore conceptuelle : LA PURETÉ EST LE TEMOIGNAGE D'ALICE dans laquelle « la pureté » est la cible tandis que « le témoignage » d'Alice est la source. Il y a un mappage entre les traits de la pureté (clarté, non contaminé, simplicité, innocence, plénitude, authenticité, intact) et les traits du témoignage d'Alice (minutieux, souci du détail, air pur, eau pure, paysages verdoyants, sérénité et tranquillité). Dans cette Figure 3 nous pouvons voir Alice qui se présente elle-même et ses sœurs, en commençant avec cette phrase « À ce moment-là, j'avais cinq ans... mes petites sœurs les jumelles... avaient trois ans » (Talmasse, 2021, p.8). A travers cette image de la Figure 3, nous pouvons voir que l'histoire est en première personne singulier du pronom. Dans cette image, l'environnement est dans sa forme naturelle avec une végétation verte et un sol naturel nous montrant la pureté et l'intégrité des environnements et des enfants. La métaphore d'un enfant en tant que témoin oculaire peut être utilisée pour transmettre l'innocence, la pureté et la perspective non filtrée d'un jeune individu qui observe et raconte un événement. Il met l'accent sur l'idée que les enfants ont souvent une vision authentique et sans mélange du monde qui les entoure, libre des préjugés, des idées préconçues et des complexités qui peuvent influencer les adultes. Tout comme le récit d'un témoin oculaire a une valeur significative dans les procédures judiciaires, la métaphore suggère que les observations d'un enfant peuvent fournir une perspective unique et sans tache sur une situation.

C'est ainsi qu'avec l'œil d'un enfant, Alice est capable de transmettre le traumatisme qu'elle a vécu avec les membres de sa famille et ses concitoyens « car celui qui n'a pas compris avec sa chair ne peut vous en parler » (Cru, 2016, p. 574) et c'est pourquoi elle est capable de se souvenir des dates exactes où certaines choses se sont produites comme indiqué dans le texte. Comme un témoin oculaire qui est présent

pendant le génocide, elle doit dire exactement ce qu'elle a vu, parce que l'objectif collectif de *testimonio* est de nommer l'oppression qu'il s'agisse de génocide, de racisme, de classicisme, de xénophobie ou de tout autre type de marginalisation institutionnalisée et si possible arrêter ses actions. Ainsi, Alice narre ce génocide qui a coupé tant de vie et détruit les propriétés. Donc, Le rôle d'attestation du témoignage est soumis aux termes du contrat de témoignage, qui fonctionne comme un accord de confiance. C'est pourquoi la présence du témoin est important : « j'y étais, j'ai vu, je l'ai vécu » (Detue et Lacosta, 2016, p. 6). Alice était présente au Rwanda pendant la guerre, elle a vu tout et elle a vécu tout ce qu'elle a raconté à son mari, Gaspard Talmasse. Donc, nous pouvons dire que la vérité racontée par Alice n'est pas justement la vérité dogmatique, absolue ou transcendante, mais c'est la vérité tout humaine, vérité du témoin sincère qui dit ce qu'il a fait, vu et senti, vérité accessible à toute homme intelligent, qui sait voir, réfléchir et sentir (Cru, 2016). C'est pourquoi elle peut raconter tous les détails dont elle se souvient sans en prendre parti, elle nous raconte les rôles joués par les Hutus, même quand elle est Hutue. Alice nous raconte également les rôles joués par d'autres soldats de différents camps (Talmasse, 2021).

Alice parle de son voyage, les maladies rencontrées en chemin comme le choléra, la rougeole et la gale (Talmasse, 2021, pp. 33 et 68). Donc, dire « toute la vérité », ce n'est pas narrer toute son expérience, c'est raconter ce qui, dans cette expérience, est le plus représentatif de ce que d'autres soumis au même régime, ont pu également subir. (Detue et Lacosta, 2016). C'est pourquoi elle ne s'est pas contentée de raconter un événement qui lui est arrivé à elle seule, mais à tous les citoyens rwandais. Même lorsqu'elle était perdue, elle nous a raconté comment elle et sa sœur ont rencontré un enfant perdu ou abandonné dans la forêt tout comme comment elles se sont égarées avec sa mère.



Figure 4 (2021, p. 92) Un exemple de la métaphore conceptuelle

Cette scène suggère la métaphore conceptuelle : ALICE EST PORTE-PAROLE où « la porte-parole » est le domaine cible et « Alice » est le domaine source. Les traits de « porte-parole » (intelligence émotionnelle, l'authenticité, neutralité, adaptabilité, empathie etc.) sont mappés sur « Alice » (qui narre l'histoire de la guerre et parle pour tous les citoyens rwandais). La Figure 4 montre un bébé avec la bouche grande ouverte, ce qui signifie qu'il pleure. Mais l'image ne représente en aucune façon le son du cri dans un discours qui montre que le bébé est sans voix. C'est à travers la narration d'Alice que l'on sait que le bébé est abandonné par la mère dans la forêt et n'a personne pour s'occuper de lui. Alice, en parlant d'un enfant abandonné sous la pluie par sa mère dans la Figure 4, on voit qu'elle représente métonymiquement l'histoire de chaque victime de la guerre dont elle a été témoin.

Donc, le récit du témoin oculaire devient par le même récit collectif. Tout comme le *testimonio* est techniquement un récit fait par une seule personne, il représente la voix de nombreuses personnes dont la vie a été affectée par des événements sociaux particuliers, tels que les gouvernements totalitaires, la violence de guerre, les déplacements ou d'autres types

d'affronts sociaux à l'humanité (Reyes et Rodriguez, 2012). Alice est capable de parler de l'expérience de ses concitoyens pendant le génocide rwandais. Le *testimonio* et le témoignage d'un témoin oculaire certifié de la véracité historique sont validés par l'histoire. Avec cela, nous pouvons dire que le témoignage oculaire nous introduit donc le phénomène de la « certification autobiographique » qui engage non seulement le témoin, mais aussi les autres spectateurs de l'événement à travers son premier regard (Dulong, 1998). Ainsi c'est possible pour Alice de communiquer son traumatisme à son mari qui écrit et illustre ces expériences traumatiques dans les pages d'un texte qui à fin sont transmis aux lecteurs.

Ainsi, *Déogratias* déploie la mémoire fragmentée pour raconter le présent et le passé du génocide rwandais à l'aide de flashback, tandis que Talmasse, par l'intermédiaire de sa femme Alice qui est témoin oculaire dans son enfance, a également pu raconter le génocide rwandais aux lecteurs. Tous ceux-ci sont les techniques artistiques qu'ils emploient pour envoyer leurs messages.

## Conclusion

L'analyse de *Déogratias* de Jean-Philippe Stassen et *Le grand voyage d'Alice* de Gaspard Talmasse révèlent comment les romans graphiques peuvent devenir de puissants laboratoires visuels et textuels pour explorer les langages fragmentés du traumatisme. *Déogratias* démontre que le traumatisme résiste à la narration linéaire, à une temporalité stable et à une articulation directe, il exige au contraire une approche multidimensionnelle qui intègre le temps (le flashback) et la cognition figurative (la métaphore et la métonymie) comme modes de représentation interdépendants. Dans *Déogratias*, Stassen utilise le flashback non comme un simple procédé structurel, mais comme un symptôme visuel et psychologique du traumatisme. L'oscillation constante du récit entre le Rwanda d'avant et d'après le génocide abolit les frontières entre mémoire et réalité, passé et présent, raison et effondrement. Cette temporalité non linéaire reflète la conscience traumatisée de Deogratias, prise dans une reviviscence répétitive plutôt que dans un véritable souvenir.

*Le grand voyage d'Alice* prolonge l'exploration du traumatisme menée par Talmasse sur le terrain du témoignage post-conflit et du déplacement des survivants. À travers le périple d'Alice du Rwanda au Congo, le récit se mue en un témoignage de migration, où l'acte de raconter devient à la fois survie et fardeau. La voix du témoignage se déploie sur les plans textuel et visuel, à travers la narration d'Alice, la mise en scène de Talmasse et l'interprétation du lecteur. Ici, la métaphore conceptuelle traduit la souffrance psychique et physique en un langage

visuel symbolique ; les images récurrentes du voyage, de la route et de la frontière servent de métaphores à la traversée incessante du traumatisme entre passé et présent, soi et histoire. *Déogratias* et *Le grand voyage d'Alice* démontrent que, dans les récits de guerre graphiques, le traumatisme n'est pas représenté par une narration linéaire, mais par une interaction complexe entre rupture temporelle, voix du témoignage et cognition figurative. Le retour en arrière saisit la récurrence du passé au sein du présent, le témoignage reprend l'autorité de la voix au silence, la métaphore et la métonymie offrent des voies cognitives et esthétiques pour appréhender l'irreprésentable. Dans la grammaire visuelle de Stassen, le traumatisme n'est pas simplement raconté, il est vécu, visualisé et incarné spatialement sur la page. En définitive, ces textes invitent les lecteurs à participer à l'acte de témoignage en décodant leurs structures non linéaires, symboliques et fragmentées. Ils montrent que l'éthique de la représentation du traumatisme dans les contextes post-génocidaires ne réside pas dans la reproduction de l'horreur, mais dans la construction d'un langage du souvenir qui honore la complexité de la mémoire et de la survie. Par la force conjuguée du retour en arrière, du témoignage, de la métaphore conceptuelle et de la métonymie conceptuelle, les œuvres de Stassen et Talmasse s'imposent comme des interventions à la fois artistiques et éthiques, elles deviennent des témoignages graphiques qui transforment le récit visuel en un acte de témoignage face à la dévastation et à la résilience humaines.

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## SENSE RELATIONS OF IDENTITY AND INCLUSION IN MWÁGHÁVÚL

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### Abstract

Sense relations are the relationships existing between lexical items of a language. This study examined sense relations of identity and inclusion in Mwághávúl language. The study adopted a descriptive and analytical research design involving the description and analysis of qualitative data gathered through both primary and secondary sources, with oral interview as the main source of data collection from native speakers of Mwághávúl language from Mwághávúl speaking areas of Plateau State, Nigeria. The lexical pragmatic theory was adopted for the study. The data collected were analyzed descriptively. The findings from the study revealed that, the sense relations of identity and inclusion that exist in Mwághávúl language include synonymy, hyponymy, and metonymy. These sense relations perform the role of explaining the meaning of words or expressions in relation to other words or expressions in the language in order to avoid misinterpretation and misunderstanding by users of the language. The study concludes that competence and proficiency in the use of the language does not just depend on the knowledge of the vocabulary of the language, it also requires the understanding of the different sense relations between words and expressions in the language; as this enhances communication in the language. The study suggests that, to further advance the study of semantics in Mwághávúl language, researchers can delve deeper into the complexities of sense relations, exploring beyond the sense relations of identity and inclusion in Mwághávúl.

**Keywords:** Semantics, Meaning, Sense Relations and Mwághávúl.

### Introduction

The study of a language is not complete until the way it comes about its meaning is studied. This is why semantics like all other aspects of language study is very important. Semantics is an area of language study which deals with the science of meaning. It is a deep and challenging subject such that for a very long time now, different scholars have been trying to understand how meaning works in their different areas or fields of study. Semantics has a lot of implications in communication; it is one thing for a speaker to talk, it is another thing for a listener to understand what exactly the speaker means. Thus, as an Associate Justice of the United States Supreme Court, Felix Frank (1939 – 1962) cited in Denham (2010:287) rightly said, “all our work, our whole life is a matter of semantics, for the words are tools with which laws were made, out of which the constitution was written. Everything depends on

our understanding of them.” Therefore, our understanding of semantics is very important to overcome the communicative challenges that exist from different areas of human endeavour.

Pushpinder and Jindal (2010:141) consider semantics as “that level of linguistic analysis where meaning is analyzed.” It is very difficult to study the meaning of words comprehensively relying only on their referential or denotative properties. This is because a large number of words cannot be easily analyzed into meaning components. The meanings of such words can only be analyzed based on the relationship such words maintain with other words. The sense of a word therefore, reveals itself through the relationship that the word has with other words in the language. It is a semantic procedure of describing a language and characterizing the meaning of a word in terms of its relationship to other words but not in terms of

componential features (Tiav, 2020). Denham (2010) as cited in Tiav (2020) refers to sense relations as the ‘nyms’ which is part of knowing the meaning of a word, including knowing the semantic relations among words. This relationship is found across human languages. When words share certain semantic features, it means that they belong to a particular semantic field for they are the same. Sense relations however, refer to how the meanings of individual words are either different or similar.

Kreidler (1998: 303) sees sense relations as “the relationship of meaning between words, as expressed in synonymy, hyponymy and antonymy.” Thus, sense relation can be seen from the similarity of meaning as synonymy, the inclusion of meaning as in hyponymy, and the opposite of meaning as in antonymy. Whereas Cruse (2004: 148) classifies sense relations into two (2) classes: those that express identity and inclusion between word meanings, and those that expresses opposition and exclusion. The first class discusses the sense relation between words whose meanings are similar or included in other ones. The second class discusses the sense relation between words whose meanings are opposite or excluded from other words. Hence, this study is only concerned with sense relations of identity and inclusion in Mwághávúl language.

Mwághávúl is a West Chadic language under Bole Ngas group, generally spoken in Mangu Local Government Area of Plateau State, North Central, Nigeria (Blench, 2012). The name Mwághávúl refers to an ethnic and linguistic group found largely in Mangu Local Government Area of Plateau State, North Central Nigeria. It also refers to the language spoken by this ethnic group (Kwarpo, 2023). According to Babuje (n.d) as cited in Blench (2012), Mwághávúl refers to the people as well as their language and it means ‘*Mùn-ávúl* or *Mwán-vúl*’ (walk two or we are two). Babuje (n.d) further argues that an alternative spelling of Mwághávúl is ‘*Mwáhávúl*’ (Blench, 2012). The people are identified with the Mwághávúl language, which is spoken by the people in all Mwághávúl speaking areas and by those in the Diaspora. The Mwághávúl people now occupy a geographical setting called Mwághávúl

chiefdom in Mangu Local Government Area of Plateau state, North Central Nigeria. Mwághávúl inhabits nine (9) districts of the chiefdom. These districts include: Chakfem, Jipal, Kerang, Kombun, Mangu, Mangun, Ampang-West, Panyam and Pushit (Kwarpo, 2023). The headquarters of Mwághávúl chiefdom, Mangu, is about 77 kilometers from Jos, the Plateau State capital. Mwághávúl chiefdom falls between latitude 9°05’N and 9°43’N and longitude 8°40’E and 9°21’E. It has a total land mass of about 1,587km<sup>2</sup> and a total population of about 20,107 based on the 1933 census and 72,864 for the 1963 census (Gowon, 2011). The population increased to 250,000 in 1980 (Datok, 1983); 340,084 in 1991 census figures (NPC, Mangu, 1991); and 462,860 in 2006 census (NPC, Mangu, 2006). It is worthy of note that, although secondary migration has brought about Mwághávúl settlements in Shendam, Quanpan, Langtang South and Wase Local Government Areas of Plateau state; Lafia of Nasarawa state; and Samunaka, Pambeguwa, Dutsen Wai, Soba and Zaria in Kaduna state; these Mwághávúl speaking areas still owe their traditional allegiance and ancestry to their Mwághávúl home settlements. It is based on this that the Mwághávúl people are among the largest ethnic groups in the state with an estimated population of about 700,000 people including those settled outside Mwághávúl chiefdom (Gowon, 2011). According to Datok (1983) as cited in Kwarpo (2023), the Mwághávúl people share boundaries on the North with Botto and Lere of Bauchi State, North West is BarkinLadi Local Government Area, South West is Bokkos Local Government Area, South is Quanpan Local Government Area and on the East is Pankshin Local Government Area, all in Plateau State.

According to Zhuanglin, Runqing and Yanfu (1988:145), sense relates to “the complex system of relationships that hold between the linguistic elements themselves, mostly the words”. This is concerned only with intra-linguistic relations. Therefore, sense relations can exist between both words and sentences. It is pointed out that, although, sense relations encourage the economy of words in Mwághávúl language, it however, impede communication. This is in the

sense that, sense relations in the language consists of vocabularies that empower speakers of the language in attaining proficiency in the use of the language; but this is not always the case as when one listens to most communications in the language, users do not show good mastery and use of sense relations. It follows that, misapplication of sense relations by speakers renders the listeners confused as to what the right option of word or expression should be in a given scenario. This misapplication or use of the semantic relations would also result in wrong grammatical constructions in the language. Hence, the present study intends to provide insights into the sense relations in Mwághávúl. The study identifies the sense relations of identity and inclusion in Mwághávúl language and examines how the sense relations help meaning to work better in the language.

### Semantics

Semantics is the study of meaning or the meaning contained in a language, code, or other sort of representation (Irawan, Fkip and Inggris, 2020). Stringer (2019) asserts that what is known as semantics is the study of how language is used to represent meaning. More specifically, the purpose of semantics is to explain how speakers and listeners encode and decode literal meanings through language. It is concerned with the relationship between signifiers, such as words, phrases, signs, and symbols, denotation, or what they represent. In fact, semantics can be known as the study that discusses about how to know meaning in language. Thus, the goal of semantic studies is to understand meaning objectively rather than subjectively. In other words, semantics is the scientific study of meaning.

Semantics as a field of linguistics studies meanings of words, phrases, clauses and sentences. However, there are differences and similarities that exist between words, phrases, clauses and sentences and these are studied in semantics under sense and reference, semantic fields, sense relations, among others. In sense relations, which are the focus of this study, therefore, the emphasis is on the study of how individual words or lexical items in a language are either similar or different (Ajim, Iorember & Iorfa,

2021).

### Meaning

Meaning here is one associated with sense and sense refers to the linguistic meaning of a word or expression. Ogden & Richard (1923: 11) presents some definitions of meaning as follows:

- i. An intrinsic property of something.
- ii. The connotations of a word.
- iii. The thing to which the speaker of that word should refer.
- iv. Other words related to that word in a dictionary.
- v. The thing to which the speaker of that word refers.
- vi. The thing to which the hearer of that word believes is being referred to.
- vii. The thing which the speaker of that word believes himself being referred to.

These definitions show that, there are many ways through which meaning is understood. Gumperz & Hymes (1972) view meaning as 'a set of possible feelings, images, ideas, concepts, thought, and inference that a person might produce when a word is heard. This means that the meaning of an expression here is the mental image or idea formed on the mind as soon as an expression is uttered.

### Sense Relations

The sense of a word is defined as the relations holding between words or lexemes and the objects and ideas in the world. Sense relations on the other hand are the relationship existing between lexical items of a language. They are concerned with meaning relations that words contract with each other in the meaning system of the vocabulary of that language (Lyons, 1977). In discussing sense relation, Tiav (2011:207) asserts that "in any human language, words do not only have meaning properties in isolation, they also bear some meaning relations with each other." He opines that "when words share certain semantic features, it means that they belong to a particular semantic field or they are the same." Tiav (2011) is of the view that sense relation has to do with how the meanings of individual words are either similar or different. Pushpinder and Jindal (2015) opine that meaning of a linguistic item can be explained by using other words and the relation of a word

with another word or sense relation. They assert that sense is a complex system of relationships that holds between the linguistic items themselves. To Pushpinder and Jindal (2015:145), “sense is concerned with the intra-linguistic relations, that is, relations within the system of the language itself, such as similarity between words, opposition, inclusion and presupposition.”

However, sense relation can also be defined as meaning relation between words (Jackson, 1988 cited in Munyaya, 2022). It is a complex system of relationships that exist between the linguistic elements. Sense relations are therefore the intra-linguistic realizations of lexical items making up the vocabulary of a language. Sense relations are important because every language is arranged in such a way that meaning is understood for purposes of communication. Thus, Cruse (2004:148) classifies sense relations in language into two (2) groups. Those that express identity and inclusion between word meanings and those that express opposition and exclusion. The first group or class discusses the sense relations between words whose meanings are similar or included in other ones (Similarity) such as synonymy, hyponymy, entailment, paraphrase, metonymy, anaphora, and presupposition; while the second class discusses the sense relations between words whose meaning are opposite or excluded from other words (Oppositeness) such as antonymy, anomaly, ambiguity, polysemy, homonymy, and contradiction. This study is therefore, only concerned with sense relations regarding to the sameness or similarity of meaning in Mwághávúl language.

### **Empirical Review**

Empirical studies on sense relations of identity and inclusion and related works are reviewed to identify the gaps that exist in literature as well as establish the landmark contributions of the present study.

Chahur (2011) analysed “The Knowledge of Synonymy in Comprehension”. The study used the descriptive method of data analysis and defined synonymy as words with similarity of meaning. The study maintained that a synonym of a word is the one that has a similar sense with the word in

question and carries the same meaning as the word in a given sentence. Examples with the lexical items “small and little” which are synonymous to each other were given in the study. However, the study concluded that synonyms are best identified not in isolation but in context; and that sense relations is a fascinating aspect of the semantic study of the Tiv language as the understanding of the sense relation in Tiv not only enhance effective communication, but also, the knowledge of sense relation in Tiv is vital in effective use of Tiv language and thorough comprehension when the language is used.

Carbone (2018) examined “Lexical Sense Relations and Meaning as Context”. The study contributes to the understanding of meaning as inherently vague and indeterminate except when seen as the active process in which discourse sets up lexical sense relations. It argues that word meaning is made up of components which are activated by the context, where the context may help disambiguate the semantic composition of a word in use. Even though some components are activated by contextual triggers, discriminating which components are active is rarely straightforward. This is precisely the kind of task lexical relations effect in context. Thus, the contention in this study is that all sense relations are constructed in texts, not just antonymy. This view helps appreciate more accurately both the flexibility and the fuzziness of meaning, but it also contributes to understanding the processes of meaning disambiguation as instantiated by lexical relations in discourse.

Faidah (2018) did an “overview of language learning in sense relation: sameness and oppositeness”. The study aimed to know the sameness and oppositeness in sense relation of language learning. The method was based on library research. The study was about language, and so the study was about the meaning of language because language is a tool of communication to each other. It was pointed out that, semantics is about meaning, and the meaning of a language could be seen from its relationship between words, as the sense of one word is related to another sense. Thus, the result of the study was that there are two main groups of sense relations.

The first group is the sense relations with regard to the similarity or sameness (synonymy, hyponymy, entailment, paraphrase, metonymy, anaphora, presupposition). The second one is the sense relations of oppositeness (antonymy, anomaly, ambiguity, polysemy, homonymy, contradiction). The study concludes that, sense relations need to be known very well for studying about semantic because those are related to the study of language meaning. The sense of the word can be understood from its similarity with another word. On the other hand, it can also be learned from its oppositeness with other words. Therefore, by understanding sense relations, it can help us communicate with each other through language and avoid misunderstanding that can occur in a language.

However, the literature gap exposed from the reviews is in terms of the fact that, literature abounds on studies on sense relations as well as the various categories or types of sense relations in different languages; but none has been conducted in the area of sense relations or any category of sense relations in Mwaghavul language. Therefore, since sense relations is an important aspect of language which not only aids in effective communication and language learning but also serves as a means of language development; studies on sense relations and categories of sense relations is also relevant in Mwaghavul language. Hence, the present study examines sense relations in Mwaghavul language with the aim of conducting a descriptive analysis of categories or types of sense relations that exists in the language; for the purpose of aiding effective communication in the language, as well as for language learning and development.

### Theoretical Framework

This study is carried out within the theoretical framework of the Lexical Pragmatics Theory proposed by Deirdre (2003). This theory has two components: lexical semantics and lexical pragmatics. The lexical semantic model has words treated as encoding concepts which denote categories of objects, events or properties in the world. The lexical pragmatic component of the theory explains how a hearer bridges the gap between the concept encoded by a word and the concept communicated by use of that word on a

particular occasion. Thus, the theory argues in favour of divisions of labor between lexical semantics and pragmatics; hence it combines the idea of semantics under specification in the lexicon, with a theory of pragmatics, that is, context. This invariably implies that a single lexical item or word once contextualized, on its own produces or gives rise to several different but related meanings. More so, in Lexical Pragmatics Theory, when words are put into contexts, they give rise to both grammatical forms and semantic (meaning) realizations, which exposed the meaning or sense relations. This therefore, makes the theory a better option for this study. Hence, the study is anchored on Lexical Pragmatics Theory as this study is guided by the Lexical Pragmatic Approach (LPA) as a tool for analysis. The theory of lexical pragmatics tackles issues on notions such as: lexical semantics, nature of concepts and their role in communication and cognition, acquisition of word meanings, word meanings and how they are processed, and about the development of lexical-pragmatics abilities. The theory has the relevant concepts and descriptive tools appropriate in the analysis of the data relevant for the study.

### Research Methodology

This study is descriptive and the qualitative research design was adopted for the study. Data for this work were collected using both primary and secondary sources. The primary sources include the native speakers of Mwághávúl language from Mwághávúl speaking areas of Plateau State, Nigeria. Oral interviews were conducted with forty-five (45) elderly members from the nine (9) districts of Mwághávúl chiefdom of Mangu Local Government: Chakfen, Jipal, Mangun, Ampang West, Kerang, Panyam, Mangu, Pushit and Kombun districts; who were randomly selected as respondents based on their deep experience and knowledge of Mwághávúl sociolinguistics. The observations and intuition of the researcher as a native speaker were also very relevant for the work. The secondary sources on the other hand, include: internet, textbooks, and journals on sense relation in language as well as some published and unpublished materials on the Mwághávúl language. However, the data collected

were analyzed descriptively, based on the meanings of lexical items produced by the native speakers, as well as from secondary sources coupled with the researcher's intuitive knowledge as a native speaker of the language. These lexical items cut across different socio-cultural backgrounds of the Mwághávúl people as well as various sociolinguistic relations. The Lexical Pragmatic Approach (LPA) is the tool for analysis in this study. The theory centres on issues or notions such as: lexical semantics, nature of concepts and their role in communication and

cognition, acquisition of words meanings, word meanings and how they are processed, and about the development of lexical-pragmatics abilities. The theory therefore, has the relevant concepts and descriptive tools appropriate in the analysis of the data relevant for the study. This is in the sense that, with this theory, identification, presentation and interpretation of words meaning to identify their sense relations is arrived at from the sources and conclusion is drawn, descriptively, by pointing out how the sense relations affect communication.

## Data Presentation and Analysis

This section present, categorize and analyzethe data gathered based on the sense relations of identity and inclusion identified in Mwághávúl; that is, synonymy, hyponymy and metonymy. The data are analyzed based on their lexical pragmatic contexts to show the sense relations of the lexical items in Mwághávúl, the roles sense relations perform in the language and how the sense relations affect communication and empower users of the language to attain proficiency in the use of the language.

### Synonymy in Mwághávúl

This is a sense relation of inclusion. It comprises words or lexical items with the same or similar meanings depending on the context. Technically, for two words to be synonymous, they have to be similar and share all essential components, and thus capable of being used to substitute one another in all contexts without any noticeable difference in their meanings. This is what is termed as complete or absolute synonymy. In the Mwághávúl language, certain lexical items have completely same or similar meanings. These words in Mwághávúl include the following:

1. *mwén/nnōs* ‘stupid/foolish’

*làà nī ā mwén/nnōs*  
boy the is stupid/foolish  
'The boy is stupid/foolish'

2. *báán/bām* ‘to help/assist’

*mó báán/bām ngù dāngdāng nī*  
they help/assist person begging The  
'They helped/assisted the beggar'

There is another type of synonymy which occurs in languages, termed as partial synonymy. This type of synonymy indicates semantically similar lexical elements which differ by some dimensions or degrees of meaning and use. They are words/lexemes which share most of their necessary components or constituents with one another, but not all. In other words, they are synonymous in one context but not in the other one. Partial synonymy in Mwághávúl includes the following:

3. *pár/nkhōō* ‘dark/black’

*nī Á pár/nkhōō*  
it Is dark/black  
'It is dark/black'

4. *jéér/nfíí* ‘barren/empty

Mát dík nī rá á jéér/nfíí  
woman married the she is barren/empty  
'She is a barren/empty married woman'

The data above (1 - 4) shows that each pair of the words or lexical items in Mwághávúl are synonymous; but while some are absolute synonyms and can replace each other and the meaning of the sentence does not change but remains the same as in data (1 and 2); others are partial synonyms that cannot replace each other in the same or all contexts as in data (3 and 4). However, in the Mwághávúl language, nouns, adjectives, adverbs and verbs can all be synonyms; and based on the various situations involving synonyms that occur, it could be due to different dialects, registers, linguistic styles, colloquial and literary conditions. Another consideration is formality; that is, the case where the truth value of the synonym used in predictions with the same referring expression is the same. Hence, synonymy in Mwághávúl does exist due to stylistic, regional, dialectal, emotional and contextual differences that create different synonymous words. Thus, synonyms in Mwághávúl affect communication in the language and the understanding of synonyms would empower users of the language to achieve effective communication.

### Hyponymy in Mwághávúl

Mwághávúl has words that have sense relations of inclusion in terms of hyponymy. Hyponymy is the relationship of enclosure of meaning where a specific word is included within or under a general word. The umbrella term is the generic, hyponymy, hypernym or superordinate term where the more specific is the hyponym or the subordinate term. Hypernyms and their co-hyponyms in Mwághávúl include the following:

5. *lēemiyēr* 'farm tools'  
rī sò m.bóng kí lēē mìyēr  
he go to farm with tools farm  
'He went to the farm with farm tools'

The co-hyponyms could be:

i. *cáán* 'hoe'  
rī sò m.bóng kí cáán  
he go to farm with hoe  
'He went to the farm with a hoe'

ii. *cùkngírók* 'sickle'  
rī sò m.bóng kí cùkngírók  
he go to farm with sickle  
'He went to the farm with a sickle'

iii. *cùkgùùpòòdép* 'cutlass'  
rī sò m.bóng kí cùkgùùpòòdép  
he go to farm With cutlass  
'He went to the farm with a cutlass'

6. *lōng* 'wild animals'  
lōng dī mó ndighìn lìghít nī  
wild animal there PL inside forest the  
'There are wild animals in the forest'

The co-hyponyms could be:

i. *pààp* ‘duiker’  
*pààp dī ndīghìn lìghìt nī*  
duiker there inside forest the  
‘There is a duiker in the forest’

ii. *ààk* ‘squirrel’  
*ààk dī ndīghìn lìghìt nī*  
squirrel there inside forest the  
‘There is a squirrel in the forest’

iii. *mòsdòng* ‘grass-cutter’  
*mòsdòng dī ndīghìn lìghìt nī*  
grass-cutter there inside forest the  
‘There is a grass-cutter in the forest’

7. *nyèr* ‘birds’  
*rā tū nī nyèr mó*  
she kill the bird **PL**  
‘She killed the birds’

The co-hyponyms could be:

i. *mbūl* ‘pigeon’  
*rā tū mèè mbūl*  
she kill a pigeon  
‘She killed a pigeon’

ii. *kushing* ‘firefinch’  
*rā tū mèè kushing*  
she kill a firefinch  
‘She killed a firefinch’

iii. *ntaaseet* ‘cordon-bleu’  
*rā tū mèè ntaaseet*  
she kill a cordon-bleu  
‘She killed a cordon-bleu’

8. *làà* ‘children’  
*rā kí làà mó*  
she have child **PL**  
‘She has children’

The co-hyponyms are:

i. *lààdyèm* ‘son’  
*rā kí lààdyèm*  
she have son  
‘She has a son’

ii. *lààrēēp* ‘daughter’  
ră kí *lààrēēp*  
she have daughter  
‘She has a daughter’

From the above data (5 – 8), it is demonstrated that the hypernyms in Mwághávúl have the inclusion of the meanings of the co-hyponyms; as the class denoted by the superordinate term includes the class denoted by the hyponym as a sub-class. However, hyponymy is a crucial aspect of language, enabling effective communication. It helps convey meaning efficiently, striking a balance between precision and clarity. Whenever there is a challenge in finding the perfect word, hyponymy allows the use of more general or specific terms, providing just the right amount of information. This facilitates natural communication, avoiding unnecessary detail and promoting clarity. Thus, understanding of hyponymy is essential for effective communication in Mwághávúl language.

### **Metonymy in Mwághávúl**

Metonymy is a sense relation of inclusion in which one word is used to describe a concept associated with the concept normally expressed by that word. Metonymy is the use of one word to substitute for another word that it is closely associated with. The word that replaces the original thing is called a metonym. Metonymy in Mwághávúl is shown in the following expressions:

9. *pùtūghūp* ‘heart’ as a substitute for *wál* ‘love’

i. *wál* ‘love’  
án cín *wál* fīnā n.ghà  
I give love my to you m. sg.  
‘I gave you my love’

ii. **Metonym**

án cín *pùtūghūp* fīnā n.ghà  
I give heart my to you m. sg.  
‘I gave you my heart’

10. *làng-làng* ‘ride’ as a substitute for *ngūm* ‘car’

i. *ngūm* ‘car’  
*ngūm* fīnā nī kí dár ātīlēng  
car my the is stand outside  
‘My car is parked outside’

ii. **Metonym**

*làng-làng* fīnā nī kí dár ātīlēng  
ride my the is stand outside  
My ride is parked outside.

11. *kícír* ‘grave’ as a substitute for *múút* ‘death’

i. *múút* ‘death’  
Ā *múút* ā kyés kí sēēn  
FOC death is end of life  
‘Life ends in death’

ii. **Metonym**

ā *kícír* ā kyés kí sēēn  
FOC grave is end of life  
‘Life ends in the grave’

12. *pán*‘mind’ as a substitute for *dyēn*‘passion/energy/effort’

i. *dyēn* ‘passion/energy/effort’

án lè *dyēn* nkáā dák fīnā  
I put **passion/energy/effort** on work my  
'I put **passion** into my work'

ii. **Metonym**

án lè *pán* fīnā nkáā dák fīnā  
I put **mind** my on work my  
'I put my **mind** into my work'

Data 9 – 12 show metonyms exist in Mwághávúl. Metonym is not just limited to nouns; they can also be verbs or any other class of word, as long as there is a close association; for instance, as in data (10), my ride is parked outside. “Ride” is a metonym for car, and this works even though “ride” is a verb because there is a close association as in “my ride is parked outside”. Metonymy can also be used to refer to abstract concepts, ideas and emotions as in data (9) and (12). “Heart” can be used as a metonym for several things. The most obvious meaning is love, as in, “I gave you my heart”; we understand this as meaning, “I gave you my love”. Also, if you “put your mind” into something, it would mean that you have put passion, energy or effort into it. ‘Heart’ and ‘mind’ works as a metonym in both contexts, respectively. However, by substituting one thing for another, one can bring a whole bunch of vivid associations along with it as metonymy can add deeper meaning or complexity to a simple word choice. Metonymy also helps one cut down on wordy explanations by relying on a word’s associations and connotations. Therefore, metonymy affects communication in the language and can enhance writing and speaking in the language by creating new imagery, making words more powerful, and conveying a complex idea or emotion in a more concise way.

### Discussion of Findings

The analysis explored the types of sense relations of identity and inclusion in the Mwághávúl language, how the sense relations in the language affects communication, positively or negatively, and how the knowledge and understanding of the sense relations enable the various users of the language including speakers and writers to effectively use the Mwághávúl language. It was discovered that, in the Mwághávúl language, there are semantic affinities between certain words and sentences as studied under sense relations. In other words, there is relatedness or similarity between words and sentences, often based on their meaning or context. This finding is in accordance with Carbone (2018) who argued that word meaning consists of components activated by the context, which may help disambiguate the semantic composition of a word in use. Hence, the sense relations of identity and inclusion identified in the

Mwághávúl language are synonymy (comprising complete or absolute and partial synonymy), hyponymy and metonymy.

This is in line with Faidah (2018) that identified sense relations of similarity or sameness, such as synonymy, hyponymy, entailment, paraphrase, metonymy, anaphora, and presupposition. The study found that these sense relations perform the role of explaining the meanings of words or expressions in relation to other words or expressions in the language. This is also indicated by Mukhalad (2017) that concludes that lexical relations are a subset of semantic relations that play a significant role in explaining, analysing, and applying word meanings within sentences. This role of sense relations can be seen in the various communicative events or situations as presented in the analysis, especially when the meaning of a word or expression is unclear and needs to be explained thoroughly, else, it may lead

to misinterpretation and misunderstanding between the parties in the communication. Therefore, in communication, sense or lexical relations are considered an effective way of explaining the meanings of words in various ways and thus, a better communication might be achieved. Hence, the study reveals that the knowledge and understanding of the sense relations of identity and inclusion identified in Mwághávúl can enhance effective communication. Faidah (2018) also agrees that grasping sense relations could facilitate better communication and help avoid misunderstandings in language. By understanding these sense relations, it can help users communicate effectively with each other through the language and avoid misunderstanding that can occur in the use of the language.

### Conclusion

The study established that the knowledge of sense relations in Mwághávúl is vital in effective use of the Mwághávúl language and thorough comprehension when the language is used. This is in the sense of the fact that sense relations explain the meanings of words in terms of their relations to others at various levels and by doing so, there would be much exposure to language and much augmentation as far as the knowledge of the vocabulary used in the language is concerned. In fact, sense or lexical relations might be considered an efficient way in understanding the exact meaning of the word and how it is related to other words within sentences. Lastly, the study established that the tendency for wrong choice of words meant for one situation for another is almost inevitable due to lack of mastery of sense relations. Thus, a good understanding of sense relations in the Mwághávúl language is an

added advantage for effective communication in the language. This is because it will help users and speakers of the language to produce very intelligible and pragmatic sentences in the language, thereby contributing to the grammar of the language.

### Recommendations

The study recommends that, to further advance the study of semantics in Mwaghavul language, researchers can delve deeper into the complexities of sense relations, exploring beyond the sense relations of identity and inclusion in Mwághávúl. This can involve analyzing how sense relations interact with other semantic phenomena, such as metaphor and metonymy and examining the role of context in shaping these relationships. Future studies should venture beyond the scope of this research, extensively examining particular sense relations identified in the language. Furthermore, researchers can investigate how Mwághávúl speakers use sense relations to convey meaning and achieve communicative goals, focusing on the languages' pragmatic dimensions. Additionally, exploring the relationship between sense relations and other areas of Mwaghavul grammar, such as syntax and morphology, can provide a deeper understanding of the language's overall semantic architecture. By pursuing these lines of inquiry, researchers can gain a more profound understanding of Mwaghavul semantics, ultimately contributing to a richer understanding and cognition of Mwághávúl language and human languages in general. This continued research can uncover new insights into the intricacies of Mwaghavul language, and further illuminating the complexities of human language and communication

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## TEACHER PERCEPTIONS ON THE EFFECT OF SPEECH DISORDER ON EDUCATIONAL DEVELOPMENT OF SCHOOL-AGE STUDENTS IN GOVERNMENT COMPREHENSIVE SPECIAL SCHOOL, LAFIA, NASARAWA STATE

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### Abstract

This study investigates teacher perceptions on the effect of speech disorders on educational development of school-age children in Government Comprehensive Special School in Lafia, Nasarawa State, Nigeria. A quantitative cross-sectional survey design was employed to collect data from 40 teachers at the Government Comprehensive Special School in Lafia, using structured questionnaires. The results revealed that stuttering (35%) was the most common speech disorder, followed by voice problems (30%), language difficulties (20%), and articulation problems (15%). A significant proportion of the students demonstrated low or very low abilities in asking and answering questions, producing spoken words, and using words correctly, key indicators of impaired academic communication and educational development. These findings are consistent with the existing literature, which highlights the adverse effects of speech disorders on language proficiency and overall educational development. The study emphasizes the critical need for early identification and intervention, including speech therapy services and teacher training, to support affected students. By addressing these communication barriers, educational stakeholders can improve learning outcomes and promote inclusive education for children with speech challenges. This study contributes to the growing body of knowledge on speech and language disorders, offering practical recommendations for enhancing academic support systems in Nigerian schools.

**Keywords:** Speech Disorders, Educational Development, School-Age Children.

### Introduction

Speech disorders are communication impairments that affect an individual's ability to produce speech sounds correctly, fluently, or with an appropriate voice (Adegbiji et al., 2019). These disorders can significantly affect a child's academic development, especially in early education, where learning is heavily reliant on verbal instruction and language interaction. In educational settings, the ability to communicate effectively is foundational to reading, writing, classroom participation, and social integration (Agbu et al., 2024). However, speech disorders often remain undiagnosed or misunderstood, particularly in developing countries like Nigeria, where awareness and access to speech therapy are

limited (Adebisi et al., 2014).

In Nigeria and specifically in Nasarawa State, many children with speech difficulties face challenges that go unnoticed due to inadequate teacher training, cultural misconceptions, and limited health services (Ahmed, 2015). Rather than being identified and supported, these children are often labeled as unintelligent or disruptive, leading to poor academic performance and social withdrawal (Okoye & Anyanwu, 2024). Despite the growing awareness of inclusive education, there is still a significant gap in understanding how prevalent speech disorders are and how they impact educational development in Nigerian schools.

Studying speech disorders in school-age

children is crucial because early identification and intervention can greatly improve a child's educational trajectory. When speech difficulties are addressed in the early years, children are more likely to succeed academically and build stronger social relationships (Okoye & Anyanwu, 2024). Moreover, understanding the types and causes of these disorders can help educators, parents, and policymakers develop tailored interventions thereby ensuring equitable learning opportunities. The problem, therefore, lies in the lack of empirical data and focused research on the prevalence and impact of speech disorders on educational development in Nasarawa State. Without clear insights, affected children may continue to face academic setbacks, low self-esteem, and limited future opportunities.

The main aim of this study is to investigate the perception of teachers on prevalence, types, causes, and effects of speech disorders among school-age children in Government Comprehensive Special School, Lafia. The study seeks to understand how these disorders influence students' educational development thereby providing evidence that could guide the development of support systems and educational policies aimed at fostering inclusive learning environments.

### **Conceptual Review**

A speech disorder is a communication impairment affecting a person's ability to produce spoken language in a typical way. As defined by Medical News Today (Eske, 2023), a speech disorder involves any condition that interferes with forming sounds that make up words, and it may result from damage to the muscles, nerves, or vocal structures. According to the National Institute on Deafness and Other Communication Disorders (NIDCD, 2020), a speech disorder includes any defect or abnormality that prevents an individual from communicating by means of spoken words; causes may include nerve injury to the brain, muscular paralysis, structural defects, or other neurological or physical conditions. Together, such definitions show that speech disorders encompass difficulties in sound production, fluency, voice quality, or coordination necessary for intelligible speech.

Stuttering, also referred to as a fluency disorder, is characterized by disruptions such as sound repetitions, prolongations, and speech blocks. Research has shown that while stuttering severity may not always predict academic achievement, severe cases are positively correlated with dyslexia and poorer performance on standardized language tests (Okoye & Anyanwu, 2024). This suggests that stuttering can complicate literacy skills, including reading and spelling, particularly when associated with comorbid conditions (Adebisi et al., 2014).

Beyond academic outcomes, stuttering has significant psychosocial effects. School-age children who stutter often develop anxiety, negative communication attitudes, and reduced confidence in speech interactions (Ahmed, 2015). These issues can undermine classroom participation, peer relationships, and learning engagement. Language difficulties are communication disorders that affect an individual's ability to understand, process, and use spoken, written, or symbolic language effectively. They can involve difficulties with receptive language (understanding words and sentences), expressive language (using words, grammar, and sentences to communicate), or both. Language disorders encompass both expressive impairments (difficulty producing language) and receptive impairments (difficulty understanding language). According to Bishop et al. (2022), language disorders are distinct from speech disorders because they involve problems with linguistic content, form, and use rather than the motor production of sounds. Children with language disorders may struggle with vocabulary development, sentence structure, storytelling, or following directions, which could impact literacy, academic performance, and social skills. Some language disorders are developmental, such as Developmental Language Disorder (DLD), while others are acquired, resulting from brain injury, hearing loss, or neurological conditions (ASHA, 2021). Early identification and intervention—through individualized speech-language therapy, classroom support, and family involvement—are essential for improving communication and long-term outcomes (Ebbels, 2020).

Voice problems are conditions that affect the pitch, loudness, quality, or resonance of a person's voice, making it sound different from what is considered normal for their age, sex, or cultural group. They occur when there are problems with the vocal folds (cords), larynx, or the processes involved in voice production. Common signs include hoarseness, breathiness, strained or weak voice, and sudden loss of vocal range (ASHA, 2021). According to Stachler et al. (2020), voice disorders could be functional (caused by misuse or overuse of the voice, such as vocal nodules), organic (resulting from structural or neurological issues like laryngeal cancer or vocal fold paralysis), or psychogenic (linked to emotional or psychological conditions). These disorders may arise in professional voice users, such as teachers, singers, or broadcasters, but can affect anyone. Early diagnosis by an otolaryngologist and treatment through voice therapy, medical management, or surgery are essential to restore healthy vocal function (Behrman, 2021).

The reviewed literature highlights that speech disorders significantly affect educational development in multiple ways. Early speech and language impairments limit vocabulary growth, reading comprehension, and writing, increasing the risk of long-term academic difficulties (Bishop & Adams, 1990). They also lead to psychosocial challenges such as anxiety, social withdrawal, and reduced participation (Ahmed, 2015). Severe stuttering is linked with comorbid learning difficulties like dyslexia (Okoye & Anyanwu, 2024). Despite evidence supporting effective interventions (Adegbiji et al., 2019), underdiagnosis remains common in Nigeria due to limited expertise and cultural barriers (Adebisi et al., 2014).

This review reveals that speech disorders including stuttering, articulation problems, and language impairments, are closely linked to educational development. They influence not only literacy skills but also social participation and self-esteem. In Nigeria, particularly in Nasarawa State, limited awareness, inadequate health services, and cultural misconceptions worsen the challenges faced by affected students. By focusing on

Government Comprehensive Special School Lafia, this study aims to generate locally relevant evidence on the prevalence and educational effects of speech disorders, thereby contributing to the development of inclusive policies and effective intervention strategies.

### Empirical Review

Several empirical studies have established the link between speech disorders and educational development among school-age children. These studies show evidence that speech disorders such as stuttering, articulation problems, voice disorders, and language difficulties negatively impact educational development, particularly in areas such as vocabulary development, language use, and classroom communication.

Dockrell and Lindsay (2007) conducted a longitudinal study on students with speech and language impairments and found that these students consistently underperformed in standardized literacy assessments compared to their peers. Their difficulties in expressing thoughts clearly and using appropriate vocabulary limited their ability to complete written tasks and engage in classroom discussions. This aligns with the framework's suggestion that children with articulation problems and language difficulties will show reduced vocabulary output and struggle with word usage.

In another study, Durkin and Ramsden (2007) explored the academic development and performance of adolescents with a history of speech and language difficulties. Their results showed that even when basic speech problems were resolved, lingering difficulties in expressive language continued to affect academic writing, comprehension, and participation. These findings underscore the long-term academic consequences of unresolved speech disorders and reinforce the conceptual framework's focus on the persistent impact of these disorders on measurable educational indicators. Moreover, a Nigerian-based study by Adegbiji et al. (2019) reported that in selected primary schools in Northern Nigeria, children with speech disorders performed poorly in classroom tasks requiring verbal responses and written language use. Teachers in the study reported challenges in evaluating such students

due to their limited expressive capabilities. This further supports the idea that "number of words" and "use of words" could serve as meaningful proxies for assessing the educational development of children with speech disorders in the Nigerian context.

Adebisi et al. (2014) highlighted the socio-cultural dimensions affecting speech disorder recognition in Nigeria. Their findings indicated that many children with voice and fluency problems were misdiagnosed or left unsupported, leading to a lack of intervention and continued educational struggles. This study validates the relevance of considering speech disorders in educational planning, especially in regions like Nasarawa State, where awareness and resources are limited. Consequently, existing empirical studies strongly support the conceptual framework of this research. They affirm that speech disorders significantly influence children's educational development, and that assessing "number of words" and "use of words" provide valid means of evaluating the impact of these disorders in educational settings.

### Theoretical Review

This study adopts a blend of behavioural and nativist theories to explain the effect of speech disorders on the educational development of school-age children in Government Comprehensive Special School Lafia. The behavioural theory, as advanced by Skinner (1957), posits that language is a learned set of verbal behaviours acquired through operant conditioning. According to Skinner, children's speech develops through imitation, reinforcement, and environmental feedback. When caregivers or educators provide consistent reinforcement for correct language use, children are more likely to adopt and retain appropriate speech behaviours. Hulit, Howard, and Fahey (2011) emphasise that external stimuli and reinforcement shape a child's communication skills, making the environment a critical factor in language acquisition and remediation. In the context of this study, the behavioural perspective is significant for understanding how speech disorders may persist

when reinforcement or modelling is inconsistent or inadequate.

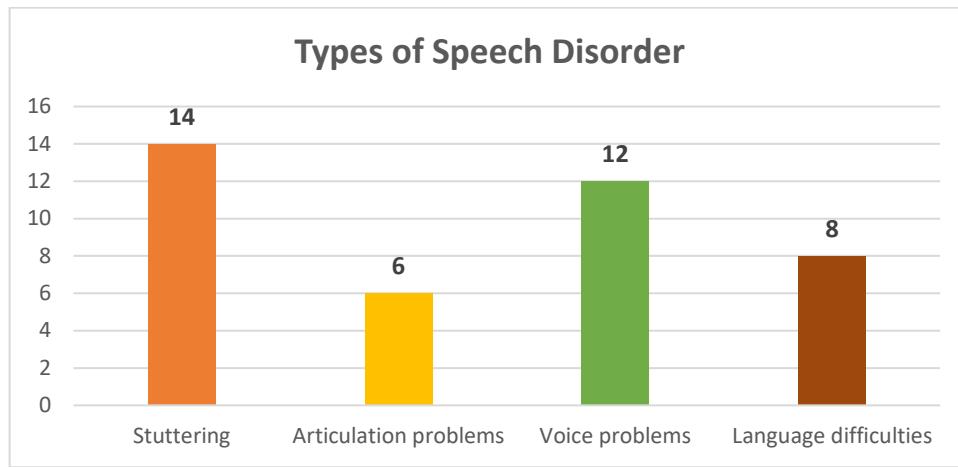
However, Chomsky (1965) argues that language acquisition is driven by innate mechanisms rather than solely by environmental reinforcement. Integrating nativist insights highlights that while external support is essential, some speech disorders may stem from underlying cognitive or neurological factors that cannot be resolved through behavioural strategies alone. Therefore, a multidimensional approach combining environmental reinforcement, innate developmental considerations, and specialised therapy are necessary to address speech disorders effectively.

### Methodology

This study adopts a cross-sectional survey research design to quantitatively investigate teacher perceptions on the prevalence, types, causes, and impact of speech disorders on the educational development of school-age children in Government Special School Lafia Nasarawa State, Nigeria. The study targeted 40 teachers from the Government Comprehensive Special School, Lafia. A census sampling technique was employed to include all eligible participants within the selected school. Structured questionnaires served as the primary instrument for data collection, allowing for standardised and objective responses related to speech difficulties and educational development. The questionnaire items were designed to capture data on the frequency, nature, and impact of various speech disorders. The collected data were analysed using descriptive statistics (frequencies, percentages, means) to summarise the prevalence and types of disorders, and correlation analysis to examine the relationship between speech disorders and educational development. To visually represent the findings of the study, graphs and pie charts were used alongside descriptive statistics. These graphs and pie charts illustrated distributions and comparisons between the data to provide insights on the data collected. The quantitative approach ensured measurable and generalisable results within the study context.

### Data Presentation and Analysis

The data collected from the study provides critical insights into teacher perceptions on the prevalence and effects of various types of speech disorders among school-age children in Government Comprehensive Special School, Lafia, Nasarawa State. The analysis focuses on the types of disorders identified and how they influence students' speech-related development, such as asking and answering questions, sentence clarity, word production, vocabulary breadth, and correct usage of words.



**Figure 1: Types of Speech Disorder among school children**

Figure 1 shows that 14 (35%) of the children were affected by stuttering, 6 (15%) had articulation problems, 12 (30%) had voice problems, and 8 (20%) of the children had language difficulties. This shows that stuttering is the most prevalent speech disorder among the school children.

**Table 1: Ability to ask questions properly**

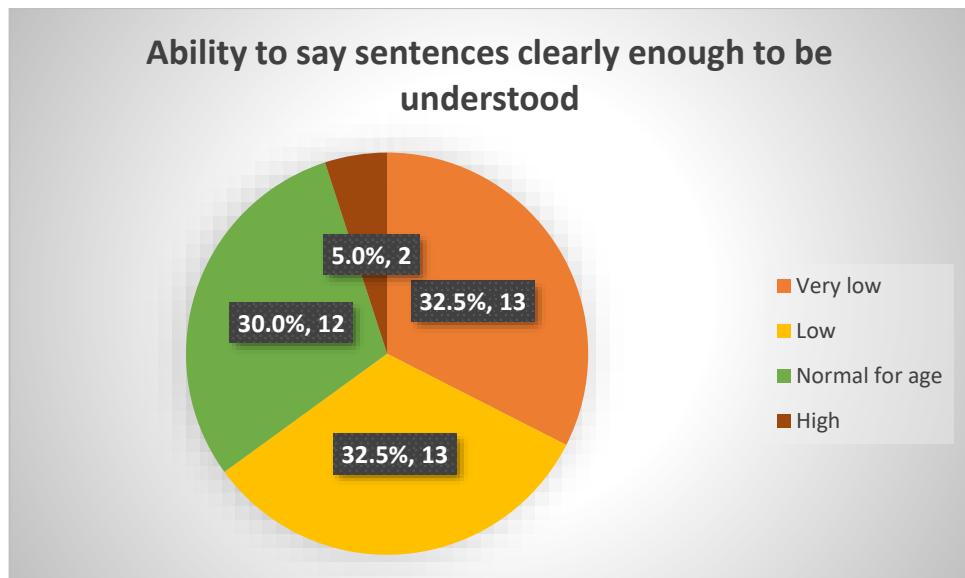
	Frequency	Percentage (%)
Very low	18	45.0
Low	11	27.5
Normal for age	9	22.5
High	2	5.0
<b>Total</b>	<b>40</b>	<b>100.0</b>

Table 1 shows the children's ability to ask questions properly. The majority of the teachers indicated that (18, that is 45%) the children have a very low ability to ask questions as they should at their age. However, only 5% of the teachers stated that children have a high ability to ask questions. Meanwhile, a cumulative 30% of teachers show that the children have low and very low ability to ask questions properly, showing a high level of disorder.

**Table 2: Ability to answer questions properly**

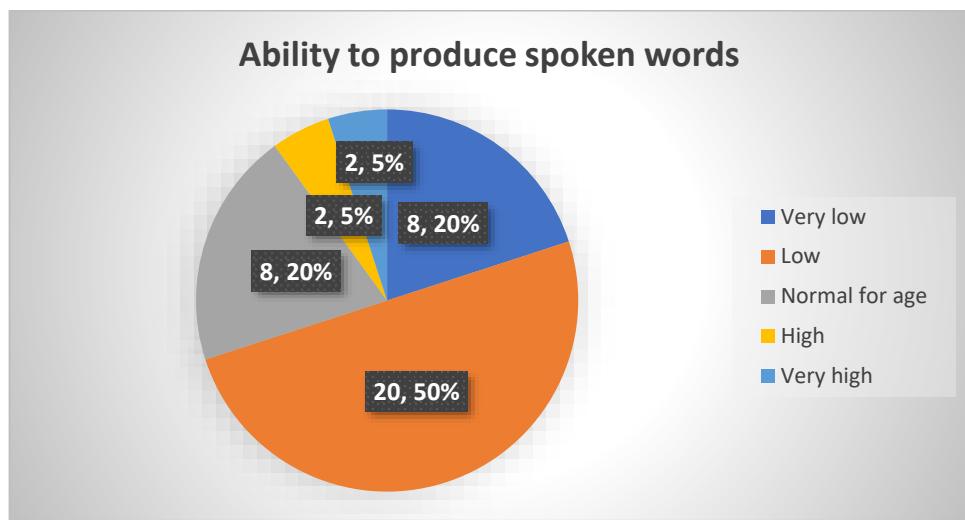
	Frequency	Percentage (%)
Very low	10	25.0
Low	12	30.0
Normal for age	14	35.0
High	4	10.0
<b>Total</b>	<b>40</b>	<b>100.0</b>

Table 2 shows the children's ability to answer questions properly. While a significant number of children (14, 35%) have the ability to answer questions normally as they should at their age, a cumulative number of the children (22, 55%) have low and very low ability to answer questions normally. A small 10% of the children have high abilities to answer questions properly.



**Figure 2: Ability to make sentences clearly**

Figure 2 shows the children's ability to make sentences clearly enough for listeners to understand. A cumulative 65% of the children have low and very low ability to make clear sentences for listeners to understand, while 30% of the children have normal ability for their age, and 5% possess high abilities when it comes to reading out sentences. This shows that the majority of the children have low abilities to make sentences clearly enough for listeners to understand, suggesting a speech disorder.



**Figure 3: Ability to produce spoken words**

Figure 3 shows the children's ability to produce spoken words. 10% (cumulative) of the children have high abilities in producing spoken words. However, a significant 70% (cumulative) of the children have low abilities to produce spoken words. Meanwhile, 20% of the children can produce spoken words normally as they should at their age. This shows a majority of speech disorders in the children.

**Table 3: The number of words**

	Frequency	Percentage (%)
Very low (<2500 words)	6	15.0
Low (2500-5000 words)	12	30.0
Normal for age (5000-10000 words)	12	30.0
High (>10000 words)	10	25.0
<b>Total</b>	<b>40</b>	<b>100.0</b>

Table 3 shows the number of words the children know in their learning. Most of the children's number of words is low, less than 5000 words (45% - cumulative of low and very low), while 25% of the children have a high number of words above 10000 words. A moderate 30% of the children know a normal number of words for their age, within 5000 to 10000 words.

**Table 4: Ability to use words correctly**

	Frequency	Percentage (%)
Very low	8	20.0
Low	15	37.5
Normal for age	13	32.5
High	4	10.0
<b>Total</b>	<b>40</b>	<b>100.0</b>

Table 4 shows the children's ability to use words correctly. 32.5% of the children have the ability to use words correctly as they should for their age. A cumulative 57.5% of the children are known to have a low ability to use words correctly. And, 10% of the children have a high ability to use their words correctly.

### Discussion of Findings

The findings from this study reveal a high prevalence of speech disorders among school-age children in Government Special School Lafia, with stuttering (35%) as the most common disorder, followed by voice problems (30%), language difficulties (20%), and articulation problems (15%). These results are consistent with the observations of Owens (2016), who noted that stuttering and articulation disorders are among the most frequently diagnosed speech disorders in children. The prominence of these disorders suggests challenges in fluency, clarity, and language development, which are essential for effective classroom interaction and academic achievement.

Furthermore, the study shows that 30% of the children have either low or very low abilities to ask questions properly, while 55% struggle with answering questions appropriately. These expressive and receptive language difficulties support the findings of Conti-Ramsden and Durkin (2012), who emphasised that children with speech and language impairments often experience difficulty in classroom communication, limiting their participation and comprehension. A notable 65% of the subjects were observed to have difficulty constructing clear sentences, and 70% demonstrated low spoken-word production ability. These results affirm the assertion by Adebisi et al. (2014) that children with speech-language impairments are more likely to encounter obstacles in expressive communication, often leading to educational underdevelopment. The study also found that 45% of children had low word knowledge, and 57.5% were unable to use words correctly, suggesting limited vocabulary development and usage. This is in line with Agbu et al. (2024), who reported that deficits in vocabulary and grammar significantly affect

reading comprehension and written expression, thereby impacting negatively on overall educational development. Consequently, this study validates previous research linking speech disorders to poor educational development. The high frequency of speech difficulties among children in Government Comprehensive Special School, Lafia, underscores the need for early diagnosis, specialised speech interventions, and teacher training to support affected learners in the classroom setting.

### Conclusion

This study concludes that speech disorders are prevalent among school-age children in Government Comprehensive Special School Lafia, Nasarawa State, with stuttering, voice problems, language difficulties, and articulation issues being the most common. These disorders significantly impact children's ability to ask and answer questions, produce and use words correctly, and construct clear sentences which are skills required for effective learning in school. The findings underscore the strong link between communication ability and learning outcomes, validating existing literature that speech disorders can hinder language development, classroom participation, and overall educational development. The results emphasise the need for early identification, professional intervention, and tailored support within the school system to address speech-related challenges. Educators and policymakers must prioritise speech and language development in curriculum required for planning and provide access to speech therapists and specialised training for teachers. Addressing these issues proactively can enhance educational opportunities and promote better educational development for children affected by speech disorders in Nasarawa State and beyond.

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## A SEMIOTIC REPRESENTATION OF SELECTED NAIRA-REDESIGN MEMES ON FACEBOOK

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### Abstract

Social media memes, known for their satirical nature, employ linguistic techniques to humorously comment on or criticise social actors and events. While previous studies on memes have focused on pragmatic nuances and discourse frames, little attention has been given to semiotic studies on the investigation of memes on social media. This study, therefore, investigated these naira-redesigned memes on social media, focusing on linguistic and non-linguistic resources as well as the use of iconic semiotic resources in the selected naira-designing memes, which are beyond the entertainment level but serve as a satirical tool. A total of five (5) memes on naira redesign were purposively selected from social media, specifically, the Facebook platform. Gunther Kress and Theo van Leeuwen's Grammar of Visual Design (GVD) was adopted as the theoretical framework. Findings reveal that the combination of linguistic and non-linguistic resources is employed in each meme to create meaning and convey meaning to the readers. The study concludes that visible images and linguistic tools are rich in meaning and can be easily interpreted and understood.

**Keywords:** Semiotics, Memes, GVD, Facebook, CBN

### Introduction

The governor of the Central Bank of Nigeria (CBN), Godwin Emefiele, on October 26, 2022, announced that new Naira notes would be introduced to replace the current 200, 500, and 1,000 Naira notes. Emefiele said the naira redesign would take effect from Thursday, December 15, 2022. The existing notes were scheduled to cease being legal tender on January 31, 2023. The CBN subsequently provided reasons for the redesign of the Naira note. This, among other reasons, is that the Naira note was redesigned to address the issue of individuals who have made currency fraud their main source of income. People who have hidden money they have stolen, for instance, would either find a way to change it by taking the money out or would not need it given the change in the value of the Naira. The currency change also aims to deal a fatal blow to the growing kidnapping and ransom industry. The change in the notes is also said to aid in lowering the rate of inflation, just as it was intended to control the amount of money in circulation. However, many citizens considered

the naira redesign irrelevant since it could not make a difference. Nigerians reacted in various ways, notably through humorous memes (images, videos, GIFs) in making caricatures of CBN and the new naira redesign. During the struggle, many Nigerians take to social media, especially Facebook, Twitter and Instagram, to express their frustration and share their experience using humour and satire. These expressions have taken the form of memes, jokes, and satire.

Memes are a worldwide social phenomenon. They play a very interesting role that makes them go viral, due to how easily they are passed across uniquely. A simple press of a button allows it to be shown to a wide range of people, making them see the other side of the picture, offering a new perspective on a situation and helping them see things from a different angle. This change of perspective makes people change how they see a stressful situation. They do all this efficiently and effectively and serve as a source. Memes are essentially a language that people use on the internet, and being able to

identify and understand the nuances is key to communication between people online, as a language of their own, having this knowledge helps give a fuller understanding of the meaning and insight into the motivation of why something was shared (Omolabi, 2024).

Kien (2019) further opined that memes have become an integral part of social media, shaping the way we communicate and share information. These humorous and relatable images and videos have taken the internet and spread across social media platforms. Shifman (2014) opined that memes are a form of cultural expression; they encapsulate a shared experience or idea, often with a humorous twist, and are easily recognisable by a wide audience. Memes can take various forms, from images with captions to short videos or even hashtags. They are typically created and shared by individuals, but they quickly gain popularity when they resonate with a larger group of people. One of the reasons memes have become so popular is their ability to convey complex ideas or emotions in a concise and accessible manner. The meaning of memes relies on cultural references, current events, or inside jokes, making them relatable to specific communities or subcultures. Memes can serve as a form of commentary on society, politics, or everyday life, allowing people to express their opinions or frustrations in a lighthearted and easily shareable way.

Memes have the power to bring people together because they create a sense of community and shared understanding, as individuals find humour and connection in the same jokes or references. Wiggins (2019) stated that it provides a common language that transcends traditional barriers, allowing people to communicate and relate to one another in ways that were previously unimaginable. However, it is important to note that not all memes are harmless or positive. Like any form of communication, memes can be used to spread misinformation, perpetuate stereotypes, or even promote hate speech. It is crucial to approach memes critically and be aware of their potential impact. Critical semiotics emerged as a relatively new approach in discourse studies, which takes into consideration semiotic resources like memes

other than language alone, and it is combined with language to communicate meaning (Bell, 2012). Lazar (2003) said that semiotics is a field of study that examines the deeper meanings and interpretations behind signs, symbols, and texts. Oyedele and Ogungbe (2022) stated that it combines elements of critical discourse analysis and multimodal discourse analysis to delve into the social, cultural, and political implications embedded within these communicative forms. By analysing the various layers of meaning conveyed through signs and symbols, critical semiotics aims to uncover hidden ideologies, power dynamics, and social norms that influence our understanding of language and visual representations.

Felicia (2021) opined that semiotics is a field of study that focuses on analysing the meaning-making processes and social power dynamics inherent in signs, symbols, and other communicative elements within various forms of media and communication. Semiotics, as a theoretical framework, explores how meaning is constructed through signs and how these signs shape our understanding of reality. Semiotics, examines how signs are used to convey ideologies, representations, and social norms. It analyses how meanings are produced, circulated, and interpreted within different contexts. By applying critical approaches to semiotics, researchers aim to unveil hidden ideologies embedded within seemingly innocent or neutral messages. Lazar (2003) stated that semiotics helps us understand the complex ways in which power relations are perpetuated or challenged through symbolic communication. Through the use of theoretical frameworks like critical discourse analysis and multimodal discourse analysis, scholars in this field investigate the intricate layers of meaning behind signs by considering their linguistic properties as well as their visual components. By studying various modes of representation such as language, images, sounds, gestures or spatial arrangements, they unravel how these modes interact with one another to construct narratives or shape social realities. Overall, critical semiotics offers valuable insights into how meanings are constructed and contested within contemporary society. However, a research gap exists in investigating linguistic memes on

social media. While memes have been explored in various contexts like cartoons, adverts and caricatures, memes like this Naira redesign have been scarcely investigated. Investigating these techniques offers insight into memes' construction and conveyance in visual media. Bridging this gap presents an opportunity to understand how language enhances memes and satire's efficacy in memes, merging linguistics, meme studies, and visual communication.

This paper examines the semiotic representations of the selected memes in the Nigeria's Naira redesign. The focus is on how users employ language and semiotic codes to unveil meanings, linguistic and nonlinguistic interpretation of memes as a way of capturing people's mind toward generating meaning.

### **Conceptual Review**

#### **Language as a Social Semiotics**

Social semiotics is concerned with the way people use semiotic resources to produce communicative artefacts and events to interpret them, in the context of specific social situations and practices. 'Language as a social semiotic' (Halliday, 1978) reveals a connection between the social and cultural context. The meaning of semiotic choices depends on the social context of use. According to Halliday (1978, p.2), cited in Eggins (2004):

The formulation 'language as a social semiotic'... means interpreting language within a socio-cultural context, in which the culture itself is interpreted in semiotic terms as an information system (p.3).

Social semiotics is an approach to communication that seeks to understand how people communicate by a variety of means in particular social settings. Modes of communication are what they are, not because of a fixed set of rules and structure, but because of what they can accomplish socially in everyday activities. Social enquiry is a means for humans to make sense of their lives. According to Kress, because of the belief that meaning arises in social environments and through social interaction, a variety of semiotic resources are used to "make signs in concrete situations". In language as a social semiotic, Halliday (1978)

proposes that the semiotic resources of language are shaped by how people use them to make meaning. Social semiotic argues against some of the working hypothesis of traditional linguistics and semiotics, and in favour of a situated perspective on communication social semiotics aims to account for 'context', not base on "a native text-context dichotomy", but rather based on the assumption that "context has to be theorised and understood as another set of text" Hodge and Kress (1998, p.8). Crucially, that involves breaking with the assumption that verbal language is always dominant and autonomous. As Hodge (2009) puts it, social meanings cannot be tracked only in one circle, even in verbal language, as the dominant one. Hodge & Kress discuss examples from a range of social contexts involving a range of different modes, but writing and image in print media (e.g. magazines, billboards, posters, etc) are discussed more than speech, gesture, gaze and other modes operating in the social encounters with which language use is concerned. In the late 1980s, when Kress and van Leeuwen began to develop a social semiotic approach to language, the focus was on print media, culminating in their book *Reading Images: The grammar of visual design* (1996). In reading image, they proposed a framework for the analysis of image, which draws on the broad semiotic aspects of Halliday's social semiotic theory and makes use of the system network. O'Toole (1994) in his book, *The language of displayed art*, accounts for image as a set of meaning-making resources informed by the insights of film studies, iconography and art history.

The issue of mode or multiple modes, perhaps inevitably, was foregrounded in the 1990s. With the focus now on the co-operation of modes rather than the study of modes in isolation, the term multimodality becomes a key term. It provides an alternative to terms such as "verbal" and non- verbal which positions the verbal as the unmarked, dominant resources for meaning making, and the non-verbal meaning making, and the non-verbal as marked, auxiliary resources. As social semiotics evolves, there is a growing emphasis on how the context of communication and the sign maker shape signs and symbols. It

moved towards a more flexible notion of grammar, with a focus on people's situated choice of resources rather than emphasising the system of available resources. Semiotic resources are central to multimodality, although they feature slightly differently within particular approaches. Kress and van Leeuwen suggest that a semiotic resource can be thought of as the connection between representational resources and what people do with them.

### **Language of Social Media**

The importance of language in our everyday lives cannot be undermined. Wen (2014) agrees that language is what human beings rely on to express themselves, communicate with others, and know the world. Its effectual use has been a blessing in helping human beings in meeting different needs at all times through educating, entertaining, informing, rebuking, or passing down social values within the global world, in communicating the intended meaning of language users. Kempson (2003) states that language is what human beings use to do things. Therefore, a language is a form of expression that helps individuals or groups to communicate and express their feelings and ideas. When two people meet, it is a particular language that helps them understand each other's views and thoughts. It also informs them about their feelings and what they are expecting or trying to say to each other. Language interacts with every aspect of human life in society, and it can be understood only if it is considered in society. That is, it has been a boon in building harmony between individuals in a society.

Social media is the social interaction among people in which they create, share or exchange information and ideas in virtual communities and networks. In Andreas Kaplan and Michael Haenlein's definition, social media is a group of Internet-based applications that build on the ideological and technological foundations of Web 2.0, and that allow the creation and exchange of user-generated content. Social Media is the future of communication, a countless array of internet-based tools and platforms that increase and enhance the sharing of information. This new form of media makes the transfer of text, photos,

audio, video, and information in general increasingly fluid among internet users. Social media has relevance not only for regular internet users but for businesses as well. Platforms like Twitter, Facebook, LinkedIn and WhatsApp have created online communities where people can share as much or as little personal information as they desire with other members. The result is an enormous amount of information that can be easily shared, searched, promoted, disputed, and created. Ejima (2021) posits that "social media is a free-for-all all internet-based platform which enables its users to become publishers by making posts and uploading pictures that are for personal, regional, national, and international internet." Language and social media are deeply intertwined and continue to evolve in response to each other. Language and social media are deeply connected in today's digital age. Social media platforms rely on language as the primary means of communication between users, and as such, language plays a crucial role in shaping our online interactions and experiences. Also, Social media platforms have allowed language to spread more rapidly and widely than ever before, and as a result, new linguistic features and trends can emerge and gain traction quickly. This has led to the creation of new words and phrases, as well as changes in the way we use existing words and expressions.

### **Memes**

Memes are a way in our society to share thoughts, feelings, humour and ideas overall. We find memes so intriguing because they are relatable, and audiences strive for things that they can relate to. Memes are a way of communication in our society, and they will continue to grow and become more popular. Memes have spread widely across internet populations and have become a common practice in many social media platforms across the globe (Kulkami, 2017). Social media platforms seem to be one of the fastest ways to communicate humorously in the world. It is the platform which had an estimated global user base of 180 million of the population with 92.4 million active subscribers. Several active users on social media sites thrive on the creation and circulation of MEMES. These tend to contain (images,

videos, texts and GIFs) projecting cultural symbols or social ideas, which often go viral on social media platforms.

The term “memes” is largely attributed to Richard Dawkins—an evolutionary biologist, in his book, *The Selfish Gene* (1976). But the word “memes” originates from the Greek word “*mimemeia*”. Dawkins defined memes as small cultural units of transmission, similar to genes that spread from person to person by way of imitation. Shifman (2013) posits that internet memes are not single ideas or formulas that spread easily, but rather groups of content items created with awareness of each other and which share common characteristics. Shifman then isolates three possible dimensions that make up memes and which can potentially be imitated: content (referencing both the ideas and the ideologies conveyed), form (the physical format of the message perceived through the senses) and stance (ways in which addressers positions themselves to the text, the reader/viewer and other potential speakers). While Shifman speaks about these dimensions in terms of a memetic YouTube video called “Leave Britney Alone”, it applies well to memes in other formats as well and does a good job of explaining the flexibility in how many ways a meme can be altered without losing the reference to the original.

### Theoretical framework

The paper adopts Kress and van Leeuwen's Grammar of Visual Design (GVD). Kress and van Leeuwen's goal in developing a "grammar of visual design" is to provide a socially-based philosophy of visual representation (1996, pp.1-5). They draw an analogy with language in doing so, noting that previous researchers in visual semiotics have tended to focus on what could be described as the "lexis" of images rather than the "grammar," focusing on the meaning projected by the individuals, scenes, and objects depicted within images rather than the connected meanings (p.1). The term "grammar" implies that they would try to investigate how what is shown in pictures is combined into a coherent, meaningful whole, similar to how discourse analysts investigate how words are combined into clauses, sentences, and entire texts. Like many

functional linguistic models, this is a visual discourse approach that seeks to connect form and meaning by viewing linguistic and visual “grammatical shapes as resources for encoding interpretations of experience and forms of social interaction” (p. 1). Thus, as Kress and van Leeuwen emphasise in citing Halliday's statement, society and ideology play a role in verbal and visual grammar.

Grammar goes beyond formal rules of correctness. It is a means of representing patterns of experience ... It enables human beings to present a mental picture of reality, to make sense of their experience of what goes on around them and inside them” (1985, p. 101).

Kress and van Leeuwen (1996) also recognise that there are secondary participants in many images, identified as circumstances, which are defined as “participants which could be left out without affecting the basic proposition realised by the narrative pattern, even though their deletion would cause a loss of information”. Following Halliday (1994), Kress and van Leeuwen recognise three forms. These are Locative Circumstances, Circumstances of Accompaniment, and Circumstances of Means. These circumstantial participants are not related to each other by vectors, but via aspects of location (thus the setting becomes a participant), or by simply co-occurring together in the same visual with no obvious relationship other than being with one another in the frame (a relation of Accompaniment), or finally by being used by a participants in some action (a relation of means) where there may be an absence of a vector between the user and the tool, but which may often assists in the formation of vector between the most salient Actor and the Goal.

### Methodology

This paper adopted a qualitative study that explores how selected Naira redesigned memes on social media and can be analysed through Kress and van Leeuwen's (2001) Grammar of Visual Design. This provides a distinctive analysis of contextual meaning within all memes on social media on the internet, the text, image

combinations and works together to create humorous meaning. The data were in the form of images, words or phrases, and sentences, generated from the Facebook platform because of the widespread nature and how fast they go viral. With some seconds passing, trending issues are

communicated through memes to create a humorous sense on those platforms. A total of 5 Naira redesigned memes were purposively selected and used for the data analysis of this study.

### Data presentation and Analysis

#### Datum 1: Nigerian struggle amidst cash scarcity



### Compositionality and textual resources

#### Background resources

The background element or shared background knowledge undergirding this datum is the prevalent contemporary issue of the Naira Redesign policy made by the Central Bank of Nigeria. This policy, as explained by the Central Bank of Nigeria in cooperation with the Federal government of Nigeria, is borne out of the fact that there is a large volume of banknote hoarding by the public, which has thus led to a shortage of clean and fit banknotes. According to the CBN, only three of the current eight denominations were redesigned, namely the ₦200, ₦500 and ₦1000 banknotes. The president of the federation, President Muhammadu Buhari, however, launched the new naira banknotes on November 23, 2022 and stated that the current notes would circulate side by side with the redesigned notes till January

31, 2023 when the current notes would be withdrawn from circulation and would cease to be a legal tender. This decision, however, due to the lack of a fundamental modus operandi from the CBN and the Federal government of Nigeria, has escalated into a national brouhaha as the new notes are not fully in circulation, and the old notes have now ceased to be legal tender.

The scarcity of the new notes in the event of a shortage has disrupted business activities in markets, restaurants, banks and major sales outlets in Nigeria. Banks across the country have now become so congested day by day as people want to urgently tender the old notes that they still have in their possession back to CBN, and then to withdraw money straight from the bank because of the lack of cash and the exorbitant price Point of Sale (POS) attendants charge for withdrawals. And

beyond the visual image, the picture explices the struggle that citizens engage in at the bank and the need for instant intervention by the government.

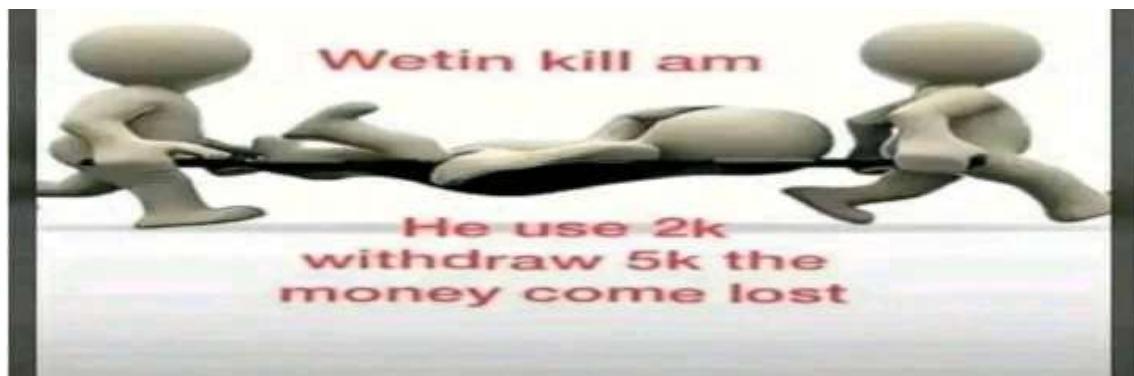
#### Foreground resources

The foreground resources in the visual image are a lady and a man, who, by the conversation "Dad, are you going for a boxing match?", can easily infer that he is the lady's father. The lady in this looks frightened, shocked and more to say confused as she asks her dad who, from the image, is seen dressed up with boxing gloves and with a stance ready for battle. In contrast, the man's response "No! I am going to the bank" gives an insight into the background resource of this datum. This image explains the current situation Nigerians are facing, particularly on the prevalent issue of naira redesign and naira scarcity.

Nigerians all over the country have been faced with the issue of no cash to fund their daily

needs, and POS attendants too, due to the hurdles they face before getting cash, which have also increased the withdrawal charges geometrically. All heads now turned to the bank that has, in turn, turned to a market arena where a lot of people who either want to deposit their old notes as stipulated by the Central Bank of Nigeria (CBN) or withdraw directly from the counter, as the ATMs are not dispensing cash. Due to the situation, there are always a lot of people in the bank striving hard to get into the banking hall and make their transactions. And as it is with Nigerians, patience is always absent where there is a group of people clamouring for something. There are usually fights, pushing and a lot of strength tussles leading to fights and protests. The social vice present in this image is the bad results of the policy enacted by the CBN and the Federal government on naira redesign without a proper modus operandi on how to go about circulating the new notes.

#### Datum 2: The ordeal of an average Nigerian withdrawing cash



#### Background resources

The shared background resource of this datum 2 is the prevalent contemporary issue of the Naira Redesign policy made by the Central Bank of Nigeria. This policy, as explained by the Central Bank of Nigeria in cooperation with the Federal government of Nigeria, is borne out of the fact that there are rolls of banknotes being hoarded by the public, which has thus led to a shortage of clean and fit banknotes. According to the CBN, only three of the current eight denominations will be

redesigned, namely the ₦200, ₦500 and ₦1000 banknotes. The president of the federation, President Muhammadu Buhari, however, launched the new naira banknotes on November 23, 2022 and stated that the current notes would circulate side by side with the redesigned notes till January 31, 2023 when the current notes would be withdrawn from circulation and would cease to be a legal tender. This decision, however, due to the lack of fundamental modus operandi from the CBN and the Federal government of Nigeria, has

escalated into a national brouhaha as the new notes are not fully in circulation and the old notes have now ceased to be legal tender. The scarcity of the notes and the struggle encountered by people to withdraw the notes from the bank are the basis of this image.

#### Foreground resources

The foreground resources of this image are three dolls used to represent men, the citizens of Nigeria. Two of them are seen carrying the other, who happens to be slumped or unconscious. The cause of this can be seen in the dialogue in the image “WETIN DO AM? HE USE 2K WITHDRAW 5K, THE MONEY CON LOST”. The individual being whisked away due to unconsciousness was a result of the prevailing issue of naira scarcity, naira redesign and the exorbitant price charged by Point-of-Sale attendants (POS) to withdraw money. He used two thousand naira to withdraw five thousand naira for his use and in the event of an emergency, after spending so more for a very less money, he eventually misplaced the money, which is the actual cause of the unconsciousness. This image, however, comically explains the hardship faced by

Nigerians due to the issue of naira scarcity, which stemmed from the naira redesigning saga. Now, citizens are forced to “buy money with money”. For every thousand to be withdrawn, some POS charge as high as ₦400, some ₦300 and so on. This is the case now for a charge that was not higher than ₦100 before the policy was established. Now buying money with money and eventually the money got misplaced, the anguish, sadness, pain, misery, and helpless nature of Nigerians is explained vividly in the image above.

The POS claims they also face challenges withdrawing from banks and sometimes even buying money. Since they are a business and profit-oriented, if they also buy money with money, they would also want to get returns, thereby increasing the amount of charges to the final consumer. The social vice present in this image is the consequence of the policy enacted by the CBN and the Federal government on naira redesign without a proper modus operandi on how to go about circulating the new notes without causing anguish and putting the citizens into disarray.

**Datum 3: Nigerians fighting at a GTBank ATM for cash**



#### Background resources

The background element undergirding this datum is the prevailing current problem of the Naira Redesign policy made by the Central Bank of Nigeria. This policy, as explained by the Central

Bank of Nigeria in cooperation with the Federal government, was the consequence of the masses' misuse of banknotes. According to the CBN, only three of the current eight currencies were redesigned, namely the ₦200, ₦500 and ₦1000

banknotes. The president of Nigeria, President Muhammadu Buhari however launched the new naira banknotes on November 23, 2022 and affirmed that the current notes would circulate side by side with the redesigned notes till January 31, 2023 when the current notes would be removed from distribution and would cease to be a legal tender in the country. This decision, however, due to the lack of fundamental technical know-how from the CBN and the Federal government of Nigeria, has escalated into a national melee as the new notes are not fully in circulation and the old notes have now ceased to be legal tender. The scarcity of the new notes in the event of a shortage has disturbed business events in markets, restaurants, banks and major sales outlets in Nigeria.

Banks across the country have now become so congested, clogged, overcrowded and jampacked day by day as people want to urgently tender the old notes that they still have in their ownership back to CBN, and then to withdraw money straight from the bank because of the lack of cash and the exorbitant price Point of Sale (POS) attendants charge for withdrawals. Beyond the awful state of the country shown vividly in the image, it is a clarion call to the government to brace up early enough and proffer working and substantial solutions that would help curb the menace already created, so it doesn't escalate into breeding dregs in the society.

### Foreground resources

The representational meta-function here is several represented participants. As indicated by the image, they are all male. They all appear to be doing something which makes the image transactional. There is the presence of vectors such as eyeline, facial expression, and gestures. The participants in the image are not staring at the viewer; rather, they are staring at themselves and are focused with glaring aggression. The image is taken from a medium long shot, which makes the image visible to the readers from the toes upwards. This is to show a formal relationship of the viewers to the represented participants. The participants in this image are in front of an Automated Teller Machine (ATM) and are all struggling, pulling and pushing one another. They are all struggling to use the ATM to withdraw money all at the same time, which in turn has led to the unusual and unnecessary turtle neck that is in play in the image. This can be traced to the naira scarcity, which is a result of the naira redesign policy yet to be successfully implemented by the CBN. And as it is with Nigerians, patience is always absent where there is a group of people clamouring for something. There are usually fights, pushing and a lot of strength tussles leading to fights and protests. The social vices present in this image are improper planning on the side of the government, a lack of consideration and a need for timely and appropriate intervention.

**Datum 4: Nigerian *Ekuru* hawker accepting transfer**



### Background resources

The backdrop of this datum is the current difficulty that has arisen from the Naira Redesign policy made by the Central Bank of Nigeria. This policy, as described by the Central Bank of Nigeria, is borne out of the fact that there is a large volume of banknotes amassing among the masses, which has led to a shortage of clean and fit banknotes. According to the CBN, only three of the current eight monies will be redesigned - ₦200, ₦500 and ₦1000 banknotes. The president of Nigeria, Muhammadu Buhari, however launched the new naira banknotes on November 23, 2022 and affirmed that the current notes would flow side by side with the redesigned notes till January 31, 2023 when the current notes would be removed from distribution and would cease to be a legal tender in the country. This decision, however, due to the lack of fundamental technical know-how from the CBN and the Federal government of Nigeria, has escalated into a national melee as the new notes are not fully in circulation, and the old notes have now ceased to be legal tender. The scarcity of the new notes in the eventuality has affected business events in markets, restaurants, banks and major sales outlets in Nigeria. In the extreme, small day-to-day businesses are also affected adversely by the scarcity of cash. As it's

shown in the image, to purchase the smallest of things, there is no cash, and people have to resort to online transfer of cash rather than waiting for the cash that no one has at the moment. Beyond the comic nature of the image, it is a vivid representation of bad and inadequate consideration of the majority (people) by the minority (government).

### Foreground resources

The representational meta-function here is several items used to represent the business of selling *Ekuru*, which is attributed to Nigerians, particularly the Yoruba people. There is a pot filled with soup, egg and meat, placed inside a bucket. The bucket is also placed inside a big pot, and the big pot is also inside another bucket. Attached to the pot is a paper that has the bank account details of the person selling the item. The image is taken from a medium long shot, which makes the image visible to the readers from the bottom to the top. This is also to show a formal relationship of the viewers to the represented business. However, the picture can be considered comic because it is unusual for a business like this to have the option of collecting transfer as a mode of payment. This is, however, due to the prevailing issue of naira scarcity currently affecting businesses in the country.

Datum 5: Nigerians struggle to beat the deadline



## Background Resources

The above datum is obtained from a pocket cartoon; this image is analysed using Kress and van Leeuwen, social semiotic theory. The image displays only one participant, which makes the datum non-transactional. The represented participant is a cartoon drawing of the Governor of the Central Bank of Nigeria, Emefiele. The process in this image is an action process because it depicts the participant announcing with a gong labelled CBN. Due to the absence of eye contact, the image offers information to the viewers that there is new naira and a new date when the new old naira won't be used anymore and informs the people that THE KING won't change his mind on this date anymore. There is no gaze from the represented participant to the viewers.

The textual information in the image is "CBN extends deadline for old naira notes to Feb 10 - news" informs the viewers that different news broadcasting has reported that the CBN has extended the date for old naira notes and thereby displayed the textual information from the represented participant "The king has magnanimously given you knew notes and a new date. Cry, wail, beg, lobby and whine. He won't change his mind" this information tells that the new date is final and no amount of begging, crying, wailing and whining will change the mind of "the king". The context of this image is that CBN redesigned naira and wants it to replace the old naira which has been given an ultimatum so Nigerians should ensure that they do not have old naira notes before the set date because after this date, old naira won't be accepted anywhere in the country as a means for transaction. Colour is used in the presentation of the image, and the image is presented in black and white to create a special effect on the viewers. Attention of viewers is drawn to this meme due to its use of colour, the tonal value and the size.

## Findings

This paper has analysed four memes on the Naira redesigned in Nigeria and has revealed that linguistic and non-linguistic resources are like two Siamese twins that cannot be separated. They co-exist with one another in such a way that linguistic resources, which are the textual

component of the memes, provide the viewer with the ideals through which they can build on for a better understanding of the meaning of other non-linguistic resources captured in the selected memes. Examples of linguistic semiotic resources that help in understanding the entire intended message are seen in Figures 1 and 2, where the textual information is presented at the top of the memes so as to communicate what is embedded in the image. In Figure 1, the linguistic resource is used to communicate the meaning idea in the datum, while the non-linguistic resource is meant to communicate what is embedded in the linguistic resource.

The paper also revealed that semiotic resources are used in the memes to communicate an idea to the viewers through the use of colour, text and image. Colour is used to communicate an idea in datum 3, where a crowd of people at an ATM stand, specifically Guaranty Trust Bank (GTB), are involved in a fistfight. The choice of colour has made us recognise that bank that is known for this type of colour. Also, in Figure 1, black and white is used to align with the form of communication to present the gong in the image. Black and white is termed as an old colour, and Gong is an old form of communication too, so colour is used to match the style employed in the meme.

## Conclusion

This paper has shown that visible images and linguistic tools are rich in meaning and can be easily interpreted and understood. Memes are used as tools to inform, entertain, satirise and educate people. Moreover, this paper perceives Semiotics as a linguistic field that reveals hidden meaning in text; most time, the meanings are powerful. Semiotics in this paper has been used as an approach that captures the modes of communication used in memes, which serve as a form of awareness to people. The paper has also been able to show possible interpretations attached to each selected meme, especially the non-linguistic resource of each, which has been made unrevealed to the viewers, that is, memes are a medium through which important messages are being passed to the people in the society. As observed in the analysis, each of the memes has a

different message to inform the viewers, and all are achieved through a combination of different

modes in meaning making.

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## IMPOLITENESS AND FACE THREATENING ACTS IN THE U.S PRESIDENTIAL DEBATE BETWEEN DONALD TRUMP AND KAMALA HARRIS

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### Abstract

The paper examines a pragmatic analysis of impoliteness and Face-Threatening Acts (FTAs) in the high-stakes context of U.S. presidential debates. Focusing on the September 2024 presidential debate between Donald Trump and Kamala Harris, the paper adopted Culpeper's (1996, 2011) framework of Impoliteness with Halliday's Systemic Functional Linguistics (SFL). The paper selected twelve excerpts (12) to deconstruct how grammatical choices engineer pragmatic effects. The findings reveal that both candidates frequently engaged in face-threatening behavior, but with distinct stylistic patterns rooted in their grammatical choices. Donald Trump's rhetoric was characterized by high-modality declarative clauses. In contrast, Kamala Harris predominantly employed Material and Causative Processes to cast Trump as the sole Actor responsible for national outcomes while her strategic use of Verbal Processes to report third-party criticism and the imperative mood functioned to perform a persona of moral and factual accountability. The study concludes that impoliteness in this context is a calculated, strategic tool, where the specific grammatical structures chosen by candidates are central to constructing political personas, delegitimizing opponents, and shaping the debate's narrative for the voting public.

**Keywords:** Impoliteness, Face-Threatening Acts (FTAs), Systemic Functional Linguistics (SFL), Pragmatics, MOOD, Transitivity, Political Discourse, Presidential Debates, Donald Trump, Kamala Harris.

### Introduction

Political debates are not just about politics but also about the language candidates use to establish dominance, project confidence, and undermine their opponents. Impoliteness, as a deliberate linguistic strategy, plays a critical role in disrupting harmony and asserting power. For instance, when a speaker uses sharp language to challenge an opponent's credibility, it can shift the audience's perception and frame the narrative of the debate. This research focuses on analyzing key terms such as impoliteness, political discourse, and face-threatening acts to uncover how these elements influence political outcomes. Impoliteness, in particular, involves strategies that intentionally threaten the "face" or public image of others, which is crucial in high-stakes debates. Similarly, political discourse involves the intentional use of language to sway public opinion, emphasizing the importance of framing, tone, and

delivery. This is where pragmatics comes in to offer the lens to analyze these subtle but impactful language choices.

Pragmatics is crucial in understanding how language creates or reduces tension. It considers factors like tone, context, and the relationship between speakers to determine the true meaning of an exchange. In political debates, where every word and gesture are scrutinized, pragmatics provides valuable insights into how candidates communicate power, defend themselves, or attack their opponents. It allows us to see beyond the words to understand the strategies at play. Pragmatics is a branch of linguistics that focuses on how context shapes the meaning of language. Unlike syntax, which concerns sentence structure, or semantics, which deals with literal meanings, pragmatics examines how the situation in which language is used influences what we say and how it is understood.

According to Fromkin and Rodman (1978), pragmatics studies language use in context and the role of social factors in shaping communication. Finch (2000) further elaborates that pragmatics is concerned with the unspoken aspects of communication—the things implied rather than directly expressed. For instance, in a heated debate, if a candidate says, "I think we need to move forward," they might not just be suggesting progress; they could also be implying that their opponent is stuck in the past or obstructing progress. This aspect of pragmatics is crucial for understanding how language is used strategically in adversarial contexts. In high-stakes scenarios such as presidential debates, language becomes a tool for power, persuasion, and provocation, which is particularly evident in how impoliteness and Face-Threatening Acts are used to challenge opponents and sway public perception. In the U.S. Presidential Debate between Donald Trump and Kamala Harris, language was not just a medium of communication but a battlefield for dominance. The deliberate use of impoliteness, executed through specific grammatical and lexical choices, framed arguments, shaped narratives, and influenced how each candidate was perceived by the audience. This study focuses on these linguistic strategies, integrating the pragmatic framework of Impoliteness Theory with the grammatical tools of Systemic Functional Linguistics (SFL) to examine how these choices disrupted harmony, asserted control, and ultimately shaped the outcomes of their political interaction. This duality is particularly evident in political contexts, where language becomes a strategic tool to assert power and influence public opinion. In this light, the study of impoliteness and face-threatening acts in U.S. Presidential Debates between Donald Trump and Kamala Harris becomes essential.

### **Linguistic Study of Metaphors and Impoliteness**

Impoliteness is an utterance or a behavior when it comes to gathering in the other community. Impoliteness is an utterance that produce disharmony between individuals and other people in social interactions. It means impoliteness is an utterance that causes a

disharmony relationship between individuals. Locher and Bousfield claim that impoliteness is a behavior that is face-aggravating in a particular context (Locher & Bousfield, 2008). According to Terkourafi, "impoliteness occurs when the expression used is not conventionalized relative to the context of occurrence (Terkourafi, 2008, p. 70). Bousfield(2008) and Culpeper (2005) argued that speakers' intention and hearers' recognition of these intentions are both main factors in determining impoliteness, whereas, Terkourafi (2008) claimed that an utterance can be impolite even if the speaker's intention was not to be polite, but the hearer perceived it as such. Since language is a means of communication, the use of language is bounded by social norms in society. People use language in the society in order to keep good social interactions with others. Maintaining interpersonal relationship is important and in other to keep the harmony with other members in the society people need to follow the social norms by performing good attitude or behave politely. There are other times in which people use linguistic strategies to attack face. According to Culpeper, they do not indicate their polite acts because they want to attack other people's identities or rights (Culpeper, 2010, as cited in Ratri & Ardi, 2009).

Even though politeness is an important aspect of social interaction, the opposite phenomenon impoliteness is inevitable and highly salient in the public life and is as important as politeness in pragmatic literature. Verschueren (1999) claims that politeness should not be treated as center of social interaction, nevertheless impoliteness may be functional as politeness in interaction. Culpeper (2011, p.23) says:

"impoliteness as a negative attitude towards specific behaviors occurring in specific contexts. Compared to politeness that has been discovered for years, impoliteness has been explored quite recently, because it has been ignored and considered as an offensive linguistic behavior."

(Culpeper, 1996)

Concisely, the reason behind the recent interest in impoliteness was the inability of politeness approaches to explain fully the confrontational

interaction in impolite discourse. It is sustained by expectations, desires and disbeliefs about social organization including in particular how one person's or a group's identities are mediated by others interaction. Situated behaviors are viewed negatively or considered impolite when they conflict with how one expects them to be, how one wants them to be or how one thinks they ought to be. Such behavior is presumed to have emotional consequences for at least one participant, that is, they cause or are presumed to cause offence. Various factors can exacerbate how offensive an impolite behavior is taken to be including whether one understands a behavior to be strongly intentional or not". He also defines impoliteness as a communicative strategy designed to attack face and thereby cause social conflict and disharmony Culpeper et al (2003). Impoliteness comes when the speaker communicates face-attack intentionally or the hearer perceives and or construct behavior as intentionally face-attacking. Verbal impoliteness is a linguistic behavior assessed by the hearer as threatening her or his face or social identity and infringing the norms of appropriate behavior that prevail in particular contexts and among particular interlocutors whether intentionally or not.

Impoliteness phenomena do not only occur in daily interactions, but also occur in the dialogues found in various media such as movies books, novels, speeches, TV shows, political debate etc. also impoliteness connects aspects of identity, social context and linguistic forms. According to Locher and Bousfield (2008, p.3) impoliteness is a behavior that is face-aggravating in a particular context. Impoliteness is a negative attitude towards specific behaviors that occur in specific contexts. Brown and Levinson's model of politeness (1987) paved the way for linguists to explore the phenomenon of impoliteness. Linguists Culpeper, Bousfield and Eelen have studied the communicative situation in which the purpose of the speaker is to damage a hearer's face rather than softening face threatening acts as in politeness (Mohammed & Abbas, 2016). Thanks to Culpeper's article "Towards an Anatomy of Impoliteness", the notion of impoliteness can be approached from different disciplines, it is

grounded in linguistic pragmatics. Generally speaking, pragmatics is the study of language in use. The modern concept of pragmatics was first introduced by the philosopher, Charles Morris, in 1938. He stated that the pragmatics is the branch of semiotics which studies the origin, the uses and the effects of signs. Pragmatics includes the study of deixis, presupposition, speech acts, implicative, cooperative principle, politeness and impoliteness (Mohammed & Abbas, 2016). According to Yule (1996), pragmatics is the study about the speaker intention and it is the study of contextual meaning. He also stated that pragmatics is a branch of linguistics that study and deals with how meaning communicated by speakers or writers and how it is interpreted by listeners or readers (Eriek, 2015, p.3).

In spite of the fact that the present study deals with the theory of impoliteness and impoliteness strategies, before defining this concept we start with defining its opposite phenomenon politeness briefly as the impoliteness theories have been developed based on the politeness. The concept of politeness was first introduced by Brown and Levinson. Brown and Levinson's theory (1987) is based on Goffman's face notion and Grice's maxims, they state that attempts to protect the face of the addressee in polite and any behavior that attacks the face of the addressee is impolite (Aydinoglu 2013, p. 473). Before discussing and analyzing Culpeper's model of impoliteness and impoliteness strategies the concept of "face" needed some explanations and definitions.

During an interaction every individual presents an image of self (face) which is intended to be internally consistent and supported by the other participants' judgement. According to Goffman (1959), self-presentation composes one of the most important elements of communicative behavior, which is aimed at establishing and maintaining an image of the individual in the mind of the others. The result of self-presentation activity is self-image (face). Face was originally proposed by Goffman in the 1960's and later Brown and Levinson (1987) utilized it for their face-saving theory which is regarded as the most well-known politeness theory. Brown and

Levinson distinguished two aspects of face: negative face and positive face. Positive face represents person's desire to be liked, appreciated and approved by others. Negative face represents person's desires to be independent and not to be imposed on. A face-threatening act is a speech that can damage hearer's positive or negative face. In other words, face-threatening act is a verbal or non-verbal act against hearer's negative face, as the hearer will be impeded by the speaker to do what the speaker wants rather than what he/she wants (Mohammed & Abbas, 2015). Face is the main reason for impoliteness. As mentioned by culpeper's (1996), impoliteness happens when there is an imbalance of power between participants, also when it is not in the participant's interest to maintain the other face. In close relationship impoliteness is quite complex.

### **Political Language and Communication**

Politics is fundamentally about power—the ability to make decisions, influence people's thoughts and behaviors, and shape societal values. One of the most powerful tools in achieving this is language, as it has the capacity to shape public opinion and drive political agendas. Rozina and Karapetjana (2009, p.113) describe language as "the universal capacity of humans in all societies to communicate," while defining politics as "the art of governance." This shows how intertwined the two are. Chilton and Schaffner (2002, p.5) go further by explaining politics as a struggle for power between those who want to maintain control and those who seek to challenge it. In this struggle, language becomes an essential tool. Obeng (1997, p.83) argues that politicians use language as a means of manipulation, shaping narratives to serve their interests. Fairclough (2000, p.85) describes political language as the "lifeblood" of politicians because communication is what connects society, keeping it functional and organized. Orwell (1946, p.139) takes a more cynical view, stating that political language is designed "to make lies sound truthful and murder respectable, and to give an appearance of solidity to pure wind." In other words, politicians often use language to obscure reality rather than reveal it.

Chilton (2008, p.226) defines political discourse as the use of language to conduct the

business of politics—whether through persuasion, euphemisms, emotional appeals, or rhetorical devices like alliteration and rhetorical questions. Political speechwriters craft powerful messages that shape public perception and control narratives. The connection between language and politics is undeniable. As Schaffer (1996) points out, human life is deeply political, and every political action is prepared, carried out, and influenced through communication. Understanding the language of politics, as Beard (2000) emphasizes, is key to recognizing how those in power gain, exercise, and maintain their influence. Political speeches are not just words—they are strategic tools used to announce policies, persuade the public, and solidify authority. In essence, a politician's career depends heavily on the ability to use language effectively.

Lakoff (1990, p.7) captures the deep connection between language and politics, stating that "language is politics, politics assigns power, and power governs how people talk and how they are understood." In other words, language is not just a tool in politics—it is politics itself. Political manipulation relies heavily on language because it is through words that power is established, reinforced, and challenged. Language does not just convey power; it determines who holds power, how it is exercised, and how it is perceived. Lakoff further explains that political communication operates within a linguistic power game, where what is left unsaid is often more powerful than what is spoken. Politicians strategically choose their words to shape public perception, mask intentions, and guide interpretations. Language allows them to frame narratives, control debates, and present their agendas in ways that serve their interests. In this sense, language is the vehicle that drives politics forward.

Opeibi (2009) supports this view, emphasizing that language is the primary channel through which politicians express their manifestos, communicate political ideologies, and translate them into social action. It is through language that candidates persuade, mobilize, and gain support from the electorate. Political discourse is, therefore, not just about informing people—it is about influencing them. The power of persuasion

in politics depends not only on what is said but also on how it is said. Akinkukrolere (2011) highlights this further, arguing that the success of a political campaign, policy, or movement is closely tied to both the message itself and the way it is delivered. Politicians understand that people are drawn not just to ideas but to how those ideas are communicated. This is why rhetoric, tone, and strategic phrasing play such a crucial role in political discourse. Ultimately, language in politics is an instrument of both offense and defense. It can be used to attack opponents, counter criticisms, rally supporters, and shape national conversations. Whether through speeches, debates, propaganda, or media interviews, politicians wield language as a weapon, a shield, and a bridge to power.

### **Impoliteness in Political Speeches**

Political discourse is often centered on power struggles and the exercise of authority (Newman, 2004). Politicians use language as a tool to assert dominance, whether over their peers, subordinates, or those they see as disloyal. While they may use polite language to maintain their public image and that of their supporters, they also resort to verbal attacks to undermine opponents. Verbal attacks occur when a speaker uses words that put the listener in a difficult position, often to gain an advantage. The listener may see such language as unfair or offensive. These attacks can take many forms, including insults, threats to reputation, shaming, sarcasm, public humiliation, dismissive remarks, criticism of appearance, the use of offensive words, name-calling, or comparing someone to an animal. Politicians use these tactics to intimidate, manipulate, or pressure their opponents. In political debates, verbal abuse is often fueled by anger and takes the form of harsh, degrading, or offensive language meant to hurt the target. Sometimes, it is disguised in polite or seemingly pleasant speech, but the goal remains the same—to damage the opponent's reputation. Culpeper (2011) refers to this kind of disguised hostility as a "mock politeness strategy."

Bousfield and Locher (2008, p.3) describe impoliteness as "behavior that is face-aggravating in a particular context." In politics, impoliteness is often used as a strategy to offend, undermine, or

damage an opponent's reputation, and it is usually recognized as such by the audience. Holmes et al. (2008, p.198) define verbal impoliteness as language that threatens a person's social identity or violates expected norms, whether intentional or not. However, it can sometimes be challenging to determine whether a speaker intends to be impolite, as listeners may perceive an utterance as offensive even when no harm was meant.

Culpeper et al. (2003, p.1552) note that while intentions are central to speech act theory, they are not always clear because "interlocutors do not wear their intentions on their sleeves." This makes it difficult to judge whether impoliteness is deliberate or simply perceived. Culpeper (1996, p.354) also observes that impoliteness is more common in situations where there is a power imbalance. A dominant speaker has more freedom to be impolite, as they can limit the ability of a weaker participant to respond—such as by denying them the chance to speak or threatening further consequences if they retaliate. This explains why impoliteness is widespread in politics, where those in power can freely attack their subordinates without fear of immediate repercussions. However, impoliteness is not limited to situations of power imbalance. It also occurs between political opponents of equal status, especially when neither is willing to maintain a respectful tone. In such cases, politicians often respond to attacks with equally harsh language to defend their public image.

### **Research Methodology**

The paper is a qualitative analysis of impoliteness in the U.S. presidential debate, focusing on interactions between Donald Trump and Kamala Harris. Through the examination of the debate transcript, the research aims to identify and interpret instances of impoliteness, understanding their pragmatic functions within political discourse.

The analysis employs a dual theoretical approach to achieve both pragmatic interpretation and micro-linguistic rigor. The primary pragmatic framework is Jonathan Culpeper's (1996, 2011) theory of Impoliteness, which facilitates the identification and categorization of impolite utterances. To provide a grammatical foundation

for this analysis, the study incorporates key concepts from Halliday's Systemic Functional Linguistics (SFL). Specifically, the analysis focuses on the MOOD system, to examine how clauses are structured as exchanges (e.g., declaratives, imperatives), and the Transitivity system, to analyze how speakers represent reality by assigning roles to participants (e.g., Actor, Goal). This SFL analysis serves to deconstruct the grammatical choices that underpin the pragmatic functions of Face-Threatening Acts (FTAs), as conceptualized by Brown and Levinson (1987). Data collection involves selecting twelve specific debate excerpts where Trump and Harris engage directly, with six (6) from each speaker to ensure a balanced analysis. The selection criteria include exchanges that demonstrate clear instances of impoliteness, face-threats, or those that garnered significant media attention, indicating the potential impact of the language used.

### Theoretical Framework

This study employs an integrated theoretical framework that combines a pragmatic theory of social interaction with a linguistic theory of grammatical choice. The primary frameworks are Culpeper's (1996, 2011) Theory of Impoliteness, which explains the social function of face-attacking language, and Halliday's Systemic Functional Linguistics (SFL), which provides the tools to analyze the grammatical structures that realize these functions.

### Culpeper's Theory of Impoliteness and Face-Threatening Acts

This study is grounded in the concept of "face," as originally proposed by Goffman (1967) and famously developed by Brown and Levinson (1987). "Face" refers to the public self-image that every individual wants to claim for themselves. Brown and Levinson distinguish between positive face (the desire to be liked, approved of, and seen as a competent member of a group) and negative face (the desire for autonomy and freedom from

imposition). A Face-Threatening Act (FTA) is any utterance that runs contrary to these desires.

### Systemic Functional Linguistics (SFL)

To understand how impoliteness is grammatically constructed, this study incorporates tools from Halliday's Systemic Functional Linguistics. SFL views language as a resource for making meaning and connects grammatical choices to their social functions. This study utilizes two key SFL systems that operate at the clause level:

**The MOOD System:** This system is part of the interpersonal metafunction and is concerned with the clause as an exchange. It analyzes how speakers enact social relationships by choosing a speech role, such as giving information (declarative), demanding information (interrogative), or demanding action (imperative). The MOOD element, consisting of the Subject and the Finite (the verb operator), determines this function. Analyzing the MOOD structure reveals how speakers position themselves and their propositions—for example, presenting a harsh accusation as an objective, factual declarative is a powerful impoliteness tactic.

**The Transitivity System:** This system is part of the ideational metafunction and is concerned with the clause as a representation of experience. It analyzes how speakers represent "who does what to whom" by choosing different process types (e.g., Material, Mental, Relational), assigning roles to Participants (e.g., Actor, Goal, Senser), and adding Circumstances (e.g., of time, place, cause). Analyzing transitivity reveals how speakers construct reality to serve their rhetorical goals—for instance, casting an opponent as the sole Actor in a negative Material Process assigns them direct blame.

By integrating SFL with Impoliteness Theory, this study can conduct a more robust analysis, moving from identifying an impolite act to explaining the precise grammatical machinery that brings it to life.

### Data Presentation and Analysis

The analyses present and highlight the data collected from the U.S. presidential debate between Donald Trump and Kamala Harris. The transcripts, sourced from official debate records, form the basis of analysis. The data is categorized into two distinct groups to facilitate a clear, comparative analysis:

- **Excerpt A** focuses on the analysis of impoliteness strategies in Donald Trump's debate responses.
- **Excerpt B** examines Kamala Harris's debate responses, identifying the impoliteness strategies she employs.

Below is the pragmatic analysis of selected excerpts from the debate.

### EXCERPT 1

- **Context:** Responding to Harris's claim about a "Trump sales tax."
- **Quote:** "That's an incorrect statement. She knows that."
- **Analysis**

This utterance consists of two clauses structured in the declarative mood, a grammatical choice that presents the propositions as objective statements of fact, thereby maximizing their force as Face-Threatening Acts (FTAs). From an SFL perspective, the first clause, "That's an incorrect statement," has the MOOD structure of Subject ('That') followed by the Finite ('is'). Its Transitivity uses a Relational Process (attributive) to assign a negative quality (*Attribute*: "an incorrect statement") to Harris's utterance (*Carrier*: "That"). This initial move attacks the 'competence' aspect of her positive face by framing her claim as factually wrong. The second clause, "She knows that," is where the impoliteness escalates dramatically. It also follows the declarative Subject ('She') ^ Finite ('knows') structure, but its Transitivity shifts to a Mental Process of cognition ('knows'), positioning Harris as the *Senser* who possesses, but has ignored, the truth. The modality in both clauses is high and unequivocal, presenting these claims as absolute certainties.

Pragmatically, this grammatical shift from a relational claim of error to a mental claim of intent is crucial. It transforms the FTA from a simple disagreement into a direct assault on her character. This constitutes a severe form of positive impoliteness through the strategy of *accusing the other of being untruthful*. The strategic function is therefore not merely to correct a factual error, but to fundamentally disqualify Harris as a credible debater. By grammatically framing her statement as a factual error and her intention as a knowing deception, Trump attempts to poison the well, suggesting to the audience that she cannot be trusted and that her arguments are rooted in malicious intent.

### EXCERPT 2

- **Context:** Responding to Harris's mention of Project 2025.
- **Quote:** "Number one, I have nothing to do, as you know and as she knows better than anyone, I have nothing to do with Project 2025."
- **Analysis:**

This utterance is structured around a central declarative clause, "I have nothing to do with Project 2025," which is reinforced by embedded clauses that perform the primary Face-Threatening Act (FTA).

The SFL analysis of the main clause shows a Relational Process of possession ('have'), with the Subject ('I') ^ Finite ('have') structure establishing a factual denial. The key FTA, however, lies in the embedded clauses: "...as you know" and "...as she knows better than anyone." These are Mental Processes of cognition ('knows'), positioning the moderator ('you') and Harris ('she') as the *Senser* of this "truth." The high modality and the intensifier "better than anyone" grammatically assert that Harris possesses absolute certainty about his non-involvement.

Pragmatically, this utterance performs an FTA against Harris's positive face, specifically her want to be seen as honest and well-intentioned. By stating that she "knows" he is not involved, Trump is not just disagreeing with her but is implying that her decision to mention Project 2025 is an act of deliberate, bad-faith misdirection. This is a clear use of positive impoliteness via the strategy of *accusing the other of being disingenuous*. The strategic function is twofold: it allows him to issue a

strong public denial while simultaneously pivoting to an attack on his opponent's character, framing her as a cynical political operator who knowingly uses false associations to attack him.

### EXCERPT 3

- **Context:** Responding to Harris citing economic analyses critical of his plan.
- **Quote:** "That's just a sound bite. They gave her that to say."
- **Analysis:**

This two-clause response, both in the declarative mood, functions to systematically dismantle the credibility of both Harris's argument and her personal agency. The SFL analysis shows a progression of attack. The first clause, "That's just a sound bite," uses a Relational Process (attributive) with a Subject ('That') ^ Finite ('is') structure. It assigns a dismissive *Attribute* ('just a sound bite') to her point, framing it as superficial. The second clause, "They gave her that to say," shifts to a Material Process of transfer ('gave'). Here, the Subject is an undefined 'They' (implying handlers or strategists) as the powerful *Actor*. Harris ('her') is positioned as the passive *Recipient* of the words, and 'that' (the sound bite) is the *Goal* being transferred. This grammatical construction is pragmatically potent. It constitutes two distinct FTAs against Harris's positive face. The first FTA attacks the substance of her argument, while the second, more severe FTA attacks her authenticity and intellectual independence. This is positive impoliteness using the strategies of *belittling the other's contribution* and *questioning the other's sincerity and agency*. The strategic function is to completely devalue her point by suggesting it is not a product of her own intellect but rather a pre-packaged, hollow line fed to her by others, thereby undermining her authority and presenting her as a puppet.

### EXCERPT 4

- **Context:** Continuing his response to Harris's economic arguments.
- **Quote:** "...she doesn't have a plan. She copied Biden's plan. And it's like four sentences, like run-Spot-run."
- **Analysis:**

This sequence of three declarative statements is engineered to systematically dismantle Harris's positive face by presenting a cascade of attacks as undeniable facts. The SFL analysis reveals the escalating nature of the attack. The first clause, "she doesn't have a plan," has the MOOD structure of Subject ('she') ^ Finite ('does' + 'n't'). The negative polarity in the Finite is key. In terms of Transitivity, it's a Relational Process negating a key attribute ('a plan') for the *Carrier* ('she'), attacking her competence. The second clause, "She copied Biden's plan," again uses a declarative Subject ('She') ^ Finite ('-ed' past tense) structure, but shifts to a Material Process ('copied'), grammatically casting Harris as the *Actor* who performs an act of intellectual theft on the *Goal* ("Biden's plan"), attacking her originality. The final clause, "it's like... run-Spot-run," uses the declarative Subject ('it') ^ Finite ('is') in another Relational Process to equate her plan (*Carrier*: 'it') with a childish text (*Attribute*), attacking her intelligence.

This consistent use of the declarative mood is pragmatically significant, as it allows Trump to stack three distinct FTAs as a series of objective truths. This is a multi-layered use of positive impoliteness, employing strategies of *criticism*, *challenging originality*, and severe *ridicule*. The strategic function is to construct a comprehensive image of Harris as a fundamentally unserious and intellectually unqualified candidate, with the progression from "no plan" to "copied plan" to "childish plan" creating a narrative of escalating incompetence.

### EXCERPT 5

- **Context:** Describing the state of the economy under the current administration.
- **Quote:** "People can't go out and buy cereal bacon or eggs or anything else. These the people of our country are absolutely dying with what they've done."

- **Analysis:**

This utterance uses two declarative clauses to construct an emotionally charged narrative that functions as an indirect but powerful Face-Threatening Act (FTA). The SFL analysis of the second clause is most revealing. In "These... people... are absolutely dying with what they've done," the main process is a Material Process ('dying') where 'people' are the affected *Actor*. The crucial element is the Circumstance of Cause: "with what they've done." This grammatical structure explicitly links the suffering of the people to the actions of "they" (the current administration). The modality is intensified to an extreme degree with the adverb "absolutely," presenting the situation as dire and unequivocal.

Pragmatically, this is an indirect FTA against the positive face of Harris, as the representative of the administration being blamed. It uses the positive impoliteness strategy of *criticizing the other's group or associates* by attributing immense harm to their actions. The strategic function is to evoke a sense of crisis, fear, and economic pain in the audience and to channel that emotion into resentment towards his opponent. By grammatically connecting "dying" people to "what they've done," he constructs a simple and potent narrative of cause and effect designed to undermine Harris's credibility on the economy.

#### EXCERPT 6

- **Context:** Criticizing Harris's policy positions and alleged shifts.
- **Quote:** "I don't say her because she has no policy. Everything that she believed three years ago and four years ago is out the window."
- **Analysis:**

This utterance consists of two declarative clauses that perform distinct but related Face-Threatening Acts (FTAs) against Harris's positive face, attacking both her substance and her integrity. The SFL analysis of the first clause, "she has no policy," reveals a Relational Process of possession. The MOOD structure is Subject ('she') ^ Finite ('has'), but the proposition is negated ("no policy"). This grammatically presents a void, an absence of a key attribute for a political leader. The second clause, "Everything... is out the window," is also a Relational Process, with 'Everything that she believed...' as the Subject / *Carrier* and 'is' as the Finite. The attribute "out the window" is a metaphorical idiom for being discarded or abandoned. The modality is high and absolute ("Everything... is"), leaving no room for nuance.

Pragmatically, these grammatical choices deliver a two-pronged attack. The first FTA attacks her competence by claiming a complete lack of policy substance. The second FTA attacks her political conviction and integrity, suggesting she is unprincipled, opportunistic, and that her beliefs are disposable. This is a powerful combination of positive impoliteness strategies: *criticizing the other for a lack of substance* and *challenging the other's consistency and principles*. The strategic function is to construct an image of Harris as a hollow and unreliable political figure, one who not only lacks plans for the future but also has no stable connection to her past beliefs.

#### EXCERPT 7

- **Context:** Continuing his critique of Harris's policy shifts with a taunt.
- **Quote:** "In fact, I was going to send her a MAGA hat. She's gone to my philosophy."
- **Analysis:**

This utterance uses two declarative clauses to perform a taunting and dismissive Face-Threatening Act (FTA) aimed at Harris's political identity and autonomy. From an SFL perspective, the first clause, "I was going to send her a MAGA hat," is a Material Process of transfer ('send'), with Subject ('I') ^ Finite ('was'). While the action is hypothetical ("was going to"), its symbolic meaning is potent. The second clause, "She's gone to my philosophy," is a Material Process of movement ('gone'), with Subject ('She') ^ Finite ('is'). This grammatically depicts her as an *Actor* who has moved towards his ideology (*Circumstance of Location*: "to my philosophy").

The high modality of the contraction ('She's') presents this as a completed action. Pragmatically, these clauses constitute a significant FTA against Harris's positive face. The act of "sending her a MAGA hat" functions as a form of mockery, a positive impoliteness strategy intended to ridicule her by suggesting she has effectively joined his political movement. The subsequent claim that "She's gone to my philosophy" is an FTA that attacks her originality and ideological independence, framing her not as a leader with her own vision, but as a follower who has capitulated to his. The strategic function is to belittle Harris, portray her as ideologically weak and inconsistent, and simultaneously elevate his own political philosophy as the dominant force that others inevitably move towards.

#### EXCERPT 8

- **Context:** Making a strong accusation about Harris's political ideology.
- **Quote:** "She's a Marxist. Everybody knows she's a Marxist."
- **Analysis:**

These two declarative clauses perform an exceptionally strong FTA against the core of Harris's political identity, a central aspect of her positive face. The SFL analysis shows the first clause, "She's a Marxist," uses the declarative mood with Subject ('She')  $\wedge$  Finite ('is'). In terms of Transitivity, this is an intensive Relational Process that defines the *Carrier* ('She') by a highly contentious *Attribute* ('a Marxist'). This grammatical choice does not describe a temporary action but assigns a fixed, essential identity. The second clause, "Everybody knows she's a Marxist," also uses the declarative mood with Subject ('Everybody')  $\wedge$  Finite ('knows'). The Transitivity here is a Mental Process of cognition ('knows') with a universalized *Senser* ('Everybody'). This grammatically frames the contentious label not as an opinion but as a universally held cognition. The high, positive modality of the Finite verbs ('is', 'knows') presents these claims as absolute and certain.

Pragmatically, the choice of a high-modality declarative mood is crucial. By grammatically encoding this extreme accusation as a simple, objective fact, Trump closes down space for negotiation or nuance. He is not *offering an opinion* ('I think she is...'); he is *stating a reality*. This grammatical choice to present an attack as irrefutable information is what makes the FTA so potent. It functions as a powerful tool for positive impoliteness (name-calling) to ideologically 'other' her, placing her far outside the accepted political spectrum and evoking fear among moderate voters.

#### EXCERPT 9

- **Context:** Concluding a critique of the current administration's policies.
- **Quote:** "They have and she has destroyed our country with policy that's insane. Almost policy that you'd say they have to hate our country."
- **Analysis:**

This utterance, structured in the declarative mood, delivers a powerful, two-part Face-Threatening Act (FTA) that attacks not only competence but also patriotism. From an SFL perspective, the first part, "...she has destroyed our country," is a Material Process ('destroyed') with 'she' as the *Actor* and 'our country' as the *Goal*. This transitivity choice assigns her direct, active agency in a catastrophic action. The Circumstance of Means is "with policy that's insane," where 'insane' is a high-intensity negative attribute. The second part, "...you'd say they have to hate our country," shifts to a Verbal Process ('say') and then a Mental Process of emotion ('hate'). The use of the generic 'you' as the *Sayer* invites the audience to agree with this extreme conclusion. Pragmatically, this is a severe FTA against Harris's positive face. The first part attacks her competence with extreme hyperbole. The second part is a more profound attack on her character and motives. By suggesting that the only logical explanation for her policies is a "hatred" for the country, Trump employs the positive impoliteness strategy of *questioning the other's motives or loyalty*. The strategic

function is to escalate the critique from simple policy disagreement to a matter of national allegiance, framing his opponent not just as incompetent but as a potentially malicious, anti-American actor.

#### EXCERPT 10

- **Context:** Discussing abortion policy, referencing an alleged comment by a former governor.
- **Quote:** "He said the baby will be born and we will decide what to do with the baby. In other words, we'll execute the baby."
- **Analysis:**

This utterance uses a declarative structure to report a statement and then provide a shocking reinterpretation, functioning as a severe indirect Face-Threatening Act (FTA). The SFL analysis shows the first part uses a Verbal Process ('said') to attribute the quote to a third party ('He'). The second part, introduced by "In other words," signals a rephrasing. The clause "we'll execute the baby" is a Material Process ('execute') with the Subject ('we') ^ Finite ('will') structure. 'We' is used to represent Democrats, and 'execute' is a process word with profoundly negative and violent connotations, far removed from the original context of medical decisions. The high modality of 'will' presents this interpretation as a certain outcome.

Pragmatically, this reinterpretation is a severe FTA against the positive face of Democrats, and by extension Harris. It employs the positive impoliteness strategy of *associating the other (or their group) with a profoundly negative and taboo act* (infanticide). Even though Trump attributes the original words to someone else, he takes ownership of the brutal interpretation. The strategic function is to horrify the audience and create moral outrage, painting his political opponents as morally bankrupt extremists on a deeply emotional issue, thereby damaging Harris's image through her party affiliation.

#### EXCERPT 11

- **Context:** Continuing his discussion on abortion and Democratic positions.
- **Quote:** "Because they're radical. The Democrats are radical in that. And her vice presidential pick, which I think was a horrible pick... because he is really out of it."
- **Analysis:**

This utterance is a sequence of declarative clauses that performs a cascading Face-Threatening Act (FTA), moving from a general attack on the party to a specific attack on an individual associate. The SFL analysis of the first two clauses, "they're radical" and "The Democrats are radical," shows an intensive Relational Process. The Subject ('they' / 'The Democrats') ^ Finite ('are') structure assigns the negative *Attribute* ('radical') to the *Carrier*. The third clause attacks Harris's running mate. The main clause "which... was a horrible pick" is another Relational Process with Subject ('which') ^ Finite ('was'), assigning the *Attribute* "horrible pick". The final clause "he is really out of it" is a third Relational Process with Subject ('he') ^ Finite ('is'), assigning the belittling *Attribute* "really out of it," with "really" functioning as a high-intensity modal adjunct.

Pragmatically, this constitutes a multi-layered FTA against Harris's positive face. By first labeling her party as "radical," he uses the positive impoliteness strategy of *associating the other with a negative group*. He then attacks her judgment by disparaging her running mate, employing the strategy of *criticizing an associate*. The strategic function is to construct a narrative of extremism that encompasses not just Harris, but her entire political affiliation and her chosen team, thereby framing her as a central figure in a movement that is outside the political mainstream and led by incompetent individuals.

#### EXCERPT 12

- **Context:** Responding to Harris's claims about his stance on a national abortion ban.
- **Quote:** "Well, there she goes again. It's a lie. I'm not signing a ban."
- **Analysis:**

This utterance is a sequence of three short clauses, primarily in the **declarative mood**, that work

together to perform an aggressive and dismissive Face-Threatening Act (FTA). The SFL analysis reveals the structure of the attack. The first clause, "there she goes again," is a minor clause that functions pragmatically to frame Harris's actions as tiresomely repetitive. The second clause, "It's a lie," is a core part of the attack. It is a Relational Process with a Subject ('It') ^ Finite ('is') structure, assigning the negative *Attribute* ('a lie') to Harris's statement. This is a classic bald on record declarative statement with high modality. The final clause, "I'm not signing a ban," is a Material Process with Subject (I) ^ Finite ('am' + 'not'), where the negative polarity serves as a direct refutation.

Pragmatically, this is a severe attack on Harris's positive face, specifically her integrity. The opening dismissal combined with the blunt, unmitigated accusation "It's a lie" constitutes positive impoliteness through the strategy of *accusing the other of dishonesty*. The strategic function is to immediately and forcefully shut down her line of argument, project an image of indignant innocence, and undermine her trustworthiness in the eyes of the audience by framing her as a habitual liar.

## Findings

The analysis has revealed that both candidates used a range of impoliteness strategies, though their patterns of use were distinct. Donald Trump's discourse was heavily characterized by Positive Impoliteness and Bald on Record Impoliteness. Positive impoliteness strategies were frequently used to damage Harris's public self-image. For example, in excerpt 8, Trump employed the strategy of *name-calling* by labeling Harris a "Marxist." In excerpt 4, he used *ridicule* by comparing her economic plan to a childish text, "run-Spot-run." His dismissals in excerpt 3 ("That's just a sound bite. They gave her that to say") questioned her authenticity. Bald on record impoliteness was evident in his direct, unambiguous contradictions, such as in excerpt 12 where he bluntly stated, "It's a lie." Conversely, Kamala Harris primarily employed positive impoliteness by *associating Trump with negative aspects*.

Also, face-threatening acts (FTAs) were employed systematically by both candidates to undermine the opponent's public image, or "face." Donald Trump's FTAs were overwhelmingly aimed at Harris's positive face, specifically attacking her competence, character, and intelligence. For example, in excerpt 4, by repeatedly asserting "she doesn't have a plan" and "she copied Biden's plan," he directly threatened her image as a competent and original leader. Furthermore, in excerpt 1, by stating, "She knows that" after calling her statement incorrect, he performed an FTA that threatened her face as an

honest person, implying she was deliberately lying. Kamala Harris also focused her FTAs on Trump's positive face, but concentrated on his moral character and fitness for office. For example, in excerpt 4, she accused him of inciting violence ("incited a violent mob"), and in excerpt 5, she cited damning testimony from his own former staff who called him "dangerous and unfit." The Systemic Functional Linguistics (SFL) analysis reveals that the candidates' grammatical choices were engineered to perform specific pragmatic functions. The linguistic strategies of Donald Trump primarily served the pragmatic function of constructing a reality of absolute certainty and framing his opponent as illegitimate. His consistent use of the declarative mood with high modality was central to this. For example, in excerpt 8 ("She's a Marxist"), he used a Relational Process to assign a fixed, negative identity to Harris, presenting this contentious label as an objective fact rather than an opinion. Similarly, in excerpt 1, his use of a Mental Process ("She knows that") functioned to claim knowledge of her internal state, pragmatically framing her not merely as incorrect, but as intentionally deceitful. This combination of grammatical choices functions to disqualify Harris as a credible political actor.

The linguistic strategies of Kamala Harris, in contrast, served the pragmatic function of performing moral and factual accountability while framing her opponent as a direct threat. Her Transitivity choices were key to this. Kamala Harris consistently used Material Processes to cast

Trump as the sole *Actor* responsible for catastrophic national outcomes, a grammatical choice that functions to hold him directly accountable for his legacy. A key strategy was her use of Verbal Processes to report the speech of authoritative third parties. For instance, Finally, her strategic use of the imperative mood functions to directly confront and command, projecting strength and refusing to accept his framing of reality. Her SFL choices, therefore, allow her to perform aggressive FTAs while maintaining a persona of a measured, evidence-based prosecutor.

### Conclusion

This study examined a pragmatic analysis of impoliteness as well as face threatening acts in the selected debates of Donald Trump and Kamala

Haris. The paper sees political manipulation relies heavily on language because it is through words that power is established, reinforced, and challenged. Language does not just convey power; it determines who holds power, how it is exercised, and how it is perceived. Major political figures operate within a linguistic power game, where what is left unsaid is often more powerful than what is spoken. Politicians strategically choose their words to shape public perception, mask intentions, and guide interpretations. Language allows them to frame narratives, control debates, and present their agendas in ways that serve their interests. In this sense, language is the vehicle that drives politics forward.

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