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- publish high quality, peer-reviewed papers aimed at advancing research and teaching in language, literature and communication studies;
- promote current and up-to-date research methodology applicable for research in language, literature and communication studies; and
- provide space for Nigerians and L2 scholars to report their research and to contribute to critical debates in language, literature and communication studies

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Theory and Practice: Stress Usage among Postgraduate English Language Students

**Adenike Akinjobi
&
Kehinde Olujobi**

Abstract

Stress, a central feature of English prosody, functions as a marker of prominence, distinguishing words, conveying meaning, and organising rhythm in speech. In Standard British English (SBE), stress is realised through alternations of strong and weak syllables, influenced by factors such as vowel quality, pitch, and duration. However, this feature has been confirmed to be used idiosyncratically by Nigerian speakers of English. Given postgraduate students' extensive exposure to the English language and their advanced linguistic training, it was assumed that theoretical knowledge should be reflected in their performance. Therefore, this study investigated how theoretical knowledge, as reflected in the practical use of stress, was applied by selected postgraduate students of English at the University of Ibadan (UIPGSE). Fifty M.A. students were randomly selected as participants, given their academic background in phonology, which made them particularly suitable for the investigation. Six content words were elicited in natural speech contexts, and the participants' productions were recorded and analysed using descriptive statistics, including simple percentages and one-sample t-tests, as well as acoustic analysis with *Praat*. The results reveal a consistent deviation from SBE word stress norms. Out of an expected 300 SBE stress placements, only 122 (40.6%) were appropriately realised, while 178 (59.3%) aligned with the Nigerian English variant. These findings demonstrate that, even among Nigerian speakers with exposure to theoretical knowledge, accurate mastery of SBE word stress patterns remained limited, highlighting the challenges of achieving native-like stress application.

Key Words: Syllable, Word Stress, Pronunciation, Standard British English (SBE)

1. Introduction

Effective communication in spoken English is enhanced by accurate pronunciation and adherence to established phonological norms, which are essential for mutual intelligibility. Among the suprasegmental features of English, stress plays a central role in shaping rhythm, intonation, and prosodic

balance, thereby ensuring clarity in speech. Vowel reduction enables unstressed syllables to be pronounced more lightly, contributing to speech rhythm and preventing monotonous delivery. Together, stress placement (suprasegmental) and vowel reduction (segmental) enhance intelligibility and the natural flow of discourse, minimising the likelihood of misunderstanding in spoken interaction. Research has shown that Nigerian English (NE) exhibits notable divergences from Standard British English (SBE) in the realisation of suprasegmental features such as stress, intonation, and rhythm. These divergences are often attributed to the influence of over 400 indigenous Nigerian languages, giving rise to nativised varieties of English with distinct phonological patterns. The English language, owing to its historical evolution and global prominence, continues to attract sustained scholarly interest across various linguistic fields. Among its suprasegmental features, stress is significant, as it functions at the syllable, word, and sentence levels to influence rhythm, emphasis, and meaning in spoken communication. Correct stress placement not only serves a lexical role, for example, differentiating between 'record' (noun) and 'record' (verb), but also aids in the prosodic organisation of speech and the clear conveyance of communicative intent.

While native speakers usually acquire stress patterns unconsciously through natural exposure, the same cannot be assumed for non-native speakers, who often need explicit instruction and purposeful practice to master stress. This is particularly true in multilingual environments such as Nigeria, where the influence of indigenous language systems markedly shapes the phonological patterns of English speech. As a result, competence in word stress placement is widely regarded as essential for intelligibility, naturalness, and effective communication in spoken English.

Scholars such as Banjo (1971, 1996), Jowitt (1991) and Bamgbose (1995) have tried to classify these varieties along a continuum from strongly nativised to more standardised forms that resemble SBE. While such classifications acknowledge the validity of Nigerian English as a variety, they also emphasise ongoing difficulties in achieving consistency in stress placement and other prosodic features. This remains an important issue, especially in academic and professional settings where deviations from standard word stress patterns may impair intelligibility and communication effectiveness.

Despite the established pattern for Nigerian speakers of English (Kujore, 1985; Jowitt, 1991, 2022; Banjo 1996; Akinjobi, 2004; Akindele 2017), there is a need to examine how postgraduate students, who have acquired a significant level of

theoretical knowledge, apply this theoretical knowledge in the practical application of word stress to determine whether their theoretical knowledge aligns with the Standard British English stress norm.

Aim and Objectives of the Study

This study aims to examine patterns of word stress assignment in the spoken English of selected Master's degree students of English at the University of Ibadan, with a view to determining the extent to which their theoretical knowledge is reflected in their practical English word stress placement. Therefore, the objectives of this study are:

- i. to examine the extent to which the word stress patterns applied to English words by UIPGSE students conform to Standard British English norms in natural speech contexts;
- ii. to consider the extent to which their word stress patterns align with the established patterns for Nigerian English;
- iii. to evaluate the influence of prior theoretical knowledge on the students' ability to apply appropriate word stress in selected English words.

2. Literature Review

Syllables

A syllable plays an essential role in phonological organisation, articulation, and rhythmic patterning in a word (prosodic word and phonological word). A syllable is a unit of speech consisting of a centre that has little or no obstruction to airflow and that sounds comparatively loud; before and after this centre, there may be greater or lesser obstruction and less loud sound (Roach 2009). Das et al. (2009) note that a syllable minimally contains a vowel or vowel-like sound serving as its nucleus, around which consonants may occur as onset or coda. Thus, *red* constitutes one syllable, while *absent* comprises two, each built around its own vowel nucleus, and "a" in *available* is a syllable without any cluster of sounds. Early articulatory perspectives emphasised the physiological basis of the syllable. For instance, Stetson (1951) associated the syllable with a single chest pulse, linking its structure to respiratory activity. Pike (1947) similarly viewed the syllable as a product of a single chest pulse, grounding its definition in the biomechanics of speech. Abercrombie (1967) also expanded on this view by characterising the syllable as a muscular contraction followed by the release of air, thereby situating syllable formation within the broader context of articulatory and aerodynamic processes. Taken together, these perspectives demonstrate that the syllable is a linguistic unit that can be understood from both physiological and phonological standpoints, with each

approach contributing valuable insights into its structure, production, and role in speech organisation.

A key aspect of English syllable structure is the distinction between strong and weak syllables, which is central to English prosody. Strong syllables typically contain full vowels and often bear primary or secondary stress, whereas weak syllables commonly include reduced vowels such as schwa /ə/ and occur in unstressed positions (Roach, 2009). The alternation between strong and weak syllables forms the basis of the stress-timed rhythm traditionally associated with English. In stress-timed languages, the interval between stressed syllables tends to be perceived as relatively regular, irrespective of the number of unstressed syllables that occur between them (Abercrombie, 1967). To maintain this rhythmic pattern, unstressed syllables are often shortened, compressed, or weakened through vowel reduction. For example, the duration of the unstressed syllables in a phrase such as '*walk to the market*' is reduced so that the stressed syllables *walk* and *mar-* occur at approximately equal intervals. This process contributes to the characteristic rhythm of English and distinguishes it from syllable-timed languages, where each syllable is produced with a more equal duration. For second-language learners, accurate recognition of strong and weak syllables is crucial, as stress placement influences meaning, naturalness, and overall communicative effectiveness.

Standard English Stress

Stress is an important feature in phonology and phonetics, marking relative prominence among syllables within words and across larger prosodic units. Ladefoged (1975:224) defines stress as a composite of phonetic cues - pitch movement, duration, intensity, and vowel quality- that collectively heighten the perceptual salience of a syllable. Katamba (1989) similarly conceptualises stress as a phonological property that differentiates one syllable from another, thereby contributing to lexical identity and structural organisation. Beyond its phonetic realisation, stress fulfils critical phonological functions: it differentiates lexical items, signals grammatical distinctions, and shapes semantic interpretation within utterances.

English stress exhibits several defining attributes, notably its culminative, hierarchical, and rhythmic nature. As a culminative feature, stress is typically assigned to a single dominant syllable per word, creating a peak of prominence (Liberman & Prince, 1977). For example, in the word *teacher* /¹ tiː tʃ ə/, the first syllable bears the primary stress, while the second syllable remains unstressed. This prominence is influenced by patterns of vowel quality, syllable

complexity, and pitch contour (Ladefoged, 1993). Thus, every content word contains at least one stressed syllable, while even monosyllabic grammatical words may bear stress when produced in isolation. Stress is also hierarchical, operating across word, phrase, and sentence levels. Chomsky and Halle (1968:34) describe this as an interactional system in which stress assignment at one level can condition patterns at adjacent levels, creating a layered structure of prominence relations. For instance, in the phrase *a beautiful garden*, the word *beautiful* has its own word stress, but within the phrase, the nucleus of prominence may shift to *garden*, depending on the communicative focus. Ladefoged (1975) notes that the most stressed syllable generally corresponds to the one with the greatest phonetic enhancement, reflecting the interaction between abstract prosodic rules and their physical realisation. English stress is further characterised by its rhythmic nature, whereby stressed and unstressed syllables alternate to produce the characteristic stress-timed rhythm of the language. In a sentence such as ‘*The students arrived on time*’, the stressed syllables (*stu-*, *rived*, *time*) occur at relatively regular intervals, while the intervening unstressed syllables are shortened or weakened. This alternation between strong and weak syllables contributes significantly to the rhythm and natural flow of English speech (Abercrombie, 1967; Roach, 2009).

Stress plays a crucial role as a primary distinguishing feature at the lexical level. The contrast between *record* /¹ rekɔ : d/ (noun) and *record* /rɪ ' kɔ : d/ (verb) illustrates how stress placement also distinguishes word classes and meaning, a phenomenon widely discussed in English phonology (Crystal, 2008). Gimson (1964) also distinguishes between primary and secondary stress in Standard English, noting that the distribution of stress across syllables is governed by morphological structure and phonotactic constraints. For example, in the word *examination* /ɪ g ɪ zæmɪ ' neɪ ʃ ən/, the syllable *-neɪ* - carries the primary stress (/¹ /), while *-zæm-* bears secondary stress (/₁ /). Similarly, in *organisation* /ɔ : g ənaɪ ' zeɪ ʃ ən/, the primary stress falls on *-zeɪ* -, whereas the initial syllable carries secondary stress. These examples illustrate how stress is distributed across syllables according to the structural composition of words.

Research on the acoustic correlates of stress confirms its complex realisation. Collins and Mees (2008) describe stress perception as a function of intensity, pitch variation, length, and vowel quality. Empirical studies by Fry (1955) and Lehiste (1970) establish pitch as the most significant cue to stress in English, followed by duration and loudness. Taken together, these findings position

stress as a core component of English phonology, operating through an interplay of phonetic and phonological factors that jointly determine syllabic prominence and contribute to lexical and phrasal meaning (Udofot, 2007). This establishes the theoretical basis for the present study by clarifying how stress is acoustically realised through measurable cues such as pitch, duration, intensity, and vowel quality. Thus, evaluating how UIPGSE students produce stress should not rely only on what is heard. It should also consider measurable features such as pitch, length, intensity, and vowel quality, since these can clearly indicate differences from Standard British English stress patterns.

Word Stress

The study of word stress focuses on identifying the prominent syllables in words and the rhythmic, positional, quantitative, and morphological factors that determine prominence patterns (Kager, 1995). The assignment of word stress in English cannot be determined solely by fixed positional rules, as stress placement varies depending on lexical and morphological factors. In contrast, in French, stress is generally predictable and tends to be fixed at the end of prosodic units rather than functioning as a contrastive lexical feature within words. Unlike English, which is a stress-timed language in which stress placement contributes to lexical distinction and rhythmic organisation, French does not employ word-level stress in the same contrastive manner, as prominence is typically realised at the phrase level. To address this unpredictability, some linguists argue for the use of systematic rules with exceptions, rather than treating stress as an inherent lexical property requiring memorisation (Cruttenden, 2014). Similarly, Chomsky and Halle (1968) propose that English stress becomes more systematically predictable when rules account for morphological information, such as suffixes and prefixes, alongside phonological structure, even though irregularities persist.

Nigerian English Stress

Research on Nigerian English stress consistently shows that its patterns diverge significantly from those of Standard British English. Todd (1980) argues that Nigerian English often reinterprets stress in tonal terms, proposing a conversion system in which primary stress corresponds to a high tone. In contrast, secondary and tertiary stress levels correspond to a low tone. This tonally oriented interpretation reflects the influence of indigenous Nigerian languages, many of which are tone languages and therefore shape the prosodic habits of Nigerian English speakers.

Building on this observation, Kujore (1985) reports that one of the most salient features of Nigerian English pronunciation is delayed primary stress, which he traces to the prosodic structures of local languages. Through extensive lexical analysis, he identifies stress-assignment tendencies characteristic of Nigerian English. For example, he notes that verbs ending in *-ass*, *-ate*, *-bit*, *-fy*, *-ise/-ize/-yse*, *-ish*, *-ment*, and *-ute* frequently receive stress on the final syllable, contrary to Standard English norms, as seen in *canvass*, *abbreviate*, *exhibit*, *amplify*, *advertise*, *distinguish*, *comment*, and *attribute*. Kujore also identifies instances of stress reversal in which words that ordinarily receive stress on the second syllable in Standard British English are assigned primary stress on the first syllable in Nigerian English. Examples include *acute* /ə¹ kjuː t/ → /¹ ækjuː t/, *cabal* /kə¹ bæɪ/ → /¹ kæbæɪ/, *canoe* /kə¹ nuː / → /¹ kænɪː /, and *cassette* /kə¹ set/ → /¹ kæset/. These examples illustrate the tendency for stress reassignment, which has been widely reported as a characteristic feature of Nigerian English pronunciation.

From a complementary perspective, Jowitt (1991) describes a systematic tendency in Nigerian English to shift primary stress. He notes that this shift is more pronounced with verbs than with nouns or adjectives, resulting in forms such as *appreciate* and *eradicate* receiving stress on the final syllable rather than the second. At the phrasal and sentence levels, this tendency persists: compound nouns and pre-modified noun phrases are frequently stressed on the rightmost element, and nuclear stress in sentences is often misplaced. Jowitt further observes that Nigerian English speakers rarely exploit contrastive stress for pragmatic emphasis, a feature central to Standard English discourse. Additionally, he notes that compound words are seldom distinguished by stress; both hyphenated and open compounds, such as *sitting room*, *eye hospital*, and *grammar school*, often receive stress on syllables that are different from Standard English preferences. This is a theoretical aspect of language study. Avoid presenting data or examples as if they were a literary study or mere descriptive research. Endeavour to show analysis separately and not in-text.

With a more analytical approach than Kujore (1985), Jowitt (1991) organises his data into clear structural categories. For disyllabic words and compounds, he observes a systematic rightward shift of stress: items that bear initial stress in Received Pronunciation (RP) are frequently assigned stress on the second syllable in Nigerian English. Illustrative examples include *challenge*, *ma'dam*, and *fire'wood*, where the normative RP stress pattern is reversed.

Single words of more than two syllables, which fall into several sub-groups:

- i. verbs ending in the suffixes *-ate*, *-ize/-ise*, *-y*, or *-ish*, where in NEA the stress falls on the final syllable (e.g. *congratu* ^ˈ*late*, *adver* ^ˈ*tise*, *modi* ^ˈ*fy*, *distin* ^ˈ*guish*);
- ii. *-ism* nouns, where in NEA the stress falls on the syllable preceding the suffix (e.g. *capi* ^ˈ*talism*);
- iii. ‘medical trade names’ (e.g. *aspi* ^ˈ*rin*);
- iv. ‘other examples’, including *agri* ^ˈ*culture*, *An* ^ˈ*thony*, *Eu* ^ˈ*ropean*, *pre* ^ˈ*ferable and*;
- v. compounds of more than two syllables (e.g. *sitting-* ^ˈ*room*, *grammar* ^ˈ*school*)

Numerous studies (Akinjobi, 2004, 2009; Ilolo, 2013; Sunday & Ayinde, 2020; Akindele, 2021) affirm that NE stress patterns are shaped by the prosodic systems of indigenous Nigerian languages. A recurrent finding is the absence of vowel reduction in unstressed syllables, particularly in the educated Yoruba, Isoko, and Edo varieties (Akinjobi, 2004; Ilolo, 2013; Akindele, 2017). Instead of weakening to schwa, syllables typically retain full vowel qualities, resulting in a predominance of strong syllables. Syncope is also infrequent, with speakers often inserting epenthetic vowels from their first languages, and syllabic nasals rarely occur.

Investigations into stress shift further highlight deviations from SBE norms. Studies by Akinjobi (2004) and Akindele (2017) reveal that educated Edo English speakers show limited proficiency in reassigning stress when suffixes that require stress shift are added to stems. The studies report reduced durational distinctions between stressed and unstressed syllables, indicating a prosodic system less dependent on temporal cues than SBE. These findings are reinforced by Sunday and Ayinde (2020), who argue that stress in NE is strongly influenced by tonal patterns from indigenous languages, particularly the placement and interaction of high tones. Their study establishes NE not as a canonical stress or tonal language, but as a hybrid pitch-accent system in which tone significantly shapes perceived stress.

At the phrasal and compound level, Sunday (2011) documents a consistent rightward pitch movement in NE. Compound nouns typically exhibit a rise–fall pitch contour, whereas compound verbs do not, though stress placement generally favours the first element. NE appears to adhere to a Compound Prominence Rule, assigning primary stress to the initial node unless branching occurs at the word level. Phrasal stress, especially in noun and verb phrases, is

largely predictable, with premodifiers frequently receiving prominence, an outcome attributed to local language influence. These findings contribute to a clearer understanding of NE prosody and its systematic yet distinctive patterns.

The geo-ethnic variability of NE stress has also attracted attention. Anyagwa (2020) shows that Igbo English (IE) and Yoruba English (YE) exhibit distinct stress patterns, challenging the notion of a homogeneous NE accent. Differences in the stress assignment of items such as PROtein/proTEIN, UMBrella/umBRELLa, and CERemony/ceREmony underscore the importance of a regional approach to defining NE phonology. This underscores that suprasegmental distinctions in NE, like segmental ones, reflect broader linguistic diversity.

Supporting these findings, Akinola and Oladipupo (2021) highlight that NE stress is heavily influenced by the prosodic structures of Nigerian languages, leading to variability among speakers and making consistent categorisation difficult. Similarly, Jowitt (2022) emphasises the uniqueness of NE stress, pointing out a tendency for primary stress to occur either early or late, a limited use of emphatic or contrastive stress, and the almost complete absence of post-nuclear stress. He explains that the frequent presence of secondary or tertiary prominence results from the lack of vowel reduction.

3. Methodology

The study employed a random sampling technique to select fifty M.A. postgraduate students as participants. The selection of this group was informed by their prior exposure to the theoretical aspects of phonology at the undergraduate level. This implies that they had undergone courses on phonology and passed them, making them suitable participants for the study.

Each participant was required to produce six selected English words in natural speech contexts, resulting in a total of 300 word tokens from the 50 participants. The speech samples were recorded using the voice-recording application of a smartphone. To ensure the quality and reliability of the recordings, data collection was conducted in a quiet environment with minimal external noise and other potential sources of interference. Adequate precautions were taken throughout the recording process to minimise factors that could affect the participants' speech production or compromise the quality of the data. The recorded samples were subsequently subjected to acoustic analysis using Praat, a computer-based speech analysis software.

4. Analysis

Word Stress Application in the Spoken English of UIPGSE

Each appropriate production of the underlisted words was allotted one mark, while all the participants' scores for each item were subsequently converted to percentages.

Table 1: Stress Placement in the Pronunciations of UIPGSE

Tested items	Expected score	Approximation to SBE	Pronunciation of Nigerian English Variant
Gardener / ¹ g a : dnə/	50	20	30
Success /sək ¹ sɛ s/	50	17	33
Professor /prə ¹ fɛ sə/	50	16	34
Campus / ¹ kæmpəs/	50	21	29
Pronounce /prə ¹ naʊ ns/	50	25	25
Corner / ¹ kɔ : nə/	50	23	27
Total	300 (100%)	122 (40.6)	178 (59.3)

Table I presents the results, indicating the extent to which the spoken English of some University of Ibadan postgraduate students of English (UIPGSE) approximates SBE or confirmed Nigerian stress patterns. The assignment of stress to the six lexical items reveals significant deviations from Standard British English (SBE) norms, aligning with Nigerian English stress patterns. For instance, *gardener* /¹ g a : dnə/, which requires a strong–weak pattern, only 20 participants (40%) made the first syllable more prominent using the Standard British English pattern, while 30 (60%) assigned equal prominence to both syllables. In *success* /sək¹ ses/ (weak–strong), 17 participants (34%) assigned stress to the second syllable following the SBE pattern, whereas 33 (66%) did not, reflecting the Nigerian word stress pattern.

With *professor* /prə¹ fesə/ (weak–strong–weak), just 16 participants (32%) followed the SBE stress pattern by stressing ‘fe’ while 34 (68%) assigned near-equal prominence to the three syllables, reflecting the Nigerian English stress pattern. For *campus* /¹ kæmpəs/ (strong–weak), 21 participants (42%) used the SBE stress pattern relatively, while 29 (58%) assigned equal prominence to both

syllables. In the production of pronounce /prə¹ naʊ ns/ (weak–strong), 25 participants (50%) approximated SBE, but 25 (50%) did not. With *corner* /¹ kɔ : nə/ (strong–weak), 23 participants (46%) approximated the SBE stress pattern, while 27 (54%) did not make a distinction in speech prominence between the first and second syllable.

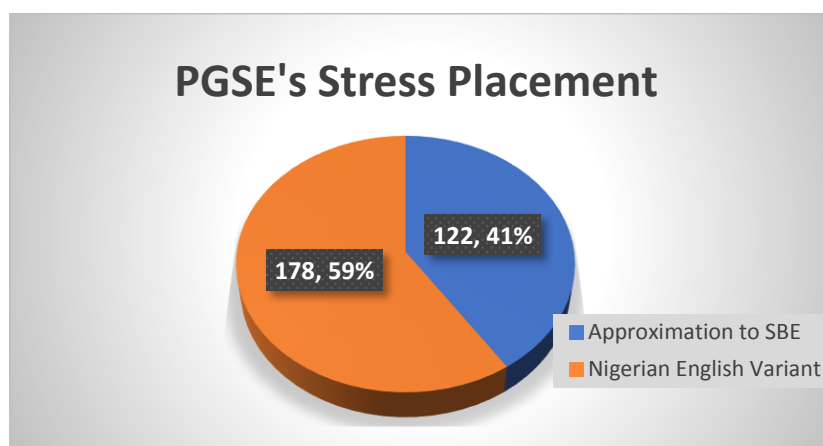


Figure 1: A pie chart of approximation to SBE and Nigerian English Variant

Overall, only 122 instances of approximation to SBE word stress patterns (40.6%) were observed out of an expected 300, with 178 Nigerian English variants (59.3%), indicating a tendency toward equal syllable prominence, a feature strongly influenced by patterns in Nigerian indigenous languages.

Praat Image Showing Stress Assignment to “Gardener”

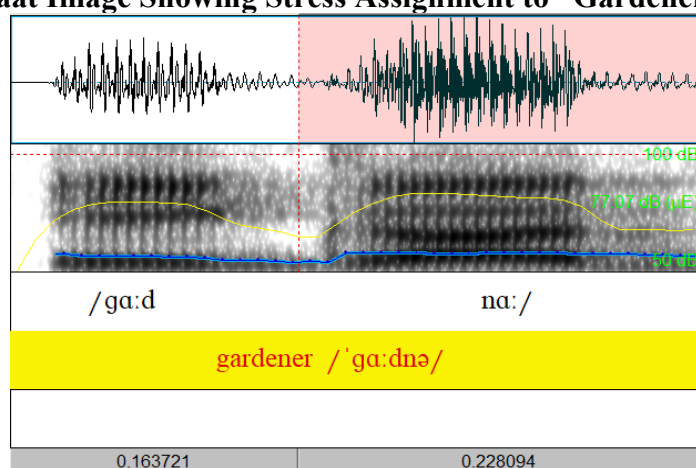


Figure 2: Acoustic presentation of the word ‘gardener’

The spectrogram above reveals near-equal pitch prominence in the UIPGSE production of the word "gardener" rather than the first syllable being made more prominent than the second. In the same vein, the first syllable (/^l g a : /) is articulated over a duration of 0.163721 seconds, whereas the second syllable (/næ/) is pronounced with a longer duration of 0.228094 seconds. Assigning more duration to the second syllable gives undue prominence to a syllable that should be weakened by unstressing. This misplacement of stress deviates from the expected pattern in standard pronunciation, where the second syllable should be weakened. The spectrogram further indicates increased acoustic intensity during the articulation of the second syllable, as indicated by the elevated yellow line, suggesting greater effort and force in its production.

Praat Image Showing Stress Assignment to “Success”

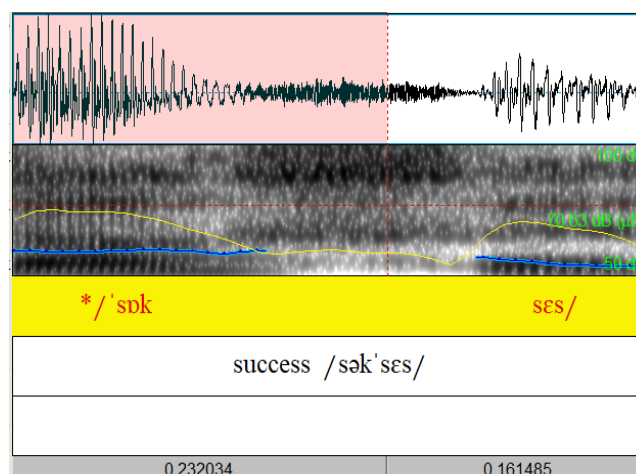


Figure 3: Acoustic presentation of the word *success*

In the PGSE production of ‘*success*’, the first syllable was given more prominence than the second syllable. The participant produced the first syllable with a longer duration of 0.232034 and produced the second syllable with a shorter duration of 0.161485. The intensity and the speech contour lines in the above PGSE’s spectrogram corroborate this, as the lines are raised higher in the articulation of the first syllable and gradually become lowered towards the articulation of the second syllable. Therefore, it can be observed that there is a contradictory assignment of word stress in the pronunciation of the word *success*: while the second syllable /^l sɛ s/ is stressed in SBE, the PGSE stressed the first syllable /sək/, aligning with the Nigerian word stress pattern.

Praat Image Showing Stress Assignment to “Professor”

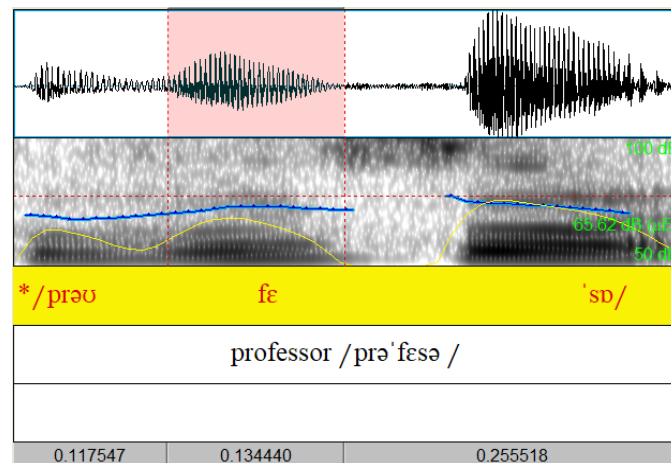


Figure 4: Acoustic presentation of the word *success*

In relation to the above acoustic production of the word “professor” by the UIPGSE, the final syllable is produced with a prolonged duration of 0.255518 seconds. It is articulated with greater force, resulting in its unintended prominence and stress. This observed Nigerian English stress pattern is attributed to the participant's failure to reduce the vowels in the first and third syllables to the schwa /ə/, as required in Standard English pronunciation. As a result, the final syllable is realised as /sɒ/ instead of the expected /sə/.

Discussion of Findings

The first objective of this study examines the extent to which the word stress patterns produced by the selected University of Ibadan postgraduate students of English conform to Standard British English (SBE) norms in natural speech. The findings reveal substantial deviations from SBE stress patterns across the six lexical items analysed. In *gardener*, *campus*, and *corner*, fewer than half of the participants assigned primary stress to the first syllable, despite these being canonical strong–weak structures in SBE. Similarly, in *success* and *professor*, the majority failed to assign stress to the second syllable, with 66% and 68%, respectively, producing different stress patterns which align with Nigerian English word stress. These results illustrate a systemic difficulty in identifying and applying SBE stress cues, particularly in polysyllabic items such as *professor*, where prominence must be hierarchically distributed.

In this regard, Akinjobi (2024), in a paper presented, provides a comprehensive synthesis of convergent findings from observational and empirical studies on stress patterns in Nigerian English. Situated within this broader scholarly

context, the high rates of deviation observed in the present study suggest limited sensitivity to reduced vowels and weak syllables, features that are central to SBE prosody. This observation aligns with convergent empirical evidence indicating that Nigerian English speakers rarely reduce unstressed vowels (Akinjobi 2004, 2009; Ilolo 2013; Jowitt 2022), resulting in near-equal prominence across syllables.

The tendency to interpret stress primarily in terms of pitch rather than vowel quality or duration further corroborates earlier claims that many Nigerian speakers process English stress through tonal patterns (Udofot, 2003). Consequently, the participants' performance demonstrates a marked divergence from SBE stress norms, reinforcing long-established descriptions of Nigerian English as prosodically distinct, characterised by delayed stress placement, weak vowel non-reduction, and a reduced contrast between strong and weak syllables (Kujore 1985; Jowitt 1991, 2022).

The second objective was to determine the extent to which the stress patterns exhibited by participants align with recognised Nigerian English stress norms. The distribution of stress across the six lexical items corresponds with established Nigerian English tendencies. Most participants produced levelled or right-shifted stress, consistent with the documented preference for delayed primary stress (Kujore 1985; Jowitt 1991) and the general avoidance of weakening functionally unstressed syllables. The high proportion of speakers who assigned greater or equal prominence to the second syllable in *corner*, *campus*, and *gardener* reflects the rightward stress shift observed in the educated Yoruba, Edo, and Isoko varieties (Akinjobi 2004; Ilolo 2013; Akindele 2017). Additionally, the participants' difficulty with polysyllabic stress redistribution in *professor* corresponds with prior findings that Nigerian English exhibits minimal stress shift in derivation and syllable restructuring (Akindele, 2013). These alignments confirm that the students' productions were more representative of Nigerian English norms than of SBE prosodic organisation.

The third objective evaluates the influence of prior theoretical knowledge on the students' ability to apply appropriate English word stress. The findings indicate that theoretical exposure alone does not translate into accurate practical performance. Despite being postgraduate students of English, presumably having received formal instruction in phonology, more than half of the participants produced different stress patterns on four of the six test items. This suggests a persistent gap between theoretical competence and applied phonological skill, consistent with earlier claims that stress assignment in

Nigerian English is largely governed by L1 prosodic transfer rather than pedagogical intervention (Jowitt, 2022).

5. Conclusion

This study demonstrates that selected Master's degree students of English continue to face notable challenges in accurately applying Standard British English (SBE) word-stress patterns in speech. Whereas SBE relies on stress as a central lexical and rhythmic cue for intelligibility, the participants frequently assigned prominence indiscriminately, producing syllables with nearly equal force, thereby weakening the contrast between strong and weak syllables. This pattern indicates that, despite extensive theoretical training in phonology from the undergraduate to the postgraduate levels, linguistic performance in SBE stress placement remains limited. Crucially, these findings are consistent with the convergent observations. As outlined in that synthesis of findings on Nigerian suprasegmentals, Nigerian English is marked by delayed stress, weak vowel non-reduction, and a tendency to realise stress primarily through pitch rather than vowel quality or duration. Hence, the overall results indicate that the stress productions of the UIPGSE students were more frequently aligned with established descriptions of Nigerian English stress than with Standard British English norms, although evidence of conformity to SBE was also observed.

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Memory and Tonality of Mourning in Hyginus Ekwuazi's *That Other Country*

Kazeem Adebisi-Adelabu

Abstract

Memory studies in contemporary humanistic scholarship, including literature, have mostly been preoccupied with collective or cultural memory. From the Holocaust, the World Wars, the Atlantic Slave Trade, the 9/11, the Rwandan Genocide, to the civil wars in Nigeria, Liberia, Sierra Leone, Sudan, and so on, major catastrophic events around the world have dominated literary memory studies, often overlooking individual memory. This article examines the imbrication of individual memory of a lover with the collective memory of a nation, and vice versa, in Hyginus Ekwuazi's *That Other Country*. Drawing theoretical insights from the assumptions of Maurice Halbwachs which challenge the autonomy of memory, the paper shows how the poet persona's individual memory of his lover is shaped by social context on the one hand. On the other hand, it shows how collective memory of a "nation" also impacts the poet persona's individual memory. It goes further to demonstrate how the tonality of the poet's versification of both memories makes the selected poems come across not only as a memory verse, but also as an elegiac verse.

Key words: Individual memory, Collective memory, *That Other Country*, Nigerian poetry, the Nigerian Civil War

Introduction

As with many others, memory is one phenomenon which lends itself to multiplicity of understandings and sometimes complexities. This, according to Vita Fortunati and Elena Lambert, is precisely because it is highly variable and dynamic. In its most literal and active sense, memory is synonymous with storing and recollecting information. While it seems attractive to stick to this literal understanding of memory in order to avoid complexifications, it is still necessary to unpack two dimensions critical to the conception of the phenomenon in order to give subsequent analysis a proper anchor.

One issue that is both contentious and central to the theory and praxis of memory is its bifurcation into individual and collective categories or a conflation of both. Ordinarily, there seems to be no argument about what individual memory is or should be. After all, we all remember or recall things, using our cognitive faculty without any recourse to interaction with another person, that is, often alone. The same thing happens when we forget, as the act of forgetting takes

place in our individual cognition. Yet, scholars of memory, dating back to foundational ones such as Frederic Bartlett and Maurice Halbwachs argue that there is no such thing as autonomy of memory or a strictly individual memory, while still maintaining that memories are shaped by socio-cultural contexts. According to Halbwachs, it is “in society that people normally acquire their memories. It is also in society that they recall, recognize, and localize their memories” (38). This view implies that memory is not just about what occupies an individual’s passive mind, but how the mind works in relation to what obtains in society. If memory is therefore understood in this light, which is that memory can neither *be* nor *become* without some outside or external influences impinging upon it, how then may we proceed to speak of what constitutes the notion of individual memory and what makes up collective memory? Or, is it that all memories are collectively shared?

In his engagement with the seeming conflation of individual and collective memories, Jefferey Olick attempts an intervention by pointing out that “collective memory is merely a broad, sensitizing umbrella, and not a precise operational definition” (158). He goes further to note that collective memory is a combination of what he describes as *mnemonic products and practices*. While *products* refer to such things as stories, rituals, images, pictures, records, speeches, and the like; *practices* include, among others, recall, commemoration, regret, renunciation, denial, acknowledgement, rationalization and so forth. More importantly, Olick concludes that focusing on collective memory as “a variety of *products and practices*” is a better way “to reframe the antagonism between individualist and collectivist approaches to memory... as a matter of moments in a dynamic process” (158). This view reasonably demonstrates a clarity that can be considered quite sufficient to lay the matter of conflation to rest.

Perhaps it is also in anticipation of the need for clarity such as this that Halbwachs eventually distinguishes between autobiographical memory and historical memory, where the former is described as remembered events of one’s own life as directly experienced by one. The latter, on the other hand, refers to events to which a group can lay claim. Generally, memory scholars recognize that while memory-making begins as an individual activity, it is ultimately shaped by influences beyond the individual. This explains why emphasis in memory studies has always been on collective memory. In this article, I bring the representation of memory in Hyginus Ekwuazi’s *That Other Country* under scrutiny with a view to deepening and extending critical engagement with memory in Nigerian literature. Unlike extant studies’ almost

exclusive preoccupation with collective memory, the article engages with both individual and collective memories in Ekwuazi's selected collection. Using Halbwachs's theoretical insights which challenge the autonomy of individual memory, the article shows how individual memory of the poet-persona in the collection are mediated by interactions and relationships with others, and how collective memory also shapes individual memory. It goes further to show how both memories conspire to place some psychological and emotional burden on the poet-persona, and makes the collection to come across not only as a memory verse, but also as an elegiac verse.

Memory in African Literature

Memory studies in postcolonial African scholarship, Sakiru Adebayo notes, occupies a rather marginal space despite the practice of memory politics on the continent. To be sure, memory studies is even more peripheral in African literary scholarship. This is in spite of the fact that historical memories about Africa and its representation in creative writings offer comparable weight to that which dominates contemporary memory studies in general – the Holocaust, the world wars, and 9/11. Without doubt, memories of the Atlantic Slave Trade, colonialism, as well as wars and violence of different magnitudes on the continent, hold as much potential for scholarly engagement as the Holocaust and similar catastrophes. Yet, while such historical events have not really been ignored in African literary criticism in general, engaging them from the perspective of memory studies is quite scarce. Besides Adebayo's recently published *Continuous Pasts*, the other extant work in memory studies in African literature is Tim Woods' *African Pasts*.

In his book, Adebayo examines the representation of collective memories in selected African novels, using the texts to make a case for what he calls African Transnational Memory (ATM), a concept which sees memories of conflicts in postcolonial African countries as interconnected, and with shared commonalities across national geographies. Although Adebayo proposes and centralizes ATM as a framework for reading memory texts from Africa, he goes further to also suggest the idea of ancestral memory as another possible framework for the studies of African memories. As a pioneer theoretical offering in African memory studies, one cannot agree more with Hanna Teichler that Adebayo's work was long overdue.

However, like Adebayo's work, and most memory studies in other parts of the world, Woods' *African Pasts* also focuses on collective memories. In his work, Woods largely examines history-memory relation, directing his focus on collective experiences such as apartheid in South Africa in particular, and

colonialism in Africa in general. Clearly, individual or autobiographical memory is sidestepped in the emerging matrix of African memory studies. In other words, like studies on the Holocaust and other devastating events in the global north and parts of the global south, emerging African memory studies also privileges collective memory, despite the fact that there are imaginative uptakes on memory at both individual and collective levels in African literature.

Ekwuazi's *That Other Country* is one of many examples. The collection comprises thirty-two poems, all of which explore memory in one way or another. In fact, to underscore the thematic focus of the collection, in the section entitled "In lieu of a Preface" (Ekwuazi 6), the poet reflects on memory as a human phenomenon, and submits that man is a creature sentenced to continual preoccupation with memory. He also shares the view that the burden of certain memories may be fatal if other memories, especially pleasant ones, do not replace or mitigate their effects. However, despite recognising the mitigating effect of pleasant memories, the poet's versification of memory in the collection is unrelentingly sombre, thus inviting more than a cursory interest.

Versifying Memories of a "Lover"

In "The feeling persists" (Ekwuazi 13), one of the early poems that explore memory in *That Other Country*, the poet persona's remembrance of his former lover, as he thinks of returning home from some distant place, marks the beginning of memorialization in the collection. After what appears like many years of separation and conscious efforts to forget the same, the thought of returning home evokes a memory of his lover, who had falsely accused him of causing a drought in the land because he killed the bird that sang for rain. As the urge to return excites memory of his former lover, the persona soon discovers that the remembrance of the lover is "like a strand of dried meat / between... teeth / where no broomstick can reach" (Ekwuazi 14). In other words, his memory of the lover is riddled with pain and discomfort. Thus, as he journeys homeward, he becomes overwhelmed with loneliness, and each step becomes a pain comparable to that of "digging out / the strand of venison in the cavity / of a decayed tooth / where no salve can reach" (Ekwuazi 15). While this comparison clearly speaks of remembering as an active component of memory practice, rather than a passive storage, the backdrop to the comparison also incites the need to see his memory construction in the given context as inflected by a social frame. We can see that it is the persona's remembrance of home that incites his anamnestic relation with his erstwhile lover. In other words, his remembrance of home provides the stimulus that activates the remembrance of his lover, which in turn shapes the way he recalls. With the persona also linking

the recall with the incident of her false accusation against him in the past, Halbwachs' view that a coherent remembrance is only possible within a group or social context is confirmed. The persona's reliance on a social framework in order to recall is more forcefully seen in some earlier lines in the poem: "and the memories of this home – / those memories that I've taken with me – / they are the remembrances / of you / that I thought I'd forgotten" (Ekwuazi 13).

Whereas the remembering of the lover comes with some pain that may be attributed to the false accusation, it also frames the current disposition of the persona as a deeply sad person. To call attention to the emotional torture and pain that remembering the lover has caused him, I cite again directly from the poem:

... this mixture of
love and guilt and bitterness and sorrow
which seeps into my blood
and makes me pant for air
each time you ride into my memory –
no longer will it poison my day (Ekwuazi 16).

It is important to pay attention to the feelings notable in these lines. Are they really feelings about the lover in the present, or feelings connected with the memory of the lover as it concerns their past association? While it seems more like the latter, the last line of the excerpt suggests that they also have potential to impact the present. In fact, the phrase "no longer" implies that up till lately the persona has been struggling with such feelings. By raising this observation in form of a question, I wish to underscore how shifting or variable social frames may impact memory. And, with this kind of serious emotional pain, the resolve in the last line comes as no surprise. Here, the poet expresses a sentiment that recalls the English poet, Thomas Wyatt's disposition in his famous sonnet "Farewell to Love". In Wyatt's poem, the persona laments over the pain often associated with love, and relates his disillusionment with the emotion, declaring it poisonous. Like Wyatt, the persona in Ekwuazi's "The feeling persists" (Ekwuazi 13-16) grieves in pain over the bitterness and sadness that accompany his memory of love.

In the poem entitled "Colour me grey", which is also concerned with memory of love, colour "grey" functions more or less as a *lieux de memoire*, a term

coined by Pierre Nora, which literally means site of memory, and has become quite influential in recent memory studies. According to Nora, “a *lieux de memoire* is any significant entity, whether material or non-material in nature, which by dint of human will or the work of time has become a symbolic element of the memorial heritage of any community” (xvii). I use the phrase “functions more or less” because while the term *lieux de memoire* is usually applied in the context of collective memory, its symbolic import in the context of individual memory in which it is deployed in “Colour me grey” warrants the formulation. This is particularly so because the idea of the object becoming a symbolic element due to “human will” (xvii) over a period of time may be difficult to apply in the context of individual memory. The main point in Nora’s articulation of the concept is that memory is mostly attached to real sites which are symbolic and functional. In this poem, colour “grey” refers to a real object that appears not only symbolic and functional to the reader, but also linked to memory. In the poem, “grey” refers to the persona’s beard’s transformation from colour black to grey, which signals a part of his ageing reality. However, the colour is deployed as a symbol of pain and a trigger of memory in the verse.

As the persona stands in front of a mirror counting the streaks of grey in his beard, he remembers how people compliment the colour grey by saying that it makes him look distinctive. While happy to note that those who compliment his grey beards are unaware of its symbolic import for him, all memories he thought he had perfectly and permanently locked up, “buried deep beyond a resurrection” (Ekwuazi 38), came back swarming over him. The memories are, however, unpleasant, as the sight of his grey beards in the mirror brings back painful memories to him. He recalls an occasion when his lover made him to shave off his beards on account of the claim that the greyness made “*her*” look old. After shaving off the beard, she fussed over him with wet kisses. The wetness on his cheeks had, in a figurative sense, barely dried up when he got the news of her death in an automobile accident. With the incident of shaving his grey beards being the last memory associated with the lover, shaving becomes not just a reminder of his tragic loss, the greyness of the beards, which originally prompted the idea of shaving, becomes a site of memory whose sight regularly evokes painful memories. Thus, whereas the persona’s memory here seems personal, the construction of the memory is framed by relationship and interaction with others. Without other people complimenting the greyness of his beards as a mark of distinctive look, the memory of pain would not have arisen. In other words, the compliments not only act as a sad reminder when his lover compelled him to shave his beard, the irony that underlines the compliments as harbingers of sadness shapes the remembrance and makes it even more painful.

As Aleida Assmann reminds us, “the dynamics of individual memory consists in a perpetual interaction between remembering and forgetting” (97). Therefore, it is also pertinent to note that active forgetting, otherwise called intentional forgetting, also plays a role in the memory making of the persona here. He had made deliberate efforts to bury the memory of his lover’s death, but others would have it untombed by unsolicited compliments. While the persona is intentionally trying to forget, others are fortuitously causing him remembrance, thereby showing that biases and psychological pressures from others influence individual memory. By constraining the persona to remember what he does not want to, the recollection is made more painful. To call attention to the intensity of his pain, I cite the concluding lines of the poem:

but I knew, even if I had my life,
from womb to tomb, to live all over again—
I knew I would never shave again:
not in any number of lifetimes
would I ever shave again” (Ekwuazi 39)

He would never shave again in order to avoid seeing his grey beards in the mirror again, which also means to avoid remembering his last moments with his lover. Like in the poems examined earlier, “Colour me grey” is used to limn the fact that while individual memory as a cognitive artefact inheres biologically with the memory-bearer, articulating memories is usually inflected by interaction with contexts. This is because, as Henri Bergson notes, remembering is an active engagement that is fluid and changing. As the foregoing appraisal of “The feeling persists” and “Colour me grey” shows that memory-making is not absolutely an individual cognitive praxis, the next section uses “I shed lava-hot tears dor both halves of the yellow sun” and “A dear Frank’s letter” to show how collective memory also impacts individual memory.

Writing Memories of a “Nation”

In separate but related works, Adebisi-Adelabu and Esamagu, and Adebisi-Adelabu and Aguele have noted that national consciousness is a major thematic focus of modern Nigerian poetry. In Ekwuazi’s shared preoccupation with this theme, the Nigerian Civil War is a major focus in *That Other Country*. Not long after its independence from Britain, Nigeria went through a civil war between 1967 and 1970. One of the then four regions in the country, the Eastern Region, declared its secession from the Federal Republic of Nigeria as Biafra in May 1967, but was forcefully resisted by the other three regions. The resultant war

is variously referred to as the Nigerian Civil War, the Nigeria-Biafra War, or the Biafran War. Besides the very suggestive title of the collection, many of the poems therein thematise the traumatic memory of this war.

“I shed lava hot tears for both halves of the yellow sun” (Ekwuazi 17) is preoccupied with memories of the war, in a way similar to the depiction of trauma teased out by Adebisi-Adelabu and Aguele in their reading of *The Monkey’s Eyes*. The “half of a yellow sun”, from which Adichie’s (2007) well known novel also got its name, is the emblem engraved on the Biafran flag, and is said to symbolise hope and a glorious future for the “nation” of Biafra. Since the civil war, the image of half of a yellow sun is still used as a symbol of Biafra. Therefore, Ekwuazi’s reference to “both halves of the yellow sun” (Ekwuazi 17) in the title of this particular poem stimulates more than a cursory interest. While a half of “both halves” of the sun is not difficult to figure out as referring to Biafra, one is a bit unsure of the referent of the other half. Could the one-half be referring to the real Biafra of 1967-70 and the other half referring to a dream-Biafra of the future? Or, could the poet have the rest of Nigeria in mind as the other half? Despite the double entendre inherent in the poet’s phraseology here, the poem demonstrably memorialises the war experience as a collective one for the Igbo, the dominant ethnic group in the then secessionist Eastern Nigeria. The memory of the war is not just a collective one for the Igbo because of their greater involvement, but also because the experience has come to shape the Igbo identity since the event of the war.

In line with Olick’s notion of collective memory as *mnemonic products* and *practices*, “I shed lava hot tears for both halves of the yellow sun” (Ekwuazi 17) interestingly functions simultaneously as a story and as a reminiscence. It is a story in confirmation of trauma’s belatedness where the narrator, in this case the poet persona, suddenly becomes overwhelmed with memories of a war while relaxing at a beach. As a reminiscence, the persona recollects with fondness the sonorous rendition of the Biafran anthem by his deceased lover. Paradoxically, it is the lyrics of the anthem that would later incite trauma in a belated mode.

Although the memory of the war is presented from an individual perspective by the poet persona, we soon realise that the experience which inspired the remembrance is a shared one. Besides the Biafran anthem sung by his lover, and the experience of a certain relation called Nwayinmma who is also mentioned in the poem, the persona also speaks of “the victors and the vanquished” (Ekwuazi 19), who had either become bonded or branded due to the war. In other words, the persona is speaking of a burden that he shares with others. It is particularly useful to note that the persona’s memory is activated by the voice

of his lover, who had not even been born as of the time of the war, singing the Biafran anthem; an act which is itself a form of memory making, one described by Marianne Hirsch as postmemory. For the persona's lover, and many contemporary Biafran activists, especially members of the Indigenous People of Biafra (IPOB), singing the anthem is simultaneously a form of post-memory-making and a practice aimed at identity-construction and solidarity-invocation.

The third stanza of the anthem in particular inscribes most of the ordeals which Biafrans went through during the war, especially as witnesses to large scale starvation and mass deaths. In short, the lyrics of the anthem, also metonymic of the collective Biafran memory, bring back personal but painful and traumatic war memories hitherto trapped in the subconscious of the persona. These include memories of Nwanyinmma grieving the loss of her husband and children who were butchered in the 1966 pre-war anti-Igbo pogrom in Northern Nigeria and the mass return of fellow Igbos to the South East of Nigeria in dangerous circumstances. These recollections, together with the lyrics of the anthem, both impel the persona to shed lava-hot tears for both halves of the yellow sun, and transform the breeze along the beach into a "into a whirlwind / of pain too deep for tears /...[and] too intense for consolation" (Ekwuazi, 2010: 18). In other words, while the persona's individual reminiscence evokes a shared burdensome memory with others, the memory evoked in turn deepens the persona's painful "free floating memories" of his lover.

It is important to note that the persona's mnemonic practice in this context aligns with Olick's view that "no matter how concrete mnemonic products may be, they gain their reality only by being used, interpreted, and reproduced or changed" (158). The use or interpretation brought to bear by the persona on the symbol "half of a yellow sun" seems not only concerned with the Biafra of 1967-1970 because shedding tears for "both halves of the yellow sun" suggests a lament over two related but different things. With his mnemonic practice figuring both sides to the conflict as "the victors" as well as "the vanquished" (Ekwuazi 19), the persona may after all be referring to the Biafra of 1967-1970 and the Nigeria of the same period. Like J. P. Clark-Bekederemo insists in one of his poems, all Nigerians, including former Biafrans, are casualties of the war. The persona in "I shed lava-hot tears for both halves of the yellow sun" also seems to insist that those perceived as "the vanquished", the Biafrans, were "victors" as much as other Nigerians were also "vanquished". This sounds plausible because the sense of solidarity hitherto uncommon among the Igbo before the war was made possible during the war, and also endures thereafter,

whereas division among Nigerians after the war belies the purported unity enforced by the war.

Given the collective roots of the memory that inflicts so much pain on the persona as he reminisces about the voice and passion of his deceased lover, the agency of the individual in collective memory-making becomes very pertinent. In fact, if collective memory is plural, rather than monolithic, as Halbwachs insists, then one is also inclined to share the view that collective memory is an aggregation of different individuals' perceptions, thoughts about, and understandings of the same experience. Accordingly, the persona's individual traumatic memory about his lover deepens the pain of collective memory he shares with other Igbo victims of the war.

In a more profound way, another poem entitled "A dear Frank's letter" (Ekwuazi 69) evinces an imbrication of individual and collective memories. Like the previous one above, the poem is both about individual and collective memories. Firstly, it is about the persona's memory of his late friend, Frank. Secondly, it is essentially about the Igbo collective memory of the Nigerian Civil War. In the first part of the poem, the persona recalls an evening of recreation with his friend, when they attended a poetry reading, wine, dined, and enjoyed the company of others. A particularly memorable feature of the reading occasion is his friend's critique of one of the poems read as "rhythmically asthmatic and asthmatically / rhythmic" (Ekwuazi 70), as well as the uproar the comment generated. The comment would become a significant memory marker when the news of Frank's death came and the tragedy was attributed to an asthma attack. Several years later, when tears over the death had ceased to flow, the memory of the evening returns like a belated trauma, renewing a silent grief. In the persona's words, "each time I am at a reading / each time I drink a cold beer / each time I eat a hard-boiled egg / each time I see a tin of sardines" (Ekwuazi 70), the memory of Frank's death returns with a sense of loss. This situation, whereby an activity rather than an object or place associated with an event triggers the memory of such an event, again recalls Nora's notion of *lieux de memoire*.

However, while the persona explores all that happened to his friend and himself since the evening of their recreation at the British Council in terms of the pain it evokes, he also reflects on how that particular memory always excavates other memories. He observes:

that evening of drinks and readings
 at the British Council always turns another
 page of memory's album of photographs:
 I am looking at that big scar of the war -
 The scar you wore on your heart
 like a hair shirt-that scar which only those
 very close to you could see (Ekwuazi, 2010: 71)

These lines naturally prompt a question: what is the connection between the evening of recreation at the British Council and the memory of war cryptically alluded to in the verse? And which war? While subsequent lines de-crypts the war as the Nigerian Civil War, they are unable to establish any link between the memory of the war and the evening of the recreation. However, a careful unpacking of the previous lines, especially the first of the five sections that make up the entire poem throws some light on this. The most memorable action by Frank during their "evening of drinks", which also happens to be on the persona's mind when the news of his friend's death broke, was the debate over whether a certain poem was "rhythmically asthmatic and asthmatically / rhythmic" (Ekwuazi, 70) or not. That the friend was killed by an asthmatic attack later on therefore always takes the persona's memory to that evening. The evening, in turn, always turns another page of memory associated with the late friend, which is a memory of the civil war that the friend was always preoccupied with. It is therefore interesting that the poet persona would draw on the personal memory of his outing with his late friend to reflect on the collective memory of the civil war. Thus, Ekwuazi's versification limns how individual memory could activate collective memory and how collective memory could engender grief at a strictly personal level.

One of the most central events to the Igbo collective memory of the Biafran war is the Asaba Massacre, where hundreds of civilians, particularly men, were killed by the Federal troops on account of sympathetic identification with Biafrans. The late Frank, apparently obsessed and traumatised by the memory of the tragedy, had been researching and writing a book on the war crime. The persona's recollection of his friend's undertaking in this regard, with its accompanying pain, further underscores what the poet persona earlier refers to as "the deluge of our pain" (Ekwuazi, 2010: 72). Thus, while personal memory triggers pains of loss in the persona, the subject of the pain, Frank's death, also

triggers the pains of war which he shares with others as a collective experience. Also, the persona not only recalls his plan with Frank to undertake a pilgrimage to the place where Christopher Okigbo was killed in the course of fighting for Biafra, Opi Junction, but also their plan to smoke pipe to the late poet's memory. This reference to the locale of Okigbo's death effectively functions as a site of collective memory for Biafran intellectuals such as the poet persona and his late friend. His plan to mount two plaques in memory of the late poet also inscribes a resolve to resist official attempt at erasing the memory of the war. What is perhaps most vital about the explorations of memory at the two levels in the poem is that both are denominated by grief, pain and trauma, just the way Ottanelli and Bird (2017) describe in their book about the Asaba Massacre.

Memory and Tonality of Mourning

In this section, I briefly reflect on how memory practice at both levels of individual and collective memory-making in the collection is readable as an elegiac versification. With due consideration to formal properties such as metrical patterns and rhyme scheme, the poems in Ekwuazi's collection can hardly be categorised as elegy. Yet, many of the poems, though in different degrees, exhibit a tonality that is at once mournful, reflective and sorrowful. They basically explore individual and collective experiences of persons in terms of events of the lives they lived and the relationship they shared. In the poems, lovers, wife, friend, and the ethnic group to which the persona belongs feature as subjects. Whereas some of the persons are deceased, it is not the events of their death that the poems focus on, it is the memories of the lives they lived. In other words, while there are no laments or griefs over the event of death itself, memories of the lives of the dead are recalled with a sorrowful tone. This cuts across the four poems examined in this article.

In "The feeling persists" (Ekwuazi 13), it is a feeling of loneliness and tone of sorrow that percolate the lines. The imagery evoked by the idea of something "weighing down / the footsteps of the mind" (Ekwuazi, 13), during which the persona's struggle to stop remembering her former lover, betrays dejection. Besides, as the memories of the time the lovers shared in the past continue to haunt the persona, as signaled in such diction as "sorrow, bitterness, guilt and love" (Ekwuazi 16), he simultaneously laments and reflects on his loss. Although he declares that memories of his lover "no longer will... poison [his] day" (Ekwuazi, 16), the persona's acceptance of the reality of their sad separation brings his grief to a closure. However, with such imagery of loss as depicted above, his choice to reconcile with reality is further betrayed as a doleful one.

As one of the poems that deal with personal memory in the collection, “Colour me grey” (Ekwuazi 38) is largely a recollection of some fond memories. The poet persona recalls memories of his wife, as well as reflects on the gravity of losing her to an automobile accident. From the mirthful and nostalgic tone in the first section and the first part of the second section of the poem respectively, the latter part of the second section to the end of the poem is suffused with shock, heartbrokenness and a woeful tone. It is a shock over the suddenness of her death, a heartbrokenness from loss of a partner, and a woeful affect due to the irreversibility of the tragedy. These feelings inevitably call attention to the sorrowful note on which the poem ends. Indeed, the sorrowful end may well suggest that just like life itself is an admixture of joy and sorrow, a memory of powerful, positive and joyful emotion of love is also sometimes tempered with elements of sadness. Thus, unlike the Freudian conception of mourning as a healthy process which often results in reinvestment in life, the continued woeful affect occasioned by the irreversibility of the tragedy in this instance resonates with the Derridean position that mourning is never complete.

Such a sad disposition is also prevalent in “I shed lava-hot tears for both halves of the yellow sun”. In the poem, the persona laments not the death of family and friends, but the loss of Biafrans’ dignity. His voice, quite subdued, imagines Biafra as “a country doomed at birth” (Ekwuazi 17). As he listens to the anthem of the ill-fated Biafra in his imagination, each word of its lyrics transforms into a tear drop as he grieves for “a hapless and dispossessed people” (Ekwuazi 18). Remarkably, as the poem inches towards its end, the persona’s anguish is foregrounded in the last two lines where his grief is further underscored by his shedding of tears. Notably, his private reflection on the memory of the Biafran War does not only give him away as sad about the tragedy of the war, it also underlines what Dominick La Capra characterizes as “acting out” (496); in this case “acting out” the trauma of the Nigerian Civil War as an instance of unfinished mourning.

While the poet emphatically states at the beginning of “A dear Frank’s letter” (Ekwuazi 69) that the poem is “mainly about that evening of / drinks and readings at the British Council” (Ekwuazi 69), it is also a meditation on personal human and cultural losses. Whereas it is about the memory of a good time once shared with his friend, the persona’s memorialisation of the moment is simultaneously nostalgic and tormenting. After dwelling on the lightheartedness of the occasion in a tone that is initially and pleasantly convivial, then sober, the poem gradually unfolds with intimations of sadness that the memory also brings. The evening of drinks and readings “turns another page of memory’s

album of photographs” (Ekwuazi 71), which is that of mental visualisation of the scar that the Civil War had etched on Frank’s heart, as well as of his research into the tragedy of Asaba Massacre during the war. This does not only bring him some pains, it also recalls the emotional and psychological pains that Frank always experienced during his research on the tragic incident. As both of these also bring “a mist of unshed tears” (Ekwuazi 71) to the persona’s eyes, a tendency towards a refusal to move on is registered.

On his frequent occasions of remembering Frank, the persona informs us that he actually grieves “well beyond / all known and unknown boundaries of grief...” (Ekwuazi 74). Just like this observation underscores a personally mournful dimension to the memorialisation of Frank in the poem, the concluding lines’ re-statement that the poem “is mainly about that evening of / drinks and poetry at the British Council...” (Ekwuazi 74) would encourage one to possibly apprehend the verse as one strictly about personal memory. On the contrary, the poem speaks more to the collective memory of pain and anguish that the Nigerian Civil War caused the Igbo persona, as Awuzie (2020) forcefully argues. Therefore, the persona’s references to grief, pain and tears betray not just personal sadness about the loss of a friend, but also sorrow and lamentation over collective human, and cultural losses of the Igbo. In short, Ekwuazi’s memorialisation in the poem, at both individual and collective levels, is both traumatic and mournful.

Conclusion

The article has examined memory at both individual and collective levels in the four poems selected from Ekwuazi’s *That Other Country*. In the poet’s representation of individual memory, privilege is given to memories of his lover or partner, as the case may be. However, despite the private and deeply personal nature of such memories, they are linked to public or shared experiences with others. In some instances, such memories are stimulated by non-personal incidents or issues, while in other instances, the memories actually stimulate other memories of experiences shared with others. At the collective level, memories of the Nigerian Civil War dominate. Yet the memories are mostly evoked in contexts of personal reflection or private ideations. Also, the article shows that it is not only individual memory that is shaped by social contexts. Just as individual memory is influenced by relationship and interaction with others, so is collective memory also mediated by individual memories and personal ideas. In this symbiosis, the article observes that the poet’s memorialisations of both personal and collective experiences in the poems are largely laced with a doleful tone, making the poems not only effectively elegiac,

but also establishing a relationship, even if a tenuous one, between unpleasant memory and mourning.

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Who Do Men Say We Are?: Interrogating Patriarchal Interiority and Exteriority Literacy in Akachi Adimora-Ezeigbo's *Children of the Eagle*

Gabriel Kosiso Okonkwo

Abstract

Within the Nigerian cultural space, patriarchal literacy assumes the character of hegemony in the way it conditions women to defer to subjugating cultural euphemisms that appear malleable, collective, and egalitarian. Existing studies on patriarchal cultures in Nigeria have largely examined women's struggles through the eye of sanctioned knowledge and collective social consciousness as external manifestations of patriarchal mind-set. This study interrogates this hegemonic mind-set by exposing its interiority and exteriority in Akachi Adimora-Ezeigbo's *Children of the Eagle*, thereby emphasising the duplicities embedded in cultural intent, dispensation, and enforcement. Deploying qualitative textual analysis as a method, it undertakes a close reading of selected episodes, characters, and cultural practices in the novel using Rudiger Campe and Julia Weber's *Interiority and Exteriority*, and Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie's *Feminism-lite* as complementary theories. A core argument is that Adimora-Ezeigbo deploys patriarchal normativity as a euphemistic technique for exposing the hegemonic consciousness underlying patriarchal order. Another point is that the novel interrogates the repressive assumptions embedded in patriarchal heteronormativity in Nigeria and reveals how seemingly benevolent cultural practices function as mechanisms of gender control. The interiority of these practices therefore exposes the cultural prejudices and inequalities in Nigerian patriarchy. The patrilineal and androcentric culture of inheritance in Umuga kinship, which functions as a window through which patriarchy externalises its single story of who women are is foregrounded for criticism alongside the female characters' construction of counternarratives. The conclusion is that Adimora-Ezeigbo encourages gender equality in Nigeria with her projection of patriarchal subtexts of unequal cultural exchanges.

Keywords: Gender equality, Akachi Adimora-Ezeigbo, *Children of the Eagle*, feminism-lite, Rudiger Campe and Julia Weber's *Interiority and Exteriority*

Introduction

As is the situation elsewhere around the world, African identities and ways of being are fundamentally influenced by the core concepts of sex, gender and sexuality.

— Sylvia Tamale

Philosophically, the human capacity to interrogate the authority or legitimacy of norms and literacies constitutes a defining marker of intellectual freedom and agential consciousness (Oyewumi 1). In this study, literacy goes beyond the mere ability to read and write. It is a reference to culturally sanctioned systems of knowledge – the epistemic consciousness through which a society legitimises and reproduces its values, identities, and social relations. The question, “Who do men say we are?” functions as an agential identity teaser analogous to the biblical question posed by Jesus Christ to his disciples to determine his identity in the eyes of his contemporaries. Fundamentally, any question of identity is a question of essence – whether of the self or of the society. In this study, a question of this nature speaks to the problematics of gendered identity formation in *women-men* binary. While Jesus Christ sought to understand the perception his society had of him within the heteronormative patriarchal order of the time, this study interrogates the various ways Nigerian androcentric culture in Akachi Adimora-Ezeigbo’s *Children of the Eagle* constructs women by means of cultural externalities which outwardly appear protective, communal, harmonious, and humorous, while concealing unequal gender relations and structures of subordination (Okonkwo 5-7; Akpah 134)

Patriarchal conditioning continues to render many African women vulnerable to what Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie describes as feminism-lite — “a hollow, appeasing and bankrupt idea” (3), a form of conditional inclusion that preserves patriarchal authority beneath the rhetoric of complementarity and benevolence. Nevertheless, writers like Adichie and Adimora-Ezeigbo remain committed to reconfiguring the ways African women negotiate patriarchal constructions of identity in contemporary society; they do this because “The human mind and writers are both purveyors of people’s culture and belief systems” (Akpah 3). Hence, recognising that patriarchy commonly operates through euphemistic cultural performances becomes the first step towards interrogating its internal contradictions. For instance, when patriarchal culture speaks of women using chivalric, celebratory or reverential language, many African feminists often interrogate the relationship between such symbolic representations and the social practices that accompany them. Hence, in contemporary times, women continue to construct counter-narratives that challenge patriarchal exclusions and asymmetries as patriarchal structures continually expose tensions between rhetorical reverence and lived inequality. This is even more so as patriarchal thinking “involves a participatory enactment of the situation of the sufferer, but always combined with the awareness that one is not oneself as the sufferer” (Nussbaum 328). Patriarchy pretends to participate in and take some share of

the inconveniences created by its heteronormative legality but it is ultimately conscious of the fact “that one is not oneself as the sufferer”.

Although gender inequalities existed in many precolonial African societies, several scholars argue that colonial administrative structures intensified patriarchal hierarchies using religion, education, legal codification, and indirect rule. Sylvia Tamale argues that “our colonial education systems largely delimited our thinking to Western theorisations of ourselves and our environments” (41). Similarly, Nwachukwu-Agbada contends that “the case often made of Igbo culture being rigidly male-centric is of recent origin” (88). Victor Uchendu buttresses this point in observing that the precolonial Igbo woman possessed considerable socio-economic agency, including the ability to leave oppressive marriages and independently manage economic resources (87). In his words:

The African woman regarded as a chattel of her husband, who has made a bridewealth payment on her account, is not an Igbo woman, who enjoys a high socioeconomic status. She can leave her husband at will, abandon him if he becomes a thief, and summon him to a tribunal, where she will get a fair hearing. She marries in her own right and manages her trading capital and her profits as she sees fit. (87)

These positions do not suggest the absence of patriarchy in precolonial Africa. They instead indicate that colonial modernity reinforced already existing gender asymmetries in significant ways. Indeed, African women – men inclusive – have lived with the consciousness of patriarchal constructions of female identity for centuries and continued to negotiate them in many African societies today. The inclusion of men in this asymmetry is not a reference to a victimhood equivalent to women’s experiences, but a reference to the social embeddedness of men in systems that reproduce restrictive gender expectations. Hence, the question of perception lies at the centre of gender identity formation in every society. Historically, the perception men have about women has in many ways conditioned what many women think of themselves. From the social conditioning of eighteenth-century English women who consumed male-authored journalistic fiction, to the gender camouflage of George Eliot, to the anti-colonial women’s movements like the Aba Women's Riot of 1929, men have always pushed women to the margin. According to Tamale Sylvia, women’s embeddedness in patriarchal systems has been both constraining and

enabling in ways that continually bring agential consciousness into dialogue with social reality (93). The attempts women make to interrogate and challenge how men define them have led to the emergence of multiple feminist traditions like Black feminism, African feminism, Womanism, and postcolonial feminism.

Existing studies on *Children of the Eagle* have extensively examined female resistance, daughteronomy, negotiation, and African feminist consciousness. For instance, while Nwachukwu-Agbada conceptualises “daughteronomy” to mean “Akachi Adimora-Ezeigbo's advocacy of an alternative proposal to the established rule of patriarchy (88)”, Azumurana’s comparative analysis argues that, “Ezeigbo’s and Agary’s major female characters are propelled in their actions or inactions by their desire to be like the other, and that it is on the basis of this desire that they enter into and sustain their individual relationships” (151). His argument on the use of penis envy by the female characters to mean a coping mechanism signals the contrivances of feminism lite. Osita Ezenwanebe also reads the novel as a struggle against oppressive cultural conventions. He argues that, “...social conventions, cultural mores, and traditional practices that oppress and marginalise women, especially in the Eastern part of Nigeria” underline feminist “struggle for freedom and survival” (1-2). Women know the difference between what men say about them and what they do on the contrary. And because they know the cynicisms in patriarchal contrivances, they are willing to continue telling their own counter stories until the day of freedom (Okonkwo 1-7). Furthermore, Oyeronke Oyewumi evaluates the universalising assumptions of Western feminism in relation to African gender realities. This subterfuge character is the reason why, “African women and feminism are at odds” (Oyewumi 1). Hence, “despite the adjectives used to qualify feminism, it is Western feminism that inevitably dominates even when it is not explicitly the subject under consideration” (Oyewumi 1). For centuries, patriarchal perceptions of women constructed the identities women were socially conditioned to internalise about themselves.

This study therefore interrogates the patriarchal interiority and exteriority used in constructing female identity in the novel. Theory-wise, it draws primarily on Rudiger Campe and Julia Weber’s concept of interiority and exteriority and Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie’s notion of feminism-lite. Campe and Weber conceptualise interiority as the hidden domain of consciousness, intention, and subjective orientation, while exteriority refers to the outward manifestations that make interiority socially visible (Campe and Weber 2). In this study, patriarchal

interiority refers to the concealed assumptions, prejudices, and gender hierarchies embedded in patriarchal consciousness. On the other hand, exteriority refers to the cultural practices, rituals, and euphemistic performances used in enacting such social assumptions. Adichie's feminism-lite complements this framework in highlighting the conditional and performative forms of gender inclusion outwardly appearing egalitarian while preserving patriarchal authority beneath the surface. In terms of methodology, the study adopts a qualitative interpretive approach that is grounded in close textual analysis. It examines dialogue, symbolism, narrative voice, cultural rituals, and gendered performances in *Children of the Eagle* – elements that underscore how patriarchal consciousness is internally constituted and externally enacted. The analysis focuses primarily on inheritance practices, widowhood rituals, symbolic exclusions, patriarchal speech acts, and female counteractions – these are mediums through which patriarchal interiority externalises using euphemistic cultural practices.

The study is guided by the following research questions:

1. How does *Children of the Eagle* represent patriarchal interiority through cultural externalities?
2. In what ways do feminism-lites function as euphemistic mechanisms of patriarchal control in the novel?
3. How do the female characters resist patriarchal identity formation?

This article therefore argues that *Children of the Eagle* underlines patriarchal domination as a mind-set – one that operates by means of coercion and legalised norms. While this form of hegemony outwardly appear communal, moralising, and protective, it is internally reproducing gender inequality. The verbal and non-verbal resistance of Adimora-Ezeigbo's female characters constructs narrative spaces that challenge patriarchal identity formation in African culture. What this study contributes to African feminist literary criticism, therefore, is a clearer articulation of the various ways patriarchal consciousness operates using cultural performance to produce and sustain gendered social meanings.

Of the Interiority and Exteriority of a Single Story: Feminist Resistance Efforts

African feminists like Flora Nwapa, Buchi Emecheta, Mariama Ba, Ama Ata Aidoo, Tsitsi Dangaremba, Grace Okot, Gorett Kyomuhendo, Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie, Catherine Obianuju Acholonu, Molara Ogundipe and others have been forthright in redefining the distorted identity of women in Africa through their works. Women have since the last century been consistent in

challenging oppressive patriarchal narratives. While some of them take the more radical routes, others feel a sense of caution in their protest. Akachi Adimora-Ezeigbo belongs to the latter group that deploys a more conciliatory approach in challenging oppressive tendencies in African culture. Her feminism, which is operationalised in her Snail-Sense Feminist Theory, is captured in the Eaglewoman's position that, "all that is wholesome in our culture should be protected and preserved" (*Children of the Eagle* 319). This non-combatant position does not necessarily signal fear or weakness. If anything, it speaks to the particular consideration that feminists like Adimora-Ezeigbo give to the ideation of cultural exclusivity and affiliation. It also speaks to the matter of non-finality of disagreement – the fact that they do not condemn the entirety of African patriarchal heteronormativity stems from a particular attitude towards decoloniality. This ennui that flows from the radical colourations of women's struggles by the solipsism of Western feminism – not regarding cultural peculiarities especially those affecting African women – is what Oyewumi expatiates in saying that the:

...very tradition of African self-determination – personal, cultural, and political – has been truncated by a series of successive global historical processes most notably the Atlantic Slave Trade and European colonization. Over the past five centuries, these developments have made Africa politically, economically, and culturally dependent on Western Europe and North America. As a result, Africa has become the recipient of ideas and goods of dubious and often harmful value. (2)

Oyewumi further argues that, "the fact that in many African societies the category-woman cannot be isolated raises the question of the relevance and value of Western feminism" (2). Hence, against the dominance of Western feminist epistemology and African male writers in the early and mid-twentieth century, "African women themselves are beginning to tell their own stories" (Davies 10). They use their unique stories to rewrite wrong narratives written about them by patriarchy and Western feminism. Ezeigbo's interest in deploying and using an indigenous narrative framework does not necessarily dissociate from the collectiveness and universalism of women's struggle against gender inequality but from the "mainstream feminist writings" (Okome 67) which "tend to portray African women as" (Okome 67) people who are

“confused, powerless, and unable to determine for themselves both the changes needed in their lives and the means to construct these changes” (Okome 67). She seems not to agree with the Eurocentric overreach and coloniality of Western feminism that reinforce what Okome calls, “reformist feminist evangelism” (67). This is a reality because, “African feminisms have always stood between the hard-rock of Western influence and domination and African relativism and disparagement” (Tamale 40). Hence, the counter narratives that are written by Ezeigbo and her ilk are intrinsically local, non-sensationalised, and mentally challenging. She speaks to the argument that feminist literature is, “about challenging the representations of women and arguing for better condition for them” (Quayson 586).

Of the Interiority of Intention and the Exteriority of Feminism-Lite

Feminism lite as a term or framework has been used by various scholars like Bullock and Fernald, Bütünwieser, Ratna, and Adichie to underscore the non-totalising attitudes of patriarchy towards the full dignity of women. By non-totalising, I refer to the way patriarchy circumscribes women’s cultural expression by permitting only limited, regulated forms of agency, while restricting the full articulation of their autonomy and dignity. In *Feminism Lite? Feminist Identification, Speaker Appearance, and Perceptions of Feminist and Antifeminist Messengers*, Bullock and Fernald illustrate how normative gaslights define the nature of feminism lite. According to them:

We found it ironic and contradictory to the most basic tenets of feminism that our credibility with students appeared to depend on physical appearance and adherence to traditionally feminine self-presentation. Eventually we came to refer to this phenomenon as “feminism lite”—the idea that feminism is more palatable when the messenger’s physical appearance does not directly challenge traditional standards of femininity. (290-291)

Bullock and Fernald’s observation speaks to the nostalgia that greets conservative consciousness – the dilemma of coming to terms with a new social order in a changing society. The dilemma comes from an interiority of preconceived cultural notions on gender mapping which manifest exteriorly as self-insecurities and hegemony. This notional difference is what Campe and

Weber mean in stating that interiority, “emerges from a process of distinctions” (2) which creates “inside and outside” (2) binary. This quandary of consciousness and personhood is also what Munck and Manoharan (2019) also identify as the, “ongoing conscious and unconscious dialogue that one has with oneself” (507). Hence, the cultural proselytization of consciousness necessarily makes the interior reflect the exterior which then pictures the, “larger patterns within the culture it is a member of” (Munck and Manoharan 507). This exteriority of the internal perception – the patriarchal to be specific – is perhaps more specifically positioned in Adichie’s epistolary feminist hypothesis entitled, *Dear Ijeawele, or A Feminist Manifesto in Fifteen Suggestions*. Adichie speaks to the exteriority of the interiority of patriarchal hegemony in warning Ijeawele to:

Beware the danger of what I call Feminism Lite. It is the idea of conditional female equality. Reject this entirely. It is a hollow, appeasing and bankrupt idea. Being a feminist is like being pregnant. You either are or you are not. You either believe in the full equality of men and women, or you do not. (Dear Ijeawele 3)

In marshalling these instructions, Adichie operationalises her consciousness of the historical trauma in patriarchal hegemony. She goes on to cite some examples of gender inequalities to buttress her point:

A woman should be ambitious, but not too much. A woman can be successful but she should also do her domestic duties and cook for her husband. A woman should have her own but she should not forget her true role as home keeper. Of-course a woman should have a job but the man is still head of the family. Feminism Lite uses inane analogies like ‘he is the head and you are the neck.’ Or ‘he is driving but you are in the front seat.’ More troubling is the idea, in Feminism Lite, that men are naturally superior but should be expected to ‘treat women well.’ No. No. No. There must be more than male benevolence as the basis for a woman’s wellbeing. (Dear Ijeawele 3)

Many African cultures have an interior essence that is diametrically opposed to what is shown on the outside. Problematising patriarchal attitude towards

women in Africa necessarily calls for a better understanding of how men see women. Do African men openly accept that they demean and oppress women through their actions which are backed by patriarchal laws and customs? Do African women accept what African men say about their personhood and dignity? These are very important questions that could help us to understand the significance of Adichie's *Feminism* and Rudiger Campe and Julia Weber's *Interiority and Exteriority* in this study. To start with, the question "Who do men say we are?" is not likely to get the same essential answer from men and women. African men when asked this question are not likely to say women are the weaker sex, the pseudo-child, the widow-murderer, the invisible gender, the sexual butt, and so on because those define the interiority consciousness of what they think about women. However, because they know that their "internal space of subjectivity" is "moulded by external factors (Munck and Manoharan 507)", they are likely to project their pretended notions about women, notions that reek of feminism lite – warped innuendos wrapped as euphemisms. In this sense, what men truly think about women is spoken through their actions and attitudes, not words. An African man can say a woman is his African queen but deep down in his heart, he is merely seeing a sex object. He says those sweet words to her presumably as answers to the question of identity but acts in the direct opposite of his words. He can even project pretended chivalry, all for an ulterior motive that derives legitimacy from patriarchal cultural expectations. The interiority of patriarchy is governed by the strong belief that, "the male intellect rules over the female psyche and the distinction of their sexes, which for them (males), signifies that a woman is different from a man" (Børresen 171). The chameleonic interiority underpins, "... the power relationships by which men dominate women, and to characterise a system whereby women are kept as subordinates in a number of ways" (Bhasin 3). Hence, many African women of today, especially the feminists, who already know that men speak their heart and mind through actions – actions that pretend to love but innately act in the opposite – wage a serious war against both patriarchy's interior hegemony and feminism lites. This war that they wage is the counternarrative that comes from the place of epistemic consciousness.

Externalising Interior Intentions: *Children of the Eagle* and the Dynamics of the Subsisting Conflict

Akachi Adimora-Ezeigbo is a renowned Nigerian scholar and prolific writer who has widely authored novels, poetry, short stories, children fiction, academic essays, and journalistic articles. She has won many literary prizes especially the highly coveted NLNG prize for literature. *Children of the Eagle* is her

significant addition to the corpus of African feminist fiction. Just like Chinua Achebe's trilogy – *Things Fall Apart*, *No Longer at Ease*, and *Arrow of God* – Nwachukwu-Agbada notes that *Children of the Eagle* is the third leg of Adimora-Ezeigbo's trilogy. He notes that the novel is “the last of Adimora-Ezeigbo's trilogy of fictions centred on the generations of Umuga women spanning over a hundred years. Preceding this novel are *The Last of the Strong Ones* (1996) and *House of Symbols* (2001)” (87). He states further that, “The three novels are interrelated, featuring major characters, largely females, who belong to the same genealogy but who represent different prongs of the battle against patriarchy. Thus, it is the same 'war of the sexes' running over generations, each generation faced with its challenges” (87). The topical consistency in the trilogy conjures a sense of autobiographical espionage perhaps meant to monitor the progress of the ongoing women's liberation struggles in Nigeria. Hence, Nwachukwu-Agbada concludes by saying that, “it is 'herstory' told in three eras of pre-colonial, colonial and post-colonial settings” (87).

In *Children of the Eagle*, Akachi Adimora-Ezeigbo continues her mission of exposing the hypocrisies in the cultural practices that oppress and marginalise Nigerian women. The fictional town of Umuga which is a prototype of the typical Nigerian semi-rustic is intrinsically and extrinsically patriarchal in ways that are pretentious. Its cultural positions on patrilineal inheritance, widowhood rites, subordination, women's achievements, and sexual offences reek of feminism lite. Mr. Josiah Obidiegwu Okwara, also known as Osai, dies leaving behind a strong-willed wife, Eaglewoman, and her five egalitarian female children. As Nwachukwu-Agbada notes, the egalitarian struggles of the Eaglewoman and her female children started in *The Last of the Strong Ones* (1996), spiralled into *House of Symbols* (2001) and have continued in *Children of the Eagle* (2002). Ugonwanyi (Eaglewoman), the last of the four strong ones, is described in *House of Symbols* as “a solid rock that gathers moss. Around her, green and yellow moss blossoms in a thick furry mass at all seasons...People obey her and dance to her tune” (*House of Symbols* 99). In *Children of the Eagle*, she is not as visible as she is in *House of Symbols*. She now allows the symbols – freedom, justice, equality, determination, advocacy, and agency – that her daughters embody to be amplified through their interrogation of the inequalities in their culture. For instance, the patrilineal culture tells them that they are human beings with dignity. However, they have no cultural right to inherit land and perpetuate the name of their late father, Josiah Obidiegwu Okwara. The culture claims that it is an abomination for a woman who will get married in the

future to another man to inherit her father's land and take same to her husband's house. On the surface, this looks blameless but intrinsically, it appeals to false reason. Feminism-lite is usually built on the faulty logic which serves no significant purpose other than the justification of the injustice in the interiority of its intention. This is what Woiwode means when he says that "interiority cannot exist without its counterpart, exteriority" (83). Unfortunately, the interiorities which manifest as feminism-lites are nothing but fallacies because they do not resonate or correlate with impartial reason.

Feminism-lite represents narcissism and the sense of entitlement which embolden and push its enforcers into bullish behaviour. Just as it is in many Nigerian cultures of today, Umeaku's so-called "battalion of sons" (75) declares war on the late Mr. Osai Okwara's family over the parcel of land that he buys from their father. In reporting the incident to her children, the Eaglewoman says, "they stalked this piece of land like beasts of prey, killed and uprooted all the markers. Their shouts of abuse filled the air, some of it directed at me personally, the rest at my departed husband" (71). The bullish boys do not have to talk or argue what they think about the late Okwara's female family, they simply acted it. This kind of behaviour is similar to the class struggles, impunity, and political oppression that pervade the socio-political landscape of Nigeria. Against the argument that "empathy plays a critical interpersonal and societal role, enabling sharing of experiences, needs, and desires between individuals and providing an emotional bridge that promotes pro-social behaviour (Riess 74)", the behaviour of the Umeakus is bereft of empathy and underpins disdain for the progress of women. Many Nigerian women of today feel the vulnerability that Eaglewoman feels in saying "What could I do? I have no husband or grown son to fight for me?" (71). While she euphemises the seriousness of the gender discrimination implied by the patriarchal literacy she has capitulated to, her strong-willed daughters are not taking the gaslights. Her words break them and force them to protest and react, "Nnenna bites her lips in an effort to suppress her rising anger" (72), Ogonna, "clenches her hand as if preparing to punch someone" (72), Obioma jiggles "her head in disgust at the sight before them, wondering how anyone could commit such a senseless act" (72), and Amara exclaimed, "Hey! 'in utter disbelief" (72). Their reactions signal the fact that "there is a long history of women mobilizing in creative ways to resist patriarchal and political domination, asserting their personal and collective rights" (Tamale 40). Through their action, Eaglewoman and her children express the clear difference between what the men of their society say about them and what they do conversely. Empathy is missing in patriarchal

interiority. It is this lack of empathy that underscores the behaviour of the bullish boys. In the words of Riess, “empathy plays a critical interpersonal and societal role, enabling sharing of experiences, needs, and desires between individuals and providing an emotional bridge that promotes pro-social behaviour” (74). In an egalitarian society, men and women treat each other with respect and empathy.

Feminism lite also gives the false pretence that men are the head who should take decision on societal matters while women are to just receive and work with men’s decision without their own inputs. This is akin to the idea of submission – the feminism lite that has validity in the Christian scripture – albeit with a gender balance in its love context. The latter however does not change the cultural ambiguity that the text carries in its gender representations. While feminism lites fan the ember of narcissism in patriarchy, they provoke anger and protest from enlightened women like Eaglewoman and her children. Through their lives, we see Ezeigbo educating gullible women who are comfortable with feminism lites to unlearn them. Eaglewoman tells her daughters who are visibly determined and angry with what Umeaku’s sons have done to their father’s land, “women are not permitted to approach Ogunano Ezeala directly or address the council” (74). She is at this point operationalising Ezeigbo’s idea of Snail-Sense Feminism, willing to observe, engage, and negotiate diplomatically with the power structures of her society. However, her daughters are not taking it – an attitude they see as capitulation to the feminism lites in the culture. Amara protests, “At this time and age women are not allowed to approach a group set up to keep peace in the town?” (74). Corroborating her protest, Nnenna swears, “we must direct our grievance straight to these men” (74). They also refuse the counsel that Pa Joel made to be their mouth piece in Ogunano meeting. Amara is very firm with her disapproval, “Here is my mother – as old, if not older than Pa Joel and here are my big sisters and I, yet you want us to wait until my kid brother returns home or until we send for our cousins before you erect the boundary markers on the disputed land. It doesn’t make much sense to me” (316). This feminism lite shows the mind-set of the men in this society – it shows that the androcentric society interiorly rejects gender equality. The daughters of Eaglewoman are not taking it – in line with Adichie’s admonition for women to “...reject this entirely. It is a hollow, appeasing and bankrupt idea” (3). They resolve to construct a counternarrative to “...communicate with them directly as well as have a record of our petition and our demand for justice in case we need to go beyond the council to seek justice at a later date” (74). And to show that they are really not willing to take what

the culture is saying about them, Nnenna assures others, "I assure you that if justice fails to materialize at this level, we'll take the case to court" (74). With this resolve and the firm actions that follow it – all contrived as a counternarrative – they are able to permanently resolve their land dispute with the Umeakus. It is resolved that permanent indicators be erected to border the two pieces of land. "Speak out", the operational phrase in feminist advocacy, has always been an effective weapon against the snarls of hegemonic patriarchy.

Furthermore, feminism lite embodies chauvinism and misogyny. The latter are not verbal expressions but interiority traits that manifest only in actions. When it is time to erect the permanent indicator pillars which will resolve the land impasse between the Okwaras and the Umeakus, the emissary representing the Ogunano council insists that a male heir, the son of the family, must be around. Nkemdirim is the only son of Obioma, one of Eaglewoman's daughters. Eaglewoman informs the emissary, "my son has not returned home yet," (315). However, the representative is not taking the excuse. He is representing the reprehensive culture which will never utter the word 'repressive' in relation to women but will perform a thousand and one repressive actions. He pretentiously insists, "He should be here while the markers are being erected" (315). His irrational obstinacy is not going down well with the ladies. Nnenna intervenes on their behalf by arguing that, "he's only a child and there are five of us present to represent the family" (315). The emissary at this point divulges the hidden male chauvinism which is driving his feminism lite, "Your brother may be a child but he is a male. The land in question belongs to him: it is his inheritance. Whoever hears that land issues are settled in the presence of women in Umuga?" (315). With this, he is representing the gender sentiments in Umuga – sentiments that he believes in. At this point, Pa Joel comes up with a save face subterfuge:

Ogunano Ezeala knows and you too know that there is no difference between the Okwara family and my own family. I have been like a father to all his children since Okwara rejoined the ancestors. I represent them in everything and have often spoken for them in the meetings of Ogunano Ezeala, especially as the only son of the family is still a minor. (315).

Interestingly, the emissary listens to Pa Joel's argument and surrenders. The fact that he is able to only pay attention to Pa Joel's opinion says something bad

about the interiority of patriarchy which pits itself against women's interests. Ironically, Pa Joel himself is not making a seasoned argument for the voices of the Okwaras to be heard directly and individually. He is rather making a tailored argument that amplifies his capacity as a representative of the Okwaras. He euphemises the hegemonic interiority of the patriarchal order he represents through his pretentious social externalities. Little wonder when he leaves, Amara wonders, "How can one have respect for a tradition that denies women the right to be treated decently as human beings?" (317). For the Okwaras, this psychological conflict represents an agential awareness that drives their counternarrative.

In addition, feminism lite is manipulative in a way that replaces reason with phobia. The later happens to women who have not heeded or come to terms with Adichie's "Reject..." (p.3), advice. The consistent emphasis on male child superiority manipulates women psychologically and places the married under intense pressure to have male children. For example, with the news of Nkemdirim's involvement in a car accident, "Eaglewoman slumps sideways: her head falls against the arm of the chair" (373). Her relapse is more of a response to the male-child superiority trauma coming from the manipulative feminism lite in her patriarchal culture than a response to the possibility of fatalism in the accident. Ironically, Nkemdirim is not even her biological child. He is adopted as it were to save the face of the family. In addition, despite the fact that all her female children are doing very well, the manipulative feminism lites Eaglewoman has come to embrace ingenuously make her find meaning only in the wellbeing of Nkemdirim. When she gets the news that he is still alive, she hurriedly visits Osai's tomb – her late husband's – and exclaims, "Osai, our son is alive and well" (397). The latter is coming from the gender superiority literacy she has come to imbibe – reacting to its pretentious euphemistic externality. This psychological manipulation is also evident in the way she positions the female child in talking about her marital experience, "people who would never have blinked their eyes at me when Osai was alive now confront me and show me their backsides. I am a prey to every roaming hyena because I do not have a husband anymore. Because I have no grown sons to speak for me" (26). She operationalises her dilemma of social trauma. However, within her lamentation lies her hidden agency to break free. We see this manipulative nature of feminism lite in the ways that it constructs history to be hi(s)tory without recourse to her(s)tory compromise. While the interior and ulterior motive of constructing history this way is to perpetuate patriarchal hegemony, feminism lites front a false exterior appearance of the common good.

In the heroism corpus of Umuga, the one popularly called “Okoroigwe”, heroes who make great exploits are celebrated with the total exclusion of heroines who play various roles in engendering social harmony. We learn about this injustice from the legendary tales told by Aziagba, Eaglewoman’s daughter’s grandmother. The enthusiasm with which she tells tales of how Western colonialists “waged” war “against Umuga people” (328) and the “...exploits of our ancestors, Obiatu and Okoroji, the War Commander of Umuga” leaves much impact on the ladies especially Nnenne who vows to do more research on the legend. This tale itself is a feminism lite designed to maintain control over women. The glee with which their grandmother narrates the exploits of Okorigwe, also Okoroji – the rhapsody that he is “the legendary figure in Umuga tradition whose story makes the head swell with wonder and admiration” makes Nnenne ask, “Was there no female Okorigwe?” (329). Nnenne’s question is introspective for her grandmother who answers innocuously that she does not “remember any female Okorigwe” (330). While grandma is following her understanding of who men say women are in the story, Nnenne is seeing loopholes in the perceptions in the story – loopholes which make her wonder if the Igbo traditional culture has changed, the fact that usually, “things in the universe stand in pairs... if something stands, another like it stands next to it to complement it” (330). For her, everything in the story is antithetical to the fact that, “a woman who wishes to live a fulfilled life expends her time fighting many battles: winning some, losing some” (330) and after all her struggles, she is not celebrated on the same red carpet with her male counterparts. The fear trait in feminism lites is shrouded with superstitions. For instance, many cultures in Nigeria make women believe that it is wrong for a woman to see a masquerade. Whereas it is just a superstition functioning as a control mechanism. In the same way, the Okwaras narrate the story of their supposed haunted home, “nobody in this house knows what it is; we only hear its cry. We are too frightened to try to find out what it is” (162). Even a bull is said to possess Osai’s spirt whenever it’s on charge. However, as part of her agential expression, Nnenne vows to put the female Okorigwe in the same hall of fame where her male counterparts are and, “if indeed she did not exist, then I would invent her – create her in my stories, in my writing” (329). Her resolve is partly gratified on Obuofo Day when the Eze confers “posthumous chieftaincy titles on both male and female Obuofo who led Umuga with wisdom more than half a century ago. They died in the service of their fatherland” (302). The Okwaras’ counternarratives, just like the gains of the many years of feminism advocacy, are yielding gradual results.

Feminism lite engenders self-deprecation in ways that make women doubt their dignity, self-esteem, and right to individual freedom. The feminism lites that patriarchy creates for women are meant to be a “prison of low self-esteem, which blights their psyche” (101). The chauvinistic custodians of this system of repression make sure that through their actions, women “abhor individual action or self-determination” (101) and get “submerged by culture” (101). They make sure “...women inevitably become self-effacing, lacking self-confidence” (101). They also make women feel less deserving of pleasure and satisfaction during sex. These are all forms of euphemistic externalities of the interiority of patriarchal subjugation which gaslight women into low self-esteem. To reject this bait, Nnenna admonishes Umuga women to know that “the pleasure is not all his. You have a right to some of it. You should ensure that you get it, or there should be no business at all” (113). To buttress the significance of her counsel, a woman in the audience narrates her sex experience with her husband, “my spirit stands aside to watch... like the ghost of a newly dead person... watching the funeral rites” (113). To also erase the self-deprecation that goes with economic dependency on men, the Okwaras “urge each one of you to find something to do to generate income for yourself so that you can take care of yourself and your children...” (118). It is ironic that the same men who enforce women’s subordination within patriarchal socio-cultural systems also engage in practices that belittle and gaslight them, especially in contexts of economic dependency.

Finally, feminism-lite is designed to oppress women both physically and psychologically. For instance, when a man dies, his wife becomes the first suspect. Eaglewoman is equally caught in this web. She is asked, ‘to perform the three-day ritual lament at cockcrow, after the burial’ (161). In a most humiliating way, she is supposed to wail, “like a hyena for three days” (161). While she sits uncomfortably at the middle of the conundrum, her daughters play the role of a devil’s advocate. They wonder “why on earth” (161) Umuga will “want to sustain such a horrible custom” (161). The burial rite is sensationalised to look communal – the euphemistic camouflage – but interiorly imbued with subjugation. Ironically, it is designed to manipulate women psychologically against their kind, pit them against each other. This is what we see in the way Umuada (women married outside Umuga) execute the rituals to the detriment of their fellow women. They force the “horrible custom” (161) on Eaglewoman, and do not mince words or actions in “eating and drinking in my house at my expense, without giving a thought to my agony or depression” (161). These Umuada “...complained that the food given them was not big

enough. Sometimes they rejected the food, threatening to desert the funeral rites and rituals” (161). The physical impact of the trauma on the Eaglewoman is that, “the one-year mourning period I was confined at home aggravated the pain in my knees. See where it has left me” (161). As Ruether argues, patriarchy forces on a woman, “...the subjugation of access to her body...” (219). What patriarchy does with feminism lite is akin to what the British colonialists did with the indirect rule system in southern Nigeria – the so-called divide and rule system. The experiences of Eaglewoman and her daughters in Umuga are best captured in Caruth’s trauma polemics, the fact that, “[T]he traumatized, we might say, carry an impossible history within them, or they become themselves the symptom of a history that they cannot entirely possess” (5). Hence, Nussbaum claims that trauma is only better understood by its victims (328). Eaglewoman and her daughters are victims of trauma who have decided to do something drastic about their persisting condition. The social consciousness that Adimora-Ezeigbo creates in the novel underpins the argument that, “The African writer is a fated social activist” (Okonkwo 198).

Conclusion

My goal in this study is to interrogate the representations of patriarchal interiority and exteriority in *Children of the Eagle*, how Adimora-Ezeigbo deploys both elements as cultural techniques used in concealing and enacting patriarchal oppression. The study draws attention to the epistemic tensions in patriarchal perception and female self-definition by foregrounding the question, “Who do men say we are?” This intellectual focus enabled a critical re-reading of gender identity formation in Nigeria – a process configured by overt structures of domination, and the subtle, euphemistic cultural performances that normalise inequality while projecting harmony. From the analysis, it is clear that patriarchal interiority – comprising entrenched assumptions, prejudices, and hierarchies – finds expression through exterior cultural practices like inheritance laws, widowhood rites, symbolic exclusions, and gendered speech acts. These practices, which are usually framed as communal, protective, or morally grounded, signpost what Adichie calls feminism-lite – a performative and conditional inclusion that preserves male authority beneath the veneer of benevolence. The study further reveals that these exteriorities are not benign. They rather produce material and psychological consequences, which include self-deprecation, economic dependency, and internalised subordination among women. The study also shows that Adimora-Ezeigbo in this novel constructs resistance as an epistemic and performative act. From the actions of Eaglewoman and her daughters, she highlights the fact that counternarratives

emerge from an awareness of the disjunction between what patriarchy says and what it does. Their verbal protests, legal consciousness, and symbolic defiance collectively disrupt the coherence of patriarchal constructs, thereby exposing its contradictions. In this sense, resistance becomes both oppositional and reconstructive as it generates alternative meanings of identity, agency, and belonging in the same cultural space. Theory-wise, the study extends the applicability of Rudiger Campe and Julia Weber's interiority and exteriority by situating both in gender studies, showing how internalised ideologies are externalised by means of cultural performance. It also deepens the analytical utility of Adichie's feminism-lite by revealing its embeddedness in everyday socio-cultural practices, instead of treating it as a purely rhetorical construct. Hence, the frameworks used in this study provide a more nuanced understanding of patriarchy as a system sustained by affect, symbolism, habituated belief systems, coercion and law. This encourages literary scholars and cultural participants to interrogate the legitimacy of inherited norms. It also highlights the importance of economic agency, narrative self-representation, and legal awareness as tools used by women in negotiating and resisting systemic subordination in contemporary African societies. In addition, the study is not without limitations. Its primary focus on a single literary text restricts the generalisability of its conclusions across diverse Nigerian cultures. In addition, while it foregrounds the ideological dimensions of patriarchy, it does not fully engage with empirical sociological data that might further substantiate the lived experiences reflected in the novel. Future research may therefore expand this inquiry using comparative method to analyse multiple literary texts or by integrating interdisciplinary approaches that combine literary criticism with gender studies, sociology, and legal theory.

In conclusion, the study reaffirms that patriarchal domination in *Children of the Eagle* operates less as an overt imposition and more as a deeply embedded consciousness that sustains itself by means of cultural performance and euphemistic legitimisation. Adimora-Ezeigbo challenges this hegemonic mindset that defines women negatively and empowers her female characters to redefine themselves from within. It is therefore within this dialogic space – imposed identity and asserted selfhood – that the transformative potential of feminist counternarratives ultimately resides.

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A Socio-Phonetic Evaluation of Courtroom Intonation Tunes in Legal Advocacy in Southwestern Nigeria

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Abstract

This study examines the socio-phonetic functions of intonation patterns within the Nigerian judicial system with on their role as discourse strategies and impact on argument effectiveness. Using Interactional Sociolinguistics Theory and the ToBI (Tones and Break Indices) framework, the research investigates how legal professionals (judges and lawyers) employ prosodic features including pitch variation, stress and rhythm in courtroom dynamics. A mixed-methods design, combining questionnaires from 48 legal practitioners in Southwestern Nigeria with qualitative acoustic analysis of audio-recorded interactions were used. Findings indicate that intonation is a conscious and strategic tool, particularly in criminal cases and closing arguments, with specific prosodic finality markers (e.g., authoritative falling tunes) asserting legal primacy. The study also highlights the significant influence of indigenous Nigerian languages on courtroom English prosody. It concludes that intonation is crucial for legal advocacy in Nigeria and recommends integrating prosodic training into legal education to enhance communicative competence.

Keywords: Courtroom Discourse, Interactional Sociolinguistics, Socio-phonetic, Intonation, Nigerian English, Persuasion, Legal Advocacy.

1.0 Introduction

Language serves as the primary instrument of the law and the courtroom represents a unique sociolinguistic arena where the strategic use of speech can determine the outcome of legal disputes. While traditional legal scholarship has often concentrated on the semantic and syntactic properties of legal language, the "what" of legal communication, however the prosodic dimensions, particularly intonation, play an important role in shaping the pragmatic meaning and persuasive impact of courtroom interactions, thereby representing the "how" of legal delivery (Cotterill, 2003; Tannen, 2005). In the Nigerian context, where English functions as the official language of the judiciary alongside a rich tapestry of over 500 indigenous languages (Ethnologue, 2025), the interplay between prosody, culture and legal procedure becomes an exceptionally

complex field of study. The courtroom is not merely a place where laws are applied; it is a space where language is performed, and where the “melody” of that performance can be as consequential as the legal statutes themselves.

Intonation, often described as the “melody” or “music” of speech, involves systematic variations in pitch, stress and rhythm that convey a speaker’s attitude, stance and communicative intent (Cruttenden, 1997; Ladd, 1996). In the high-stakes, adversarial environment of the courtroom, these prosodic features serve as vital “contextualisation cues” (Gumperz, 1982), enabling judges, lawyers, witnesses, and litigants to interpret meanings that frequently extend beyond the literal or “black-letter” words used in courtroom interactions. For instance, a sharp falling tone may signal institutional authority, finality and factual certainty, while a rising tone might indicate uncertainty, a request for confirmation, or even a subtle challenge to a previous statement (Roach, 2000; Wells, 2006). The ability of a legal professional to master these cues is not merely a matter of stylistic flourish; it is a core component of communicative competence. It influences how judges and jurors perceive the credibility of a witness, sincerity of a defendant and emotional weight of a lawyer’s closing argument. In a linguistically diverse society such as Nigeria, where English has been nativised under the influence of the tonal systems of indigenous languages, the strategic deployment of intonation constitutes a critical resource for negotiating legal persuasion and managing courtroom interaction.

The significance of intonation in legal discourse is underscored due to the fact that courtroom interactions are fundamentally oral. Despite the importance of written briefs and documents, the trial remains a verbal performance where the spoken word is the primary vehicle for justice. In Nigeria, the judicial system is characterised by a blend of British common law traditions and indigenous social realities. This unique hybridity is reflected in the way legal professionals speak. The Standard English employed in courtroom proceedings is often realised as a distinct variety of Nigerian Legal English, characterised by prosodic features that reflect the speaker's first language, whether Yoruba, Igbo, Hausa, or one of Nigeria's numerous indigenous languages. (Akindele & Fabunmi, 2026 and Farinde & Ojo, 2015). Understanding how these prosodic patterns function within the formal constraints of the law is essential for ensuring that the judicial process is both clear and fair. When a lawyer’s intonation is misinterpreted by a judge from a different regional or linguistic background, the consequences for the case can be profound. Thus, the study of courtroom prosody extends beyond a purely academic exercise in linguistics; it constitutes a necessary exploration of the communicative foundations of the Nigerian justice system.

Despite its importance, the study of intonation in Nigerian courtroom discourse remains relatively under-researched. Existing studies have explored various aspects of Nigerian English and legal discourse, but few have provided a detailed analysis that integrates acoustic phonetics with sociolinguistic theory in a legal setting (Ekpang & Ogolekwu, 2024; Aluko, 2020 and Farinde & Ojo, 2015). This gap in knowledge is particularly significant given the nativisation of English in Nigeria, where the phonological features of indigenous languages such as Yoruba, Igbo and Hausa inevitably influence the prosodic patterns of legal professionals.

This study addressed this gap by examining the effect of intonation patterns on argument effectiveness and identifying the roles of intonation as a discourse strategy in Nigerian courtrooms. By adopting an interactional sociolinguistic theory and ToBI (Tones and Break Indices) framework, the research aimed to uncover how prosodic features are utilised to manage power dynamics, negotiate meaning and enhance persuasion within the institutional constraints of the judicial process.

1.1 Research Objectives

The study was guided by the following specific objectives:

- i. to examine the effect of intonation patterns on argument effectiveness in Nigerian courtroom discourse; and
- ii. to determine the roles of intonation patterns as a discourse strategy in courtroom interactions.

2.0 Literature Review

The intersection of language and the law has long been a subject of scholarly inquiry, with researchers studying how linguistic choices reflect and reinforce power structures within the judicial system. This section reviews relevant literature on courtroom discourse, the role of intonation in persuasion and the specific sociolinguistic context of the Nigerian legal system.

2.1 Courtroom Discourse and Power Dynamics

Courtroom discourse is a specialised form of institutional interaction characterised by rigid procedural rules and profoundly asymmetrical power relations. Scholars such as Atkinson (1984) and Drew (1990) have highlighted how the structure of legal questioning particularly during cross-examination allows lawyers to control the narrative and constrain the responses of witnesses. In these interactions, language is not merely a medium of communication but a tool for exercising authority and managing the verbal performance of the trial.

The courtroom is an arena where legal “stories” are constructed and the success of these stories often depends on the speaker’s ability to manipulate linguistic and paralinguistic features to establish credibility and dominance. This power is not just expressed through the choice of words but through the “vocal choreography” of the trial, where every pause, emphasis, and pitch shift contributes to the performative force of legal speech.

In the Nigerian context, the study of courtroom discourse aid in accounting for the unique sociolinguistic history of the nation. Farinde and Ojo (2015) investigated the use of declaratives and control in Nigerian courtroom discourse, noting that lawyers often use falling intonation on declarative questions to exert coercion and persuasiveness. Their research suggests that prosodic features are integral to the “linguistic communication” between legal professionals, serving as markers of power and control. They argue that the “nativisation” of English in Nigeria adds a layer of complexity to these power dynamics, as local linguistic norms influence the “tone of authority” adopted by legal practitioners. For instance, the “commanding” tone used by a senior lawyer may be influenced by the hierarchical structures of Nigerian society, where age and professional status are reflected in speech patterns. Similarly, Ekpang and Ogolekwu (2024) emphasised the need for sociolinguistic lenses to understand the “language dynamics” in Nigerian High Court proceedings, particularly how participants navigate the institutional constraints of the judicial process while expressing their cultural and professional identities. Furthermore, the notion of “communicative competence” in courtroom discourse extends beyond mastery of legal statutes and case law to encompass what Hymes (1974) defines as the ability to use language appropriately within a particular “speech community”. In the Nigerian courtroom, this speech community is shaped by the intersection of British colonial legal traditions and contemporary Nigerian sociocultural realities. Consequently, the use of English in this institutional context is adapted to satisfy both the formal demands of legal procedure and the communicative expectations of the wider Nigerian society.

2.2 The Pragmatics of Intonation in Legal Settings

Intonation plays a vital role in the pragmatic interpretation of speech, acting as a bridge between the semantic content of an utterance and its communicative intent. Gumperz (1982) introduced the concept of “contextualisation cues” to describe how prosodic features such as pitch and rhythm signal the social meaning of an utterance. In the courtroom, these cues are essential for managing turn-taking, signaling emphasis and conveying speaker stance. As Couper-Kuhlen (1986) notes, intonation is the “prosodic glue” that holds a discourse

together, providing the listener with the necessary signals to distinguish between what is central and what is peripheral. The pragmatic function of intonation is particularly evident in the way it “brackets” information, helping the judge or jury to follow the logical progression of a complex legal argument.

The persuasive power of intonation has been noted by several researchers who argue that the “melody” of an argument can be as influential as its logical structure. For instance, falling tunes (H*L%) are often associated with factual assertions, finality and the exercise of institutional power. A lawyer who delivers a closing argument with a series of resolute falling tones is likely perceived as more confident and authoritative than one who uses rising or level tones. Conversely, rising tunes (L*H%) can signal doubt, politeness, or a request for confirmation, which may be strategically used during the questioning of a witness to imply uncertainty or to encourage a more detailed response. In Nigerian professional discourses, Akindele et al. (2024) found that intonation cues are crucial for managing complex interactions, such as those between doctors and patients, where trust and authority must be negotiated through speech. This finding has significant implications for the legal sphere, where the “authoritative fall” is frequently used by judges to restore order, overrule objections, or deliver judgments.

The ability to use these prosodic patterns effectively is a key component of what Cotterill (2003) describes as the “linguistic performance” of justice. Cotterill’s analysis of high-profile trials suggests that the “prosodic signature” of a lawyer can become a defining part of their professional identity. In the Nigerian context, this performance is further complicated by the “tonal carryover” from indigenous languages. As Roach (2000) and Wells (2006) have pointed out, the intonation of English is fundamentally different from that of tonal languages. Nigerian legal practitioners must therefore navigate a “prosodic middle ground,” where they use the formal structures of English intonation while still remaining culturally resonant to their audience. However, this “nativised prosody” is not a sign of linguistic deficiency but a mark of professional adaptation, allowing the law to be communicated in a way that is both legally sound and socially meaningful.

2.3 Nigerian English and Indigenous Language Influence

The sociolinguistic landscape of Nigeria is characterised by extensive linguistic diversity, with over 500 indigenous languages influencing the way English is spoken and perceived (Ethnologue, 2025). Nigerian English (NigE) is a nativised variety that incorporates phonological, syntactic and lexical features

from these local languages (Aluko, 2020). This “nativisation” is profoundly evident in the prosodic patterns of Nigerian speakers. Unlike British or American English, which are stress-timed, many Nigerian languages are syllable-timed or tonal. This often results in a distinct “Nigerian accent” in legal English, where pitch movements are used differently to signal emphasis and emotion.

Akindele & Fabunmi (2026) conducted a study on the sociolinguistic perceptions of intonation in Southwestern Nigerian courtrooms, highlighting how local cultural norms shape the interpretation of prosodic cues. For example, a rising tone on a declarative sentence, which might be a neutral “uptalk” in some Western varieties of English, could be perceived as disrespectful, inquisitive or even argumentative in a Nigerian legal context. Conversely, a very flat intonation might be interpreted as a lack of interest or a lack of conviction. This explains the importance of the need to understand the “culturally specific” nature of prosody in the Nigerian judiciary, where the effective use of intonation requires a delicate balance between adhering to formal legal discourse conventions and remaining intelligible and persuasive to a linguistically diverse audience. The literature suggests that while the formal rules of legal discourse are often universal, their pragmatic realisation through prosody is deeply embedded in local linguistic and cultural practices (Farinde & Ojo, 2015).

3.0 Research Methodology

The research design for this study followed a mixed-methods approach that combined both quantitative and qualitative techniques to ensure the results were both scientifically sound and rich in detail. The participants in this study were legal professionals working in the judicial system of 3 States that includes Osun, Oyo and Lagos. A total of forty-eight (48) participants were selected using a purposive sampling method to ensure that only those with significant experience in courtroom advocacy and management were included. This group was carefully divided to include eight (8) judges from both Magistrate and Federal High Courts and forty (40) lawyers with varying levels of experience. This specific selection process was vital because it allowed the researchers to gather information from experts who understand the subtle ways language is used to assert authority and persuade others in a legal setting.

Data collection involved two main tools that captured different parts of how people speak. First, a detailed twenty-item questionnaire was sent out to participants to gather their thoughts on how intonation is used and how culture affects their speech. To make sure everyone understood the technical terms, the survey included a simple guide explaining concepts such as pitch and tone.

Second, the researchers recorded ten hours of actual courtroom proceedings after getting permission from the appropriate authorities. These recordings captured the natural, unscripted speech of judges and lawyers as they worked, providing a real-world view at how they use their voices naturally during trials.

The analysis of this data was done in several stages using both statistical methods and specialised computer software called Praat. The survey results were analysed to find general trends and see where most legal professionals agreed or disagreed. For the audio recordings, the researchers employed discourse analysis to examine the relationship between specific speech patterns and their communicative functions, such as the expression of authority and the management of topic transition. In addition, the audio recordings were subjected to acoustic analysis using *Praat*, which enabled the visualisation of pitch contours and the precise measurement of fundamental frequency (F0) variations. The acoustic findings were integrated with the qualitative discourse analysis to provide empirical validation of the identified prosodic features and their interactional functions.

Throughout the research process, the study was guided by the principles of Interactional Sociolinguistics, which posit that communicative meaning is constructed through both the linguistic content of an utterance and the prosodic and contextual cues accompanying its delivery. Ethical standards were strictly followed, with all necessary permissions obtained from judicial authorities. All participants were told exactly why the study was being done and their identities were kept completely confidential. The recordings and survey responses were stored securely and used only for this academic research, ensuring that the study met international standards for conducting sensitive linguistic research in institutional settings.

4.0 Data Presentation and Analysis

CASE A: Analysis of Intonation Pattern in an Accident Case

Table 1: Representation of Intonation Patterns, Functions and Persuasive Effects of key Exchanges in an Accident case between the State and Mr. XY

Speaker	Excerpt	Intonation Pattern	Intonation Function	Persuasive/ Interpretive Effect
State Counsel	"...death of five students..."	Falling	Attitudinal	Conveys seriousness, emotional gravity
State Counsel (Referencing Witness Statement)	"...he persisted."	Fall-rise	Discourse	Highlights reckless decision-making
State Counsel (Referencing Witness Statement)	"Pictorial evidences from the accident scene, Skid marks and witnesses statements confirm that the luxury bus was on a wrong lane."	Falling	Accentual and grammatical	Adds forensic credibility and logical structure to the prosecution's case.
State Counsel	"Enough of this lawlessness..."	Rise –fall	Accentual and attitudinal	Signals collective anger and advocacy
Defence Counsel	"We plead with the court..."	Fall-rise	Attitudinal	Polite appeal for compassion
Judge	"...bail is hereby denied."	Falling	Discourse	Finality, institutional authority

Speaker	Excerpt	Intonation Pattern	Intonation Function	Persuasive/ Interpretive Effect
Judge	<i>"The defendant is to be remanded at Ilesha Correctional Centre until June 2, 2025."</i>	Falling intonation	Grammatical	Marks closure of argument; affirms legal authority.

Source: Researcher's Computation (2026)

Interpretation of Table 1

The analysis of the accident case between the State and Mr. XY vividly illustrates the strategic deployment of prosody in criminal litigation to convey emotion, moral judgment, and legal authority. The distinct prosodic choices made by each legal actor systematically reflect their institutional roles and persuasive objectives. The State Counsel's strategy to emphasise gravity and moral condemnation is evident in the systematic use of the Falling Tune (HL%) to establish the seriousness of the offense and the Rise-Fall Tune (HL-H%) to signal collective advocacy and strong conviction. For instance, the falling tone in "...death of five students..." not only conveys seriousness and certainty but also leverages the inherent finality of this intonation pattern to underscore the factual weight of forensic evidence, such as the road safety report and pictorial evidence. The shift to a fall-rise tune when referencing the witness statement ("...he persisted.") subtly highlights reckless decision-making, thereby challenging the defendant's Ethos by implying a deliberate disregard for safety.

Conversely, the Defence Counsel employs a controlled tone and a Fall-Rise pattern ("We plead with the court...") to project caution, politeness, and an appeal for judicial leniency (Pathos). This prosodic choice aims to evoke empathy, framing the client not as an inherently criminal individual but as someone who made a serious mistake, thereby mitigating the perceived severity of the act. This strategic use of intonation seeks to soften the court's perception and open a pathway for compassion.

The Judge's discourse is consistently dominated by the Falling Tune (H*L%), which unequivocally serves to assert institutional authority and deliver rulings with an air of finality. The definitive statement, "...bail is hereby denied," delivered with a firm and conclusive falling tone, clearly communicates the court's serious stance on the loss of life. Similarly, the final order regarding the

defendant's remand is also characterised by a falling tune. This pervasive prosodic pattern signals absolute closure and reinforces the institutional Ethos of the court, demonstrating that the judge's legal authority takes precedence over the emotional appeals presented by the defense. This highlights how intonation functions as a powerful tool for maintaining order and enforcing judicial decisions within the courtroom setting.

CASE B: Analysis of Intonation in a Debt Recovery Case

Table 2: Representation of Intonation Patterns, Functions and Persuasive Effects of key Exchanges in a case of Debt Recovery between Mr. A Enterprises Ltd and K & A Store.

Speaker	Excerpt	Intonation Pattern	Intonation Function	Persuasive/ Interpretive Effect
Judge	"This matter is for the continuation of hearing. The witness, Mr. K, is still under cross-examination. Claimant's counsel, you may proceed."	Falling tune (H*L%)	Discourse	Establishes institutional control and marks procedural transition.
Claimant's Counsel	"Thank you, My Lord. Mr. K, you have admitted under oath that your company... received the goods listed in Invoice No. -0225... Is that correct?"	Rising tune (L*H%)	Grammatical/ Attitudinal	Seeks confirmation of the foundational fact (receipt of goods); constrains the witness.
Witness	"Yes, we received the goods."	Falling tune (L*L%)	Attitudinal	Factual admission; projects compliance.
Claimant's Counsel	"And this invoice, which has been admitted as Exhibit C3, states a total value of Four Million, Eight Hundred Thousand Naira only. Do you see that?"	Rising tune (L*H%)	Grammatical/ Attitudinal	Seeks confirmation of the debt amount; continues to build factual certainty.
Witness	"We... we called their salesman."	Falling tune (L*L%)	Attitudinal	Evasive; attempts to introduce a non-verifiable verbal complaint.

Speaker	Excerpt	Intonation Pattern	Intonation Function	Persuasive/ Interpretive Effect
Claimant's Counsel	"I put it to you that you never made any formal complaint. I have here the Certified True Copy of your company's WhatsApp chat... Can you point to <i>one</i> message where you complained about dented cans or weak crates?"	Falling tune (H*L%)	Discourse/ Attitudinal	Direct confrontation; asserts the documentary evidence over the witness's claim.
Witness	<i>(Pauses, looks at his lawyer)</i> "It might not be there... but we told them verbally."	Fall-rise tune (H*L-H%)	Attitudinal	Admission of lack of documentary proof; attempts to salvage the claim with a verbal assertion.
Claimant's Counsel	"Your defence is a recent fabrication, isn't it, Mr. K? You received valuable goods, sold them in your store, and now seek to avoid payment by inventing defects."	Rising tune (L*H%)	Attitudinal	Direct accusation of dishonesty; invites denial or admission of the rhetorical question.
Defendant's Counsel	"My Lord, I object. Counsel is badgering the witness and making declaratory statements."	Falling tune (H*L%)	Discourse	Formal objection; asserts procedural protection for the witness.
Judge	"Objection sustained. Counsel, ask questions, do not testify. Rephrase."	Falling tune (H*L%)	Discourse	Judicial ruling; asserts control over the Claimant's Counsel's rhetoric.
Claimant's Counsel	"As Your Lordship pleases. Mr. Khalifa, after receiving these goods in March 2024, did you make <i>any</i> part-payment towards the ₦4.8 million debt?"	Rising tune (L*H%)	Grammatical/ Attitudinal	Shifts focus to the lack of payment; seeks confirmation of a negative fact.
Witness	"We had an arrangement... we were paying in bits. We paid maybe one million."	Falling tune (L*L%)	Attitudinal	Vague claim of payment; attempts to introduce a non-verifiable fact.

Speaker	Excerpt	Intonation Pattern	Intonation Function	Persuasive/ Interpretive Effect
Claimant's Counsel	““Maybe one million”? Do you have any proof of this payment? A bank transfer receipt, a teller, a signed acknowledgment from my client?”	Rising tune (L*H%)	Grammatical/ Attitudinal	Challenges the payment claim; forces the witness to admit lack of proof.
Witness	“It was cash. We gave it to the driver sometimes.”	Falling tune (L*L%)	Attitudinal	Evasive explanation; attempts to justify the lack of proof.
Claimant's Counsel	“So, you have no proof whatsoever. I put it to you that no payment was ever made. Furthermore, I have in my hand a series of demand letters... Did you receive it?”	Rising tune (L*H%)	Grammatical/ Attitudinal	Assertive statement followed by a question; forces admission of the demand letter.
Witness	“It means business has been very bad. Sales are slow. We could not sell the goods as fast as we thought, and that affected our ability to pay. We intended to pay, but we needed patience.”	Falling tune (H*L%)	Attitudinal	Detailed narrative of hardship; appeals to <i>Pathos</i> (sympathy).
Defendant's Counsel	“So, your failure to pay was not an outright refusal, but an inability due to circumstances?”	Rising tune (L*H%)	Attitudinal	Guides the witness to a clear, mitigating conclusion.
Judge	“Court is adjourned.”	Falling tune (L*L%)	Discourse	Signals absolute closure and institutional control.

Source: Researcher's Computation (2026)

Interpretation of Table 2

The analysis of Mr. A Enterprises Ltd vs. K & A Store represents the use of prosody in civil litigation to establish factual certainty, challenge witness credibility and assert the finality of contract law. The prosodic choices of the legal actors systematically reflect their institutional roles and persuasive goals. The Claimant's Counsel's strategy to mark Factual Certainty and Credibility Challenge is marked by the systematic use of the Rising Tune (LH%) to establish a chain of uncontested facts and the Falling Tune (HL%) to assert the legal conclusion. In establishing the Core Facts, the initial cross-examination uses a series of rising-toned questions (“Is that correct?”, “Do you see that?”,

and “Correct?”) to force the Witness to confirm the foundational elements of the contract: receipt of goods, invoice amount, and signed delivery note. This technique uses the rising contour not to seek new information, but to constrain the Witness's discursive space to simple, factual admissions, thereby building a foundation of certainty (Logos). While challenging credibility, the counsel shifts to a falling tune when asserting the documentary evidence over the Witness's verbal claims (“I put it to you that you never made any formal complaint.”). This prosodic shift asserts the primacy of the written record and challenges the Witness's Ethos. The Witness's use of falling tune (“It might not be there... but we told them verbally.”) is a prosodic reflection of his credibility being undermined. The Defendant's Counsel's strategy is to reframe the motive for non-payment from fraudulent intent to economic hardship, primarily appealing to Pathos. The Counsel uses the Rising Tune (L*H%) in re-examination (“So, your failure to pay was not an outright refusal, but an inability due to circumstances?”) to guide the Witness toward a clear, mitigating conclusion. The Witness's subsequent use of falling tunes in the narrative of hardship (“It means business has been very bad...” are used to project sincerity and appeal for judicial sympathy. The Counsel's formal closing argument is delivered with a falling tune, attempting to balance the admitted facts with the mitigating narrative of a “genuine business dispute and liquidity challenge.”

The Judge discourse is dominated by the falling tune (H*L%), which serves to assert the primacy of contract law and dismiss all mitigating arguments. In addition, the Judge judicial summary (“The defence of defective goods is unsupported... and is inconsistent with the defendant's own earlier correspondence.”) is delivered with a falling tune, systematically dismantling the defense's arguments. The definitive statement, “Economic hardship, while unfortunate, is not a legal defence to a valid debt,” is delivered with falling tune. Also, the final Judgment and the specific orders are delivered with a falling tune. This prosodic pattern signals absolute finality and reinforces the institutional Ethos of the court, asserting that the legal principle of contractual certainty overrides the individual circumstances of economic difficulty.

Quantitative Analysis

The quantitative data investigates how legal professionals consciously perceive and utilise intonation in their daily practice.

Table 3: Factors Influencing Intonational Variation in Courtroom Discourse (N=48)

S/N	Question	Response Category	Frequency	Percentage
1	Does intonation differ between civil and criminal cases?	Yes, significantly	18	37.5%
		Yes, slightly	18	37.5%
		No, not noticeably	12	25.0%
		Unsure	0	0.0%
2	Does the nature of the interaction (e.g., judge-lawyer) influence intonation?	Highly adapted	22	45.8%
		Minor adaptations	15	31.2%
		Largely consistent	7	14.6%
		Unsure	4	8.3%
3	Differences between opening statements and closing arguments?	Yes (Openings: Informative; Closings: Persuasive)	31	64.6%
		Yes (Closings: More dramatic)	9	18.8%
		No, generally similar	3	6.3%
		Unsure	5	10.4%
4	Does the presence of a jury affect intonation use?	More conscious and strategic	17	35.4%

S/N	Question	Response Category	Frequency	Percentage
		Simplify for clarity	15	31.3%
		More emotional and expressive	8	16.7%
		No significant effect	3	6.3%
		Unsure	5	10.4%
5	Gender-based differences in intonation?	Males: More authoritative falling tones	13	27.1%
		Females: More rising tones (misconstrued)	6	12.5%
		Subtle/Individual differences	17	35.4%
		No significant differences	11	23.0%
		Unsure	1	2.0%

The data in table 3 above indicates a strong consensus (75%) that the gravity of the case (civil vs. criminal) influences vocal delivery, with criminal cases likely demanding a more solemn and emphatic tone. Furthermore, 83.4% of respondents observe a clear distinction between opening statements and closing arguments, with the latter being significantly more "persuasive and emotional." This suggests that legal professionals strategically vary their prosody to match the rhetorical goals of different trial phases.

Table 4: Cultural and Sociolinguistic Influences on Intonation (N=48)

S/N	Question	Response Category	Frequency	Percentage
1	Influence of indigenous Nigerian languages on English intonation?	Significantly/Profoundly	15	31.3%
		Moderately	14	29.2%
		Slightly	16	33.3%
		Not at all	3	6.3%
2	Cultural misinterpretation of intonation patterns?	Yes, can be misinterpreted	20	41.7%
		Yes, but understood in context	12	25.0%
		No, little impact	10	20.8%
		Unsure	6	12.5%
3	Formality of courtroom shaping intonational range?	Allows variation within boundaries	23	47.9%
		Strictly limits variation	14	29.2%
		Little impact	8	16.7%
		Encourages dramatic intonation	3	6.3%
4	Regional differences in intonation?	Yes, distinct and noticeable	23	47.9%
		Yes, but minor	14	29.2%

S/N	Question	Response Category	Frequency	Percentage
		No, standardised intonation	8	16.7%
		Unsure	3	6.3%
5	Inclusion of intonation in legal training?	Absolutely crucial	18	37.5%
		Beneficial but not essential	24	50.0%
		No, natural skill	4	8.3%
		No, content is more important	2	4.2%

Table 4 presents the impact of the Nigerian sociolinguistic environment on courtroom discourse. A staggering 93.8% of participants acknowledge the influence of indigenous languages on courtroom English prosody. This confirms that Nigerian legal English is a distinct variety characterised by unique stress and tone patterns derived from the speakers' first languages. Moreover, 87.5% of respondents support the inclusion of prosodic training in legal education, underscoring the perceived importance of vocal delivery in professional success.

Praat Analysis

CASE A: Praat Analysis of Excerpt from Membership of Secret Cult Group

Figure 1

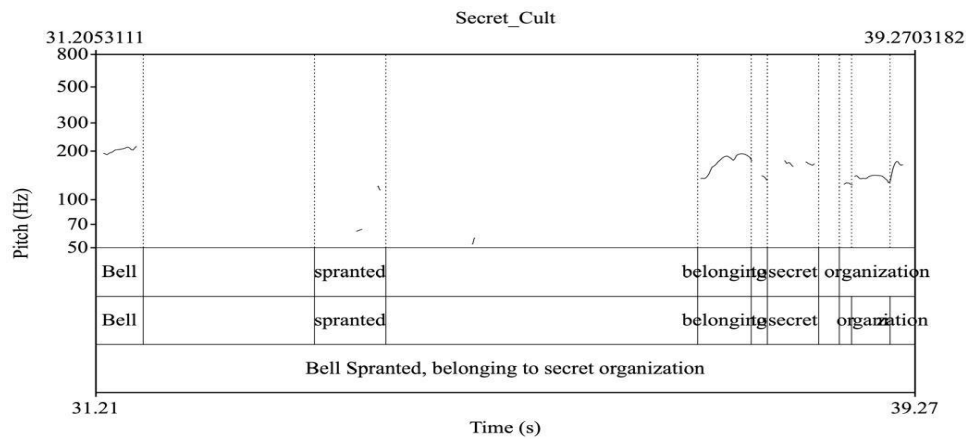


Figure 1 illustrates the acoustic analysis of the statement: ".....belonging to secret organisation." The pitch contour demonstrates a Falling Tune (H*L%), which remains relatively stable during the initial identification and drops significantly on the final syllable of "organisation." This intonation is used to establish a factual premise for the court, serving as a "prosodic anchor" that signals formal, informative delivery.

Figure 2

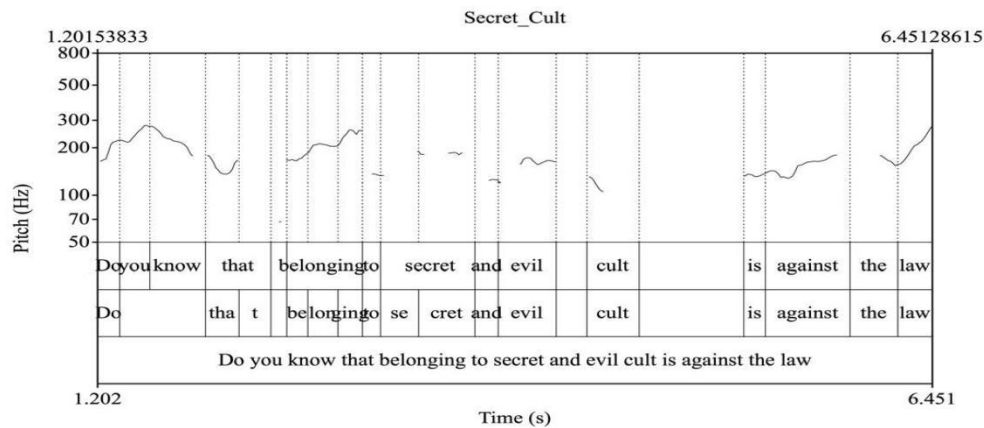


Figure 2 presents the acoustic analysis of the statement: "Do you know that belonging to secret and evil cult is against the law." The pitch contour demonstrates a prominent Rising Pitch (L*H%), which starts low and climbs sharply toward the end of the interrogative on the word "law." This intonation is used to challenge credibility and exert psychological pressure, functioning as

a "prosodic trap" during cross-examination. By ending with a high rise, the counsel forces the witness into a binary "yes/no" admission, directly challenging or seek to establish credibility.

Figure 3

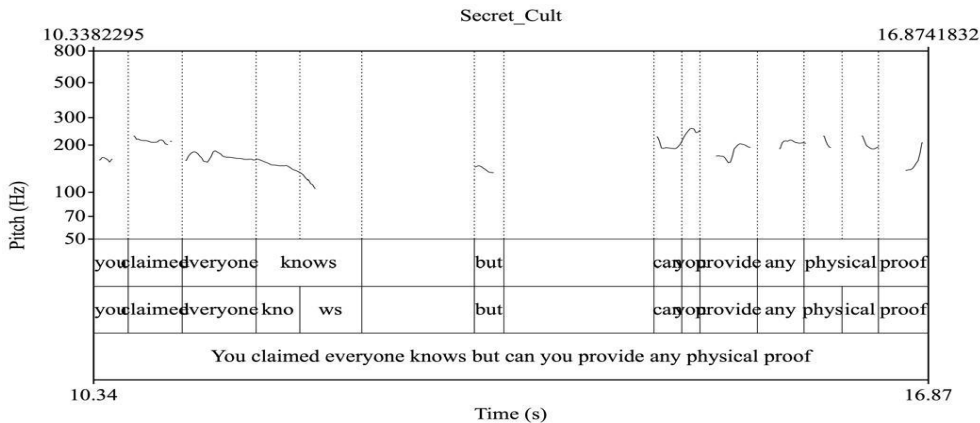


Figure 3 illustrates the acoustic analysis of the statement: "You claimed everyone knows but can you provide any physical proof." The pitch contour demonstrates a High Pitch Accent (H) on "claimed" and "proof," with a noticeable Fall-Rise (H*L-H%) on the final phrase "physical proof." This intonation is used to highlight the witness's subjective assertion versus the demand for empirical evidence, signaling skepticism and guiding the court's attention to the lack of empirical evidence.

Figure 4

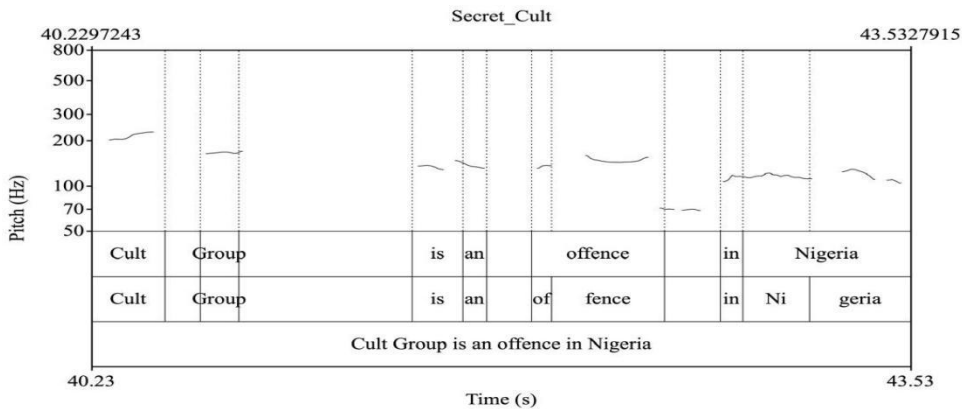


Figure 4 illustrates the acoustic analysis of the statement: "Cult Group is an offence in Nigeria." The pitch contour demonstrates a definitive Low Falling Tune (L*L%), which is controlled and reaches its lowest point at the end of the

utterance. This intonation is used to assert the primacy of the law and establish legal finality, serving as a "prosodic anchor" that solidifies legal principles.

Figure 5

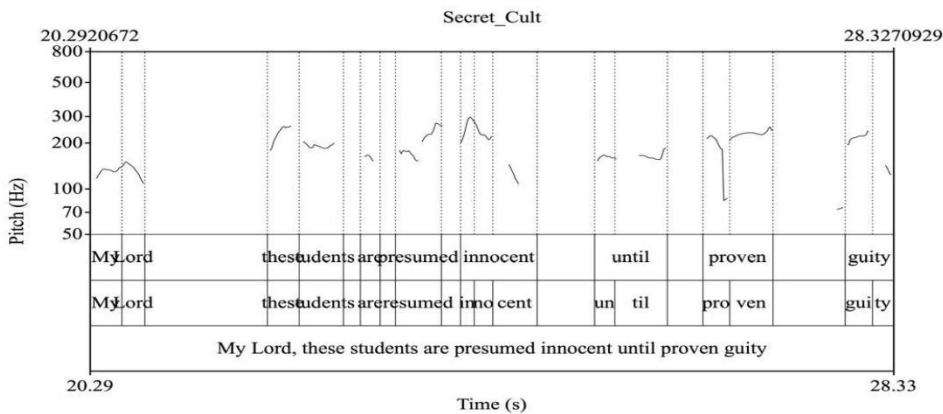


Figure 5 shows the acoustic analysis of the statement: "My Lord, these students are presumed innocent until proven guilty." The pitch contour demonstrates a Rising-Falling Contour on "My Lord" (a polite vocative) followed by a steady, persuasive Falling Tune on "proven guilty." This intonation is used to manage emotional tone and appeal to the court's sense of justice (Pathos), projecting an aura of calm reasonableness.

CASE B: Praat Analysis of Excerpt from Debt Recovery

Figure 6

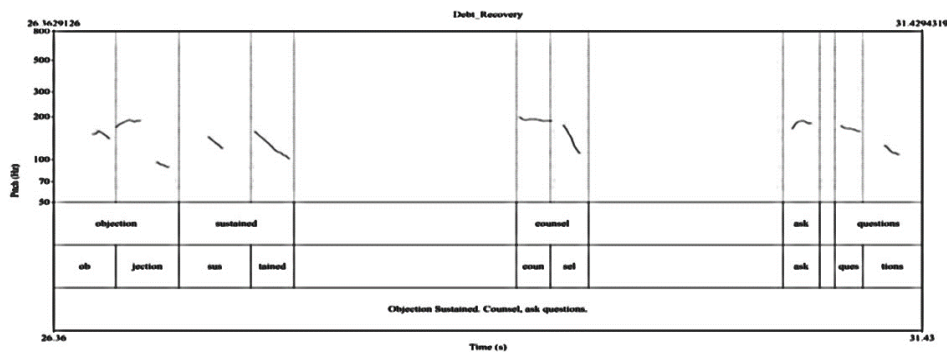
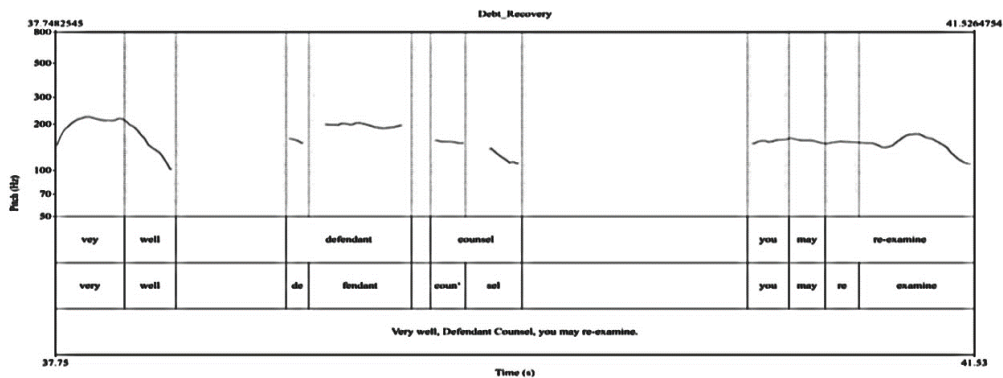


Figure 6 illustrates the acoustic analysis of the Judge's statement: "Objection Sustained. Counsel, ask questions." The pitch contour demonstrates a Falling Tune (H*L%), which begins with a high pitch on the initial syllables and falls sharply to a low point at the end of each phrase. This intonation is used to assert judicial authority and restore procedural order, serving as a "prosodic anchor" that signals institutional control. The finality of the fall leaves no room for

further argument, effectively steering the discourse back to the prescribed legal format.

Figure 7



In Figure 7, the graph illustrates the acoustic analysis of the Judge’s statement: “Very well, Defendant Counsel, you may re-examine.” The pitch contour demonstrates a controlled Falling Tune (H*L%), characterised by a steady, neutral pitch that descends gradually toward the end of the utterance. This intonation is used to provide procedural guidance while maintaining an aura of institutional neutrality. The lack of significant pitch variation projects a sense of fairness and adherence to legal protocol, facilitating the smooth transition between different phases of the trial.

Figure 8

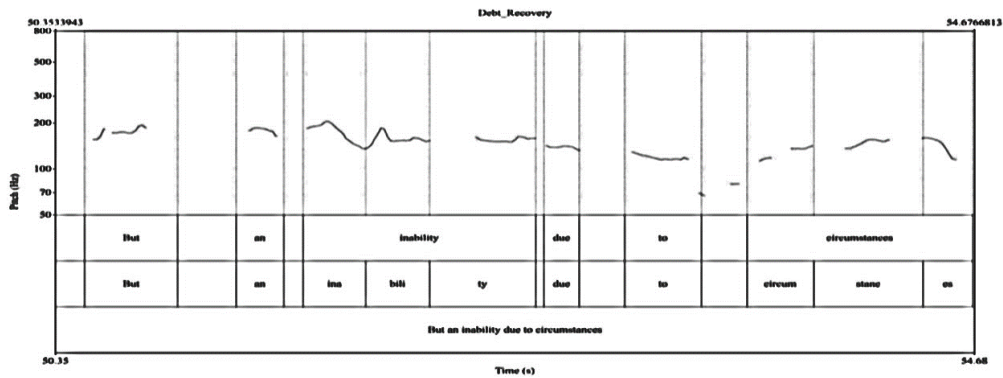


Figure 8 shows the acoustic analysis of the statement: “But an inability due to circumstances.” The pitch contour demonstrates a Fall-Rise Tune (H*L-H%), which begins with a high pitch, falls during the middle of the phrase, and then rises at the end on “circumstances.” This intonation is used to express mitigation and introduce an element of doubt, invoking Pathos by portraying the defendant’s failure to pay because of external factors rather than a lack of intent.

The final rise invites the court to consider the context of the “inability” subtly challenging the claimant’s narrative of outright refusal.

Figure 9

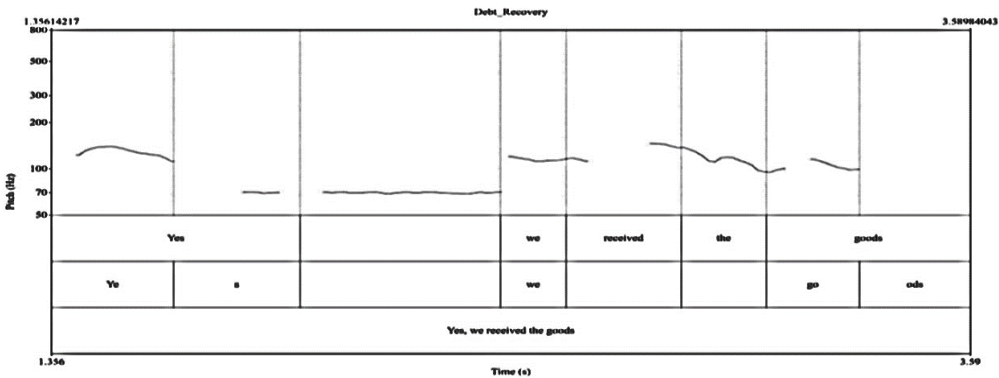
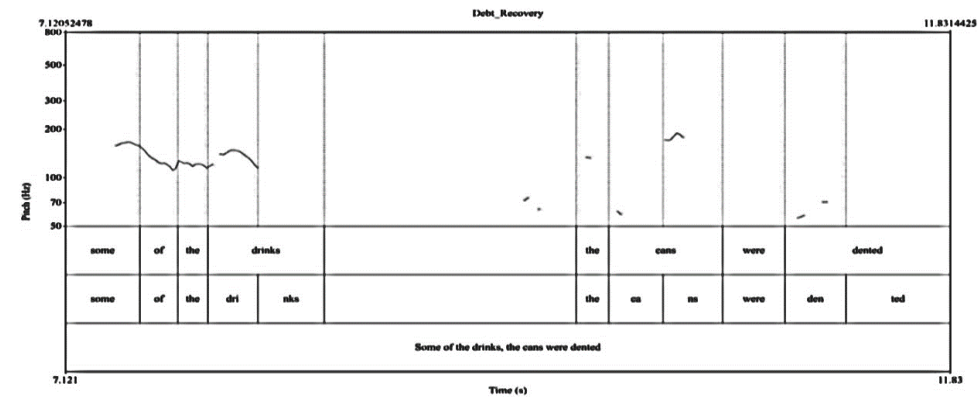


Figure 9 illustrates the acoustic analysis of the witness’s statement: “Yes, we received the goods.” The pitch contour demonstrates a definitive Falling Tune (H*L%), which starts at a moderate pitch and drops to a low level on the final word “goods.” This intonation is used to convey factual certainty and project transparency. By using a falling tune for a direct admission, the witness signals a lack of evasiveness, which can enhance their perceived credibility and Ethos in the eyes of the court.

Figure 10



In Figure 10, the graph presents the acoustic analysis of the statement: “Some of the drinks, the cans were dented.” The pitch contour demonstrates a Rising-Falling/Hesitant Contour, characterised by minor pitch fluctuations and a final fall on “dented.” This intonation is used to highlight specific evidentiary details while simultaneously reflecting the witness’s emotional strain or caution. The hesitant delivery serves as a “prosodic highlighter” drawing the court’s attention to the physical condition of the goods, which is central to the legal dispute.

4.1 Discussion of findings

This section presents the discussion of the study's findings. The discussion is structured to address the two primary research objectives.

Objective i: *to examine the effect of intonation patterns on argument effectiveness in Nigerian courtroom discourse.*

The findings demonstrate that intonation patterns significantly influence the effectiveness of legal arguments by aligning prosodic choices with rhetorical objectives. In Nigerian courtroom discourse, argument effectiveness is not merely a product of lexical precision but is heavily reliant on the vocal authority projected through intonation. This aligns with the views of Cotterill (2003) and Tannen (2005), who argue that the "how" of legal delivery its prosodic dimension is as consequential as the "what" of legal communication. The study's quantitative data, showing a 75% consensus among practitioners that case gravity (civil vs. criminal) dictates vocal delivery, corroborates the notion that solemnity and emphasis are perceived as prerequisites for effectiveness in criminal litigation. Furthermore, the strategic use of the Falling Tune (HL%) to establish a foundation of certainty mirrors scholarly associations of falling intonation with factual assertions and finality. Conversely, the use of the Rising Tune (LH%) as a prosodic trap during cross-examination illustrates its effectiveness in constraining witness responses and challenging credibility, a tactic that aligns with the coercive strategies identified by Atkinson (1984) and Drew (1990). Thus, the effectiveness of an argument is maximised when intonational patterns are strategically synchronized with the speaker's communicative intent, whether to project institutional authority (Ethos) or evoke empathy (Pathos).

Objective ii: *to determine the roles of intonation patterns as a discourse strategy in courtroom interactions.*

The study identifies intonation as a pivotal discourse strategy used to navigate the asymmetrical power dynamics and complex interactional constraints of the Nigerian courtroom. Intonation functions as a contextualization cue, signaling social meaning and managing turn-taking, which Couper-Kuhlen (1986) describes as the "prosodic glue" of discourse. A key strategy identified is the use of the "authoritative fall" by judges to restore order and deliver judgments, a role that asserts institutional primacy and signals absolute closure. This findings aligns with the work of Farinde and Ojo (2015), who found that falling intonation on declarative questions serves as a marker of power and control. Additionally, the study highlights the strategic nativisation of prosody, where legal professionals navigate a prosodic middle ground influenced by indigenous

Nigerian languages. The acknowledgment by 93.8% of participants regarding the influence of indigenous languages on courtroom English prosody confirms that intonation is used as a strategy to maintain cultural resonance while adhering to formal legal protocols. This culturally specific deployment of prosody ensures that legal persuasion remains intelligible and persuasive to a linguistically diverse audience, supporting the view that the pragmatic realization of legal discourse is deeply embedded in local linguistic practices.

5.0 Conclusion and Recommendations

Overall, these findings show that the way people speak in Nigerian courts is a highly skilled and deliberate practice. Judges and lawyers are not just talking; they are carefully using their voices to manage the courtroom, show their authority and make sure their messages are understood. This use of intonation is a deep-seated part of the Nigerian legal system that helps everyone navigate the high-stakes environment of a trial in a way that is both professional and culturally appropriate.

The study concludes that intonation is a fundamental yet often overlooked component of legal advocacy in Nigeria. The strategic use of prosody is necessary to navigate the complex interactional dynamics of the courtroom, assert authority and enhance the persuasive impact of legal arguments. Given the profound influence of indigenous languages on courtroom English, there is a need for greater awareness and training in the prosodic dimensions of legal communication.

While this study provides valuable insights, it is important to acknowledge certain limitations. For instance, the sample size of 48 participants, though purposively selected for expertise, represents a relatively small segment of the legal community in Southwestern Nigeria. This regional focus, while providing in-depth analysis means that the findings may not be fully generalisable to the entire Nigerian judicial system, which encompasses diverse linguistic and cultural contexts. Future research could expand the scope to include a larger and more geographically diverse sample of legal practitioners across Nigeria to provide a more comprehensive understanding of sociophonetic patterns in legal advocacy.

The findings of this study advocate for the formal integration of prosodic training into legal education and professional development in Nigeria, emphasising that communicative competence in the courtroom extends beyond mastery of the law to include the strategic management of vocal delivery. By fostering an awareness of the persuasive and coercive functions of intonation, such training would equip legal practitioners with the tools to navigate the

prosodic middle ground between British legal traditions and Nigerian sociocultural realities, thereby enhancing the clarity, fairness, and overall effectiveness of judicial communication. Furthermore, recognising the influence of indigenous languages on courtroom prosody can help judges and lawyers minimise linguistic misinterpretations, ensuring that the melody of justice remains consistent with the principles of a fair and equitable legal process.

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The Representations of Conflict-Related Pragmatic Impoliteness in selected Nollywood Films

Fredrick Friday John

Abstract

Impoliteness is a major trigger of conflict that often results to violence in different sociological spaces, marking it to consistently attract research interests. This study examined the representations of impoliteness in Nollywood films, underscoring the pragmatic strategies of impoliteness. Qualitative design was used. Jonathan Culpeper's impoliteness and Mey's Pragmatic Acts served as the framework to purposively selected texts extracted from *Mr. and Mrs. (MMS)*, a Nollywood film portraying the South-Southern Nigerian context. Data were analysed qualitatively. Findings showed four forms of impoliteness in family conflicts, namely, bald on-record, positive, negative, and sarcasm and mocking, were found. Bald on record impoliteness was performed by the practs of attacking, threatening and hurting underlined. Positive impoliteness was achieved by practs of undermining, dismissing, and ignoring. Negative impoliteness was performed by the practs of patronising, mimicking and frustrating, while hyping, lampooning and deceiving were performed in sarcasm and mocking impoliteness. Linguistic resource such as nouns, verbs and adjectives, and pragmatic features like metaphor, inference, reference and relevance were used to mark impoliteness in Nollywood films. sarcasm and mocking impoliteness manifested the possibility of impoliteness to achieve positive rather than negative effects in the context of conflict-related impoliteness. the study concludes that Nollywood films are valuable resources for evaluating impoliteness in Nigerian sociological milieus.

Keywords: Impoliteness Discourse, Pragmatic Acts, Relevance Theory, Face Theory

Introduction

Culture is a parameter for determining what is polite or impolite. This is so because there are marked differences in the norms, values or precepts in different cultures. In other words, a people's communication engagement is not only determined by these norms, but they also reflect in every communicative encounter that they engage in. Language is a part of the culture system of a people. In the words of Kövecses (2010), the relationship between language and culture is symbiotic, as everything about them is tied to the expression of meaning. Kövecses (2010, p. 1) identifies the areas of relationship to include,

“Proverbs, politeness, linguistic relativity, cooperative principle, metaphor, metonymy, context, semantic change, discourse, and ideology”. The list is inexhaustible because both language and culture keep evolving and certain oral culture or significations are susceptible to change. One of the functions of literary scholars and actors who are concerned with the representations of oral culture(s) across different sociological spaces is to reflect how these cultures and traditions evolve in their creative – literary works. The manner that these representations focus on the culture system that generate (im)politeness, using the examples in Nollywood films, is the interest of this research. In other words, the main questions worthy of note are, what sociocultural contextual factors underscore the representations of impoliteness in Nollywood films, which are literary texts in their own rights; what are the resources marking them in such texts?

The basis for representations of impoliteness in any creative literature is language, which are signs or words that are used in a semiotic network. Semioticians like Danesi (1994) and Barthes (1977) put it that language is a sequence of narratives reflecting “value systems and etymologies”. These values are part of everyday life and the lived experiences of people in the society, including creative writers. In other words, creative writers are not too distant from the realities and contexts in which they write or choose to portray in their literary works. The basis for writing about these settings is validated because they have some forms of knowledge about the culture systems that produce the texts. Thus, creative writers consciously create scenes or speech events or experiences in literary texts that reveal their thoughts, feelings and perceived actions in sociocultural spaces. This study is focused on identifying and analysing those that are concentrated on politeness or impoliteness. The linguistic resources and pragmatic strategies marking them are prioritised in this research. The basis for determining what is polite or impolite lies strongly within the frame of culture. In other words, what is polite in one culture may be impolite in another culture because of practices that are either acceptable or unacceptable in the cultures. Thus, culture seems to affect impoliteness to a large extent. However, canonical scholars, who have worked on several aspects of the interface between culture and impoliteness have proposed or implied certain points. For instance, Mey (2001) says this is influenced by situations which are shared between participants. Since language is mutually shared by a group, it therefore means that the share certain understanding of what to say to be polite and what is said that will be regarded as impolite. Odeebunmi (2006) agrees with Mey but opines that in a local setting, interactions are moderated by

the understanding of culture rather than situations. In other words, culture emphasises politeness and attaches consequences to impoliteness. However, the fact still remains that culture traits are shared among people. Hence, the questions we should ask are, what are the traits that account for cultural impoliteness and how are they represented in the body of literary texts that have cultural undertones?

Impoliteness has featured as both concept and theory in various research in pragmatics and sociolinguistics. Khosravi and Babaii (2017) connects impoliteness to judgement, in the bid to uncover the connection between any face-related theory and appraisal theory. The implication is that there is some form of judgement in place when determining impoliteness (Bousfield, 2008). For instance, bald on-record and off-record impolite behaviours draw on appraisal, particularly judgment (Martin and Rose, 2003). Khosravi and Babaii (2017) identify the relationship between impoliteness and appraisal on the bases of capacity, veracity, propriety, normality and tenacity. They opine that these levels of judgements are used to code impolite behaviours, focusing more on bald on-record impoliteness. Limberg (2009) opines that what instigates impoliteness is a speaker resorting to intentionally cause social conflict and disharmony using communicative strategies, especially those that foreground impoliteness. Tajeddin and Rassaei-Moqadam (2023) posit that speakers make judgements concerning the choice or strategies that are employed to signify impoliteness. The choices made are affected by the three factors that, according to Archer et al. (2012), trigger impoliteness in discourses, namely, social distance, which may exist between the speaker and hearer, power relations, and the level of imposition based on the sociocultural context. This means that apart from impoliteness causing social distance, it can be triggered by social distance, especially distal relationships. In the words of Tajeddin and Rassaei-Moqadam (2023), impoliteness can be demonstrated by perception, performance, response or reactions of the speaker.

A review of the extant literature has signified gap in the representation and description of impoliteness in creative literatures portraying the culture traits of certain communities. This strengthens the need for a study of this nature to address the forms of impoliteness that Nollywood script writers and directors use to account for triggers of domestic violence. This study examines the pragmatic features of impoliteness, underscoring the relationship among culture, pragmatics and impoliteness in communication.

Literature review: Language and identity

Identity is widely used in a wide range of academic disciplines, including psychoanalysis, psychology, political science, sociology, history, and linguistics. Its conceptual connotations and theoretical purpose, especially with respect to language use are not often taken for granted in disciplines where it is used. First, Calhoun (1994) describes identity as a people's culture, suggesting its interchangeability with ethnicity. Although this perspective on identity is comprehensive, it does not take into account identity in modern social and political contexts leading to a void in description, especially considering the focus of this study. Second it is linked to a common means of identification of a collective category of actors in a sociocultural space (Tajfel, 1982; Febrian et al., 2025). This description fills in the void in the first definition, giving the inference that identity can be in social, religious and political perspectives. According to Snow and Oliver (1995), social identity is branded as a "social movement" that aims to unite individuals. In other words, it is in description a means of identification of a people. The depiction of "self" is infused in the third definition of identity, which means that it links to specific people. This link, in communicative term, is what Blumer (1969) calls symbolic interactionism, and Bach and Harnish (1979) refer to as common grounds. This is crucial to the philosophical legacy of social agents recognising the complexity of contemporary societies (Mead, 1934; Kappeler et al., 2019). However, to Giddens (1991), the interpersonal reflection of identity is based on "lifestyle" of individuals. These conceptions still show significant gap in the area of interpersonal communication among domestic agents, using language.

According to Schifffrin (1994, p. 371), language is "deeply embedded within cultural frameworks by which we make sense out of experience" and is used "to organise and conduct our lives". This illustrates the relationship between language, social structure, and social life. Identity, according to Deaux (2000), operates by the same basic principles, which means that the representation and interpretation of identities in text are determined by the same rules. If culture functions according to the same principles, identities will consequently resound or generalise among participants, aligning with social actors' in-group and out-group phenomena groups. This suggests that the concepts of in-group and out-group are the frameworks through which identity representation is always evaluated. Identity is a notion that is exploited a lot, according to Cronin (2000, p.19). His goal is to restrict its use to a certain range so that the intended meaning is clear. Thus, "self" and "institutions," which are regarded as branches of the social identity paradigm, are the focal points of identity. Adding to this

perspective, Warner (2000, p. 64) contends that "it is rarely possible" to discern between "personal" and "collective" identity in the context of human experience, implying that identity is a social construct. According to Giddens (1991, pp. 53-55), this type of mutuality is a critical theory of modernity in which a "person" is an embodiment or model of identity linked to a "biographical" narrative in addition to being a reflexive actor of a group's identity.

Jenkins (2008, p. 2) defines identity as "the human capacity, rooted in language, to know 'who's who' and, consequently, 'what's what.'" Identity helps us understand not only who we are and what we know about others, but also who we are recognized as and what other people believe about us. Identity is a "multi-dimensional classification or mapping of the human world and our places in it, as individuals and as members of collectivities", according to Ashton et al. (2004). According to Martin (1995) and Malešević (2004), a person's culture or identity can influence their actions, and a person's actions can reveal something about their identity. Jenkins (2008) goes on to say that identity mapping and construction are complicated processes that go beyond "merely a matter of neutral classification." This is because categorisation requires extensive examination, which is generally boring to humans, particularly when it comes to classifying other people and vice versa. Identity and collectivity are negotiated by "individuals pursuing their own interests", according to Barthes (2000). Specific cleavages or linkages are indicated by the identity of a given class. The idea that what people do in relation to their cleavage projects their identities as belonging to a socio-political or religious group and culture, revealing their lineage, clan, tribe, nationality, and political class in the process, is brought to a point of convergence with identity by this. Social anthropologists have developed this theory. However, Tajfel (1982) believes that when a group channels its behavior in favor of its in-group and discriminates against the out-group, it is arbitrary to state that the group's actions are sufficient to determine its identity.

Nollywood in the Nigerian society

Nollywood, which has become the formal name of the Nigerian film industry, was coined by Matt Steinglass in 2002 in the New York Times (Onuzulike, 2007). But film production in Nigeria began long before then, precisely during the colonial era with foremost veteran actors like Hubert Ogunde and Ola Balogun. The cinema history in Nigeria can be divided into four periods according to Onuzulike (2007). These are the colonial (1903–1960), independent (1960–1972), indigenization (1972–1992), and Nollywood (1992–

present). According to him, the first film presentation at the Glover Memorial Hall in Lagos took place in August 1903, marking the beginning of the colonial era of Nigerian cinema. *Living in Bondage*, which became a hit in 1992, conceived by an Igbo businessman, by name Kenneth Nnebue, served as the catalyst for the Nollywood era. It is worthy of note that Nollywood now has its viewership extending beyond Nigeria to other nations, regions and continents of the world (Asogwa, et al. 2015). Its remarkable patronage and stellar reputation in Nigeria, the West Africa sub-region, Africa, and the world at large are connected to its educational, social and cultural relevance. It is rated as the second largest film producing industry, next to Bollywood (Indian film industry). The number of movies it churns out per year is more than Hollywood. Despite falling short in terms of revenue, it is not devoid of creativity and expressive contents that are indexical to contemporary realities.

Theoretical framework: Impoliteness and pract in interactions

The study is anchored on Culpeper's (2011) impoliteness and Mey's (2001) Pragmatic Acts, Culpeper's impoliteness theory is centred on conversation offence strategies, which makes it relevant for film data which have dialogic sequences. Culpeper (1996; 2011) describes impoliteness as the use of strategies that are aimed at attacking face, causing or instigating social conflict and disharmony (Bousfield 2008:131), and in the case of this study, marital conflict. Culpeper (1996) bases the entire theoretical argument on Brown and Levinson's (1987) model of negative politeness which is the purview of Face Threatening Act (FTA), but Culpeper (1996) uses the term Face Attacking Act (FAA) just to sound different. In Culpeper's view, impoliteness is "marginal" to determining politeness in interaction. This means that politeness cannot be determined if there is no act called impoliteness. In other words, before saying something is polite, it means that there is a way it could have been said that it would be impolite, which makes the theory of impoliteness fundamental. Locher and Bousfield (2008) opine that impoliteness is stronger when viewed along power relationships between and among individuals that are participants in a discourse. In other words, Locher and Bousfield (2008) are saying here that impoliteness is a way of showing off or asserting power, on the one hand, and resisting, challenging or undermining power, on the other hand. Bousfield (2008) asserts that when people use language impolitely, it means that there is a certain leverage to avert consequences, or they simply condescend to or are damning the consequences. However, there are instances of spontaneity in executing impoliteness that may arise due to differences in cultures. It has been

established that there are things that may be polite in one culture but impolite in another.

Culpeper set up five super strategies that are used to underscore impoliteness. These are bald on record, negative, positive, sarcasm and mocking and withholding impoliteness. These impoliteness types and their underlying features are categorically defined by Thielemann and Kosta (2013, p. 238) in patterns that align with this study. The first, Bald on Record Impoliteness (BRI), is the act of delivering face-threatening or attacking act (FT/AA) in a straightforward, understandable, and unequivocal manner, without making an effort to lessen its impact on the hearer. The second, which is Positive Impoliteness (PI), can be achieved by excluding, dismissing, or displaying a lack of interest in the recipient's personality, opinion or wellbeing, thereby undermining the good face of the hearer. The third, Negative Impoliteness (NI) features as being patronising, mocking, or menacing for the purpose of infuriating the recipient's negative face wants. The fourth, which is Sarcasm and Mocking Impoliteness (SMI), is marked by being courteous or modest but with implicit impoliteness, employing modesty maxims in a way that seems fake and significantly impolite to make fun of the hearer. The fifth, which is Withholding Politeness (WP), is demonstrated by purposive suspension of expected civility, thereby causing embarrassment, disgrace, and sometimes unrecognition of the self-worth and position of the affected persons. This study is focused on identifying the representations of BRI, PI, NI and SMI in Nollywood films.

Mey's (2001) Pragmatic Acts theory is a speech act theory that is built around the contexts of utterances. The theory analyses context in two dimensions, which Mey (2001) refers to as 'part'. There is the 'activity part' on the left and there is the textual part on the right. Every utterance is negotiated in a broad context that can be categorised under any of the activity types – part variables. These are limited speech act at the individual speech process. However, every utterance's meaning is negotiated directly, indirectly, in a conversation, psychologically, and using prosody, body moves, facial or body expression and emotional stunt. However, the performance of meaning is negotiated between any of these features and co(n)textual resources (John, 2024; John, Akano & Oyinlola, 2022). Mey (2001) lumps three things that define contexts here, the co-text, that is the linguistic context, the context, that is physical, or sociocultural, and the textual, which extensively focuses on the situational context of the discourse. More than one of these features can be found in an utterance at the same time, which is another reason for the catenation of the word as 'co(n)text' (Mey 2001, p. 222). The combination of both parts in

a conversation achieves what Mey calls ‘pragmeme’, which sequences to the performance of a ‘pract’, that is, the performed act, such as deceiving, insulting, etc. that can feature in impolite conversations. The framework of pragmatic acts is represented in Figure 1.

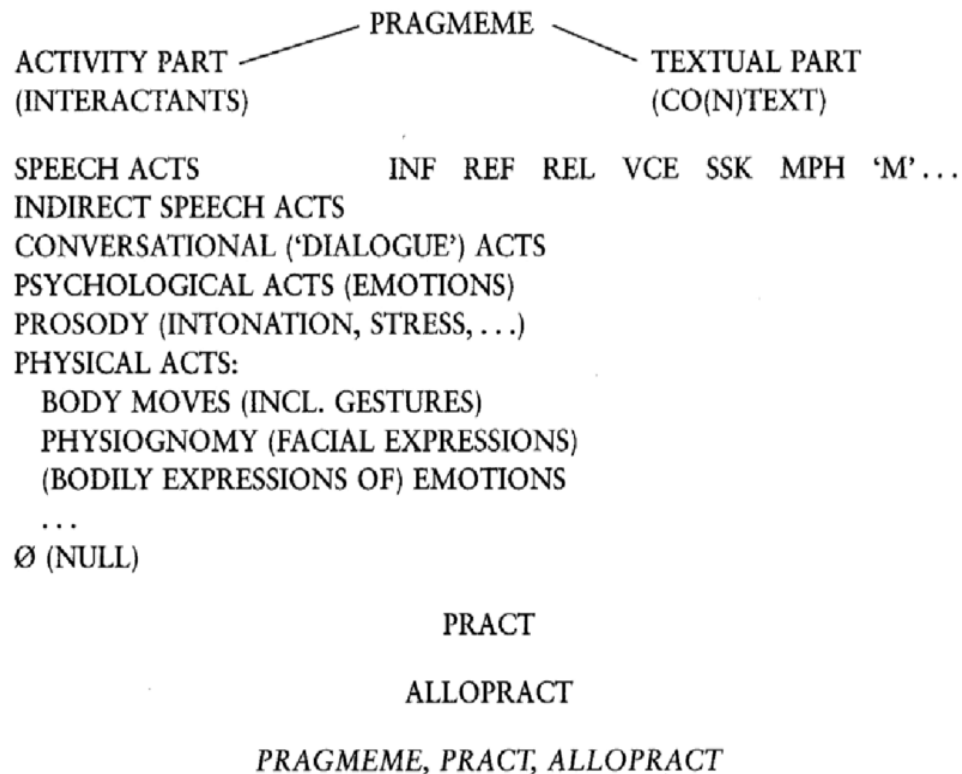


Figure1. Mey’s pragmatic acts theory (Mey, 2001, p. 222)

Methodology

The study adopted the descriptive design. Data for this study entailed a purposively selected Nollywood movie, which was filmed to reflect the Nigerian context. The data selected was the movie titled *Mr and Mrs*, directed by Ikechukwu Onyeka. It featured main characters such as Susan (NseIkpe Etim), Kenneth (Benjamin Joseph), Mrs Abbah (Barbara Sokey), Linda (Thelma Okodua), Charles (Paul Apel), Mrs Brown (Chioma Nwosu), Monica (MpieMapetla), and Kate (Nonye Ike), among others. The film was selected for its density of themes relating to conflict and impoliteness. movie was purchased from a vendor. The transcript of the film, from which excerpts were purposively sampled was obtained from the subtitle, samples selected for analysis were from the above main characters. Only excerpts reflecting impoliteness were

purposively analysed qualitatively, using Culpeper(2011) impoliteness and Mey's (2001) Pragmatic Acts as the framework. The analytical procedure involved thematisation and mining of the text to the forms of impoliteness, bald on record (BRI), negative (NI), positive (PI) and sarcasm and mocking impoliteness (SMI). Subsequently, the practs for each impoliteness strategy were analysed. Figure 2 shows the analytical model used to engage the data

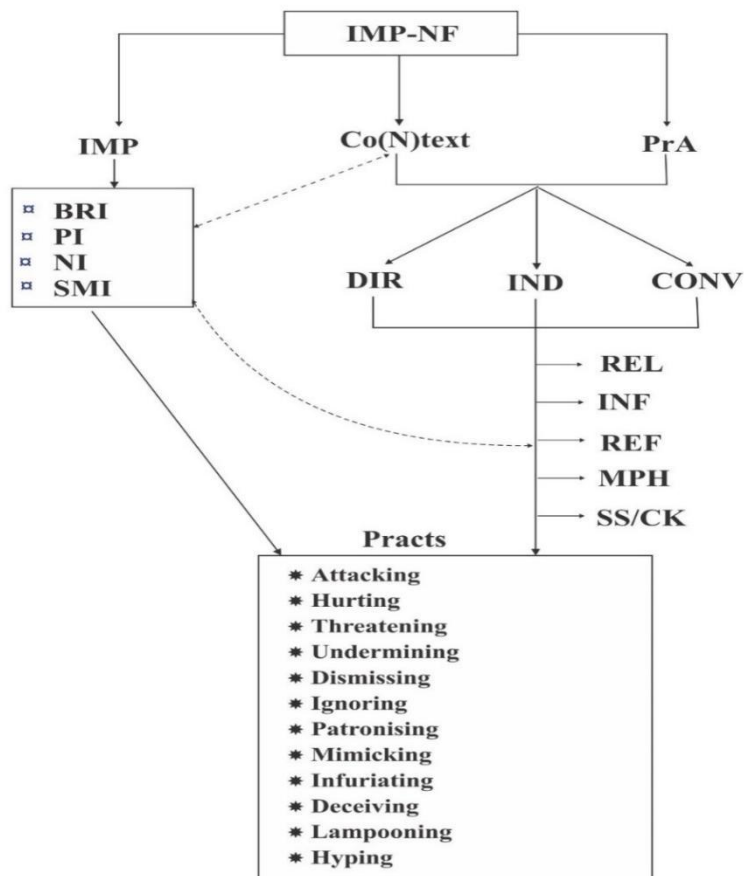


Figure 2: Impoliteness in Nollywood films

Co(N)text and PrA were treated as factors that determined impoliteness. There were two macro contextual variables here, the Co-text and context; hence, the term co(N)text as represented in Figure 3. The activity part shows significations such as direct (DIR), indirect (IND) and conversational (CONV). At the micro level, which was the textual part, the analysis focused on identifying and discussing textual principles in PrA such as Relevance (REL), Inference (INF), Reference (REF), Metaphor (MPH) and Shared Situational/Cultural Knowledge (SS/CK). The use of these principles foregrounded levels of impoliteness, Bald

on-Record Impoliteness (BRI), Positive Impoliteness (PI), Negative Impoliteness (NI) and Sarcasm and mocking Impoliteness (SMI).

Analysis and findings

This section focuses mainly on the representations of impoliteness in the two Nollywood films, *Mr. and Mrs.* The four forms of impoliteness, namely, bald on-record, Positive, negative and Sarcasm and mocking impoliteness, are discussed.

Bald on-record IMP-NF

Thielemann and Kosta (2013) describes bald on-record impoliteness as the delivery of threatening and attacking acts, with a conscious intention to provoke the hearer. Three *practs* are used to mark bald on-record impoliteness in the data. These are attacking, hurting, and threatening. They are underscored by direct, indirect and conversational acts, manifesting textual resources of pragmatic acts.

Pract of attacking

Characters in the text deploy the *pract* of attacking when they think they have certain advantage over the hearers, that is, the person(s) they are attacking. This is performed both explicitly and implicitly, because the hearers are able to identify and feel attacking tendencies on their personality or livelihood. Sometimes, they even respond to such attacks by defending their rights and personality. Excerpts showing instances where the *pract* of attacking is achieved are analysed below.

Excerpts

- i. MRS ABBAH: Shut up! How dare you, you this thing! ...
God only knows what you did to him. A pig will always be a pig. (To Ken) I warned you didn't I this is the thing you end up with, wretched daughter of a wretched washman!
- ii. KEN: What would they have done if you didn't graduate?
Your bloody wash man of a father...
- iii. KEN: ...Meet Kenneth Abbah, and his wife, daughter of who, wash man!

There is the *pract* of attacking in excerpt (i), where the speaker (Mrs Abbah) attacks Susan's personality, calling her derogatory names that are culturally dehumanising and stigmatising. These names are also metaphorical such as,

thing and *pig*, giving the inference that she has been reduced in status. For instance, *thing* implies a worthless object, while the latter signifies being classless. These acts also amount to condemning and relegating the hearer's social status; the speaker uses the terms repetitively as a direct act to achieve the *pract* of attacking repeated lexical items include *wretched* and *washman*, which resonates in the entire excerpts (i) to (iii). Mrs. Abbah creates a disparity between her family's background and Susan's, to show her disapproval of her marriage to her son, and to verbally attack her personality.

Pract of hurting

The *pract* of hurting is demonstrated by actions that have some forms of negative effect on the hearer. These are used as bald on-record impoliteness, that is, a conscious attempt to injure the hearer's feelings, causing or resulting to some kinds of victimisation.

Excerpt

- iv. SUSAN: I amaze you! Kenneth, you are the one who has a woman in this house. So go back to her and concentrate...
- v. MONICA: (*To Susan*) You know I'm travelling today. Now, is it too hard for you to cook for me, your husband and the father of your children? ... too bad you are starving Ken, but for me you wouldn't do that. We call it HOSPITALITY!
- vi. SUSAN: Listen to me Monica, I will try as humanly possible for you and I to remain friends... if you push me, I will make sure that this man here (*pulls Ken's ear*) ... chooses between you and his kids... (*Mr. and Mrs.*).

There are different representations of bald on-record impoliteness, using the *pract* of hurting in excerpts (iv), (v) and (vi). This is implicitly represented, using a performative act in excerpt (iv). After the agents' divorce, the couple begin to play the game of hurting each other, attacking their feelings to implicitly cause jealousy. For instance, Ken bringing *another woman* into the house is an emotional act aimed to hurt Susan's feeling, and possibly torture her emotionally and make her jealous. The verb *amaze*, is an indirect act, and is pragmatically relevant to generating the effect of hurting. This, ironically, is to hurt and instigate jealousy that the culture system of marrying another wife allows. However, she euphemistically performs, implicitly, the *pract* of hurting, which is to return the guilt to his mind that he is the one doing the wrong thing going after another *woman*; she thus encourages him to *concentrate*. The *pract*

of hurting is verbally performed in the bidirectional verbal exchange – dialogical acts between Monica (the lady Ken brings to the house) and Susan. The argument is initiated by Monica with the direct and explicit intention to hurt, that is, anger Susan, to make her begin to show the jealousy that Ken wants to see. Reference is used in form of the pronouns *you*, *your* and *we* to show proper indexation, that she (Susan) still recognises the role she played as Ken's *wife*. This is represented using inference in *husband* and as *mother*, as represented in *father* and *children*. Monica performs the *pract* of hurting, using prosody features like shouting and indirect command. This achieves an indirect effect because Susan initially demonstrates positive politeness, accepting to cook for her rival. However, she (Susan) performs her own *pract* of attacking, taking her own pound of flesh, marking her own bald on-record impoliteness in excerpt (vi). She climaxes her utterance with a threatening act. Susan's intention in this excerpt is to hurt Ken and Monica, both verbally and performatively. Thus, she verbally assaults Monica to hurt her feelings and by extension, Ken's ear to hurt him physically.

Pract of threatening

Threatening is the most widely represented *pract* in bald on-record impoliteness. It is represented also by violent verbal and demonstrable acts. But in this case, physical action may not be performed. Verbal threats may also be empty of real action; it may just be for the purpose of intimidating, causing fear or even forcing the hearer to perform an act. Examples are analysed in this section.

Excerpts

- vii. SEWA: Damola, if you lay your hands on me, I will not hesitate to use this knife... (*Unforgiveable*).
- viii. KEN: ... Since you are no longer happy; you are unhappy with my family's progress, I will speak to my lawyer tomorrow so I can give you the liberty to find your beautiful world in your bloody memory lane...
- ix. KEN: When I asked for the divorce, it was in a bid to humble you. I expected you to beg... (*Mr. and Mrs.*).

Excerpts (vii), (viii) and (ix) show clear indications of bald on-record impoliteness with the the performance of the *pract* of threatening. In excerpt (xxx), the speaker makes empty threat, using physical act, marked by the image of a knife in hand. She uses indirect act, in form of irony to show her inability

or constraint to actually perform the act. The verb, “*hesitate*” directly marks her inability to perform the actual act of harming Ken, who is the hearer. In excerpt (vii), the speaker performs the *pract* of threatening by taunting the hearer with divorce, which he using the euphemisms, *liberty* and *beautiful world*, which in the context of the excerpt is also a metaphor representing the freedom to live as she pleases. On one side of the coin, some people consider divorce to be freedom, especially when a marriage is sequenced with conflict, violence and has consistently become grounds for different shades of impoliteness and, sometime, violence. In the linguistic context, which is marked in excerpt (ix), the speaker does not plan to activate his threat; he is forced to do so because of family influence, and his attempt to gamble with Susan, which is the inference in the adjective ‘humble’.

Excerpt

- x. SUSAN: ... I swear to God, I will kill you; I will kill you next time you touch me like that again...
- xi. CHARLES: Kate is not going anywhere and if any of you touches her, you’ll see the other side of me... (*Mr. and Mrs.*).

Excerpt (x) signifies the performance of the *pract* of threatening, using repetition, reinforcement and a direct act that is hinged on the context of religiosity. She uses the *pract* of swearing to show her determination as well as to reinforce her verbal threat, that is; to pretend to the hearer and make him think she is able to perform the act. However, in the indirect act, this is just an empty threat, considering the legal and social context. There is reference in the use of pronouns to mark participants, and inference in the violent illocutionary verb *kill*. This is a direct act as against the indirect representation of threat in excerpt (xi) with the mental cognitive verb ‘see’. the *pract* of swearing is used indirectly because in the cultural norm, ‘swearing’ reinforces a determination to do something but in the case of the excerpt, the speaker shows that she is unable to perform the act. She marks it using the adverb, ‘next time’

Positive IMP-NF

Positive impoliteness, in the description of Thielemann and Kosta (2013) are milder forms of impoliteness used as dismissing strategies. In the Nollywood film selected for this study, three *practs* marking positive impoliteness are recurrent. These are undermining, dismissing and ignoring as represented in the excerpts presented in this section.

Pract of undermining

The *pract* of undermining is dominantly used in instances involving class and issues of great importance, which the actor tries to trivialise. In this case, the person devalues the importance of an issue just to trigger or push back annoyance.

Excerpts

- xii. SUSAN: ... look at this nonentity, where do I start from, Are you even a woman? You can't cook you can't keep a home; you don't even have manners.
- xiii. KEN: Look who is talking, daughter of a washman, no no dry cleaner... see my father is the honorable minister of petroleum...
(*Mr. and Mrs.*)

The utterance in (xii) shows the performance of the *pract* of undermining, using direct abuse, picking on the deficiencies of the character (Monica), who was brought by her husband to replace her. The points she expresses as deficiencies in her are weighed on the basis of her own strengths, which her husband did not initially appreciate before filing in the divorce. The inference is that she is not only undermining Monica's personality as a woman, but also her husband's deficiency in making the right choice of a competitor. Ken shows understanding of positive impoliteness in the utterance and initiates a bald on-record, performing the *pract* of attacking Susan's social class, from the perspective of her heritage. She is from a humble background, her father is a drycleaner, which is a sophisticated name for the term wash man, which Ken and his mother often use to indirectly undermine the profession.

Pract of dismissing

The *pract* of dismissing is another subtle impoliteness that is used to reject opinions, suggestions or contributions. In the scale of things, the effect of dismissing is not on the hearer. One of these is the disappointment of having one's view rejected.

Excerpt

- xiv. SUSAN: First thing first, I think kate has to leave this house.
- xv. CHARLES: Which house! Says who? You don't seem to understand what is going on here... Kate is the reason I'm a

good husband; Kate is the reason that I'm still with her; Kate is the reason that I'm still in this marriage...

- xvi. LINDA: You're stealing from me too? ... He bought this for me on Valentine's Day...
- xvii. CHARLES: She did not steal from you; I bought two of that (*Mr. and Mrs.*).

It is important to comment on the underlining situational context of excerpts (xiv) to (xvii) before analysing. Linda catches her husband committing adultery with her maid, an act he has adapted to as a result of inability to endure sexual starvation. Thus, in excerpt (xiv), we see him dismissing the suggestion of Susan to send the maid away because of the act. In both instances, the direct conversational act is used. Charles dismisses the suggestion directly, and subsequently employs repetition to reinforce his stance that she will not be sent away. The conversational act is used in (xiv) and (xv) to signify the *pract* of dismissing, as Charles dismisses the claim that Kate stole from Linda. The direct act of buying two similar clothes for his wife and made is to signify that he is viewing Kate as a replacement for his wife who is always busy with her secular job and ignoring her husband.

Pract of ignoring

The *pract* of ignoring is evident in *Mr and Mrs*. This is evident in the conscious rejection of warning or predictions. It can be an act of pretense or unconcern, especially when it seems that one's attention is needed. This is conscious deviation from topic of attention or discussion.

Excerpts

- xviii. MRS ABBAH: ... you left this home yesterday at 6pm, and you returned today at 2pm and you say that's fun? It's unacceptable, at least, show some respect.
- xix. SUSAN: To who? (*Pretending to be on a phone call*) Hello honey. Uhh... yes! I miss you. Yes, I'm home already... it was fun... Yes darling!

The *pract* of ignoring is represented using the indirect and conversational acts in excerpt (xix). Two underlining strategies are used in performing ignoring as *pract*, namely, pretense and deviation of attention. Mrs. Abbah, deviating from the legal arrangement that the hearer, Susan, is not answerable to her by reason of divorce from her son, accuses her indirectly of infidelity causing

impoliteness. Her demand for accountability is in the direct act, using relevance, which is marked by the noun *respect*. She also uses emotional act, trying to blackmail her emotionally about her children, who look up to her. Susan's response in excerpt (xix) deploys rhetorical question and the prosody act, *who*, to show the *pract* of ignoring. She pretends that she does not acknowledge Mrs. Abbah's status, and demand for 'respect'. In the same manner, the *pract* of ignoring used creates a diversion of her attention from Mrs. Abbah; using the psychological act, she pretends to be on a call with a man, who is presumed to be a new lover. This is done consciously to trigger two shades of impoliteness; to annoy Mrs Abbah and to make her husband, who is also present in the room, jealous. In the context of the utterance, impoliteness is performed in marital situation by the participants while playing a game of jealousy, which is not normative in the cultural contexts. When a marriage couple have divorced, they are not supposed to be living under the same roof, which both participants can simply take advantage of.

Negative IMP-NF

Negative impoliteness, dominantly, manifests as an indirect act. On the one hand, it reflects the conscious or unconscious use of the *practs* of patronising, mimicking and infuriating. This section analyses excerpts exemplifying these.

Pract of patronising

The negative politeness *pract* of patronising is realised in two recurrent ways. The first is aligning interaction to what the hearer/speaker wants. In other words, the speaker, at that time, says what he or she thinks the participant want. Examples are analysed below.

Excerpts

- xx. SUSAN: Ah! Mrs. Brown! Please, this is the best time of my life. I am so very excited. I can't wait for this to...
- xxi. KEN: ... I expected her to be depressed, she has not lived without me for the past ten years... the Susan I know would not be in a hurry to give me up...
- xxii. SUSAN: Mrs. Brown, we do not have any set rules, do we? We just live as normal flat mates!
- xxiii. MRS ABBAH: Shut up, you rat! Kenneth does not live in a flat; in case you don't know, that house is a mansion.
- xxiv. SUSAN: oh... I'm so sorry... we get to live like normal mansion mates(*Laughs*).

There are two *practs* of patronising marked in excerpts (xx), (xxi) and (xxiii). The other excerpts reflect the reaction to the generated impoliteness. The *pract* of patronising in (xx) reinforces Ken's desire to threaten Susan with the nominal, divorce. His thought is that initiating divorce would make Susan *depressed* as explicitly referenced in (xxi). Thus, Susan's excitement in (xx), reinforcing her urgency of securing divorce, is an ironic – indirect act aimed at patronising Ken's initial divorce motion. It achieves her intention; inadvertently, this makes him unsettled, apparently making his own plans to backfire. The *pract* of patronising is marked here by indirectness, using irony *The best time of my life*. Divorce is not supposed to be sweet or happy, as implied by Ken in excerpt (xix), it is meant to be depressing. Ken becomes confused and worried, reflecting the original feeling that comes from divorce in the culture system that produced the excerpt. The *pract* of patronising in (xxii) and (xxiv), which is also reflective of the *pract* of satirising, is directed to Mrs. Abbah, who apparently does not catch the sarcasm, and thus, reacts to the impoliteness in a way that generates reinforcement of the *pract* of patronising. Susan hinges the act of patronising on the generic – shared situational knowledge *flat-mates*, which is a description for people living under the same roof. But Mrs. Abbah coins the nominal term, *mansion mates* to represent this to show superiority.

Pract of mimicking

Mimicking signifies copying. It is the act of replicating one's action and manner of speaking. It is a deliberate act to cause negative impoliteness. Both positive and negative actions could be mimicked or copied to offend the hearer as observed in the following excerpts.

Excerpts

- xxv. KEN: Look who's talking, daughter of a wash man... dry cleaner... My father is the honourable Minister of Petroleum...
- xxvi. SUSAN: Stealing resources. And because your father is a thief, you expect me to run around like headless chicken. Misappropriation and diversion of funds expert... (*Mr. and Mrs.*)

In excerpt (xxv), Ken performs the *pract* of insulting, which he has used all through the earlier period to make Susan depressed. In excerpt (xxvi) Susan mimics Ken's tone and coins an insulting act from it. For instance, copying Ken's insult of her father, she also directs her insult to Ken's father. While Ken

insults her, using her father's humble profession, Susan humbles Ken, accusing his father of benefiting from political influence and not competence. On the one hand, Ken contrasts between a modest, *wash man*, which he uses as a derogatory term, and *hourable* as an indirect act. She points to the difference between her father who has a honourable job and Ken's father who bears the title *honourable* but thrives by dishonourable means (politics), This is portrayed by relevance in, *misappropriation and diversion of funds*.

Pract of infuriating

Infuriating also implies the *pract* of annoying, intentionally targeting characters. In some cases, the *pract* of infuriating is tied to any particular reason. It can be an intentional act as demonstrated in this section.

Excerpts

- xxvii. MONICA: ... Any time I pick up a fight with her she makes me look stupid...
- xxviii. KEN: before you leave tomorrow, make sure you leave a venom in her. Make her bitter...
- xxix. MONICA (*The following day*) ... can what Susan! Too bad you're starving Ken. But for me you wouldn't do that. We call it hospitality! Hospitality Susan! (*Mr. and Mrs.*)

In excerpt (xxvii), it can be inferred that there is a continuous performance of the *pract* of infuriating. This is portrayed by relevance, using the verb phrase, *pick up a fight*. This is a physical act demonstrated metapragmatically. for instance, picking a fight in the context of the utterance does not mean physical exchanges but to just an attempt to instill anger in one's mind, in this case, Susan. The speaker uses reference pronoun for proper indexing of roles, and to mark the initiator of the annoyance. The pronoun 'I' marks Monica, while 'her' marks Susan, who is knowledgeable enough to identify ever conscious, direct or indirect attempt to annoy her. The speaker also reports the consequence of fruitless performance of the *pract* of infuriating, which is leading to *stupidity*. The inference is that an attempt to infuriate makes the initiator stupid and reverses the effect of their own impoliteness, if it does not succeed in infuriating the target subject, as represented in excerpt (xxix). Monica in the text picks up a flimsy condition to background her proposition or performance of the *pract* of infuriating. She uses relevance, in form of antonym, *hospitality*, to foreground the context and give a contrasting effect of annoyance. Susan's behaves hospitably to turn around the consequence.

Sarcasm and mocking IMP-NF

Sarcasm and Mocking are interfacing impoliteness in Nollywood films, despite being separate in the framework by Culpeper (2009, 2011). This is because both are used for achieving humour to ease tension. However, three *practs* were used to achieve sarcasm and mocking impoliteness, namely, deceiving, lampooning and hyping. These are analysed in this section.

Pract of deceiving

The *pract* of deceiving is an ironic behaviour or verbal commissive and (or) expressive acts. It is vastly represented in instances of relationship when actors are trying to cover up their true behaviour or feelings. Sub-text to deceiving include lying, which is generic in pretensive marital relationships.

Excerpts

- xxx. SUSAN: (*to Monica*) ... so it's you all this while. You've been sleeping with my husband; you even dare to bring into my home; you even try to break my home... (*to Ken*) O now, Yes! I have finally seen the woman that supplies you honey in your office...
- xxxi. LINDA: I've got Charles in my palm... he has never, and will never cheat on me
- xxxii. SUSAN: My friend Linda, I've told you this, many times. When a man is not getting his due, he's definitely tapping it somewhere else.
- xxxiii. BARRISTER: Why are you so sure he is not cheating on you?
- xxxiv. LINDA: Because he is always at home...
- xxxv. BARRISTER: ... show up on Thursday, just come when he's having a nap... call him from the office that you're very busy. Then, you just show up 5 minutes later... (*Mr. and Mrs.*)

Two instances of deception can be inferred and referenced in excerpts (xxx) to (xxxv). First, most cases of deception in relationships can be traced to adultery. For instance, in excerpt (xxx), Susan eventually realises that her husband has been in a relationship with Monica, even before their divorce. This is portrayed in the perfective, *you've been sleeping*, which is euphemistic of having sexual relationship. Her husband brings her boldly into their house after their divorce. Significantly, it can be seen that the culture system does not make room for infidelity. But after divorce, the couple are not accountable to each other, so the cultural norm does not favour that separate individuals should stay committed to each other. However, the fact that they have been having the affair before the

divorce triggered impoliteness, which is performed by *pract* of annoyance. In the same statement, the speaker represents certainty or confirmation of the acts of deception, using the adverb *finally*, and infidelity using *supply of honey*, which metaphorises sexual relationship. Her husband had lied to her that Monica was supplying honey to his *office*, which she had literally believed. In excerpts (xxxvi) to (xxxviii) the conversational sequence shows another case of deception in the case of Linda and Charles' relationship. The latter who is always at home with the house maid, an adult, commits adultery with her, when he is being deprived of sexual intercourse by his wife. Deception is portrayed in excerpt (xxxviii). Linda is deceived to believe that her husband is faithful to her, using the modality of certainty *will never*. This is relevance in the context of swearing. This is also marked by inference that is, *cheat on*. Susan's experience with her own husband, lying about his own infidelity, makes her doubtful and suspicious of Charles. Linda eventually applies Barrister's suggestion in excerpt (xxxviii), which is also a deceptive act. Barrister's statement deploys both shared situational knowledge and inference, sharing Susan's perspective that her husband is not honest, and must be covering it up. Linda eventually catches her husband in the act of adultery with her maid, revealing her husband's deceptive act.

Pract of lampooning

The *pract* of lampooning is used to generate insult and resentment in Nollywood films. It is used to directly or indirectly mock an actor or agent.

Excerpts

- xxxvi. SUSAN: Why don't you get someone in your own class to make you classical meals? My cooking is for my type. Oh! Monica...
- xxxvii. KEN: In my wildest dream Susan, I never imagined you could turn out to be heartless and...
- xxxviii. SUSAN: Enough... Enough, I'm not in the mood for any insult or name calling... (*Mr. and Mrs.*)

Excerpts (xxxvi) to (xxxviii) show a dialogical sequence. In excerpt (xxxviii), Susan performs the *pract* of lampooning, using satire, which she hinges on Ken's initial class stratification – attack against her and father. After condemning and sidelining her on the basis of status, he finds himself needing her assistance. This gives her the opportunity to lampoon him. She represents this by creating an inference. Ken's orientation about class, is implied by the nominal, *type*,

which is used to create the feeling of inequality. Ken, understanding satire in excerpt (xxxvii) employs emotional blackmail to get her to change her mind to do what he is asking her to do. Susan's satire causes blackmail and *name-calling*, which is also impoliteness, in excerpt (xxxviii).

Pract of hyping

Hyping is synonymous to praising or psyching. It can be from self or others, for the purpose of mitigating effects or justifying actions resulting into impoliteness. Examples are presented in this section.

Excerpts

- xxxix. CHARLES: You don't seem to understand... who is going to cook, wash and iron for me and my children... who is going to take care of me and the children? ... kate is the reason you had a good husband. Kate is the reason that I'm still with her. Kate is the reason I'm a good father. Kate is the reason that I'm still in this marriage. Kate is the reason I've not lost it...
- xl. LINDA: My friend, I've always known you to be an angel.
- xli. SUSAN: Angel! Angel you say my darling but you forget that angels also draw swords when it's time to fight a war (*Mr. and Mrs.*).

In excerpt (xxxix), the *pract* of hyping is deployed to embarrass or insult, and make light the consequence of marital infidelity. Charles hypes Kate and authority, rather than express weakness or condescension after being caught in the act of infidelity. The inference here is that his wife does not possess the qualities that he is hyping in Kate, meaning that she lacks the ability to be a good wife. This also suggests the factors that motivated infidelity. He uses reference, to foreground the features and qualities which include the ability to *cook, wash, iron* and *take care of* that make up a good wife. While these features are not in his wife, they are linked to *the reasons* why Charles continues to ignore his wife and prefer their maid. He uses anaphora as reference – repetition strategy to achieve the *pract* of hyping. The conversation – dialogic act is employed in (xl) and (xli) to achieve the *pract* of hyping. The metaphor *angel* is used to compare the qualities Susan possesses, performing the job of reconciliation. However, Susan does not like to be hyped as an *angel* that cannot harm when she is supposed to. This is also reference to the fact that there are different angels, those that are used to fight battles and those that are used to achieve peace.

Discussion

Findings show that all the variables of impoliteness formalised by Culpeper (2011) and explained by Thielemann and Kosta (2013) are evidently deployed in Nollywood texts, which give conspicuous representations of domestic conflicts in Nigerian sociological spaces. Dominantly, these forms of impoliteness are bald on-record impoliteness, positive impoliteness, negative impoliteness and sarcasm and mocking impoliteness. Sarcasm and mocking impoliteness, in the Thielemann and Kosta (2013) framework, were merged in this study due to similar and interlocking features marking them in Nollywood films, especially from the dimension of humour *practs*. The pragmatic strategies and *practs* marking impoliteness were analysed based on Mey's (2001) framework. The activity part, using direct, indirect and conversational or dialogic acts, and the textual part, reference, inference, reference, Metaphor and SS/CK featured dominantly in identifying the *practs*. For each impoliteness form, three *practs* were recurrent in the text. For positive impoliteness, the *practs* of undermining, dismissing and ignoring were found following Thielemann and Kosta (2013). The *pract* of undermining occurred in two ways; the first was to make light situations of grave consequences like warning and prediction. The second was to belittle characters or under-represent their importance; for instance, Susan, before the transition, was made to feel undermined, because her importance was not appreciated. Monica was also undermined in status as a 'woman', which is impolite. The *practs* of undermining, dismissing and ignoring were achieved by inference, Metaphor and reference and repetition.

Culpeper's (2011) categorisation of negative impoliteness in Nollywood films is underscored by *practs* of patronising, mimicking and infuriating, using mostly indirect acts, and in sometimes, direct and conversational acts (Mey, 2001). This justifies Odebunmi's (2016) assertion that context is inherently what underlines meaning, in this case, impoliteness. Impoliteness *pract* of mimicking occurs in conversational encounters because in instances of use, characters repeat in a mocking manner what other characters' say, as seen in the case of Susan mimicking Mrs. Abbah's 'mansion' versus 'flat' utterance, leading to the coinage of 'mansion-mates. This is novel to the concept of impoliteness formalised by Culpeper (2011) or even Brown and Levenson's (1987) FTA framework. The *pract* of infuriating was underscored by direct and indirect acts. Three forms were found, namely, intentional infuriating acts, mediated infuriating acts, which occurred as a result of negative inference, and unintentional and attitudinal infuriating acts. For example, Ken in *Mr. and Mrs.*

sees Susan as a nagging wife, even when she is saying what is right or obvious. Sarcasm and mocking impoliteness were achieved by *practs* of deceiving, lampooning and hyping. These were marked by obvious use of indirect verbal commissive or expressive act; for instance, Susan saying, indirectly, she wants to remarry, when her intention is to make her husband jealous as a strategy to get him back. This gives a positive implication for impoliteness against the generic notion in Culpeper (1996; 2011) and Brown and Levinson (1987) that impoliteness breeds conflicts. The implication is that in some cultures, some forms of impoliteness such as sarcasm and mocking may yield positive results. For instance, in marital relationship, which dominates this study, Susan goes to the level of claiming to be in a fake relationship, which is an act of deceit and lampoon to make Ken jealous enough to renew their marital vow.

Sarcasm as impoliteness in Nollywood manifests as deceiving, that is lying, which is an indirect act of misrepresentation. It is metaphorically underpinned against the maxim of relation the is the basis for Thielemann and Kosta (2013:238) conception of sarcastic impoliteness. The *pract* of deceiving underscores false belief, which has effect on impoliteness. The *pract* of lampooning mostly reflected in dialogic sequences, and had pragmatic features like inference relevance and metaphor, mainly used as relevant markers of satire or mockery in cultural utterances. Finally, the *pract* of hyping was signified as indirect acts for ridicule; but presented as praising and complimenting. For instance, Charles' praised the qualities of his wife's maid to ridicule his wife because those qualities were absent in her.

Conclusion

It can be concluded that Nollywood films are mediated significations that show the culture systems that underline impoliteness in sociological spaces in Nigeria. Impoliteness is bi directionally linked to conflict-related discourses. For impoliteness to thrive in marital spaces, it must not manifest all the features that produce conflicts. In other words, as long as conflicts continues to occur between couple, there will always be impoliteness forms performed directly, that is consciously or spontaneously, indirectly or accidentally, depending on the participants, who are the couple (husband and wife) and external agents. This also indicates that conflicts that leads to impoliteness could be triggered internally or externally. It can be concluded thus that the factors that induce impoliteness in family settings are both generic (normative) and interpersonal. Generic issues may include infidelity, violence and arguments, while interpersonal factors are moderated by the situational contexts and may achieve positive or negative effects.

The study concludes that emerging conflicts and impoliteness are changing family dynamics and landscapes in Nigeria as represented in Nollywood films such as *Mr and Mrs.* the director, Ikechukwu Onyeka, portrays that family ties are consistently befuddled by conditions like divorce, infidelity, dishonesty and all manner of maladies that cause loss of value systems. These factors are increasing face threats in domestic settings. On the other hand, factors that preserve human face in communicative encounters are narrowing in family environments. Language remains the tool that is used to trigger, bidirectionally, impoliteness that often results in domestic conflicts or conflicts that produce impoliteness. The study concludes that violence erupts from impolite communication in the same way that conflicts impoliteness leads to conflicts. To manage conflicts in families, communication has to be managed properly. Even if all other factors that cause conflict exist, if communication is properly guided and impoliteness and conflicts are effectively managed, domestic violence in communities will drastically reduce. Therefore, there is need for social and community campaigns on communication managements; social groups or agencies that responsible for managing domestic violence should pay more attention to the role of impoliteness as advocated by Ikechukwu Onyeka in *Mr and Mrs.*

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Leveraging Digital Resources and Tools for Yoruba Language Engagements and Revitalisation among University of Ibadan Undergraduates

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Abstract

The rapid decline in indigenous language use due to globalisation and urbanisation presents a significant problem, yet the potential of digital platforms remains underexplored. This research, guided by the Technology Acceptance Model (TAM), investigated the use of digital resources and tools for Yoruba language engagement and revitalisation among University of Ibadan undergraduates. It specifically examined the students' digital tool preferences, the impact of these tools on their language engagement, and the challenges they face. Using a descriptive statistical approach with a questionnaire-based methodology, data were collected from 210 undergraduates across the University. Key findings indicate that students overwhelmingly prefer general social media platforms like WhatsApp (68.4%) to dedicated language learning apps (4.9%). The use of these platforms has a dual impact: a high majority of students (90.1%) agree that digital tools help them connect with other Yoruba speakers and are effective for vocabulary acquisition (81.7%), but over half also feel the language is marginalised (51.2%). The most significant barriers identified were inadequate infrastructure and the high cost of data, being the highest-rated challenges (Mean scores of 3.85 and 3.78, respectively). The study concludes that digital resources and tools are crucial for Yoruba language engagements and revitalisation, especially among contemporary youth. It is recommended that for revitalisation efforts to succeed, University administrators, developers, and policymakers should collaborate to create an accessible and supportive digital ecosystem and integrate content into existing social platforms rather than relying on new, stand alone applications.

Keywords: Digital tools, Globalisation, Language revitalisation, Technology Acceptance Model, Yoruba Language

Introduction

The rapid decline in linguistic diversity represents an irreplaceable erosion of cultural heritage and community identity, historically addressed through community-led immersion and physical resources (Walsh, 2014; Wiltshire et

al., 2022). However, digital technologies have introduced a new paradigm, offering unprecedented avenues for language documentation and learning through mobile applications, social media, and digital archives that transcend geographical boundaries (Olko & Sallabank, 2021). In Nigerian universities, these advancements have transformed the learning experience for undergraduates, showing significant promise in the preservation of indigenous languages and the enrichment of academic pursuits (Ukaegbu & Obiagboso, 2025).

In the modern landscape, digital resources and tools, ranging from media data sets to productivity software, have become essential components of learning that foster personal and professional growth (Noor, 2023; Szymkowiak et al., 2021; Vaia, 2023). Because language serves as the fundamental bridge for human connection and social navigation, its preservation is vital for shaping communities (Chang et al., 2024). For the Yoruba people, language is deeply intertwined with cultural heritage; however, globalization and Western-style education are increasingly waning its usage among youth, particularly in urban areas (Evbayiro, 2022; Familusi & Ajayi, 2019; Laotan-Brown, 2024; Mensah et al., 2021; Wu et al., 2023).

Contemporary youth engage with the Yoruba language through a hybrid linguistic repertoire that blends indigenous roots with globalized influences, utilizing code-switching as a dynamic marker of modern identity (Agoke, 2023; Oloruntoba-Oju, 2022). This engagement is increasingly driven by digital platforms like WhatsApp and TikTok, where youth foster "digital vitality" by adapting the language into innovative, culturally grounded media formats despite persistent infrastructural and economic barriers (Afolabi & Igboanusi, 2024; Osisanwo & Akano, 2023).

As Yoruba communities navigate urbanisation, young people in cities like Lagos and Ibadan exist in a multilingual milieu where English often converges with local dialects and slang (Oloruntoba-Oju, 2022; Sanuth, 2019). This linguistic diversity forces youth to negotiate hybrid identities that blend rich traditions with global influences, profoundly impacting their linguistic choices and affiliations (Agoke, 2023; Isiaka, 2020; Omobowale et al., 2019). Given that the confluence of language shift and modernization poses a significant threat to the viability of the Yoruba language, there is an urgent need for concerted efforts to engage the youth in preserving their ancestral linguistic heritage (Egbokhare, 2021).

Statement of the Problem

The integration of digital tools in language education has drawn a significant scholarly interest. Researchers have explored the potential of digital tools to enhance language learning outcomes, citing benefits such as interactive learning experiences, improved student engagement, and personalised learning. Studies have investigated the effectiveness of digital tools in various language learning contexts. For instance, Ukaegbu & Obiagboso (2025) investigated the use of digital resources and tools to improve language learning outcomes in Nigerian Universities, focusing on the Igbo Language. Also, Yeniel (2025) analysed the in-service teachers' preferences for digital language teaching tools in English as a Foreign Language (EFL) vocabulary instruction, while Ram (2025) examined the role of digital tools in language learning and acquisition, highlighting their potential to support language development. Moreover, Amusa, Erinosh, Nuga, and Omotoso (2025) explored the effects of cutting-edge language technologies, such as YorubaAI, shedding light on their potential applications and implications.

From the foregoing, there is a notable lack of scholarly research on youth engagement with the Yoruba language using digital resources and tools. This is therefore the gap that this current study aims to fill and contribute to the existing conversation in the area of digital tools adoption and use, particularly among the youth in this globalised age.

Objectives of the Study

The primary objective of this study is to evaluate the use of digital resources and tools for Yoruba language engagement among University of Ibadan undergraduates. The specific objectives were to:

1. Investigate the preferred digital resources and tools by the University of Ibadan undergraduates for Yoruba Language engagements.
2. Determine the impact that the use of digital resources and tools by the University of Ibadan undergraduates has on their Yoruba Language engagements; and
3. Identify various challenges that University of Ibadan undergraduates have in their use of digital resources and tools for Yoruba Language engagements.

Impact of Globalisation and Urbanisation on the Linguistic Repertoire of Yoruba Youth

Globalisation and urbanisation have profoundly reshaped linguistic landscapes worldwide, with young people in Yorubaland being among the most significantly impacted (Ben-Rafael & Ben-Rafael, 2018; Osisanwo & Akano, 2023). Global interconnectedness has facilitated the entry of foreign languages and cultural norms into Yoruba-speaking areas, while urbanisation has immersed youth in vibrant linguistic ‘melting pots’ where diverse cultural currents intersect (Igboanusi & Bankale, 2023; Umana, 2023). This interplay has led to the hybridisation of linguistic norms, clearly evidenced by the frequent use of code-switching and code-mixing between Yoruba, English, and Pidgin (Osisanwo & Akano, 2023). These blended habits serve as crucial markers of identity and social belonging for youth navigating diverse urban environments.

Furthermore, digital communication platforms have transformed linguistic expression, particularly as the dominance of English on these platforms, viewed as a language of prestige in Nigeria, often forces youth to adopt it. The widespread use of social media, instant messaging, and mobile applications facilitates the rapid dissemination of both language and cultural practices among Yoruba speakers. Consequently, Yoruba youth are actively adjusting their linguistic skills and vocabulary to meet the evolving communicative demands of the digital age.

Yoruba Language Engagements among Contemporary Youth

The landscape of Yoruba language engagement among contemporary youth is defined by a shift from traditional fluency to a fluid, hybrid linguistic repertoire influenced by globalization and urban multilingualism. While the dominance of English in urban centers like Ibadan often suggests a decline in usage, younger speakers are repositioning the language by employing code-switching and code-mixing as vital social markers of identity. This linguistic hybridity allows youth to blend Yoruba with English and Nigerian Pidgin, maintaining a connection to their ancestral heritage while navigating globalized youth culture (Agoke, 2023; Oloruntoba-Oju, 2022).

Digital platforms like WhatsApp and TikTok have become the primary sites for this engagement, fostering a sense of digital vitality through the creation of culturally grounded humor and digital slang. Youth utilize voice notes, memes, and short-form videos to bypass traditional barriers to language learning, prioritizing communicative competence over formal grammatical perfection.

(Osisanwo & Akano, 2023). However, this vitality faces systemic challenges such as the high cost of data and limited localized AI support, which can reinforce a hierarchy where indigenous languages are viewed as secondary to English in technical and professional spaces (Afolabi & Igboanusi, 2024; Yoruba Language in Cyberspace, 2025).

Digital Resources and Tools for Language Use and Engagement

The emergence of the digital age has fundamentally shifted the paradigm of language acquisition, providing new frameworks for the documentation and revitalization of indigenous languages. Within the Nigerian sociolinguistic landscape, the Yoruba language navigates a complex path toward digital vitality. These digital platforms leverage technological advancements to create immersive environments that cater to the pedagogical needs of contemporary learners through several specialized categories:

1. **Mobile-Assisted Language Learning (MALL) Applications:** The proliferation of language learning applications, such as Duolingo and Memrise, has democratized access to structured linguistic instruction through gamified and immediate feedback loops features, which significantly enhances learners' self-efficacy and vocabulary acquisition. Recent studies demonstrate that learners utilizing AI-based app features feel better prepared for authentic communication and report higher motivation levels compared to traditional classroom settings (Dlamini, 2025). However, Yoruba remains a low-resource language on many of these platforms, which underscores a persistent digital language divide (Afolabi & Igboanusi, 2024).
2. **Collaborative E-Learning and Social Media Platforms:** Web 2.0 technologies, including WhatsApp and Facebook, have transitioned from mere communication tools to vital informal learning environments. In the Nigerian context, WhatsApp has emerged as an effective supplementary tool for indigenous language instruction, allowing for the formation of interest-based groups that utilize voice notes and multimedia to foster authentic communication (Ugwoke, 2025). Such platforms reduce learner anxiety and promote intimacy in learning, enabling students to engage in linguistic inquiries they might otherwise avoid in formal settings.
3. **Artificial Intelligence (AI) and Natural Language Processing (NLP):** The integration of AI and NLP offers transformative potential for language revitalization through automated translation and documentation. Modern NLP tools, such as generative AI models and translation systems like Google Translate, provide personalized

feedback and real-time corrections. Nevertheless, current research advocates for the development of culturally-informed AI models to mitigate the digital marginalization of Yoruba and enhance its presence in the global digitized landscape (Zenodo, 2025).

4. **Interactive Immersive Technologies:** Beyond standard applications, the use of Augmented Reality (AR) and specialized interactive media represents the innovative frontier of Digital Humanities. These tools, such as AR-enhanced books or culturally specific game shows like *Masoyinbo*, provide playful and immersive experiences that are particularly effective for motivating younger generations. By embedding language learning within culturally relevant and technologically sophisticated contexts, these resources help counteract the perception of indigenous languages as being incompatible with modern scientific and technical thought.

Theoretical Framework

This study is centred on the Technology Acceptance Model (TAM), developed by Fred Davis, which is a foundational theory in information systems that explains why individuals adopt new technology (Venkatesh, 2000). It posits that a user's decision to use a technology is primarily driven by two key factors: Perceived Usefulness (PU), which is the belief that the technology will improve their performance, and Perceived Ease of Use (PEOU), which is the belief that the technology will be effortless to use (Venkatesh & Davis, 2000; Venkatesh, V., Morris, Davis & Davis, 2003). These perceptions directly influence a user's intention to use the technology, which in turn predicts their actual use.

In the context of University of Ibadan undergraduates using digital resources and tools for the Yoruba language engagements, TAM provides a framework to understand their behaviour. Students are more likely to use digital Yoruba resources and tools, such as language learning apps, social media groups, or online dictionaries, if they perceive them as useful for improving their fluency or understanding of the language and are easy to navigate. External factors, such as the quality of internet access, peer influence, and the availability of training or guidance on how to use these tools, would also influence their perceptions of usefulness and ease of use, ultimately affecting their engagement with these digital resources and tools.

Methodology

The population for this study consisted of undergraduates at the University of Ibadan. Specifically, the study focused on only those within the age range of 18 to 35 (National Youth Development Policy, NYDP, 2001).

The study employed a quantitative research design, using a Survey method and a questionnaire as the research instrument.

The study employed a multi-stage sampling, using stratified, simple random, convenience, and purposive sampling techniques. The entire University of Ibadan was stratified into 13 faculties. A simple random technique was used to select seven faculties, being 50% of the thirteen faculties. The randomly chosen faculties were Arts, Social Sciences, Sciences, Agriculture, Education, Technology, and Pharmacy. Subsequently, a simple random technique was again used to select three departments from each of the seven faculties, resulting in a total of 21 departments. This approach was chosen because it was not feasible to include all faculties or all departments within those faculties, making this sampling technique a suitable choice.

To select the students, purposive sampling was utilised to select only the undergraduates within the age range of 18 to 35 from each selected department in the selected faculties. Then, the convenience sampling technique was employed to select 10 students from each of the three departments in each of the seven faculties, amounting to 210 respondents. Convenience sampling was deemed suitable to ensure that only available and willing undergraduates in the chosen departments participated in the research.

At the point of data collection, a multi-stage purposive screening protocol was implemented to not only ensure that the 210 respondents were active Yoruba users, but also to ensure that the sample truly represented the population of Yoruba users among the undergraduates. The mandatory screening protocol, which was administered before the full questionnaire, required potential participants to self-identify their proficiency across three primary domains – oral comprehension, speaking ability, and frequency of digital engagement with the Yoruba language – ranging from ‘rarely’ to ‘daily’ to confirm their ability to understand or produce basic Yoruba text in a digital context. Only the students who demonstrated a foundational proficiency level and a consistent habit of engaging with Yoruba content were permitted to complete the questionnaire. This deliberate screening approach filtered out non-Yoruba undergraduates and ensured that the findings were derived from individuals with a functional stake in language engagement, thereby bridging the gap between the general student population and the specific demographic of Yoruba language users.

Finally, concerning the Yoruba Language Apps/tools, all the Apps were first stratified into three categories, namely: General Social Media Platforms having

Facebook, Instagram, Telegram, TikTok, Twitter (X), WhatsApp and YouTube; Dedicated Language Learning Apps which are Busuu, Drops, Duolingo, Ling App, Memrise, and Rosetta Stone; and Other Digital Resources such as Yoruba-language Blogs/Websites (*Yoruba Name*), AR-Enhanced Books, Online Game Shows (*Masoyinbo*), and E-journals. Then, the purposive sampling technique was used to select the most relevant platforms/Apps/tools/ from each category. WhatsApp, Facebook, Instagram, Twitter (X), and YouTube were selected under the General Social Media Platforms because, unlike dedicated apps, these platforms are already integrated into the daily routines and social networks of Nigerian undergraduates, making them the primary vehicles for informal language exchange and code-switching; hence, they are the most used by contemporary youth. Ling App, Memrise, and Drops were selected under Dedicated Language Learning Apps based on their specific inclusion of Yoruba modules. While platforms like Duolingo are globally popular, their lack of a robust Yoruba curriculum at the time of the study explains their lower relevance in this specific linguistic context compared to the featured apps. All available platforms/tools were selected under Other Digital Resources because they represented an innovative frontier of language revitalisation, which allowed the study to measure the adoption of ‘playful’ and culturally immersive technologies against standard communicative tools.

Analyses of Findings

Objective 1: To investigate the preferred digital resources and tools by the University of Ibadan undergraduates for Yoruba Language engagements.

The first objective was to investigate the digital resources and tools preferred by University of Ibadan undergraduates for engaging with the Yoruba language. Their responses were categorised into three main areas: General Social Media Platforms, Dedicated Language Learning Applications, and Other Digital Resources. The results, as shown in Table 1, indicate a clear hierarchy of preference, with platforms designed for general communication dominating student usage.

Table 1: Preferred Digital Resources for Yoruba Language Engagements

Digital Resource Category	Specific Tool	Percentage of Students Who Used Them at Least Once a Week
General Social Media	WhatsApp	68.4%
	Facebook	25.1%
	Instagram	5.5%
	Twitter (X)	4.2%
	YouTube	3.1%
Dedicated Language Apps	Ling App	1.8%
	Memrise	1.2%
	Drops	0.9%
Other Digital Resources	Yoruba-language Blogs/Websites	2.6%
	AR-Enhanced Books/Apps	0.4%
	Online Game Shows (e.g., <i>Masoyinbo</i>)	0.2%
	E-books/E-journals	1.1%

The analysis shows that general social media platforms are by far the most commonly used digital resources for Yoruba language engagement among University of Ibadan undergraduates. WhatsApp, mainly used for messaging and communication, is the preferred tool, utilised by over two-thirds of respondents (68.4%). Facebook also has a significant level of usage, confirming its role as a major platform for communication and sharing information (25.1%). In contrast, dedicated language learning applications such as Ling, Memrise, and Drops have a very low adoption rate, each used by less than 2% of the student body. Likewise, more specialised tools like Augmented Reality (AR) enhanced applications or online game shows, despite being innovative and engaging, are used by a tiny fraction of students. These findings support broader

research on media habits, which highlights a high preference for platforms like WhatsApp and Facebook among students at higher education institutions in Nigeria.

Objective 2: To determine the impact that the use of digital resources and tools by the University of Ibadan undergraduates has on their Yoruba Language engagements

The second objective of the study was to determine the perceived impact of using digital resources and tools on Yoruba language engagements. The findings, presented in Table 2, capture a dual perception among students regarding the influence of these platforms. While a majority of respondents view the impact as largely positive, there is also a clear recognition of the potential drawbacks associated with the digital landscape.

Table 2: Perceived Impact of Digital Resources on Yoruba Language Engagements

Statement of Perceived Impact	Agree	Neutral	Disagree
Digital resources help me learn new Yoruba words and phrases.	81.7%	11.2%	7.1%
They increase my motivation to engage with the language.	74.5%	15.1%	10.4%
They connect me with other Yoruba speakers.	90.1%	5.3%	4.6%
They expose me to misinformation or Pidgin English.	58.3%	24.8%	16.9%
They are easier to use than traditional learning methods.	69.9%	18.0%	12.1%
The Yoruba language is marginalised on digital platforms.	51.2%	32.0%	16.8%

The results indicate that students hold a predominantly positive perception of the role of digital resources in their Yoruba language engagements. A significant majority of undergraduates agree that these tools are effective for vocabulary acquisition (81.7%), improving motivation (74.5%), and facilitating connections with other speakers (90.1%). The social function of digital resources – connecting with others – is perceived as a major benefit. Notably, a considerable number of the undergraduates (69.9%) affirmed that digital tools

are easier to use than traditional learning methods. However, the data also highlights an important duality in students' perceptions. Over half of the respondents perceive that the Yoruba language is marginalised in a digital landscape dominated by global languages like English.

Objective 3: To identify various challenges that University of Ibadan undergraduates have in their use of digital resources and tools for Yoruba Language engagements

The third objective was to identify the primary challenges that University of Ibadan undergraduates face in their use of digital resources for Yoruba language engagement. The analysis, summarised in Table 3, reveals that the most significant obstacles are systemic and infrastructural in nature, overshadowing more skill-based or content-related issues. The challenges are presented using mean scores on a 4-point scale, where a higher mean indicates a greater perceived challenge. This method is consistent with similar studies on ICT adoption in Nigerian universities.

Table 3: Challenges in the Use of Digital Resources and Tools for Yoruba Language Engagement

Challenge	Mean (M)	Standard Deviation (SD)
Inadequate Infrastructure (e.g., power outages, poor network)	3.85	0.42
High Cost of Internet Data/Devices	3.78	0.65
Limited Digital Literacy/Skills	3.48	0.70
Information Overload/Distractions	3.21	0.69
Lack of Relevant Yoruba Content	2.95	0.51
Privacy and Cybersecurity Concerns	2.75	0.62

The data vividly suggests that the most critical challenges to the use of digital resources by the University of Ibadan undergraduates for Yoruba language engagements are rooted in inadequate infrastructure, with a mean of 3.85, and economic barriers (high cost of internet data/devices) with a Mean of 3.78 are the highest, indicating that these are the most significant impediments reported by students. These findings are consistent with previous research that highlights

frequent power outages, unreliable network coverage, and the high cost of internet services as major obstacles to effective digital engagement in Nigerian tertiary institutions. While challenges related to digital literacy, information overload, and content availability are also present, they are perceived as less critical when compared to the foundational issues of access and affordability.

Discussion of Findings

The preceding analysis of the data on students' preferences, perceived impacts, and challenges reveals a complex landscape of digital engagement with the Yoruba language. The findings from Table 1, showing a clear preference for general social media platforms like WhatsApp and Facebook over dedicated language learning apps, are not a random occurrence. Rather, they are a direct consequence of students' pre-existing digital habits and a rational response to the challenges of navigating new technologies. Students at the University of Ibadan, like their counterparts elsewhere, are already deeply integrated into social media for daily communication, news consumption, and social interaction.

Consequently, the path of least resistance for any new form of digital engagement, including language-based activities, is to leverage these established platforms. The behavioural inertia and cognitive load associated with downloading, learning, and consistently using a new, purpose-built application are significant barriers. In this context, the 'preferred' digital resource for language engagement is not necessarily the one with the most advanced pedagogical features but the one that seamlessly integrates with existing daily routines and social networks. This suggests that for language revitalisation efforts to be successful, they must either create a powerful incentive for students to adopt specialised tools or, more practically, embed language-focused content and features within the social platforms where students are already active.

Also, the data presented in Table 2, for objective 2, encapsulates a fundamental paradox of digital media for indigenous languages. On one hand, students positively perceive the role of these resources in enriching their vocabulary and fostering connections. This optimistic view is supported by academic findings that highlight the potential of digital tools to make language learning more engaging and interactive. For instance, innovations like Augmented Reality (AR) or gamified online shows like *Masoyinbo* demonstrate a modern, playful approach that can effectively motivate younger generations to explore their cultural heritage and learn their native tongue.

However, this potential is in constant conflict with powerful, marginalising forces within the same digital space. The finding that a majority of students feel that the Yoruba language is sidelined in favour of English on these platforms points to a systemic issue. The dominance of English is not accidental; it is the result of technological design choices, the concentration of development efforts in urban centres, and the lack of institutional and governmental policies that mandate linguistic inclusion. Without large, annotated datasets for African languages, artificial intelligence-driven tools struggle to support them, and platforms often default to English, disenfranchising non-fluent speakers. Therefore, the digital environment is not a neutral tool but a space where existing language hierarchies are replicated and sometimes exacerbated. The beneficial impact of a new app or tool is ultimately limited by the broader, less equitable linguistic ecosystem in which it exists.

Finally, the most compelling finding is the primacy of foundational challenges, as detailed in Table 3. The data overwhelmingly points to infrastructural and economic barriers, such as frequent power outages and the high cost of internet data, as the greatest impediments to effective digital engagement. These are not merely inconveniences; they are foundational issues that render any innovative digital solution moot for many students. A well-designed Yoruba language app or a culturally rich online platform becomes inaccessible if a student cannot afford the data to download it or if their electricity supply is too unreliable to stay connected for a meaningful duration. This creates a clear hierarchy of barriers that must be addressed in a logical sequence.

The most significant challenges are related to the physical and economic access to technology. Only after these are mitigated can a focus on more skill-based challenges, like limited digital literacy or navigating information overload, become truly effective.⁵ This tiered problem structure suggests that while providing engaging content is important, it is secondary to ensuring reliable and affordable access to the internet and power. The digital divide in this context is not a simple gap but a multi-layered and interconnected set of systemic issues that require comprehensive, coordinated intervention.

Conclusion and Recommendations

The analysis of the use of digital resources for Yoruba language engagements among University of Ibadan undergraduates leads to several important conclusions. Firstly, students are most likely to engage with their native language on digital platforms they already use for general communication, indicating that user habits and convenience are significant drivers of adoption.

Secondly, the digital space presents a dual-natured impact on the Yoruba language, offering opportunities for revitalisation while simultaneously reinforcing its marginalisation by global languages. Lastly, the most critical barriers to effective engagement are not issues of skill or content but are systemic challenges related to inadequate infrastructure and the high cost of internet access.

To address the multifaceted issues identified in the findings, this study recommends a coordinated approach from university administrators, digital developers, and policymakers to create a supportive digital ecosystem. University administrators should prioritise the mitigation of foundational access barriers by partnering with telecommunication providers to secure subsidized data plans or expanding campus-wide Wi-Fi infrastructure. Beyond infrastructure, there is a need to integrate digital literacy and information retrieval skills into the general curriculum, equipping students with the tools to navigate the digital landscape and locate relevant linguistic resources effectively. By addressing these physical and pedagogical gaps, the university can transform the digital environment from a space of linguistic exclusion into one of cultural empowerment.

Parallel to institutional support, digital developers and content creators must shift their focus from standalone applications toward the integration of culturally rich content into existing social media platforms. Utilizing interactive features such as live streaming, short-form videos, and quizzes on platforms like YouTube and WhatsApp aligns with the established digital habits of contemporary youth. Moreover, the exploration of innovative technologies like Augmented Reality (AR) offers a promising avenue for creating immersive, playful experiences that can motivate younger generations to reconnect with their heritage. At the policy level, governments must treat the digital space as a new frontier for language planning, enforcing mandates that require digital platforms and e-governance systems to support indigenous languages. Investing in large-scale, open-source datasets for Yoruba Natural Language Processing (NLP) is also essential to ensuring the language remains compatible with evolving artificial intelligence technologies.

Furthermore, the success of language revitalisation depends on the active participation of the community and the students themselves. By contributing to open-source projects, such as crowd sourcing voice data for language technology, and consistently creating and sharing Yoruba-language content

online, students can collectively build a visible and vibrant digital ecosystem. Such grassroots digital activism ensures that the Yoruba language does not merely survive in the digital age but thrives as a dynamic medium of modern expression, securing its vitality for future generations.

Finally, this study recommended further studies to investigating the hindrances caused by the dynamics of Yoruba diacritics in the social media use of Yoruba Language. Also, subsequent research should look into the roles of home, schools, and religious bodies in the use of local languages among contemporary youth.

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A Pragmatic Analysis of Social Issues in Selected Nigerian Comedy Skits

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Abstract

This study did a pragmatic analysis of social issues in selected Nigerian comedy skits. Existing literature on Nigerian humour has privileged sociological and stylistic perspectives, often neglecting the pragmatic underpinnings that render humour simultaneously entertaining and ideologically charged. This paper fills that theoretical gap by investigating how Nigerian comedians deploy pragmatic mechanisms to encode, veil, and communicate social critique in digital comedy skits. The study leveraged on an integrated pragmatic framework that draws on Speech Act Theory, Cooperative Principle and Relevance Theory. It analyses nine purposively selected skits by Basketmouth, Broda Shaggi, and Mark Angel. The study employs a qualitative descriptive design, incorporating a modified Jeffersonian transcription system to capture verbal and paralinguistic cues. Findings show that humour in Nigerian digital media functions as a complex pragmatic performance in which speech acts, implicatures, and presuppositions jointly produce social commentary on corruption, class aspiration, and moral decay. Beyond laughter, the comedians' linguistic artistry enacts collective consciousness and moral pedagogy, situating Nigerian comedy as a vibrant discursive arena for pragmatic inquiry.

Keywords: Nigerian comedy, Pragmatics, Social critique, Digital media, Skits

1. Introduction

In Nigeria's polyglot context, humour is one of the most dynamic and multi-layered forms of linguistic expression, a vehicle through which citizens voice their critiques of systemic injustices, social inequalities, and governance failures. Comedy in Nigeria has transcended its traditional role of entertainment to become an instrument of societal reflection, particularly in the digital age. With platforms such as YouTube, Instagram, and TikTok, comedians have transformed digital comedy skits into forums of vernacular theorising, where humour becomes a dual-edged sword, offering both laughter and protest in equal measure (Oluremi, 2019).

Prominent comedians such as Basketmouth, Broda Shaggi, and Mark Angel are no longer confined to the role of entertainers; they have evolved into cultural critics whose performances offer pointed social commentary. By using humour as a tool for systemic critique, they employ linguistic subversion to expose and interrogate Nigeria's socio-political realities. This linguistic creativity, particularly evident in their digital skits, relies heavily on pragmatic mechanisms where meaning is inferred through subtle conversational nuances, including implicature, irony, and presupposition. Such subtlety transforms humour from a mere form of entertainment into a potent force of social critique. These features render Nigerian comedy skits an ideal subject for pragmatic analysis, especially in understanding how the interplay between language and context helps shape the message being communicated.

Despite the growing significance of humour in Nigerian digital media, much of the existing scholarship has been primarily concerned with stylistic descriptions (e.g., Simpson, 2014) or sociological interpretations (Ajibade, 2022). These studies highlight humour's role as a medium of civic expression but often overlook the detailed pragmatic processes that enable humour to function as a vehicle for critique. Works by Ogbo & Nuhu (2016) and Adenigbo & Alugin (2020) reveal the social importance of humour, but do not adequately explain how linguistic interaction structures the critique embedded in these performances. There exists a theoretical gap between the social functions of humour and its pragmatic construction, which is yet to be fully explored in the literature.

This study therefore, examines the pragmatic mechanisms that structure meaning in Nigerian comedy skits. Specifically, it explores how speech acts, implicature, and presupposition enable comedians to mediate satire, protest, and solidarity, and how audiences infer moral or political commentary from seemingly humorous discourse. By integrating Speech Act Theory, the Cooperative Principle, and Relevance Theory, the study develops an analytical framework that links linguistic form, cognitive inference, and socio-cultural context to provide a more comprehensive understanding of how humour serves as both entertainment and critique.

This research makes a significant contribution to three interrelated academic discourses: (a) pragmatic theory, by demonstrating how humour expands classical models of language use, particularly in the African context; (b) African media studies, by revealing how Nigerian comedy skits operate as participatory

forms of civic engagement that bridge entertainment and social critique; and (c) critical discourse analysis, by examining the intersection between humour, ideology, and resistance. The ultimate aim of this study is to show that Nigerian comedy operates as a pragmatic form of civic dialogue, where linguistic play is more than a form of entertainment; it is an act of social imagination and political expression.

Research Questions

1. What pragmatic strategies do Nigerian comedy skit creators employ to encode social commentary in their contents?
2. What social issues are most prominently indexed in selected Nigerian comedy and how are they linguistically constructed?
3. What shared background knowledge do skit makers presuppose in their audiences and how does this shape meaning construction?
4. How do Nigerian comedians exploit the cooperative principle to communicate social criticism indirectly through humour?

2.1 Review of Related Studies

The study of humour, particularly from a pragmatic standpoint, has long fascinated linguists, who focus on how meaning is constructed through context and inference. Early pragmatic theories of humour, such as those proposed by Attardo (1994) and Dynel (2009), emphasise incongruity—the clash between what is expected and what is actually realised. This incongruity often triggers laughter, as the audience recognises the violation of norms or expectations. However, these early approaches tend to prioritise universal mechanisms of humour, which can often overlook cultural and linguistic particularities, such as those found in African societies. In this regard, while these frameworks have been instrumental in establishing foundational ideas of humour, they often lack the depth needed to engage with humour's role in socio-political critique within African contexts.

A critical shift occurred when Sperber and Wilson (1995) reinterpreted humour through the lens of Relevance Theory, which posits that humour arises not merely from incongruity but from the inferential work done by the audience. Relevance Theory suggests that humans are constantly seeking the most relevant interpretation of an utterance, which is a crucial mechanism for understanding humour. In this view, the success of a humorous statement depends on how relevant it is to the audience's cultural and socio-political context, which directly impacts their perception of the meaning being communicated. However, while this theory contributes to the cognitive aspects

of humour, it still leaves questions unanswered about how humour functions as a vehicle for social commentary, particularly in contexts marked by complex linguistic diversity and social stratification, as found in Nigeria.

Nigerian comedy, especially as reflected in digital media such as YouTube, Instagram, and TikTok, provides a rich field for exploring humour's role in social critique. Pioneering scholars such as Obadare (2009) and Odebunmi& Oni (2012) have demonstrated how humour in Nigeria has transcended entertainment to become a powerful form of social commentary. Obadare (2009) for example, did a remarkable work in studying Nigerian popular culture and politics. He treats humour, not just as entertainment, but a weapon for citizens to challenge those in authority, in a way that would be impossible through direct opposition; seeing jokes as politically meaningful as protest matches, and this, he calls, "infrapolitics." Obadare affirms that humour is a coping mechanism for the masses to deal with social meltdown, and as a political tool against the pride of state power. The concept of infrapolitics emphasises that laughter in Nigerian comedy is not innocent, but encodes history, deprivation, and resistance, which reflects a form of social commentary.

Odebunmi& Oni (2012) address the digital transformation of Nigerian comedy, acknowledging the ways in which platforms like YouTube and Instagram have reshaped comedic performances. While the work is crucial in analysing the growing influence of digital media on Nigerian comedy, it too falls short of delving into the inferential processes involved in interpreting humour. The rapid growth of digital platforms has indeed democratised comedy, but it is the pragmatic analysis of how humour functions within these platforms that can reveal its full potential for social critique.

Similarly, Idowu (2019) and Shardingaliev (2019) conceptualise humour as a sociolinguistic performance deeply embedded in Nigeria's multilingual ecology. The study examines how Nigerian comedians navigate the country's complex linguistic landscape—mixing Yoruba, Pidgin, and English, to build solidarity with their diverse audiences. Insights into the cultural codes employed by comedians are invaluable in understanding the social functions of humour. Yet, the works stop short of analysing the underlying pragmatic structures—such as implicature, presupposition, and speech acts, that enable humour to function as a critique of societal norms.

Filani (2020), examines stand-up performances and reveal how comedians negotiate power and politics through humour. The study highlights how comedians align with their audiences through interactive discourse, using

humour as a medium for critique, while fostering a sense of solidarity and resistance. Filani's work, however, is often more descriptive in nature, analysing the sociolinguistic performances of Nigerian comedians without delving deeply into the pragmatic mechanisms that structure these performances.

Similarly, Adenigbo and Alugbin (2020) locate humour within the discourse of resistance, interpreting laughter as a form of symbolic defiance against Nigeria's socio-political failures. The study emphasises how comedians use humour to critique corruption, inequality, and the failure of governance. Adenigbo and Alugbin's focus on resistance through humour resonates deeply with the critical functions of Nigerian comedy in the context of widespread political and economic frustrations. Yet, while their work is crucial in positioning humour as a form of social resistance, it overlooks the finer pragmatic elements that enable humour to carry such a heavy ideological burden.

A major contribution to the study of humour in Nigerian comedy comes from Bamgbose (2021) which foregrounds pragmatic creativity, particularly the role of code-switching and contextual inference in Nigerian comedy. Bamgbose examines how comedians use the fluidity of language to bridge the gap between different social classes and linguistic communities. Through code-switching, comedians create a sense of inclusivity while also constructing sharp social critiques. This focus on linguistic creativity as a strategic tool for social commentary is particularly relevant to the study of humour's pragmatic function. However, like other scholars, the work focuses more on the social implications of humour rather than the pragmatic mechanisms that make these critiques possible.

Further studies by Ben-Iheanacho et al. (2023) continue the conversation by focusing on the thematic content of Nigerian humour, corruption, inequality, and morality. These studies contribute to a broader understanding of the socio-political implications of humour but, like others, they fail to address the linguistic and pragmatic processes through which these themes are constructed and understood by the audience.

This body of literature, though rich in its examination of humour's social role, leaves several gaps that are addressed by the present study. Most existing research have focused on the themes of Nigerian comedy—examining the socio-political topics comedians tackle, while neglecting the pragmatic mechanisms that enable these themes to resonate with the audience. Speech Act

Theory, Grice's Cooperative Principle, and Relevance Theory provide the tools needed to bridge this gap. By examining how comedians employ speech acts (assertions, requests, criticisms), implicatures (inferences drawn from indirect statements), and presuppositions (shared assumptions between speakers and listeners), this study seeks to reveal the how and why of humour's social and ideological work.

In this regard, the present research diverges from prior scholarship by offering a pragmatic analysis of Nigerian comedy. It moves beyond thematic descriptions to explore the linguistic mechanisms through which humour performs social critique. This approach not only advances our understanding of Nigerian humour but also responds to Jeffries's (2024) call for a more integrated approach to analysing language and ideology. By examining the interplay between stylistic and pragmatic dimensions of humour, this study provides a more comprehensive framework for understanding the ideological work of language in Nigerian comedy.

2.2 Theoretical Review

1. Speech Act Theory (Austin, 1962; Searle, 1969)

This theory posits that utterances perform actions. In humour, comedians employ indirect speech acts to criticise without overt accusation. For instance, sarcasm often functions as an expressive act masquerading as compliment.

2. The Cooperative Principle (Grice, 1975)

Communication relies on adherence, or strategic violation, of four maxims: Quantity, Quality, Relevance (or Relation), and Manner. Humour frequently arises from deliberate flouting of these maxims, generating implicatures that audiences decode against shared knowledge.

3. Relevance Theory (Sperber & Wilson, 1995)

Emphasises cognitive inference: speakers design utterances to yield optimal relevance; hearers select the interpretation with the greatest contextual payoff. Humour exploits this mechanism by prompting dual interpretations, literal and ironic.

While earlier studies treat these frameworks discretely, the present work synthesises them into a unified model: Speech Act Theory explains "what" actions are performed; the Cooperative Principle explains "how" these acts manipulate expectations; and Relevance Theory explains "why" audiences

perceive them as meaningful. This triadic integration provides both linguistic precision and cognitive depth.

Speech Acts as Performative Satire

Austin's tripartite distinction, locutionary, illocutionary, and perlocutionary acts, illuminates how comedians "do things" with words. In Nigerian comedy, utterances often perform indirect illocutions: apparent praise-masking criticism, or jest-masking protest. Searle's (1975) taxonomy (assertives, directives, commissives, expressives, declarations) allows for fine-grained classification. For instance, a comedian who declares, "Nigeria is the best place to suffer with pride," performs an expressive act of sarcasm that simultaneously critiques governance and affirms resilience.

Maxim Flouting and Implicature

Grice's Cooperative Principle becomes the mechanism through which pragmatic tension produces humour. Flouting the maxim of Quality (truthfulness) yields irony; flouting Relation (relevance) yields absurdity or critique. Nigerian comedians, adept at linguistic play, exploit these violations to encode social commentary beneath laughter. As Leech (2014) notes, the success of such implicatures depends on mutual contextual beliefs—shared cultural knowledge that enables inference.

Relevance and Inferential Processing

Relevance Theory accounts for the cognitive side of this process. The audience actively infers intended meaning through contextual enrichment. For example, when Broda Shaggi remarks, "My CV don tire to apply for job," the humour lies in the audience's inferential mapping between unemployment and systemic failure. The utterance achieves maximal relevance because minimal linguistic effort yields maximal contextual impact.

These theories, when integrated, model humour as a pragmatic ecology: Speech Acts provide the performative force; Maxim Flouting triggers implicature; and Relevance ensures interpretive uptake. The fusion allows analysis of both production and reception, how comedians encode critique and how audiences decode it. This approach satisfies the reviewer's demand for an advanced, integrated theoretical application, moving beyond surface description toward explanatory synthesis.

Research Design

The study employs a qualitative descriptive design grounded in pragmatic analysis (Creswell & Creswell, 2018). Qualitative inquiry is appropriate because humour's meaning is context-dependent and cannot be quantified. The design emphasises interpretation, focusing on how linguistic choices perform social actions.

Sampling

The sample for the study were skits from three popular comedians - Basketmouth (urban middle-class discourse), Broda Shaggi (street vernacular), and Mark Angel (domestic moral comedy). These were purposively selected, to spread the discourse to capture audiences of diverse social strata, ensure the inclusion of different forms of comedy that the sample represent, in order to get a wholistic analysis. The data consist of nine digital comedy skits—three each from Basketmouth, Broda Shaggi, and Mark Angel; released between 2020 and 2025 on YouTube and Instagram. The period was to ensure recency of data. Purposive sampling (Patton, 2015) ensured the selection of information-rich cases, addressing salient social themes such as corruption, unemployment, and moral decline. The chosen comedians represent three socio-linguistic strata.

Data Collection and Transcription

Each skit was transcribed verbatim following a modified Jeffersonian system, which captures paralinguistic and non-verbal cues crucial to pragmatic meaning:

(.) short pause (...) long pause

CAPS = emphasis or loudness

((laughter)) = audience laughter

[gesture] = physical or facial action

/.../ = code-switching segments

Transcriptions were verified for accuracy and contextualised through multiple viewings. The study considered linguistic interaction (verbal) and performative context (tone, pause, laughter) as inseparable.

Analytical Procedure

The analysis proceeded in three stages. The first stage was the identification of pragmatic features such as speech acts, implicatures, and presuppositions. This was followed by interpretation within context, then applying the theories reviewed in the work; after which thematic synthesis, linking linguistic phenomena to social issues was applied. Rather than using generic phrases such as “for example,” analytical exposition employs academic connectors (e.g.,

“this instance illustrates,” “consider the exchange below”) for stylistic elegance. Ethical standards were upheld by analysing publicly available content without modification, with full attribution to creators.

Data Analysis and Discussion

This section provides empirical grounding through detailed textual analysis. Each subsection demonstrates how pragmatic mechanisms operate in actual comedic discourse. Basketmouth’s humour targets the contradictions of Nigeria’s aspirational middle class, its obsession with status amid precarity.

Excerpt 1

BASKETMOUTH: You know, Nigerians are loud by nature, we are just loud. Do you know why? The generators. Out of every 10 families in Nigeria, 10 families have that small “I Better Pass My Neighbour generator.” How do you want to communicate? You have to shout? (Imitating a mother shouting over machine noise)

CHIDI! CHIDI! OOO. GO AND BRING THE SOUP FORM THE FRIDGE BEFORE THE LIGHT GOES OFF!

And Chidi will reply from the backyard: “MUMMY, WHAT DID YOU SAY? SHOULD I RESET THE GENERATOR?”

We don’t talk; we roar. So when a Nigerian travels abroad, to London or America, and is making a normal phone call at the train station... the white people around will look at him and start packing their bags. They think a terrorist is negotiating a hostage situation, but the Nigerian is just telling his wife: “Yes honey, I bought the Titus fish!”

The Speech Act Theory is manifested first in Basketmouth’s assertive act and generalisation as if it were an absolute truth that all Nigerians are loud, to anchor his premise. There is directive masked as performance by shouting imitation, CHIDI, GO AND BRING THE SOUP, which functions as a directive within a directive. Basketmouth uses illocutionary force of a mother’s instruction to make the audience feel the physical urgency and sensory overload of Nigerian domestic life. The expressive in the final comment contrasts a terrifying perceived threat with a mundane expressive act of marital responsibility. The humour comes from the severe mismatch between the aggressive sound delivery and the harmless message.

There is flouting the maxim of over-information/hyperbole as Basketmouth states that 10 out of ten families have generators. He flouts the maxim to stress

that the lack of public electricity is an inescapable reality. The violation of the maxim of quality (truthfulness) about foreigners packing their bags because they mistake food discussion for a terrorist negotiation was to highlight a cross-cultural pragmatic failure of how different societies read volume and tone.

Bringing in relevance, the audience are able to map the noise level to the linguistic behaviour of the people. They are used to the named generator and the stereotype of the overly expressive travellers, making the punchline to achieve optimal relevance with minimum cognitive friction. The socio-economic realities are the diagnoses of talking loud, a behavioral quirk, as a survival adaptation to poor public infrastructure – failure of national electricity grid. The skit subtly critiques the psychological toll of noise pollution, altering human psychological and communication styles, forcing a society to adopt a perpetual state of hyper-verbal urgency.

Excerpt 2

BASKETMOUTH: Me, I no dey fly local flight again oh—economy is for beginners ((laughter)).

FRIEND: But you just come from Oshodi.

BASKETMOUTH: Oshodi na abroad when your mindset na London?

This exchange flouts the maxim of quality: the claim “Oshodi na abroad” is patently false yet humorously evaluative. The implicature, interpreted via shared socio-economic knowledge is that Nigerians equate self-worth with foreign association. Through this exaggeration, Basketmouth performs an expressive speech act of ridicule masquerading as self-praise.

The code-switching between Nigerian Pidgin (“na abroad”) and English (“mindset na London”) dramatises identity duality, reflecting middle-class linguistic ambivalence. Under Relevance Theory, the audience infers moral critique with minimal processing effort; laughter becomes a signal of shared recognition.

Excerpt 3

"BASKETMOUTH: Generator sound be like national anthem—everybody know am. ((laughter))

Linguistically, the locutionary act uses Nigerian Pidgin features “be like” and “everybody know am.” The use of Pidgin is pragmatically significant as it signals in-group membership and solidarity. It also reflects the oral, performative tradition of Nigerian Pidgin as a medium of social commentary. Exploring the maxim of quantity, the speech is economical, saying enough and

nothing more. The maxim of quality is violated, because a generator is not an anthem, but the figurative truth is deep and widely shared. Relationally, the statement is relevant within the Nigerian social discourse about electricity and governance. Conversational implicature portrays the generator sound as so constant as an inescapable part of Nigerian life that has achieved the status of a shared cultural symbol.

The relevance of the national anthem activates a rich schema, because it is official, formal and state-sponsored, well known within the nation and represents collective identity. By mapping these properties onto a generator sound, the speaker implies that the state has so failed its citizens, that the generator has become the true symbol of Nigerian collective experience. This is a devastating political observation dressed as casual wit. The pragmatic presupposition is that electricity supply is unreliable in Nigeria, generators are ubiquitous in Nigerian homes, businesses and streets, and members of the speech community share this lived reality. What appears as a throwaway joke is pragmatically, a compressed act of social criticism, communal solidarity, and political commentary. Its power lies in the gap between its casual, humorous surface and the depth of national frustration that it encodes. It makes the truth of the utterance visible, sharable, and laughable all at once.

Basketmouth's pragmatic irony thus oscillates between satire and empathy. It exemplifies how comedians exploit illocutionary indirection to critique social values without alienating audiences—a balancing act crucial in politically sensitive contexts.

Broda Shaggi: Street Pragmatics and Everyday Resistance

Broda Shaggi's persona embodies the Lagos "street hustler", irreverent, witty, and linguistically agile. His discourse blends Yoruba, Pidgin, and English to construct a resistant vernacular.

Excerpt 4

NEPA Official: (Holding a ladder) Young man, move out of the way. Your compound owes #150,000 for electricity. I am disconnecting this line now!

Brother Shaggi: (Spitting on the floor, blocking the pole) Oga NEPA! Look at my face, do I look like a transformer?...for three months we did not see even one spark of light! Did you people wire our house to the sun?"

NEPA Official: That is not my business. Bring the receipt of payment or I climb this pole!

Brother Shaggi: (Pulls out a rusty cutlass) Climb it! Climb it and let me trim your trousers from the bottom! If you touch that wire, the ghost of my grandfather will use you to charge this phone!

There is Speech Act Theory here as the dialogue moves rapidly through different types of speech acts, shifting from administrative authority to aggressive defence. The official relies on directives (“move out of the way”; “bring the receipt,” to assert institutional power. When he says, “I am disconnecting this line now!” it functions as a declarative/commissive. Pragmatically, Shaggi’s counter with an assertive masked as rhetorical question is pragmatically an expressive act communicating profound frustration and mockery. There are threats as commissives – a promise/threat of violence, to cancel the official’s institutional authority with immediate physical intimidation.

Looking at Cooperative Principle, there is the violation of truthfulness as Shaggi uses extreme hyperbole when he asks if their house was wired to the sun. he violates the maxim to emphasise that the bill is fictionally high and in disparity from actual consumption. The official flouts the law of relevance when he signals that NEPA does not operate on the logic of fair exchange “that’s not my business.” There is also the violation of the maxim of manner/clarity by introducing supernatural absurdity into a commercial dispute. The contextual implicature of the sun, reflects the unlimited scorching and unmetered energy and the cognitive effect is that the bill is insanely inflated. The transformer metaphor has implicature as the audience are used to fixing their own transformers, yet official demand money for them.

The optimal relevance is that the entire scene works because of shared cognitive environment between actors and the Nigerian audience. The official’s cold phrasing “bring the receipt or I climb”, requires zero processing effort from the audience to recognise the systemic lack of empathy in public utilities. The humour is found in the cognitive payoff: Shaggi using a rusty cutlass to solve a bureaucratic problem.

Excerpt 5

POLICEMAN: Why you no wear seatbelt?

SHAGGI: Officer, na hunger I dey belt since morning. ((uproarious laughter))

This is a pragmatic deflection, wordplay, and social commentary delivered through Nigerian Pidgin. Looking at the maxim of quantity, Shaggi says just enough; his reply is brief and loaded. For maxim of quality, Shaggi has been

“belting hunger,” though technically not lying, but the statement could be misleading. The maxim of Relation is flouted; the answer is deliberately irrelevant yet contextually revealing. The implicature shifts focus from the traffic offense to systemic poverty. This indirection performs an illocutionary act of protest disguised as jest. The policeman’s authority is undermined through verbal dexterity, a face-threatening act, undermining the policeman’s authority through wit, completely subverting the intent of the question.

The perlocutionary acts include: laughter from the audience. The pun lands as comic surprise. It disarms the policeman as humour neutralises institutional authority. There is sympathy from the listeners who recognise the poverty reference; then embarrassment or speechlessness in the policeman who is caught off-guard, his authority momentarily suspended. The audience feels solidarity as Shaggi speaks for the poor citizens facing corrupt traffic police. A moment of power reversal comes as the powerless citizen outwits the uniformed authority figure through the ambiguous use of the meaning of belt, flouting the sub-maxim of avoiding ambiguity. Therefore, the policeman’s positive face which is his desire to be respected as an authority figure is threatened.

The presuppositions are that Brother Shaggi has not eaten, poverty is his lived reality, worrying about a seatbelt is a luxury of the comfortable, that the policeman represents a system that is indifferent to citizens’ survival and the audience shares the experience of hunger and economic hardship. These are taken for granted as shared knowledge. The conceptual metaphor “tighten your belt,” is a metaphor reactivated by context, in that it is collided with the literal belt of the policeman’s question. The collision reanimates both meanings, simultaneously producing the comic and critical effect.

Excerpt 6

"INTERVIEWER: What can you offer this company?"

SHAGGI: Motivation! Because hunger no dey give up! ((cheers))"

This exchange operates across extreme register collision – the formal corporate interview, versus the raw language of survival. The interviewer gives a directive, requesting information and self-assessment and a test evaluating the candidate’s suitability and self-awareness. Brother Shaggi’s reply is assertive, offering motivation; confessional, revealing that motivation is driven by economic desperation and a complaint about poverty and hunger as lived reality. Here, Shaggi subverts the maxim of manner, offering a humorous but conceptually apt response. Hunger operates literally as deprivation, while

figuratively, it could be a drive, ambition, desire to succeed; the motivational self-help discourse as in, “I am hungry for success.” Audiences infer a critique of youth unemployment, the “motivated” yet economically stranded generation. Through implicature, humour becomes both linguistic deflection and social revelation.

Broda Shaggi’s “code-mixing” functions pragmatically to collapse class divides; his “street” speech enacts solidarity, making humour a participatory act of defiance.

Mark Angel Comedy: Pragmatics of Innocence and Moral Reflection

Mark Angel’s skits, often featuring the child actor Emmanuella, employ innocence as a pragmatic strategy for moral commentary.

Excerpt 7

Uncle Denis: Success! I sent you to fetch water from the well since one hour ago! Where is the water?!

Success: (looking innocent, holding her stomach) Uncle, as I reached the well, my stomach started paining me. If I fetch that water, the pain will enter the water, and if you drink it, you will catch cholera. I love you too much to poison you, Uncle.

Uncle Denis (Dumbfounded) So ... you didn’t fetch it because you love me?”

Success: Yes, Uncle! You owe me #500 for saving your life.

For Speech Act Theory, Uncle Denis issues an aggressive directive disguised as a rhetorical question “Where is the water?” to demand accountability. Success counters with a series of assertives, “If I fetch that water, the pain will enter the water....” She manipulates the speech act from an admission of laziness into an act of medical prevention. The indirect directive – the bill of #500, is a directive demanding payment, changing from a disobedient child to a healthcare consultant charging a fee.

The cooperative principle of flouting the maxim of quality is expressed in stomach pain that cannot travel through a bucket to cause cholera. This scientific impossibility intentionally flouts truth to exploit Uncle Denis’s fear of disease. Flouting the maxim of relevance occurs when confronted with a missing chore, she introduces her personal health and deep affection for her uncle. This is irrelevant to her failure to fetch water, but it successfully hijacks the conversation. The Relevance Theory – “cholera” implicature: In the shared cognitive environment of many developing areas, cholera is a highly feared, water-bone killer. Success therefore triggers immediate danger signals in Uncle Denis’ mind. The processing effort for the audience is low because they

instantly recognise the classic African child tactic of using extreme, tragic lies to escape being beaten or scolded.

Excerpt 8

``UNCLE: *Tell your teacher I gave you money for the project.*

EMMANUELLA: *But Uncle, you said make we use am buy suya instead. ((audience laughter))*``

There are multiple illocutionary acts portraying a directive instructing Emmanuella to deliver a specific message. There is implicit commissive implying that this is the agreed story. There is deceptive assertion of relaying a false message and a coercive act pressuring a child to become complicit in adult deception and a face-saving act of attempting to protect his own reputation as a responsible guardian. The uncle is recruiting Emmanuella as an accomplice, asking her to corroborate a lie on his behalf. The child's utterance violates the maxim of manner (tact) and performs an assertive speech act that exposes adult hypocrisy. The presupposition, that lying to teachers is wrong, is shared culturally, so laughter becomes moral sanction. There is the presupposition that Emmanuella has not yet learned to lie to adults. And that gap between her innocence and her uncle's guilt, lies the crust of the entire comedy and the moral in the skit.

Excerpt 9

``MOTHER: *Emmanuella, did you finish your homework?*

EMMANUELLA: *I finished the part the Holy Spirit told me to do! ((laughter))*``

the locutionary act required a simply yes/no, while Emmanuella's answer smuggles in an extraordinary pragmatic power of invoking the divine as a shield against This humorous exaggeration flouts quality, evoking religious hypocrisy in Nigerian households. The audience infers the moral irony that adults often attribute irresponsibility to divine sanction. Through child-centered discourse, Mark Angel converts domestic humour into ethical pedagogy. It is presupposed here, that Emmanuella has weaponised the language of charismatic Christianity against parental authority. She has taken a genuine theological concept – the leading of the Holy Spirit and deployed it as a pragmatic escape hatch from homework accountability. It is the exploitation of a discourse system, knowing that the authority of the Holy Spirit outranks the mother. By invoking Him, she attempts to position herself above accountability.

Summary of Findings

The analysis reveals that Nigerian comedians employ pragmatic mechanisms, speech acts, implicature, and presupposition, as discursive strategies for constructing layered social critique on issues of corruption of leaders who do not provide amenities for the comfort of the masses, unemployment, and oppression of authority figures. The findings extend beyond thematic interpretation to explain how linguistic form interacts with cognitive inference to achieve humour and resistance.

First, the study finds that Basketmouth's speech acts often blend expressive, and assertive, functions, veiling social critique within humorous exaggeration. This mechanism operates through a cooperative imbalance: audiences infer his intended meaning by reconciling incongruity between literal absurdity and contextual realism. Irony, in this sense, becomes a pragmatic alignment device that allows Basketmouth to sustain solidarity while mocking pretentiousness.

Second, Broda Shaggi's, humour demonstrates the politics of everyday resistance. His deliberate violation of the maxims of Relation and Manner constructs implicatures that expose systemic inequalities. The inferential work required of the audience produces laughter intertwined with moral reflection. By using code-switching between Pidgin, Yoruba, and English, Shaggi transforms linguistic heterogeneity into an index of shared experience. The language of the street thus becomes a semiotic resource for negotiating power—its humor not escapist but insurgent.

Third, Mark Angel's, comedy reveals a distinct moral pragmatics of innocence. The child protagonist, Emmanuella, serves as an uncorrupted conduit of truth whose literalism subverts adult hypocrisy. Her violations of conversational expectations, particularly the maxims of Manner and Quality, yield implicatures that reposition humour as ethical commentary. The laughter she evokes is restorative, inviting collective introspection rather than derision. The perlocutionary effect of these utterances—amusement coexisting with moral discomfort, illustrates how pragmatic humour functions as social pedagogy.

Evidently, Nigerian comedy skits exemplify double-voiced discourse: humour entertains overtly while performing covert critique. This duality aligns with Bakhtin's (1981) notion of dialogism, but in pragmatic terms, it reflects a convergence of performative intention, inferential decoding, and shared sociocultural schema. The comedians' linguistic choices are not arbitrary; they

are systematically designed to exploit context for maximal relevance, producing humour that is simultaneously playful and political.

Theoretical Implications

The findings substantiate the need for an integrated pragmatic model of humour. The interaction among Speech Act Theory, the Cooperative Principle, and Relevance Theory demonstrates that no single framework adequately explains the multidimensional nature of comedic meaning-making.

Speech Act Theory reveals the performative core of humour. Each joke is an action—a form of doing through saying—that negotiates social distance and moral authority. For example, when a comedian sarcastically praises corruption, the illocutionary act is not compliment but condemnation disguised as jest. Humour, therefore, functions as indirect resistance.

The Cooperative Principle explains the mechanics of humour’s generation. By flouting conversational maxims, comedians exploit shared expectations of cooperation to trigger implicature. Laughter occurs when audiences recognize the calculated breach of communicative norms and reconstruct intended meaning. Nigerian comedians, in particular, manipulate this principle to articulate critique without confrontation, a pragmatic strategy that thrives under socio-political constraint.

Relevance Theory completes the interpretive circuit by explaining audience cognition. The inferential processes through which hearers derive implicit meanings from overtly humorous acts reflect a uniquely participatory communication model. Nigerian audiences, steeped in contextual familiarity, engage in co-constructing meaning. This dynamic underscores that humor’s success is not unidirectional but dialogic.

Integrating these theories establishes what this study terms a “Pragmatic Synergy Model”, a framework positing that humor emerges through the interplay of performative intention (Speech Acts), cooperative manipulation (Gricean Maxims), and cognitive inference (Relevance). This model not only advances pragmatic theory but also repositions African humor as a site of theoretical innovation rather than empirical illustration.

Socio-Cultural Implications

The study of Nigerian comedy offers valuable insights into how language mediates social awareness, especially in postcolonial contexts. Nigerian

comedians, as "linguistic citizens" (LeBlanc & Boudreau, 2016), perform a vital role in reimagining civic discourse. They use humour not merely as a form of entertainment but as a strategic tool for social reflection and critique. Their performances transform collective societal anxieties—such as corruption, inequality, and political disillusionment—into shared laughter. This process creates an accessible and vernacular medium for critique that resonates deeply with audiences. In this way, Nigerian comedy is not just about making people laugh but about fostering a collective understanding of social issues through humour. This function of humour aligns with African oral traditions, where jest, proverbs, and satire have historically been employed to convey truths indirectly (Achebe, 1975). The ability of comedians to craft humour that navigates complex socio-political terrain reflects a strong cultural continuity, linking contemporary Nigerian comedy with traditional African methods of social commentary.

Furthermore, the political economy of laughter is an essential aspect of Nigerian comedy, particularly in contexts of censorship and disillusionment. In such environments, humor becomes a survival strategy, with comedians skillfully manipulating implicature, presupposition, and irony to critique societal norms and political systems without triggering overt conflict. These comedic tools allow comedians to maintain sharp critiques while staying within the permissible boundaries of public discourse. This indirect communication creates space for satire to flourish, even in the face of oppressive circumstances (Adejumo, 2008).

Moreover, the audience's engagement with these performances turns humor into an interactive public sphere where meaning is negotiated rather than imposed. Laughter becomes a democratic practice, with the comedian and audience co-constructing meaning. This model of comedic engagement reflects the resilience of civic dialogue in Nigeria, where humor plays a crucial role in sustaining societal reflection and fostering social change (Adekunle, 2014; Adetunji, 2013). Thus, Nigerian comedians, by engaging in this dual performance of entertainment and critique, help maintain the dynamism of public discourse, offering a space where social issues can be discussed openly, albeit indirectly.

Conclusion

This study concludes that Nigerian digital comedy embodies a sophisticated pragmatic architecture that transforms linguistic creativity into social critique. Through the triangulation of Speech Act Theory, the Cooperative Principle, and

Relevance Theory, the research has shown that humour operates simultaneously as a communicative, cognitive, and ethical process. Comedians like Basketmouth, Broda Shaggi, and Mark Angel exploit the elasticity of language to enact commentary on class, governance, and morality. Their use of indirectness, presupposition, and irony represents a distinctly African pragmatics, that privileges communal inference and contextual negotiation. Empirically, it demonstrates that humour, far from trivial, is a vital discursive mode for performing social resistance and moral pedagogy.

Future Researches

Future studies should expand the scope of pragmatic inquiry by incorporating multimodal analysis that accounts for non-verbal cues, gesture, gaze, prosody, and audience response that co-construct humor. Since digital platforms now host interactive commentaries, analysing audience feedback could further illuminate how meaning circulates beyond performance. Additionally, comparative studies across African contexts, such as Ghanaian, Kenyan, or South African digital comedy, would enrich understanding of how pragmatic mechanisms adapt to cultural variation. Quantitative methods could complement qualitative approaches to trace frequency patterns in speech acts or implicature types.

For Educators and Linguistic Scholars

Departments of linguistics, communication, and performance studies should incorporate humour pragmatics into their curricula. Doing so would not only bridge theoretical linguistics and cultural studies but also encourage students to appreciate the socio-political potential of language play. Pragmatics provides a toolset for analysing real-world communication—where meaning often resides in what is not said.

For Comedians and Content Creators

Comedians should recognize their performative agency as civic educators. By maintaining linguistic authenticity and ethical responsibility, they can sustain humour's corrective power without compromising its entertainment value. Attention to pragmatic subtlety, how implicature or presupposition carries critique, can deepen audience engagement and social resonance.

For Policymakers and Media Regulators

Government agencies should treat humour not as subversion but as a form of constructive civic feedback. Policies that encourage creative freedom can harness comedy's potential for national consciousness. Media regulators

should promote ethical humor that critiques responsibly, reinforcing dialogue rather than division.

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Blackness, Protest and Resistance: A Study of African Epistemology and Afro-American Narratives

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Abstract

The protest marches on The United States University Campuses most especially the Harvard Campus in year 2025 on Donald Trump's Academic Visa Ban on Blacks evidently proven the resonations of black slavery which was thought has been totally abolished through the efforts of the early Abolitionists. The study speaks to black emancipation and manumission process using Afro-American Narratives doing such using Oyeronke Oyewunmi's Multiculturalism or Multibodism: On the Impossible Intersections of Race and Gender in American White Feminist and Black Nationalist Discourses. The life of average black man offshore African soil is fraught with greater challenges especially before the passed 13th Amendment of Abraham Lincoln in the 1860s that ameliorated enslavement and increased the impetus of the then Abolitionists like W.E.B DuBois, Harriet Tubman, Frederick Douglas and the rest. The study concentrates on Blackness, Protest, and Resistance which is poised to be a psychological study of Black Liberation from white overlords. Many of these challenges could be mild and severe, traumatizing and excruciating; causing great mental or physical pain. The extreme of these challenges is that, it leads to early death if the victim or the situation is not rescued. Four (4) Afro-American literary texts; Richard Wright's "Black Boy" and "Native son", August Wilson's "Fences" and Toni Morrison's Beloved are used as source of data for this study. Major findings are the psychological errors committed by traumatized blacks during their travels and passages from slavery and how the errors defined their lives in ruins and their identity as blacks. Major attention was focused on how the sampled-blacks faced and accepted or defends themselves and possibly gained their emancipation from slavery and how this affects or defines the limitations of blacks as second-class citizens in the diaspora.

Keywords: defense mechanism, psychological concept, Afro-American Narratives

Introduction

The psychological concepts in its totality are measure of mental reaction or neuron-responses that determines one's action or behaviour mechanically, perfunctorily or routinely in human sub consciousness. Omosule, (2013) in his examination of Lady Macbeth used Freud's psychoanalysis to reveal through

the reflection of Lady Macbeth's statement; how desperate and determined she was to prosecute the assassination of Duncan. He stresses that Lady Macbeth's behaviour is a reflection of her innate trait (unconscious) for bestiality. The fundamental claims such as the infiltration of the realm of the *conscious* by the *preconscious* and the *unconscious* is pinned to psychoanalysis. An overall assessment of what is going on in the sub consciousness of an average black living on American soil will be revealed through the defense mechanism employed by the characters picked from the four (4) texts chosen for this study. Meanwhile, the outcome of the findings will suggest the tendency or what a black man is capable of doing offshore African soil. Care is also taken not to generalise as the behavioural pattern of the chosen characters remain mere behavioural tendency.

Meanwhile, Afro-American literature is a body of literature written by authors of black origin or background but who lived all of their lives in America and writes about their American experiences. African-American or Afro-American literature is also a balkanized version of American literature. African American literature was dominated by autobiographical spiritual narratives before the climax of slave narratives. African literature as an Art was further glorified and made colourful and flowering with the Harlem Renaissance of 1950s.

The scope of this special art includes the role of African Americans within the larger American society, blacks as fillers or substitutes to the whites' deficiencies, Afro-American culture, racism, slavery and social equality. The argument of this paper has grown out of an attempt to formulate what it means to be Black in the twentieth century. W.E.B. DuBois wrote in 1903 that 'the problem of the twentieth century is the problem of the colour-line'; that race and its variously linear parameters (borders, passages, journeys; traditions and origins; demarcations and discriminations) are still politically central at the end of the century serves as a reminder that the urgency of this message has in no sense diminished.

Situating the politics of race and racism as the problem that haunts and constructs the discourses of modernity, the subjectivities we inhabit and the times in which we live, makes dramatically apparent the ways in which 'race' has become the founding illusion of our identities. Dubois published *The Souls of Black Folk* on the threshold of the twentieth century, and his declaration on its future had its roots in the events, the dreams and the thoughts of the century that had just closed. What he meant by 'Negro' identity cannot be exactly

mapped onto the ideologies, the debates and the times out of which Black identities are understood and enacted today. However, the differential and highly contextualised meanings of Blackness and of Whiteness are still closely and significantly bound to the histories inhabited and analysed by Dubois, and cannot be adequately interrogated without those histories.

Theoretical Framework

Anxiety, fear of persecution and the fragmentation of the *self* are experiences peculiar to the era from Matthew Arnold to Paul de Man: they can be found throughout recorded history. What is perhaps significant is that in this period such experiences become constituted in a new way as a systematic field of knowledge. That field of knowledge is known as psychoanalysis, developed by Sigmund Freud in late nineteenth century Vienna; and it is Freud's doctrines that we now want briefly to summarise. 'The motive of human society is in the last resort an economic one.' It was Freud, not Karl Marx, who made this statement, in his Introductory Lectures on Psychoanalysis.

What has dominated human history to date is the need to labour; and for Freud that harsh necessity means that we must repress some of our tendencies to pleasure and gratification. If we were not called upon to work in order to survive, we might simply lie around all day doing nothing. Every human being has to undergo this repression of what Freud named the 'pleasure principle' by the 'reality principle', but for some of us, and arguably for whole societies, the repression may become excessive and make us ill. Following the justification of Sigmund Freud theory, the paper unraveled the fear and anxiety of the black characters in the chosen texts for practical analyses.

Definition of Terms

(i) Afro-American literature

A body of writings and literary works detailing the movements and ordeals of blacks on American soil is what is today referred to as African American or Afro-American literature. Critics cite Wheatley's successful defense as the first recognition of African American literature. As a result of the skepticism surrounding her work, 'Poems on Various Subjects' offers its reader several introductory documents designed to authenticate Wheatley and her poetry and to substantiate her literary motives. Another early African-American author was Jupiter Hammon (1711–1806). Hammon, considered the first published Black writer in America, published his poem *An Evening Thought: Salvation by Christ with penitential cries as abroad side* in early 1761. In 1778 he wrote

an ode to Phillis Wheatley, in which he discussed their shared humanity and common bonds. In 1786, Hammon gave his Address to the Negroes of the state of New York. Writing at the age of 76 after a life time of slavery, Hammon said and I quote: 'If we should ever get to heaven, we shall find nobody to reproach us for being black, or for being slaves'.

He also promoted the idea of a gradual emancipation as a way to end slavery. Hammon is thought to have been a slave until his death. In the 19th century, his speech was later reprinted by several abolitionist groups. William Wells Brown (1814-84) and Victor Sejour (1817-74) produced the earliest works of fiction by African-American writers. We cannot talk about African American literature without mentioning the 13th Amendment passed by the late Abraham Lincoln which almost ended slave trade. When we move further in the history, we must examine the good efforts of the early Abolitionists like WEB Dubois, Fredrick Douglass, BookerTaliaferro Washington, Henry Louis Gate, and so on.

Of importance also is their secret road networking and stoppages called 'The Underground railroad' which was the homes of the individual Abolitionist following 'The Northern Star'. Of great reference also is the work and effort of Harriet Tubman who helped more than 500 blacks gained manumission. We can remind ourselves the nostalgic effect of slavery when we talk about the early counties system; cotton and sugarcane plantations where blacks work as indenture servants. When we move forward, we discuss at length about 'The great Migration' towards the Northern Carolina and Philadelphia down to the Renaissance period, then to the Age of Toni Morrison the 1980s winner of Pulitzer award.

(ii) Defense Mechanism as a Psychological Concept

Defense mechanism is a psychological tool or device unconsciously or perfunctorily used by a frustrated or traumatized being to escape from assailing threats either coming from other super-human being or from the vicinity or environment habited by the victim to remain or stay alive. Sigmund Freud was adjudged to be the first scholar to have discussed this tool or device as one of the psychological devices postulated in his early psychoanalysis theory dated 1939. Other tools are *fear, inferiority complex, anxiety, racial discrimination, death*, etc . Terry Eagleton and Louis Tyson also dwell on this theory in their *Literary Theory: An Introduction* (2005) and Tyson L . (1999). *Critical Theory Today* respectively.

Application/Analysis

i. Comparing Bigger Thomas and Paris

If it was not a case of inferiority complex, one of the numerous psychological concepts developed by Sigmund Freud, Bigger Thomas a character in Richard Wright's 'Native son' would not have had to defend himself by preventing Mary Dalton with a pillow case which suffocated her to death when the latter tried to answer the call of her blind mother while Bigger laid her on bed in her room. Bigger having watched nude films and had seen the beauty of white ladies in the movie savored and immediately became hungry of having sexual intercourse with any of them. Mary Dalton who of course a victim of the established circumstances was naive of this psychological disorder of his glorified driver, got herself drunk and was left in the mercy of a black man who could not control his sexual urge and feelings ; was almost raped and unfortunately died through psychological error committed by Bigger. Had Bigger Thomas a white young man, the best he could have done was to contest with Jan Earlon Mary's boyfriend and struggle to have Mary to himself the way Paris did to Menelaus to have Helen all to himself in Homer's Troy even though it will result to an all-out war and bloodshed just as the war between The Greeks and The Troy which lasted for 10years with a continuation of another 30years in Odyssey.

ii. Defense Mechanism in Black Boy

Of significance is the fight that ensued between Richard and some boys in the novel because his victory over those boys gave him a lot of relief thereafter. Richard fought some boys who waylaid him on his way to the grocery store when he turned six years old. Because the boys are many and are apparently more powerful than he is, they beat him mercilessly and make away with the money his mother has given him to buy, items at the store. This incident happens thrice.

On each occasion, his mother sends him back and gives him money again. On the fourth occasion, his mother gives him a whip in addition to the money and warns him not to come back home without what he is sent to buy. Richard is torn between running away from the boys, and being beaten by his mother and squaring up to the boys. If he is beaten by the boys, he can retaliate, but if he runs home and he is beaten by his mother, he cannot retaliate. He finally chooses to fight with the boys. He succeeds in beating the hell out of them.

The boys flee to their parents. Their parents come to look for Richard and threaten to beat him. He vows to deal with them the way he has dealt with their

children. The boys and their parents go back home, surprised about the kind of a boy Richard is. Since then, nobody waylays him again. His mother has done this to instill in him the need to fight back when oppressed. He would not probably have known his potentials if his mother had not handled him in a tough way. We see in Richard's mother a good motivator, someone who does everything in her capacity to bring out the best in a child. This particular incident influences Richard's later actions. At almost each new school he attends, he has to fight with some boys to assert his prowess. Some parents encourage thuggery. The parents of the boys who waylay Richard exemplify such. They do not bother to ask their children what they have done to Richard. They want to defend their children. If Richard does not threaten to beat them, they would have joined their children to beat Richard and may have probably killed him in the process. These parents behave as if they are the only ones who have children. If Richard's parents most especially his mother had come but to defend him, those children's parent would not have found it palatable.

Richard's stubbornness is his own defense mechanism. His stubbornness at childhood knows no bounds; he holds on tightly to whatever he believes is right. When called upon to be the valedictorian, he rejects the principal's address. This action of his is the first of its kind in the history of the school. His argument was that though the address of the principal is better than his, it does not say what he as a black boy would like to say. He was threatened by the principal, who claims he has the power to fail anyone, even if he has passed. The principal also lures him with a teaching appointment.

Richard, however, remains undaunted. He damns the consequences and goes ahead to read the address he has prepared himself. Some people applaud him after the address but he is not moved by people's reaction. Through this event, Richard portrays himself as an iconoclast; somebody who believes in himself and feels things should be done the proper way, one who is undeterred by the beauty of any office. With this he has succeeded in doing something new. People can use anything to suppress anybody who wants to change the status quo. The principal knows that Richard is right; this is why he wants to use all possible means to make him change his mind. He does not want Richard to attack the issue of class differentiation and colour bar prevalent in his society then.

In contrast, Richard's stubbornness could be compared to that of KuntaKunte; son of Omoro and BintaKunte from Uganda in Alex Haley's *Root*. The saga of

a slave boy in defense of his black identity who refuses to accept Toby as a new name given to him by his slave master; the Toubab, a white man. He knew that a change of name is a total loss of his African identity.

CELEBRATING A WOMAN: Richard's mother

An average African mother is always portrayed as a tough woman, an example is Richard's mother who is tough for a good reason. His mother sends him back and gives him money again each time he is waylaid by some boys and mercilessly beaten. On the fourth occasion, his mother gives him a whip in addition to the money and warns him not to come back home without what he is sent to buy. The whip is a symbol of protest and resistance in the paper. His mother has done this to instill in him the need to fight back when oppressed. He would not probably have known his potentials if his mother had not handled him in a tough way.

iii. Defense Mechanism in Wilson's Fences

Rose mentions that Cory has been recruited by a college football team. Troy wants Cory to give up on football because the white man will never let him get anywhere with it. He believes that Cory should keep the job he has at the A & P and "get recruited in how to fix cars or something where he can make a living". Bono comments that if Cory is as good at football as Troy was at baseball then the boy will do alright. Troy says that despite his skills at baseball he's still poor. His wife tells him that times have changed since he played baseball – now black people are allowed to play in the major leagues. Bono says that Troy just came along too early. "There ought never have been no time called too early!" says Troy. He talks about how his batting average was way higher than Selkirk's, a guy who played right field for the Yankees back then.

Rose comments that people just had to wait for Jackie Robinson to come along. Her husband says, "Jackie Robinson wasn't nobody" and that he "knows teams Jackie Robinson couldn't even make!" Troy complains that it should never have mattered what colour you were. If you were good at baseball, they should have let you play. He believes that minorities will never receive the same deference given to white players. Troy thinks that this son ought to be learning a trade instead of focusing on sports. He has no faith in organized sports; he was a great ball player as a younger man, but never had a chance to play in the major leagues. He is still haunted by the denial he suffered in the hands of whites who never gave him opportunity to play in major leagues despite his distinguished talent in playing baseball.

Rose and Bono tried to convince Troy that things have changed. The significance here is not to use the past to judge the present; what obtained at one time might change within the future. Troy played baseball in his youth, but it was before the days of Jackie Robinson and baseball's integration. Troy couldn't advance to the big leagues because of his race. Baseball, Troy says, never got him anywhere. "Ain't got a pot to piss in or a window to throw it out of" because of the sport. It is part of the dynamics of life that what has less value yesterday may assume higher value today. Troy with all his baseball talent never got to play in the major leagues because the "colour" of the player was a factor then. But that discriminatory consideration no longer exists today.

Troy is still very unhappy about the colour discrimination he suffered at the expense of his talent. He fears the same fate may befall his son in football and doesn't want a repeat experience. He is concerned that his children should do better in life than himself. Cory's dream is attainable, yet Troy will not recognise that. He is blind to the changes that are taking place in society. On the other hand, Troy is far from being passive about the discrimination that touches him personally. He despises the racist practices at his job and attempts to change them. But when it comes to his son, he has a blind spot; he can't see the point of striving for higher attainment.

This conflict deepens as the play progresses. This unpleasant memory is what he wanted to repress reason for not allowing his son Cory to venture into sports because he believes white man will deny him the same he was denied. This is where defense mechanism comes in.

August Wilson's *Fences*: Celebrating a Black Father

Troy wants Cory his son to give up on football because he strongly believes that the white man will never let him get anywhere with it. He believes that Cory should keep the job he has at the A & P and "get recruited in how to fix cars or something where he can make a living".

iv. Defense Mechanism in Wright's *Native Son*

By the time Mary arrives home from the outing with Jan, she is thoroughly drunk so drunk that she could not walk unaided. Bigger thinks of helping her to her room but is initially paralyzed by the fear of what her father, mother or any person, would think if he is seen in a position considered as a compromised one with a white girl. Realizing that her situation is hopeless, he decides to help her to her room. In fact, at a point, he had to lift her bodily. While assisting, Mary, Bigger experiences mixed feelings of admiration and hate. At a point he feels that she does not hate him the way other white people do. Anyhow, he manages

to carry her to her room. While he holds her in his arms, sensuous feelings are awakened in him and he kisses her. He lays her on the bed. He wants to leave but is apparently held back by uncertain feelings. He grips her breasts and kisses her again, "feeling her move toward him" (p. 116). Suddenly, the door behind creaks and he stiffens. As he turns back to behold Mrs Dalton, he is overwhelmed by terror.

Bigger's initial reaction to the appearance of Mrs Dalton is to knock her out of his way and make a run for his life. At that instance, the old woman calls Mary's name. Not wanting Mary to speak and to frustrate her from getting up, which may attract Mrs Dalton to the side of the bed and lead to his discovery, Bigger covers her mouth. However, Mary mumbles and tries to get up again, but Bigger frantically grabs a corner of the pillow and covers her mouth with it.

Apparently impelled by intuition, Mrs Dalton who had earlier thought that Mary "must be asleep" (p. 116) moves towards the bed. As Bigger realises that he is going to be discovered, he is frightened, quickly picks the pillow and firmly covers Mary's entire face with it. With Mary's hands and fingernails being used to resist the covering on the face and the likely threat of exposure increasing, Bigger applies pressure with all of his strength in pressing the pillow down. After some moments, he no longer feels the resistance. By the time he takes his hands off the pillow, he hears "a long slow sigh go up from the bed" (p. 117). Mary is dead.

Mrs. Dalton, who is still in the room, but unaware of her daughter's death wonders whether she was sick. As she moves closer toward the bed, Bigger moves stealthily away. In defense of his crime, Bigger carries Mary's corpse, puts it in the trunk she had planned to take to Detroit later in the morning. He takes it down to the basement. Here, he tries to put the corpse in the furnace but the size of the furnace appears incapable of taking in the entire length of the corpse. Having put in the feet first, further pushing-in stops at the shoulder. He eventually gets a hatchet, severs the head off and throws it also into the furnace. After taking all he considers the necessary precautions, he pushes the level of the furnace back, pushes the trunk into a corner and goes out through the back door.

The murder of Mary is clearly not premeditated. Bigger is driven into the act by fear of what the white folks would think if caught alone with a white girl in a room in the night. Consequently, this episode is significant in that it shows how

fear can drive people into criminality. It also shows the consequence of the culture of fear, which the white oppression in the United States imposed on the black folks of Wright's society. Bigger Thomas was crippled with fear because he is a Black man (Blackness). Jan Elon Mary's boyfriend will not commit same havoc as Bigger's because he has every right to date a white counterpart.

v. Defense Mechanism in Toni Morrison's *Beloved*

Though the name of Sethe's third child murdered, her throat having been cut with a handsaw by the deceased mother is not known, but the reason for Sethe's "rough choice, her infanticide has left much to be desired and food for thought to the critics. *Beloved* explores the all-encompassing destruction wrought by slavery, which affects the characters freedom. The plot of *Beloved* follows two different stories. The first story takes place in present time, which is the year 1873, in Cincinnati, Ohio. The second story unfolds through flashbacks that tell of events that transpired in the past years. The Novel begins with Paul D appearing on Sethe's porch one day. They have not seen each other in eighteen good years, when they both ran away from Sweet Home, the plantation in Kentucky where they lived as slaves.

Though both escaped captivity, they endured traumatic experiences in the process. Paul D ended up at a prison camp in Georgia, where he worked on a chain gang until a flood created conditions for an escape. For her part, Sethe was nine months pregnant when she fled from Sweet Home, and she had to give birth en route to freedom. Help from a young white woman saved her life and enabled Sethe and her newborn, Denver, to make it to Ohio. There Sethe reunited with the three older children she had sent ahead of her. When school teacher tracked her down, twenty-eight days later, Sethe responded by trying to kill her children to spare them from enslavement or being re-captured, and though three survived Sethe succeeded in killing her eldest daughter.

The memories stirred by *Beloved*'s presence build toward the novel's twin climaxes. The first climax occurs in chapter 16, which narrates the scene where schoolteacher arrives at house 124 and Sethe tries to kill her children in the shed to save them from a life of slavery. She wounds her two sons, slits her eldest daughter's throat, and attempts to bash Denver's head against a wall. This horrific event changed Sethe's life, poisoning her reputation in the community and was later haunted because of the defense mechanism she adopted.

Conclusion

The resonant idea deduced from the type of defense mechanism adopted by the characters chosen for this research work is that one which is not in their favour. Bigger Thomas' idea of silencing Mary Dalton with a pillow to prevent the latter from talking so that his presence in Mary's room will not be noticed boomeranged, Richard's chosen stubbornness only ended him as a bully even though he uses that defense method to save himself whenever trouble looms, Troy Maxson's conservative, adamant and impenetrable opposition of Cory's ambition to become a footballer contributed in what almost shattered the latter's big dreams or his chosen future career. Sethe's attempted murder of her sons and daughters and the eventful killing of her eldest daughter makes her become a savage and consequently a gothic character. Memories of past bitter experiences could be too dangerous to repress most especially the type of traumatic slavery experiences discussed in many slave narratives in the whole body of Black Literature.

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A Necropolitical Reading of Selected Poems from Adeoti's *Stoning the Wind* and Ofeimun's *The Poet Lied*

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Abstract

This study focuses on selected poems from Odia Ofeimun's *The Poet Lied* (1980) and Gbemisola Adeoti's *Stoning the Wind* (2024) through Achille Mbembe's necropolitical framework. It argues that both collections constitute a sustained poetic testimony to the death-worlds of Nigeria's postcolonial history. Three necropolitical concepts — the death-world, necropower, and the disposable body — organise the comparative close reading of eight selected poems, four from each collection. The analysis demonstrates that both poets document the same structural condition across different historical phases (Odia Ofeimun is of the second generation while Gbemisola Adeoti belongs to the third generation): a postcolonial sovereignty exercised as the capacity to expose populations to death, through direct violence and structural abandonment. The study further argues that both collections deploy formal strategies of naming, witnessing, and countervisuality to assert the grievability of lives which the necropolitical order renders disposable.

Keywords: necropolitics, death-world, disposable body, Nigerian poetry, postcolonial sovereignty, necropolitical testimony

Introduction

Nigerian poetry has long served as the primary archive of the country's political catastrophes. From the civil war verse of J. P. Clark-Bekederemo and Christopher Okigbo to the protest poetry of the second generation of Nigerian poets, politics has been the focus of Nigerian poets. The Nigerian poetry has consistently chronicled the Nigerian history and documents communal struggles, critiques governance, and preserves cultural memory through verse (qtd. in Idowu 209). This commitment finds its fullest expression in two collections separated by three decades in Odia Ofeimun's *The Poet Lied* (1980) and Gbemisola Adeoti's *Stoning the Wind* (2024), which together constitute a sustained poetic testimony to the death-worlds of Nigeria's postcolonial history. The present study analyses eight selected poems, four from each collection, through the theoretical framework of necropolitics, arguing that both collections

document the same structural condition across different historical phases: a postcolonial sovereignty exercised as the capacity to expose populations to wanton death.

Theoretical framework

The theoretical framework governing this study is Achille Mbembe's necropolitics, developed in his 2003 essay and his 2019 book of the same title. Mbembe argued that Foucault's biopolitics, the account of how modern states govern by administering life, through "making live and letting die" (Foucault 241). In classical sovereignty, as Foucault established, "the very essence of the right of life and death is actually the right to kill" (240); Mbembe argues that colonial and postcolonial sovereignties never fully departed from this formula. Agamben's elaboration of bare life is equally foundational: his figure of *homo sacer*, the life that "cannot be sacrificed and yet may be killed" (82), the body held in "life's irreparable exposure in the relation of abandonment" (83), is the Agambenian precursor to Mbembe's disposable body. Three of Mbembe's concepts are deployed for this study. The death-world names "new and unique forms of social existence in which vast populations are subjected to living conditions that confer upon them the status of the living dead" (*Necropolitics* 92). Necropower names the sovereign capacity to produce these conditions: as Mbembe states, sovereignty resides in "the power and the capacity to dictate who may live and who must die" ("Necropolitics" 11), exercised through direct violence and through what Foucault calls indirect murder: "the fact of exposing someone to death, increasing the risk of death for some people" (256). The disposable body is the life rendered expendable by this order, whose death, as Mbembe puts it, is the product of "the capacity to define who matters and who does not, who is disposable and who is not" ("Necropolitics" 27). Emerson's reformulation clarifies that necropower operates not only as an external force but as an internalised condition, one that "enters the body to form part of it, dissolving in the body" (3).

Despite the richness of existing scholarship on both poets, neither collection has been subjected to a necropolitical reading, and the two have not been studied comparatively. Bello's Marxist study of Ofeimun establishes that the poet's work presents a society in which "the ruling class shows little or no pity for the toiling masses" (1), while Agofure's New Historicist reading situates *The Poet Lied* within its socio-historical context, reading "Exodus '67" as capturing the traumatic experience of "how so many Nigerians had an untimely exodus to their graves" (7). Idowu's study confirms the direction the field is moving, arguing that Nigerian poets function as "cultural historians and moral

witnesses” who document “lives rendered disposable” (207). What none of these readings provides is a framework capable of naming the structural logic that makes the death-world a recurring condition rather than a series of discrete episodes. Necropolitics provides precisely that framework, moving analysis from the observation of violence to an account of the sovereign power that produces it. Awuzie has demonstrated that necropolitics is not an imported framework alien to Nigerian literary scholarship, arguing that it “can better be deployed to describe the social-existential situation that is constantly reflected in postcolonial Nigerian poetry where the differential value placed on people results in psychological problems for others” (1).

This study fills the gap by demonstrating, through comparative close reading of eight poems, that the death-worlds Ofeimun documents in the civil war era and those Adeoti documents in the Fourth Republic are not separate historical episodes but structurally continuous expressions of the same necropolitical logic. The study adopts a qualitative approach combining close reading with comparative and theoretical analysis, paying close attention to diction, imagery, figurative language, tone, and formal structure.

The Death-World as Total Condition: “Infernal” and “A Dustbin Laden with Bomb”

Mbembe’s death-world is not a zone of exceptional violence but a total condition of existence in which populations are subjected to “living conditions that confer upon them the status of the living dead” (*Necropolitics* 92). Ofeimun’s “Infernal” and Adeoti’s “A Dustbin Laden with Bomb” construct this condition as total, a state of existence from which there is no exit and within which death has become the governing principle of social life. Their formal strategies differ, but the necropolitical logic they enact is structurally identical.

“Infernal” opens with an image of absolute dispossession that places the living inside the garment of the dead from its first lines:

The phantoms smoked the days away
with our faces in the shroud
The phantoms gobbled the earth
with our faces in the shroud
All-emptiness: no reality to feed upon
We floundered between nothings (36)

The shroud is not metaphor for hardship; it is the specific garment of the dead. Ofeimun places the living inside it from the outset, enacting precisely what Emerson theorises: “those that live death do not so much inhabit death worlds but the reverse: death inhabits them” (43). The collective “we”, a population, not an individual, flounder “between nothings.” To flounder between nothings is not to suffer a particular deprivation; it is to occupy a space that the necropolitical order has evacuated of the conditions that would make life fully human. The refrain “we floundered between nothings” returns at the close of stanza to stanza four, performing through formal repetition the inescapable, cyclical nature of the death-world condition. “All-emptiness: no reality to feed upon” names the condition as ontological rather than merely material: it is not food that is absent but reality itself, stripped away by necropower’s systematic withdrawal of the conditions that constitute meaningful existence. Foucault’s formulation is precise here: death in the biopolitical-necropolitical register is “something permanent, something that slips into life, perpetually gnaws at it, diminishes it and weakens it” (244). Ofeimun gives this formulation its concrete poetic body.

The poem’s fourth stanza introduces the question of prayer and its failure under necropower:

We prayed. But what sky listens
to a whining people seeking
fit conscience in machine guns
we prayed, reaching for the unborn
we floundered between nothings (36)

The juxtaposition of prayer and machine guns is not merely ironic, it is a precise account of necropower’s displacement of every other framework of meaning, including the transcendent. Sovereign power has displaced divine authority as the arbiter of who lives and who dies. Mbembe’s formulation that sovereignty resides in “the power and the capacity to dictate who may live and who must die” (“Necropolitics” 11) is here rendered as the condition in which prayer becomes structurally meaningless: the sovereign has already decided. The poem’s final stanza completes the picture: “The living had been derailed; / and the dead, pushed to shallow graves / could not afford a smile of mockery / with their rotted lips.” The dead are “pushed” to shallow graves — disposed off, not buried. Ferrándiz and Robben identify the mass grave as a necropolitical instrument designed to “occult massacres, destroy incriminating evidence, prevent martyrdom, and deny the bereaved relatives their mourning” (57). Even

in death, the disposable body is denied the rituals that would constitute it as a life that was lost.

Where “Infernal” constructs the death-world through collective voice and formal repetition, Adeoti’s “A Dustbin Laden with Bomb” constructs it through a single named body. The poem opens through establishment of Afilaka’s poverty with vivid precision before the bomb detonates:

Afilaka patches his torn cap with care
too poor to purchase a spare
Afilaka heads for the city centre
in search of a morning meal
he reaches for the refuse bin
his main source of main meal (94)

The naming of Afilaka is itself a political act. The poem establishes him as a disposable body before the explosion: his dependence on a refuse bin for food has already placed him within the death-world, already constituted as a life for whom the state has withdrawn the conditions that sustain meaningful existence. Idowu identifies this mode of necropolitics as “the reduction of life to bare existence” is “not a symbol of resilience but of abandonment, of a state that has relinquished its duty to protect” (213). The bomb concealed in the dustbin “concealed by a silken drape” literalises Foucault’s indirect murder: “the fact of exposing someone to death, increasing the risk of death for some people” (256). The state’s failure to secure the urban space, its abandonment of Afilaka to the necessity of scavenging in weaponised spaces, is structurally equivalent to the murder that follows. The onomatopoeic “GBOAAAAM!!!” refuses the aestheticisation of Afilaka’s death; after it, the poem pivots to a quiet irony: his “fractionated flesh / and pulverised bloody bones / sing blissfully in error” (94). The body has been reduced to fragments that cannot know their own destruction. The poem’s closing lines: “All that glitters is bomb / that shortens the space of life / from the womb to the tomb” (94), generalise Afilaka’s fate into a structural condition. In the death-world, the entire arc of a disposable life is compressed to nothing.

The Death-World as Atmosphere: “Sick Times” and “This Road Is Sated”

The death-world operates not only through spectacular or pronounced violence but through what Emerson, drawing on Berlant, calls slow death: “making killable is not only immediate but incremental and accretive, playing out across

a range of spatiotemporal scales” (5). Ofeimun’s “Sick Times” and Adeoti’s “This Road Is Sated” construct the death-world as atmosphere: a pervasive, ambient condition that accumulates rather than erupts. Their formal strategies are calibrated to render this slow death visible: the accumulation of decay images, the personification of landscape as a death-agent, and the dissolution of clear boundaries between the living and the dying.

“Sick Times” opens with a force that resists direct naming:

Some clammy ‘thing’ spewed out of time
drowns the laity, encumbers breath
of the raw, the fresh.
Overlaid by the putrid stench
of pregnant over-anxious gutters
some bloated dialect in the wind is
sweeping heads to mud. (22)

The “thing”, placed in quotation marks, withheld from direct naming, is the death-world itself: a force so ambient that it has no precise name because it has become the condition of existence. It “spews out of time,” locating its origins not in any single political event but in the accumulated weight of postcolonial history. It “encumbers breath”: a precise necropolitical image, since breath is the most elementary condition of life, and to encumber it is to perform exactly the slow structural diminishment that Foucault described as death “perpetually gnawing” at existence (244). The poem’s second stanza deepens this: the “thing” is now “grown soggy / with the rain of absences” and is “rolling the corpses of naked dreams / down the relentless flow of sizzling rivers” (22). The “rain of absences” is a precise formulation of structural necropower: not the presence of violence but the systematic withdrawal of what life requires, the absence of infrastructure, governance, and future. Dreams are rendered as corpses because the death-world does not only kill bodies; it kills the possibility of life. The poem’s third stanza identifies the institutional source: “an ominous nebulae of measureless quackery / has outvoted understanding” (22). The political institutions that should constitute the bios, the qualified political life, of the Nigerian state have been colonised by fraud and pretension. Governance has become the systematic negation of the faculties that constitute a fully human life.

Adeoti's "This Road Is Sated" extends this atmospheric construction into the specific domain of infrastructure:

the thin road now wears satiation like a coronet
eating to swollenness, the fresh flesh of travelling toddlers
drinking to discomfort, the rancid blood of old travellers
on life's jarred and jaded journey. (102)

The road is not merely dangerous; it is predatory, actively consuming the bodies of those who use it. This personification formally enacts what Idowu describes as necropower "exercised through neglect and abandonment in postcolonial states" (211): the road's hunger is the figure for the state's structural abandonment of its population to death-inducing conditions. The poem's third stanza introduces the agents of state power, "the Lords of long sticks", who "host rituals of virulent kicks / on the ribs of quacking wrecks" while "the earth opens its genocidal bags" (102). The word "genocidal" is not hyperbole; it names the structural logic by which a population's exposure to lethal conditions is organised and maintained. Emerson's argument that: "letting die fails to consider the underlying social relations that inform abandonment", doing nothing is "an active, structured exercise of power" (11) is garmane. The poem's catalogue of victims, "pastors and pastoralists / farmers and fishermen / winnowers and widows" (102), performs a necropolitical accounting. The list moves across social categories to establish that the road's predation is indiscriminate: necropower does not select victims individually but brands entire populations as killable through the conditions it produces. The poet concludes through "This road is well-fed," with a flat declarative that registers the death-world's satiation as normalised, structural, beyond outrage.

The Disposable Body: "Exodus '67" and "Summoned to Die"

The disposable body, the life rendered expendable by the necropolitical order, whose death produces no official mourning and no accountability, is the figure at the centre of Ofeimun's "Exodus '67" and Adeoti's "Summoned to Die." Both poems are structured around moment of death, but their necropolitical argument concerns the structure of disposability that precedes it: the conditions already in place, before the lethal event, that have constituted these populations as lives for which no protection is owed.

"Exodus '67" opens with the inversion of the natural order as the figure of sovereign violence:

The iroko is spitting fire

if you have a child strap him to your bosom
Chapters that the writing down would demean,
chapters that rend our talking drums
chapters that tongues will fail
ram down the crags of memory (28)

The iroko, among the tallest and most enduring of West African trees, spits fire: the natural and cultural order has been inverted. The italicised imperative, “if you have a child strap him to your bosom”, is the most direct address to the disposable body in the selection. It is the voice of collective survival in conditions where the state has abdicated its protective function entirely as no institution, no authority, no structure can be appealed to. The only protection available is the body of the parent pressed against the body of the child. This is bare life in Agamben’s precise sense: “life exposed to death” (88), stripped of every form of political and legal protection. The poem’s middle stanzas dissolve the boundaries between living and dead: “The days crawl on a thorned belly, / dense, unnerving biers try / the living corpse: ‘in brotherhood we stand.’” (28). The “living corpse” is Mbembe’s living dead given its most direct poetic formulation: the person who is biologically alive but whose social and political existence has been reduced to zero. The closing lines name the condition without mediation:

behold these meaningless abattoirs of history
behold these senseless abattoirs
and this seed about to be earthed:
‘what unhealthy hate convulses us all!’ (28)

The word “abattoir”, a slaughterhouse, is not metaphor but diagnosis. The civil war is not tragic accident; it is organised slaughter. Mbembe’s formulation that sovereignty is “the capacity to define who matters and who does not, who is disposable and who is not” (“Necropolitics” 27) finds its most violent instantiation here. Agofure reads this passage as capturing the traumatic experience of mass death (7), but necropolitics goes further: the abattoir names a sovereign decision, not a historical catastrophe. “This seed about to be earthed” — the child, the future — is the ultimate disposable body: a life whose potential has been foreclosed before it has had the chance to develop.

Adeoti's "Summoned to Die" approaches the disposable body from a different historical angle. Móyeni is not a victim of military violence; she is a victim of structural poverty:

In her room,
Móyeni is scampered awake from sleep
by clanging thud of James' jerry can
on the floor
James asked her to come along
and join the party of free scoopers
fetching free fuel from a sloshing rivulet
flowing out of the tanker's belly, (98-99)

Móyeni's motivation is established precisely: she is "swayed by the prospect of / paying fees and feeding her children" (99). These are not extraordinary desires; they are the elementary requirements of a life that the necropolitical order has made inaccessible through ordinary means. It is not Móyeni's presence at the tanker spill that defines her as disposable but the conditions that made the spill her only available resource. Akanwa et al.'s formulation is exactly applicable: "the land is rich but its people get virtually nothing from the land" (51). Nigeria's resource wealth is embodied in the tanker's fuel; Móyeni's jerry can is the necropolitical paradox in miniature, disposability in a landscape of abundance. The fire that kills her: "smoke and fire balls rolled in fury / from the belly of the tanker / encircling all along its path" (99), comes not as sudden event but by accumulation, enacting the logic of slow death. The poem's title makes the necropolitical logic explicit: "Summoned to Die." The passive construction removes agency from Móyeni and places it where it belongs, with the structural condition that left her no alternative. The closing moral: "He who seeks a date with cheap fortune / May keep appointment with costly misfortune" (99), is the poem's deepest irony: the necropolitical order not only kills Móyeni but generates the proverb that will be used to explain her death as her own fault.

The Silence of the Killed and Necropolitical Testimony

Necropower exercises its authority not only over living bodies but over dead ones. Ferrándiz and Robben establish that mass graves "functioned to occult massacres, destroy incriminating evidence, prevent martyrdom, and deny the bereaved relatives their mourning" (57). This fourfold function: occulting, erasing evidence, preventing martyrdom, denying mourning — is precisely what Ofeimun's "The Dead" and Adeoti's "Unknown Fire in Arsonists'

Paradise” address. Both poems are organised around the figure of the ungrieved, unnamed, unaccounted dead: lives whose disposability extends beyond death into the management of their absence.

Ofeimun’s “The Dead” is the shortest poem in the selection and its most formally precise:

The dead do not complain
they are content with mass-graves
once the convenience of the living
come into the matter.

The dead do not scream
for rehabilitation, like us.
They are rehabilitated. (41)

The irony is structural: the dead are “content” not because they are satisfied but because they have no capacity for discontent. The phrase “the convenience of the living” is the poem’s most precise formulation: the mass grave is not a failure of care but a deliberate administrative act, a decision by those who exercise necropower to manage the dead in the way that generates the least political consequence. Robben confirms this: mass graves are “an in-the-face display of necropower” that extended sovereign authority “by denying them an identity and a proper burial” (66). The poem’s final sentence, “They are rehabilitated”, is devastating in its brevity. “Rehabilitated” is the bureaucratic language of the state applied to the act of permanent erasure: the dead have been removed from the space of political contestation. The living, “us”, still scream, still demand, still contest their disposability. The dead cannot. As Idowu writes of Nigerian poetry’s testimonial function: “in the silence that follows gunfire and grief, poetry remains, speaking, mourning, and remembering” (222). “The Dead” is precisely this: poetry that speaks for those who have been rehabilitated into silence.

Adeoti’s “Unknown Fire in Arsonists’ Paradise” addresses the same silence through a different formal means, the register of concealment and anonymity:

Unknown fire
kindled by invisible hands
of unnamed vengeance seekers

who are weaned on the creed of
“eye for eye, nose for nose”
ghostly avengers sworn to roasting all in sight; (96)

Every agent in the poem is unnamed, invisible, unknown. This is the necropolitical erasure of accountability: when the killers are invisible and the fire is unknown, there is no homicide, no perpetrator, no political consequence. The poem’s geographical extension: “Like a wild beast from the East / the fire roars in the wild forests of the West / burns through brushwood of the North / to the undergrowth of the South” (96), transforms a local act of arson into a national condition: the arsonists’ paradise is the whole country, and the Foucauldian caesura between those the state protects and those it exposes to death has collapsed entirely. Yet the poem’s speaker watches “unseen”: “I watched unseen / the unknown kindlers of unseen fires / as they dance on walkways and flyovers” (96). This watching is the political act. The poem does not name the perpetrators, it cannot, but it names the structure; the geography, the rhythm of the violence, and the sovereign indifference that enables it. This is what Robben identifies as countervisuality: “the assertion of the right to look” in defiance of sovereign authority (71). The poem refuses the anonymity the arsonists depend on: it watches, it names the structure if not the perpetrators, and it refuses the silence that necropower enforces.

Conclusion

This study has demonstrated, through comparative study of eight selected poems, that Ofeimun’s *The Poet Lied* and Adeoti’s *Stoning the Wind*, through Mbembe’s necropolitical framework, reveals a historical structure that studying either collection alone cannot disclose. The Nigerian postcolonial death-world is not episodic but structural, reproduced across the full arc of postcolonial history by the same necropolitical logic: a sovereignty exercised as the capacity to expose populations to death through direct violence, structural abandonment, and the conditioning of the state in which the poor have no choice but to enter lethal spaces.

The study contributes to Nigerian literary scholarship by extending necropolitics as a precise analytical framework for studying political poetry, moving beyond existing applications to offer a comparative necropolitical reading across two generations of Nigerian poets. It contributes to the broader application of Mbembe’s theory in African literary studies through a modelling of its use in a comparative poetic analysis across two generations. The study further argues that poetry, within the death-world, remains one of the primary

instruments through which populations assert their own grievability against the sovereign power that has decided otherwise. The necropolitical framework applied here has the capacity to illuminate the full arc of Nigerian poetry's engagement with death, disposability, and sovereign power: an engagement that, as both Ofeimun and Adeoti demonstrate, has not yet reached its end.

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Decoding the Non-Verbal: Sociolinguistic Influences on Multimodal Surrogate Language and Traditional Communication in Ejigbo, Nigeria

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Abstract

This study examines the constituents, sociolinguistic forces, and functional roles of Surrogate Language (SL) within the traditional Yoruba communication system, with specific focus on Ejigbo Local Government Area (LGA) of Osun State, Nigeria. Specifically, the study sets out to identify the non-verbal, multimodal constituents of SL, to examine how sociolinguistic variables such as age, occupation, and social class shape SL proficiency and use, and to assess SL's contribution to meaningful communication, emotional expression, and cultural preservation in the community. Employing a mixed-methods design, the study gathered primary data through structured questionnaires (n=250), Focus Group Discussions (n=30), and in-depth interviews with key informants (n=12). The study is theoretically anchored on Labov's Sociolinguistics Theory (SLT) and Thomason's Language Contact Theory (LCT). Findings establish SL as a developed, multimodal repertoire involving symbolic artefacts, codified sound waves (aerophone instruments), and intricate body cues such as gestures and paralanguage. The study records robust sociolinguistic stratification in SL proficiency and use, with age, social class, occupation, and rural residence emerging as decisive determiners. Despite pressures from globalisation and language shift, SL remains a vital vehicle for discrete message coding, cultural memory preservation, and community solidarity in Ejigbo. The study advocates for curriculum integration, ethnographic documentation, and digital archiving to sustain this endangered communicative heritage.

Keywords: Surrogate Language, Traditional Media, Yoruba Culture, Multimodal Communication, Aerophone Instruments, Ejigbo LGA.

Introduction

Communication, in its widest sense, is the conveyance of meaning from one individual to another; it comes in a wide array of channels other than spoken language. While speech has often been considered the most dominant and universally recognised form of human interaction, it represents just a fraction of

the communicative repertoire available to societies around the world. In many cultures, especially within sub-Saharan Africa, non-verbal systems of communication serve as an essential device in conveying meaning, emotion, and intention. These systems, deeply ensconced in the culture, are more accurately described as Surrogate Languages or Traditional Media. Not a replacement for spoken language, SL works as a complementary mode, an auxiliary or codified surrogate used to bridge the gap that culture, time, or space may cause.

SL among the Yoruba of Southwestern Nigeria has evolved into one of the most sophisticated and well-documented traditional communication systems, one that is deeply woven into the broader fabric of Yoruba cultural life and identity (Adebanwi, 2018). One of the most iconic representations of Yoruba SL is that of the *dùndún*, or talking drum, a musical instrument capable of closely mimicking the tonal sequences and rhythmic patterns of the Yoruba language. The speech it transposes into sound allows messages to be transmitted over space and across social divides with remarkable accuracy. As Villepastour (2010) observes, however, to restrict Yoruba SL to the talking drum is to ignore the immense multimodal complexity of the system. Yoruba SL is also constituted by visual signals, symbolic objects, and an array of other aerophone instruments: gongs, trumpets, and flutes are deployed together to produce a layered, dynamic repertoire underpinned by dense cultural knowledge and social context.

With over 400 languages, the linguistic landscape of Nigeria poses both challenges and opportunities for traditional communication systems. Yoruba is a tonal language spoken in many states; as such, it is bound to be more adaptable to surrogate forms than non-tonal languages. Among all these, Ejigbo Local Government Area in Osun State has emerged as a particularly significant site for exploring the resilience and sociolinguistic complexities of SL. Ejigbo is a town that, though gradually modernising, is heavily influenced by its traditional institutions and ways of life. This makes it an ideal environment for examining how SL continues to function and evolve amidst the pressures of globalisation, urbanisation, and formal education (Finnegan, 2012; Salawu, 2006).

Despite the historical recognition and cultural significance of SL and Traditional Media, a number of gaps still characterise the scholarly discourse. Much of the extant research has narrowly focused on the acoustic properties of the talking drum, with little regard for the symbiotic roles that other modalities like symbolic objects, gestures, and visual cues, play. This mono-modal approach fails to capture the full communicative potential of SL as a multimodal

system. The present study tries to fill this gap by positioning SL as a genuinely multimodal phenomenon, one that integrates sound, sight, and movement to convey complex messages. This challenges prevailing assumptions and expands the analytical framework for understanding traditional communication. Additionally, literature often neglects the sociolinguistic variables that affect SL's function and distribution within the community. Age, social class, education, and locality determine to a great extent who uses SL, for what reason, and in which context. These variables are central to this study's third objective, which examines how SL contributes to meaningful communication, emotional expression, and cultural perpetuation within Ejigbo. As younger generations become progressively inculcated with Western-centric approaches to education and media, indigenous languages stand the risk of being marginalised. Understanding these sociolinguistic dynamics is essential in the implementation of strategies to sustain and revitalise SL in an evolving social landscape.

The central concern of this study is a survey of the constituent elements, functionality, and sociolinguistic parameters that determine surrogate language in Yoruba traditional culture, with specific reference to Ejigbo LGA. Consequently, this study is informed by three key questions: First, what are the non-linguistic, multimodal features that define SL among the Ejigbo people? Second, how do sociolinguistic parameters like age, occupation, and social class affect the use and proficiency in SL? And third, how does SL contribute to meaningful communication within the community with respect to message coding, expression of emotions, and perpetuation of culture? These questions underpin the research and together form the framework for understanding the enduring significance of SL in Ejigbo.

Literature Review and Theoretical Framework

Conceptual Review of Surrogate Language and Traditional Media

Traditional media in the African context are considered to be indigenous, non-Western channels of communication, very often emanating from oral and kinetic traditions in the forms of storytelling, proverbs, dance, and music, among others (Obidike 2011, Finnegan, 2012) . Surrogate Language is one of the most important constituent parts of Traditional Media, comprising a system whereby non-verbal or non-linguistic forms are encoded according to the structures of the spoken language, one that carries strong markers of cultural identity across Nigerian communities (Adegbite, 2019). The most recognised form of SL is the drummed language, especially the Yoruba *dùndún*. The talking drum can only work effectively because the Yoruba language is a tonal language, whereby the pitch of the drum imitates the high, mid, and low tones

of spoken syllables (Villepastour, 2010). However, the literature necessitates a move toward a multimodal understanding. Studies have highlighted that SL often incorporates visual and tactile signs:

- ✓ **Visual SL:** Includes the use of specific clothing, symbolic objects, or architectural symbols. In Ejigbo, for example, the presentation of ewé ọdán (leaves of the majestic tree) is used to admonish an arrogant person, drawing meaning from the Yoruba proverb that cautions pride, while osùn (camwood) sent to an offended party conveys an appeal for forgiveness.
- ✓ **Kinesic/Proxemic SL:** Encompasses deliberate gestures, body postures, and the use of space to convey status or warnings.

The current study builds on this, claiming that SL in Ejigbo is a synergistic combination of the acoustic, visual, and kinetic modalities, where the understanding of one depends, in many instances, upon the contextual use of the other (Finnegan, 2012). The Ejigbo community, located in Osun State and known for its strong adherence to traditional Yoruba institutions, offers a particularly fertile context for examining this multimodal interplay. The town's annual festivals, monarchical structures, and age-grade systems continue to sustain active SL use across a range of communicative domains.

Theoretical Framework

Sociolinguistics Theory (SLT)

The work of William Labov is foundational to modern sociolinguistics. His model of linguistic variation, particularly the principle that language use is systematically correlated with social variables such as age, class, and occupational network, provides the analytical bedrock for examining SL stratification in Ejigbo. Labov's framework is appropriate here because it enables the study to interrogate not just what SL forms exist in the community, but who uses them, under what social conditions, and with what degree of competence (Labov, 1972). SLT asserts that the linguistic choices individuals make, in this case, the decision to use or their proficiency in understanding SL, are intrinsically linked to their position within the social structure.

Application to SL: SLT predicts that the use and competence in Surrogate Language will be significantly differentiated across the Ejigbo community based on:

1. **Age-Grading:** Older members are predicted to exhibit higher SL proficiency.
2. **Social Class and Occupation:** Individuals tied to traditional structures are expected to rely more heavily on SL.

3. **Locality:** SL thrives in rural settings where traditional governance remains strong.

Language Contact Theory (LCT)

Developed primarily to explain language shift, language maintenance, and language death, LCT is pertinent in the study of SL as a non-dominant, indigenous linguistic system coexisting with the dominant national (English) and major regional (Yoruba) languages (Thomason, 2001). LCT is particularly well-suited to the Ejigbo context, where digital media, formal education, and urban migration exert visible pressure on the intergenerational transmission of SL. It enables the study to frame SL decline not as neglect but as a rational sociolinguistic response to cultural contact and economic incentives.

In the Nigerian context, the proliferation of digital communication, which increasingly mediates everyday personal and social interaction (Baym, 2015), and the obligatory use of English and standard Yoruba in formal settings exert pressure on localised systems like SL. LCT helps analyse this tension in two directions:

- ✓ The decline in SL proficiency among younger, educated Ejigbo residents can be viewed as a form of language shift, where SL domains are being ceded to verbal communication.
- ✓ Conversely, LCT also explains language maintenance, why SL survives and even thrives in specific protected domains, such as religious ceremonies, royal communication, and traditional festivals, where it functions to exclude non-initiates or reinforce cultural authority.

By applying LCT, the study contextualises the findings regarding the waning use of SL as a rational linguistic response to cultural contact and socio-economic imperatives, rather than mere neglect.

Methodology

Following established practice in anthropological and ethnographic research (Bernard, 2017), this study adopted a descriptive survey design within a mixed-methods framework, aimed at ascertaining the sociolinguistic dynamics and multimodal constituents of SL in Ejigbo, Osun State. The descriptive survey design facilitated quantitative data collection that captured the prevalence and frequency of SL usage across diverse sociolinguistic groups. These were complemented by a qualitative component comprising Focus Group Discussions (FGDs) and In-depth Interviews (IDIs) that provided contextual insights into the semantic meanings, cultural significance, and functional roles of SL elements. The triangulation of data sources guaranteed a robust and

nuanced understanding of SL practices, validating statistical findings with experiential depth.

The study was carried out in Ejigbo LGA, a culturally significant Yoruba town in Osun State. The choice of Ejigbo was informed by the fact that it possesses living traditional institutions. Importantly, the town maintains a fairly stable indigenous population with a well-demarcated urban-rural divide, enabling meaningful comparison across residential zones. A community where traditional governance, annual festivals, and age-grade systems remain active, Ejigbo constitutes an ideal site to study the resilience and change of SL within a community navigating the tension between modernisation and cultural survival. The study adopted adult members of the indigenous population aged 25 years and above, on the basis that this age cohort has acquired adequate cultural literacy and experiential knowledge to meaningfully engage with traditional systems of communication.

A combination of probability and non-probability sampling techniques was used to select 292 participants. In the quantitative component, 250 residents were selected through Simple Random Sampling to ensure representativeness across Ejigbo's administrative zones, reflecting both urban and rural areas. The qualitative sample included 30 participants for FGDs, selected via Snowball Sampling to identify culturally active individuals with shared traditional experiences. In addition, 12 key informants were purposively selected for IDIs, comprising six scholars of Yoruba culture and six traditional practitioners; including drummers, town criers, and herbalists, recognised for expertise in interpreting and using SL. Data collection was facilitated through two main instruments: a structured questionnaire with closed-ended items including Likert scales and categorical variables, aimed at gathering data on socio-demographic characteristics, self-assessed proficiency in the three SL modalities (sound waves, symbolic objects, body cues), and frequency of use; and semi-structured guides for FGDs and IDIs that elicited detailed information on specific gestures, facial expressions, and eye contact used within SL, as well as the cultural meaning ascribed to these non-verbal elements. Participants were further probed on how age, education, and social status influence SL use, and its role in emotional expression and maintenance of social relationships.

Quantitative data were analysed using the Statistical Package for the Social Sciences (SPSS). Descriptive statistics in the form of frequencies and percentages mapped the distribution of SL forms, while inferential statistics in the form of cross-tabulations and Chi-square tests explored associations between sociolinguistic variables and SL usage. Qualitative data were

transcribed and subjected to thematic analysis (Bazeley & Jackson, 2013), where recurring themes such as ‘multimodal complexity’, ‘age-related attrition’, and ‘message coding’ were systematically extracted and interpreted. In line with the study’s multimodal orientation, both the quantitative and qualitative data were disaggregated and analysed separately across the three SL modalities identified in the literature and confirmed in the field, namely sound waves and aerophone instruments, symbolic objects and visual cues, and body cues and paralanguage, before being synthesised to show how the three operate together as an integrated communicative system. This enabled the paper to present a detailed portrait of SL as both a cultural artefact and a living communicative system within Ejigbo.

Results and Discussion

1.0 Multimodal Constituents of Surrogate Language

The findings of this study establish that SL in Ejigbo is neither a unitary nor a straightforward acoustic phenomenon but a complexly layered multimodal system. SL in this context consists of three key non-linguistic modalities: *sound waves*, *symbolic visuals*, and *body signals*, operating interactively to produce meaning. As revealed in the subsequent sections, each modality was consistently demonstrated through participant testimonies, FGD discussions, and observed communicative practices in the Ejigbo community. In this way, the findings challenge the strongly held view of SL as no more than drummed speech and instead situate it as a dynamic communicative repertoire firmly entrenched within Yoruba cultural logic. Such integration of modalities embodies an eloquent encoding of messages whose correct deciphering is predicated on cultural literacy; hence, SL can be upheld as a linguistic and semiotic system.

1.1 Sound Waves and Aerophone Instruments

While the dùndún remains the most iconic instrument in Yoruba SL, the study underlines the indispensable roles of other aerophones and codified sound waves. IDI Participant 8, a male practitioner from Inisha, Ejigbo, elaborated on the classification of Yoruba drums: “The first category can be referred to as the sacred ones because they are always used during traditional rites and ritual festivals. These include Bâtá, Ìpesè, Àgèrè, Gbèdu, Ìgbìn, Kósó. But, apart from using Gbèdu during traditional religious performances, it is usually drummed to announce the death of the king. The second categories, which are common ones, include Dùndún, Bâtákoto, Ş èkèrè, and BèDḡḡ. They are the ones being used for eulogising, advertisement, and entertainment” (IDI Participant 8, Male, Inisha, Ejigbo). The agogo (bell) and gong are also active within Ejigbo’s

communicative ecology: IDI Participant 7 noted that king's emissaries use bells to call people's attention to official proclamations, while the gong signals communal gatherings and public warnings. Trumpet and flute sounds are reserved for ceremonial and royal contexts where they signal reverence, status, or sacred presence. These instruments are not used arbitrarily; their meanings are shaped by traditional proverbs and oral conventions, confirming that sound in SL is governed by phonological and semiotic rules emanating from Yoruba oral tradition.

1.2 Symbolic Objects and Visual Cues

The use of visual elements in SL is highly symbolic, particularly in contexts where subtlety or coded messaging is required, and reflects a broader Yoruba aesthetic tradition in which everyday objects are routinely invested with layered cultural meaning (Abiodun, 2015). The study found that ordinary items serve as communicative tokens whose meanings are drawn specifically from Ejigbo and wider Yoruba cultural logic. IDI Participant 2, a female academic from Inisha, Ejigbo, offered several precise illustrations: the presentation of ewé odán (leaves of the majestic tree) admonishes an arrogant person, referencing the Yoruba proverb “Ewé odán ọ̀ẹ̀ jù bẹ̀ẹ̀ lọ, ẹ̀ràn ló fí jẹ́” (the leaf of the majestic tree was more pompous than that, goats eventually eat it); and osùn (camwood), a substance traditionally used for bodily adornment, is sent to a person one has offended as an appeal for forgiveness, invoking the idiom “fí se osùn kí o fí para” (use it as camwood to rub the body). Palm fronds (màriwò) tied across an entrance or around a tree in Ejigbo signal that a space is consecrated, while palm fronds placed in front of a vehicle indicate a corpse is being transported (FGD Participant 14, Male, Inisha, Ejigbo). These visual signals are deeply contextual and require cultural initiation to decode accurately. Their deployment demonstrates how SL constitutes a visually rich language premised on shared cultural background knowledge.

1.3 Body Cues and Paralanguage

With specific reference to Ejigbo SL practices, the human body emerges as a crucial medium of communication, with gestures, facial expressions, and eye contact playing integral roles in message transmission. Paralanguage, non-lexical utterances such as whistling, ululation, and shouting, transmits emotion and intention that speech may not clearly convey, as was repeatedly evident from the FGDs and IDIs. A particular ululation such as iyèyè immediately conveys communal joy or celebration within the Ejigbo community. These cues depend highly on emotional intelligence and cultural fluency: the receiver must go beyond perceiving the gesture to interpreting its socio-emotional coding. SL

is thereby a fundamentally relational and affective means of communication, one in which meaning is co-constructed between culturally competent interlocutors.

2.0 Sociolinguistic Stratification of SL Usage

The results confirm that sociolinguistic variables significantly influence SL proficiency and usage, a finding that directly upholds the predictions of SLT and the study's second research objective. Age and education emerged as pivotal determining factors: older subjects (60+ years) showed near-universal comprehension of SL, while younger adults in the 25–35-year bracket demonstrated notable gaps in the decoding of complex sound and visual cues. This pattern reflects the influence of LCT, in which enculturation processes have been displaced by Western education and exposure to digital media. SL, once transmitted through apprenticeship and communal immersion, is therefore in danger of attrition, with knowledge increasingly concentrated among the elderly.

3.0 Influence of Occupation, Social Class, and Locality

Occupational roles and social class further stratify SL usage. Traditional practitioners, farmers, artisans, and chiefs, display high SL proficiency because of their reliance on it for daily functions and ceremonial duties. In contrast, white-collar professionals whose work environments emphasise either English or standard Yoruba report low SL usage. The inverse relationship between SL proficiency and integration into the formal economy underscores how social class moulds linguistic domains. In addition, locality plays a decisive role: rural residents, insulated from intense cultural contact and modernisation, maintain strong SL traditions compared to their urban counterparts. This rural–urban divide supports the view that SL flourishes within a culturally insulated ecology.

4.0 Functional Impact on Communication and Culture

Beyond its structural intricacy, SL serves essential communicative and cultural purposes. Data from the study confirm that it allows for the discreet coding of messages, whereby leadership passes important information through symbolic objects or drummed patterns intelligible only to initiates, a political and security function serving as cultural encryption. SL is equally powerful in emotional expression: drummers can convey sorrow or joy with nuance, while gestures and paralanguage reinforce social connectedness and mutual respect. Emotional intelligence emerged as a determining factor in decoding these cues. Finally, SL preserves Ejigbo's cultural heritage through oral archives like *oríki* and festival performances, anchoring identity and community solidarity across generations.

Contribution to Knowledge

This study makes two specific contributions to knowledge. First, it moves the study of Yoruba Surrogate Language beyond its conventional, largely acoustic focus on the talking drum, showing with primary data that SL functions as an integrated multimodal system combining sound, visual symbolism, and body cues. Second, by mapping SL competence against sociolinguistic variables such as age, occupation, social class, and locality, the study offers an empirically grounded, stratified account of who uses SL, how, and under what conditions, within a specific Yoruba community; an account that can serve as a template for comparative work in other Yoruba-speaking areas and, potentially, other African surrogate language traditions.

Conclusion and Recommendations

The present study provides an empirically supported, comprehensive analysis of SL in Ejigbo Local Government Area, tracing its rich multimodality through data drawn directly from Ejigbo community activities, practitioner interviews, and focus group discussions. The phenomenology of SL in Ejigbo goes far beyond mere acoustic elements like drums and gongs to include symbolic visuals and kinetic expressions like gestures and paralanguage. These different components combine into one effective communicative resource that reflects profound cultural knowledge and social nuance. The research demonstrates that SL does not merely function as information transmission but is a dynamic medium for encoding meaning, emotion, and identity, elements this study has substantiated through participant testimonies and observed communicative practices.

Importantly, the research clearly shows that SL proficiency and usage are significantly sociolinguistically stratified. The factors of age, occupation, and locality clearly determine who can interpret and successfully deploy SL. Older, traditionally employed, and rural dwellers are more competent, while the trend is one of attrition among younger, urban, formally educated populations, a pattern consistent with wider concerns about Yoruba language endangerment in Nigeria (Fabunmi & Salawu, 2005). This trend accords with Language Contact Theory, which postulates that globalisation, formal education, and urban migration are agents in the gradual erosion of indigenous communicative systems. Despite these pressures, SL continues to serve vital functions in Ejigbo, including covert communication, emotional expression, and the preservation of culture.

The study advocates a set of strategic interventions to help safeguard and revitalise SL. First, integrating SL education into the local school curriculum

would bridge generational gaps in cultural literacy. Second, detailed ethnographic documentation of SL modalities is necessary to preserve their meanings and usage contexts. Third, comparative studies between Ejigbo and urban centres like Ibadan or Lagos would shed light on the mechanisms driving SL decline, while cross-ethnic comparison with other Nigerian surrogate language traditions, such as the Igbo Ojà (Eze & McPherson, 2025), could help establish whether the patterns observed in Ejigbo reflect a broader national trend. Fourth, the role of Emotional Intelligence in SL interpretation warrants targeted psychometric research. Finally, support for digital archiving efforts should be provided to ensure SL's rich audiovisual heritage remains accessible to future generations and scholarly inquiry.

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Book Review

Title: *Obeah, Orisa & Religious Identity in Trinidad Africana Nations and the Power of Black Sacred Imagination* (Pp.1-254)

Author: Dianne M. Stewart

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Book Reviewer: Morufu B. Omigbule

The gods are not a single transcendent entity analogous to a Western projection of personhood with a bounded identity and delimited personality, but always a multiplicity of effect¹

First, the coming-into-being of the seminal treatise *Obeah, Orisa & Religious Identity in Trinidad: Africana Nations & the Power of Black Sacred Imagination* is worth remarking right from the outset. This is to indicate the status of the text as a complement in ‘a two-phase’ scholarly exploration of the historical evolution of Trinidad in which cultural ‘heritage love’, as Stewart puts it, (246) paved the way for Trinidad’s struggle for spiritual, material and intellectual emancipation and sustained the achievements thereupon. Tracey Hucks and Dianne Stewart wrote separately volumes I and II on the evolution under the following titles respectively: *Obeah, Orisa & Religious Identity in Trinidad: Africa in the White Colonial Imagination* and *Obeah, Orisa & Religious Identity in Trinidad: Africana Nations & the Power of Black Sacred Imagination*. If the former inundates a reader with accounts and a series of archival evidence of the thorny trajectory of the emancipation journey, the latter is an exhilarating account of the gains of the struggles, and national as well as global impact of the successes recorded. Stewart’s study is also a memorialization of key actors and actions which constituted the human and intellectual components of the struggles. The pride of place won for the African cultural heritage in the course of Trinidad’s sociocultural evolution is a keynote which a worthwhile assessment of Stewart’s study must never miss out. The definitive point in the milestone attained is the Africana religion by which Trinidad is set apart as a locale of dense and enduring spiritual consciousness – a site of social contestations fed by historical contradictions, cultural negotiations and intellectual formulations. Orisa practice emerged out of

¹Steven M. Friedson. *Remains of Rituals: Northern Gods in a Southern Land*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2009, P. 34.

struggles against colonial repression and denigration of Obeah spiritual practice to become the most visible spiritual tradition in Trinidad and Tobago. Again, *ab initio*, it is important to note that Stewart intermittently theorizes conditions of the mind, state of existence and spiritual involvements of colonial and post-emancipation Trinidadians. The following instantiates this:

Through communication with *nation* deities, who visited their worshipping families by manifesting in the bodies of their devotees, *nation* members simultaneously condensed and expanded time and space, circumventing fictions and binaries of the colonial imaginary, and addressed, if not redressed, the otherness of their condition. Although not untroubled by the power dynamics and conflicts that qualify the daily life of all institutions, these affective achievements have sustained African diaspora religious communities across centuries (20)

Since the very interesting subject of Trinidad's socio-cultural evolution has earlier been broached in two separate monographs authored by Tracey Hucks and Dianne Stewart, the two subsequently published volumes of which the presently reviewed is one is enough testimony to how familiar the authors are with the terrain in which they worked. This testimony is equally of the mutual efforts of the two scholars which culminated in their treasured treatises. Theirs are, indeed, a co-extensive exploratory experience. However, the outcomes of their efforts, as Stewart affirms, are both expected and unexpected (xiii). The reductive approach to archival documentation and historical reconstruction of Africana spiritual culture in Trinidad which contrasts with the much deeper and insightful readings, discoveries, and gap-filling of both authors exemplifies this antithetical experience. Of course, this would be a strong reason Stewart's like Huck's book illustrates 'conceptual architecture and theoretical justifications for transdisciplinary Africana Religious Studies... as a way forward in twenty-first-century scholarship on African-descended peoples' (xiv). This way, further studies will leverage the immense illumination provided by this volume and its compliment to advance knowledge on Africana religions in the Diaspora generally without any risk of being unduly influenced by categorical information, colonially inspired analytical concepts, and methodological preferences. Hence, the cluster of theory derived from a bridging of 'phenomenology of religion, indigenous hermeneutics, and black affect theory'

which the study applies (xv) is well-placed. Yet, a full account of scholarship on Africana religious practices must take cognizance of remarkable intellectual interventions and investment, even if by default, of such works on Obeah which falls within 1907 and 1914. Melville Herskovits is one author so acknowledged in this regard by Stewart for being the first scholar to document the association between the Yoruba deity, Shango, and the Catholic saint, John the Baptist in Trinidad (24-25).

Hucks' and Stewart's simultaneously conducted studies and published treatises focus on the same broad subject of Trinidadian sociocultural evolution from two different but related standpoints. Despite that two standpoints to the same issue are what the reader seems to be presented with, to evaluate each of the texts as a separate scholarly effort is a worthy evaluative approach. No doubt, this would afford a would-be reviewer an opportunity of recognizing efforts and processes of the coming-into-being of each volume in its own right. Adopting this approach might also help to avoid being unduly influenced by knowledge of one while evaluating the other. This way, a focused – more concentrated assessment of the concern, frame of reference and discourse, and import(s) of each – might be more properly determined and possibly used in gauging the frame of mind, depth of thought and objective/subjective attachment each scholar had while engaging with their chosen subject. The whole of this resonates with the fact that every review – at least of this nature – is an evaluative act characterized by selection and exclusion processes which cannot but result in the omission of a relatively large quantum of information.

Indeed, Stewart's study deserves to be made a single focus of assessment. Her treatise explores how 'Yoruba religious cultures' evolved in Trinidad. This phenomenon, she avers, took place within 'two conflicting orders': (1) 'the intimate universe that organized Yoruba people-groups into a unified *nation*, and (2) the long horizon of colonial Obeah. While one might be persuaded to see the orders as 'conflicting' as Stewart seems to do, it might be incorrect to disregard the two orders as a continuity, though a windy trajectory in which Stewart has been able to tease out three epistemic categories of Africana religions: 'colonial obeah, African Obeah, and Orisa' (xvi). In fact, this is what a close reading of the text offers. It is a copious account of ways in which the African cultural heritage has been retained and reprocessed in one of the few places on planet earth where culture has been productively weaponized. Obviously, it is unusually informed by first-hand experiences of African spiritual heritage, thereby serving as a textual space of visibility for authorities on African spiritual tradition as well as archiving of such important voices

which must have been hoped would resonate across generations and serve as an enduring source of inspiration to Diaspora and continental Africans – peoples who have been in constant struggle for a fair consideration as a part of humanity. If it is not, what else could it be other than a polemic on the heroic journey of self-preservation against the odds of alien cultural environment and intentional strategies of denaturalization of the forcefully displaced Africans – today’s black Africans in Trinidad? Stewart names the preservation devices: ‘religion, music, and dance’ – cultural forms with which they built a mechanism for retaining ‘innate possession’ despite that ‘peoples and cultures... are shifting continuities’ (79). Yet, one observes that orisa religious culture is central to a certain cohesion which undergirds the Trinidadian social distinctiveness.

Not only that, the book is a textual field in which the reader encounters interplays of religious/spiritual symbolisms – a textual stage for first-hand attestation to the efficacy of Africana spiritual powers which is capable of confounding a reader and reducing them to either a bewildered or enchanted spectator, or both at once. It therefore cannot be further from the truth that indeed ‘the custodians of the Yoruba-Orisa diaspora traditions [in ‘Trinidad, Brazil, the United States, or elsewhere]... constantly attest to the daily import of ancestral revelation ...coded knowledges only partially translatable and often unintelligible to academics untrained in ancestral modes of communicating’ (186-7). In the conflation of spiritualities and sacred acts that defines the Yoruba aspect of the Trinidadian Africana spiritual life, one mode of understanding which Stewart proposes is never to see the Yoruba orisa practice as syncretic because of its adaptability and inclusivity which allows for ‘*christianisms* in the Yoruba-Orisa tradition’. No doubt, Rudolph Eastman’s preferred terminology – ‘symbolic dualism’ would sit well with Stewart who has allotted a little but significant space to air the view of the coiner of the concept, Baba Rudolph Eastman (72-73). When, therefore, Stewart avers with respect to the ‘*christianisms*’ in Yoruba-Orisa tradition, that a most important concern for her as a scholar of religion is to ‘access the intended metaphorical and metonymic significations in the [syncretic] equation’ (76), a bit more detail ought to be added in our present valuation of Stewart’s account. Indeed, the originary cosmogonic and cosmological frames of reasoning do not give room for such an alien syncretism. Yet, syncretism might apply to a relationship of the originary Yoruba gods and originary ways of relating them to one another, or worshipping them interrelatedly and/or interchangeably. Simply, a syncretic view negates the principle of spiritual ecology of the Yoruba orisa tradition. Indeed, Stewart’s illumination of the significance of metaphor and symbolism in the religious/spiritual construction and understanding of the Trinidadian Yoruba is

an insight that can enrich knowledge of continental Yoruba Orisa religion/spirituality. As Stewart further avers, ‘calling the Powers by foreign names enciphers the Orisa’s authentic, sacred names and advances a Yoruba ethics of discretion and protection’ (77). No part of the Trinidadian cultural history reinforces the foregoing better than the Egbe Onisin Eledumare. The remark of Massetungi on the religious movement which Stewart affords her reader comes to mind here. The religious movement adopts an inclusive method of spiritual practice and growth in a way that the innate African familial disposition to life is allowed to define their spirituality (118-123).

From experience as an Africa-based ritual scholar whose bias is in favour of religious scholarship, an account of Africana-Yoruba spiritual immersion, devotion and level of manifestation of unusual powers inherent in the African spiritual systems which the book provides outweighs any that has been produced on same subject within Africa itself. So is the quantum of insight the book affords on diaspora Africana religion in Trinidad. So also is its insightful juxtaposing of Africana religious practices with their precursors or originary models on the African continent. All of this comes across through a certain level of ‘semantic simplicity’ (xi) and code-mixing that place the Yoruba language at an advantage in the text’s communicative schema.

In accounting for the construction and sustenance of an Africana religious nation of Trinidad, the book catalogues strong affinities between continental Yoruba spiritual heritage and replication of the heritage in the diaspora – specifically Trinidad. If the book foregrounds the roles of individuals in the process of triumphant emergence of the Africana religion in Trinidad, it is but to underscore the compositionality of the orisa community – an interethnic, interreligious and intercultural social formation imbued with emancipatory spirit – and the human resolve that accounted for the evolution of the Africana spiritual tradition. Stewart reads this phenomenon in form of macro nation-building process which exploits to a great advantage culture’s psychological, mobilizational, interactive, and integrative potency. Orisa practices in Trinidad, therefore, come across as a tool of national reconstruction deployed along two parallel courses: an orisa spiritual practice that looks inward (within Trinidad) for religio-cultural embellishments and orientation and that which looks outward (Nigerian Yoruba religious space) for same. On this, Stewart observes a ‘productive tension’ (4) since both enhance the African identity and progress of the Africana religion in Trinidad. Both tendencies in conjunction with the African familial traditions assist in the building of what is termed and foregrounded by Stewart as ‘nationscapes’ (23).

In regard to the book's account on decolonial politics and, indeed, its verdict on it, an invitation to re-evaluate the concept and ideology of decolonisation is extended particularly to readers who are aware of a book-length de-accentuation of decolonization published the same year Hucks and Stewart did theirs – *Against Decolonisation: Taking African Agency Seriously*. Indeed, the studies of the duo of Hucks and Stewart individually and jointly significantly rekindle the discourse of decolonization. Hence, evaluating Hucks' and Stewart's books against the background of Taiwo's polemics on decolonization might be useful in evaluating the dimension of decolonial discourse by which Stewart's book, in particular, is somewhat considerably enriched. In this wise, it might be particularly interesting to so act because of how the opposing assumptions beneath the joint and complementary studies of Hucks and Stewart provocatively diverge from those of Taiwo's polemics of objection to anything and everything decolonization in so far as it aims beyond attaining political independence. In other words, it might be insightful to look into how decolonization ideology inspired Hucks and Stewart along a direction and Taiwo in a totally opposite direction. If the field of Africana Studies to which African Studies mutually relates is reinforced by the exposition of the former, the latter aims to rupture it from foundation to the superstructure, unapologetically. Both (Hucks and Stewart on the one hand and Taiwo on the other) also differ in terms of fidelity to historical account. The former reconstructs history to assume a kind of alternative history which exposes the weakness and rather intolerable biases of official history from/on colonial Trinidad while the latter makes intermittent allusions to African colonial history and history of Africa post-independence to rationalize his claim that decolonization as a philosophical concept and ideology stands in the way to modernity, which Africa must strive to attain as a matter of urgency. On the contrary, Stewart declares her concern in the book: to explicate 'a necessary analytical and conceptual decolonial turn in Africana religious studies (82). Suppose she does not so declare, the book in every material particular would still come across as an endorsement of decolonial processes in the cultural life of black Africans in Trinidad. Her invention of '*numenym*s' to unveil the insidiousness concealed through colonial conceptual categories that delegitimize sacred acts of the Black Africans in Trinidad underpins her approval of decolonial processes beyond merely targeting political independence as Taiwo proposes. Therefore, her reading of Trinidad's cultural history in terms of inseparability of 'politics and spirituality' (105) would not likely sit well with Taiwo who is a purveyor of anti-decolonisation once and when decolonisation aims beyond political independence for the colonised.

Stewart focuses on symbols, myths, performative acts including rituals, social actions and cultural processes. It is, therefore, very obvious that how religious beliefs mold individuals' thoughts and perceptions amidst life's vicissitude is central to her studies as a scholar of religion. Taken alongside Hucks' account, a very fertile field for interdisciplinary, diversified methodological and transcontinental approaches to the black African studies generally, and black Africa religious studies in particular, are being opened up. This volume attests to many new epistemic possibilities, one of which is what may be described as authorship in related or one continuous scholarship and self-evident collaborative studies. It is significant that this characterizes a robust seminal work in a field that has waited for long for full engagement with the scholarly opportunities it copiously offers. It is also a keynote of the volume that availability/access to resourceful centers of knowledge preservation, production and incubation as well as custodians of cultural memories and experienced researcher are helpful to the kind of field-based research that produced this book. This is in addition to the opportunity of being in environments conducive for thoughtfulness, which afforded the author the needed conversations and access to hands that were willing to help. This is the message the terms 'collegiality' and 'congeniality' (xxiii) should echo in the reader of the volume. When Stewart therefore discloses in the acknowledgements that her book had incubated for long, and that she contended with keeping within required word-count, one should sense how working in a fertile uncultivated field and submitting oneself (as a researcher) faithfully to the drift of the kind of marvelous field of knowledge and viable research idea that culminated in her seminal volume in *Africana Religious studies* and *Black African studies* in general can be. Stewart's study on *Africana* religion, black religious imagination and *Africana* sacred poetics is conducted within the Trinidadian nation context, but speaks to *Africana*, African and diaspora black religious consciousness in thought-provoking and illuminating ways. Continental Yoruba cultural influences on Yoruba Trinidadians is at the heart of her study because, as she reports in the volume, scholarship on cultural realities in the African diaspora has failed to pay attention to this, and the way the archive has been silent (71-72) on this important cultural condition should accentuate the need for intervention in this respect. Stewart's intervention in this regard is by all standards significant. Often, scholars are constrained to observe the limits of valorization so as to succeed in conducting a non-biased study. What this actually means is contentious. Through Stewart's thoughts there seems to be lots to benefit from research focused on 'affective modes', for she predicts for

our next line of research that should a scholarly approach would help to make a big difference.

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SHORT STORY

OMONIJE

YEMI ATANDA

“Mother, be yourself; it's just the time.” The statement was plain, poignantly piercing, and stark. Perhaps it was lost to the rhythmic pattering of rain drumming on the roof. This brought the reminiscence, the faint and painful memory of her birth. Osunfunke held her hand; the expanding fluid of love warmly flowed through her veins, and she became so bloated with heartbeats and, at the same time, shrunk in fear to her bones. Her only daughter's defiant look sent bitter pills down her throat. She wanted to cry. “You say what? Omonije, talk to me...” Omonije stared at her mother, and she stared back at her; their steady gaze remained fixed on each other for a long while. Streams of tears ran down Osunfunke's face, but Omonije's face was dry and determined. After a while, she removed her gaze from her mother and fixed it far ahead of her, far beyond the thick wall of her room. She seemed lost to a strange world; not seeing what she was seeing, not hearing what she was hearing. Yet Osunfunke knew very well that her only child, Omonije, was lost to the world to which she had ever belonged. “Would she go like that?” Osunfunke fought her thoughts, the terrible thought that was as dark as the sackcloth of death, the painful thought of losing her dear, lovely daughter. “No! No!! No!!! You can't do this to me. No, Omonije, you can't do this!” She cried bitterly. Still, their hands were clamped on each other, more stiffened now. She could sense the flow of blood through her veins pulsating, and it sent fear down her spirit as she thought that this would soon stop. Although she hated the thought, she cried.

Her husband and about two relations came into the room when they heard Osunfunke crying. They had been there when her problem began until Osunfunke asked them to go out and leave her alone with her daughter. Segun, Omonije's husband, could not withstand it any longer; he had to come in and see his wife. People outside never knew what was going on. Women were busy preparing breakfast. A lot of people had arrived for the naming ceremony. The child was asleep, left alone in her innocent world. Omonije returned her look to her mother; their hands were still together, and she smiled, not minding the presence of her husband and the two other relations.

“I am Omonije, a child-mother from the great beyond. A cycle is the symbol of our creation. At a point, we are here; at another point, we are there. Yet, on a spot, we are moving on the axis of time. You don't know because you are not

well informed. “To us, nothing is wrong about the world of Abiku; it's a simple world to learn about the creation of the world and the futility of living in it. You may not know that living here is a mere running shadow; the longer it becomes, the sooner it is getting ready to go with the night. “You believe all of you believe that there is real meaning in living here, but we laugh at you all. Your reason is so absurd, thinking that you can break the chains, the shackles of existential futility. You find meaning in meaninglessness; you gloat over it. The maroons amongst you even fight over it, yet lose all beyond the stricture of their imagination. Mother, you know me well. I came to teach a lesson, a truth about us all: we are prisoners of creation. Mother, do not bother; do not cry. I had taken so much from you, so you feel. I've returned all I took, so you should know. Seven times I was born with a bangle as an image of a cycle in an attempt to tie me down to a spot. Seven times I must break it to show the futility of your efforts. Anyway, seven times I've brought back what I had taken. Take care of all the children; they are yours, not mine. It's time to go back home.”

The genesis was as dramatic as the end, and all began thus: On the main road, from the narrow paths and along the bends, legs began to tread towards Akesan. Within a matter of seconds, a crowd of heads, with their crowns of hair protecting them from the scorching sun if they could at all, converged, and their eyes were consumed in admiration of the common object. They were all enjoying the theatrics of Ojeade. Anybody who had not seen an Alarinjo performance before might not have known the sensuality inherent in the theatricality of their performances. They were groups of masquerades, otherwise known as Apidan or Egun Alare. They were itinerant groups and went about from one town to another, doing the job they knew best. Which aspect was not enough to arrest anybody's attention? Was it the bata rhythm, with its consonance of sensual interpretation, as it stirred everybody's emotions and threw every head into conscious shaking and moving with necks and shoulders? Or was it Ojeade's dance? The magical displays, among others, were equally thrilling. The most alluring and appalling moment was when Ojeade turned into a python. A rain of money showered on it before it changed back to human form. Drama was also performed by Ojeade and his group. A satirical re-enactment of a woman engaged in extramarital affairs and caught red-handed by her husband was another spectacle that threw the crowd into a furore of delirious laughter.

Sonorous songs were also rendered by Ojeade.

Among the crowd was Osunfunke, the beautiful daughter of Baale Alakesan of Akesan. Baale himself was powerful, and stories had it that during the prolonged Kiriji War, he was beheaded but quickly carried another head. When he was born, the tribal marks engraved on his cheeks were “pele,” but when he returned from the war, he had a head with “abaja” on his cheeks.

Baale was also known as Egun Apidan before he became Baale.

They always praised him as:

Ojegboyeolori	Onsanmori	Ojegboye the great Socialite
Ajonleto baba	Osunfunke	the itinerant Masque- Osunfunke’s father
Ogbori-Olori	Saye	He who adorns his life with a different head
Ba bawalakesan.		Our Father in Akesan

Little did Ojeade know about Baale. He felt his absence was a slight. Although he felt insulted that he had not seen him, at least to dash him some money which was the usual practice anywhere he went to perform he had noticed Osunfunke. He called her and danced with her. Within him, he felt different, and he knew that he must marry this beautiful young lady. The beautiful picture of Osunfunke did not blot out some words he wanted to send to Baale, wherever he might be. So, he began to sing. He used idioms, proverbs, anecdotes, and allusions to portray Baale as a man who lacked a sense of appreciation and as a miser who was not supposed to be the head of a community. Baale himself got the message from his house as Ojeade was performing at the square, some metres away from Baale's palace. In annoyance, he came with only his cover cloth spread around him. Everybody was amazed to see Baale like this; people knew something was wrong. Some elders knew that Ojeade, a young handsome man, had got the handshake beyond his elbow. He had truly climbed the tree beyond its leaves.

Baale did not mind what might be going on in the minds of his people. He got to the centre and began to dance to the solemn rhythm of the bata drum. This time, Ojeade had stopped and wore a whimsical smile, waiting to see what the old man wanted to do. Baale's performance was incredible. Ojeade watched him as he turned his piece of cover cloth inside out without any part of his body showing. People began to praise their Baale. Ojeade was in trouble. This was an act whose tricks he had long wanted to learn. This was a major artistic feat that could enable him to challenge anybody under heaven. This was a marvellous performance that he dreamt of doing one day. Of all the magical knowledge he possessed and all the intricacies of the trade he had learnt, this

stunt by Baale was the last and only one he still wished to master as the summit of his career and this was done by the panther without stress. He was ashamed. He was afraid. He was in trouble. He quickly prostrated, poured sand on his head, rolled on the ground, and kissed the lotus feet of the Baale.

In the night, the whole episode became a joke as Ojeade drank palm wine with Baale. Later, Osunfunke and Ojeade had time to talk; it was just the beginning of their turbulent journey through life. Some months later, Ojeade's parents and relations went to ask Baale of Akesan to give his beautiful daughter to their son, Ojeade. He gladly consented, and a wedding date was fixed. Before the D-day, Ojeade's mother went to consult Mayegun, the noble witch-doctor in Odo-Oba, near Ogbomoso. He told her that if they could look beyond Akesan, perhaps it would be better. In plain language, as Ojeade's mother understood it, he was saying that her son should not marry Osunfunke, the daughter of the lion himself. How to communicate this to her son was a problem.

At night his parents summoned him for a discussion. His father started:

‘Ojeade what have you done to know your wife?’

‘I know her very well, very well papa’.

‘What if Ifa says you should not marry her?’ mother questioned

‘Mama, Ifa cannot say such a bad thing’.

‘But Mayegun, you know him, Babalawo at Odo-Oba said you should not’, his mother said again.

That's to Mayegun, the short-sighted diviner!

‘Ah! You think you would not listen to the words of Ifa?’

‘Papa,no. I did not say so, but I cannot take Mayegun very seriously. ‘My Osanyin told me everything is good about Osunfunke, what else?’

By this time, Ojeade stood up. ‘Is it on this issue you called me?’ He eventually married Osunfunke, and the wedding was elaborate. Shortly after the solemnization of their marriage, Osunfunke conceived and gave birth to a baby girl. However, the unfortunate child died on the very day she was to be named.

Thus, the bitter experience continued for another six consecutive times. It was a difficult period; infant mortality was very high due to the lack of adequate medical care. But could that explain Ojeade's and his wife's plight? Never! The

first child was perfectly healthy until the seventh day, when she was supposed to receive a name. Yet, she was in too much of a hurry to leave. Nobody knew this. On the third day after she came into the world, at about 1:30 a.m., the baby got up from her mother's side. As if by magic, she stood upright. One could watch her as she became tall and beautiful. She ran her forefinger diagonally from the left side of her mother's forehead to her left toe and smiled as she swaggered out of the room. The door opened automatically, and no sound was heard. Anyway, even if there had been any sound, her seemingly lifeless mother was too far gone to notice.

Through a passage, she sneaked into an open space, and there lurked a figure. He was fully awake as she came onto the veranda. He wiped his face in disbelief but quickly realized that something strange was happening. He could not pin it down to anything concrete, but psychologically he set out to fathom the mystery. Ogunsakin trailed the figure into an open space, and since the moon was bright, he could see clearly. At first, when he saw her crossing the veranda and entering the dark region beyond Ojeade's house, he knew she could not be somebody who had merely come out to urinate or attend to some other need. Besides, nobody in the village would dare violate the instruction given by the Hunters' Guild that after midnight no one should be seen outside. When he beheld her radiant and beautiful figure shining under the bright moonlight, he knew this was no ordinary event. As if the young lady knew what was passing through his mind and indeed, she seemed to she said: "Look at me, Ogunsakin, as if you do not see me." At that moment, he was struggling within himself to get closer to the strange being. As he determined to apprehend her and had begun making efforts by reciting incantations, the figure vanished into thin air. That was the first mysterious thing the child did.

When morning came, the baby was kicking happily. It was around 9:00 a.m. Women were preparing breakfast for the invited guests and relations of Ojeade and Osunfunke. In the room where the baby lay, three strange faces appeared. They surrounded her and hurriedly summoned her to get ready so that they could leave. They were all young girls, smiling. A girl stepped out to look at them. Women, especially Osunfunke and Ojeade, were overwhelmed with happiness. The girl shook her head and said: "Very soon, I shall watch all of you crying." Nobody noticed that anything unusual was going on. Nobody saw them anyway.

Osunfunke brought out a new dress and placed it beside the bathing tub where the soap and smooth coconut sponge had been arranged. The stage was set to bathe the newborn before giving her a name. Her three friends surrounded her, though nobody could see them. Even Ojeade, whom one would believe could see beyond ordinary beings; a powerful magician, herbalist, and occultist was unaware of their presence. Unfortunately, he was busy moving about, greeting people and attending to his friends, while rams and goats were being roasted for the occasion. Meanwhile, Mojo, a middle-aged woman who was the wife of Ojeade's uncle, sat down to bathe this child of fate. Little did she know that it had already been ordained that, while bathing her, the child would die. That was the assignment the newborn had come to fulfil.

“Queen, it's time to go.” “I know that.” “It's going to be fun to get our Queen back in the kingdom of spirits.” “Yeah.” “No, it's now. Make it look as if this woman kills her,” another said. They all laughed. Bad, so bad, that nobody heard them; nobody saw them. As Mojo poured water on the baby's head, water entered through her nose, and she started convulsing. Mojo panicked and shouted. People rushed in, and everybody was amazed. Ojeade was there in a moment. He took the child from the woman carrying her, put his mouth on the centre of her head, and rained incantations upon her. Ojeade threw away his agbada, sweating profusely, and rushed to get his *sere*. Then he began:

Bi a femoloju a riran, Let me see clearly

Olupara da nialupaida

Oko tokobo fi para sale

Ada to ko boofi koro se yewu

Olomi tutu mi orukoete.

Change is always immutable, change,

Hoe always rest, after a tedious labour

So also cutlass does rest in the room

Cold water changes to warm in process.

The child became still, cold and stiff. Ojeade was shaking; he gave a heavy sigh; women around read the alarm and danger in his look. They knew the unfortunate girl was no more. They all cried, Osunfunke wept bitterly. The whole village cried. While women were crying, Ojeade rushed into his medicine room and spoke with his Osayin:

Osanyin, ‘my god why? Why has this happened to me?’

‘Ojeade, the water and calabash are not the same’

But they are related’,

‘Related but not similar, right?’

‘What are you talking about, my god?’

‘Ojeade, your problem is that you are impatient’.

“Pour water on me. Wash your face with it, go out, and you will see.” Ojeade did as he was instructed. When he got to the open passage, what he saw was amazing. He saw three floating young girls. Among them was a lady whom he could recognize as his own newborn baby, but now transformed into a beautiful young woman. They laughed at the people wailing, but when they realized that Ojeade had seen them, they vanished. Ojeade now understood what the problem was. He was able to pacify his wife and disabuse her mind of the insinuation that Mojo must have deliberately killed her daughter, for there was a rumour that Mojo was a witch. That was their first bitter experience. Ojeade tried all he could to reverse this recurring situation for six consecutive times, but all to no avail. Until the seventh time, each child died before receiving a name. Each departed in the same manner. When the sixth child died in the same way the others had gone, people suggested that they should burn her body to ashes and bury the ashes, or cut the body into pieces.

Early enough, before they could carry out their decision, Ojeade's mother returned from Mayegun. The fire had already been set, and Ojeade's friends were coming out with the dead child to burn her when Ojeade's mother met them.

‘Where are you taking the body to?’

‘To burn the wicked child to ashes’, Fani said

‘No, bring it’ Subu, Ojeade's mother said

She took the baby to the bunch of plantain at the bank of Olojuoro, a stagnant spring at east of their house. There, the child was buried with some totems Mayegun gave Subuola. That was the sixth time.

Not long afterward, Osunfunke became pregnant again and was safely delivered of a healthy and boisterous baby girl, just a replica of the previous children. It was everybody's expectation that the child would die on the day she was to be christened, as had become the usual pattern. It had become a well-known fact that Ojeade, with all his herbal knowledge, all the magical powers he could claim, and all his pride as a prince of witchcraft, could not solve his own problem. His reaction towards the dictum, *"Abiku so oloogun deke"* ("the Abiku

has rendered the herbalist powerless"), was that no cutlass can make its own handle. In fact, on the seventh day, the ceremony was scanty. He merely wanted to give the child a name. The fire of love that usually accompanied the arrival of a newborn and inspired the enthusiasm of throwing a lavish celebration was dead, completely dead. Throughout that day, Ojeade and Osunfunke waited anxiously to see what would happen. They saw, anyway, but nothing happened apart from the child crying occasionally whenever she needed her mother's attention. Indeed, nobody waited until the seventh day before people started calling the child Omonije; she was simply known by that name. This name eventually overshadowed Ojeropo Adeyinka Adekanbi, the name officially given to her. Until the point of her death, she was known and called Omonije.

Ojeade held Mayegun in high esteem; the admiration he had for the man was beyond expectation. On the eighth day Omonije came into the world, he went to Mayegun.

‘Thanks, Mayegun, for your efforts to enable me have child at last’

‘May Ifa be praised’

‘I never knew I should have listened, when mother said Osunfunke might not be a good wife for me’.

‘Never bother about that.

OrunmilaeriipinOrunmila the destiny giver
Odifa fun ekuasinas the oracle is cast for ekuasin
Pe oro 'nu eni a maa pani That the caustic tongue kills
Eku asinnibawonioro? Eku asin wonders how could that be?
Enu o se ni pa ohun May my mouth not kill me
Orunmila fun un lesi peOrunmila responds that
Afe bo, afebo ,afebo Only sacrifice is the solution
Ai rueboa ma pani Without it there would be problems

‘Mayegun, what can I do now?’

‘When the child starts speaking bring her to me’

Omonije had some unusual characteristics. The child, as tender as she was, would not take her mother's breast milk apart from *agbo*. This was a combination of various herbs boiled together, with the resulting liquid served as food. The strange aspect was that she would take neither cold nor warm liquid,

but only dangerously hot ones. The first day it happened, a crowd gathered around Osunfunke, wondering how a child could develop immunity to the heat of a liquid that an adult would drink and immediately cry out from. Omonije, however, would take her food with ease. Another peculiar trait was that Omonije did not like light at night. Before her parents discovered that the reason she was always crying was the presence of light, both and the child had suffered many sleepless nights. By the age of six months, Omonije could walk and run. She became an object of wonder, especially because of her unusually rotund and protruding tummy. Osunfunke and her husband were alarmed, but they later came to know that the problem with Omonije's stomach would disappear the moment she started talking. Omonije did another strange thing one night. It was the night the family had pounded yam with *egusi* soup laced with bush-rat meat for dinner. In her case, hot water had been used to prepare the pounded yam, and it was still warm at least by Omonije's standards. What she did was astonishing. She took her plate and placed it directly on naked, glowing charcoal and began eating from it. Nobody said anything. They had probably become accustomed to her strange ways.

On the day Omonije was exactly one year old, one halcyon evening, Osunfunke was peeling melons. Omonije sat on her mother's left lap, held her waist, looked into her eyes, and said: "Mama, I want to talk." What she was saying was not clear to Osunfunke, and she asked Omonije to repeat what she had said. But she did not. Instead, she left and returned to her toys. Curiosity and fear all lumped together into nervousness, and it overcame Osunfunke. It was obvious when Ojeade came home and saw his wife. He quickly demanded to know what the problem was, but Osunfunke was unable to say anything meaningful. "Omonije has started talking." "What did she say?" "I couldn't understand. Perhaps it was a question or a statement; I could not tell. But the manner in which she said it was terrific and unusual." "Today I must see Mayegun. Do not forget that he said we should bring her to him the day she opened her mouth to talk."

They went to see Mayegun. He closed the door of his power house after asking his clients, Ojeade and his mother, to remain outside. For hours, Omonije and Mayegun were alone in the room. What transpired between them remained the subject of rumours and speculation to this day. Some said Omonije grew into her true form and revealed the mysteries of her personality in both the physical world and the First Heaven. It was even said that Mayegun and Omonije transported themselves to the First Heaven, where they spent the night together.

How do we know any of this? There is no way to know. Is it not beyond our understanding? When the door was finally opened, Mayegun and Omonije were simply laughing. From that day on, Omonije talked and talked. One afternoon, while she was with her father, she explained that her stomach was filled with words and that he should not worry about it. Some months later, she was often seen talking to herself. One day, Ojeade was resting on a chair beneath the big tree in the open yard. His thoughts had wandered far away as he ruminated and planned for the next performance at Abide Village and some adjoining villages. Then he saw Omonije waving away some unseen beings.

‘Go away! Go away!!

Let me be for now until what had been denied her are given back

If I'm the Queen, does it mean I could not be responsible for my actions and in-actions?

It's okay, do not come here again for now.

Me, you can't do anything now until the day I said you should come for us all to have a jolly fly back home.’

Ojeade propped up, looked askance and was berated.

‘What is that? Who are you talking with?

‘Do not mind, papa’

Omonije narrated how she was crowned the Queen in the spirit world. The need they come in human form to test the earth and to punish human beings as the reactions of their actions. She even revealed a story of one of her past lives. Prior to the crowning years back anyway, I was the wife of Oba Arubidi, the king that conquered Dahomey and as far as Benin and extended his Empire to Ketu and Isabe’. ‘So, the story my grandfather told me which himself was told by his grandfather you were a part?’ ‘Yes, not a part, but a factor.’ Omonije turned to look at her friends. One of them tall and pretty, a damsel beamed at Omonije with igniting smile wished her to return to their kingdom where she has her throne. This gesture of theirs would not bulge, this time, Omonije wanted to stay. Ojeade was at sea of what was happening. Although he sensed that Omonije spiritual colleagues were around, he not being an ordinary man. Himself a prodigious medicine man he wasn't fall short of knowing the precarious attitude of the spirits. If he had the power to deal with them, shouldn't he have done that long ago? His predicament and lamentable experience were to ascertain the fact that ‘one does not possess fire and not be burnt by fire made by others’, he thought

Omonije told him many stories and lives she had lived. A life of an animal gloating over others and obstructed their lives with inflection of cruelty, the experience she had with human hunters who in their own cruelty tortured and terminated her life, how she was as spirit child in a mother and caused a train to derail that killed people, another time a mother of two died when delivering the third child. Many astonishing stories were told; stories went on and on. She grew in leaps and bounds. She became a dazzlingly slim and well-structured beautiful young lady. She became a subject of admiration to young handsome boys. Perhaps she must have used her power of attraction to get her place in the heart of Venus to have blessed her. She got all the attention and devotion from eligible bachelors and married men as well, to the irritation and jealousy of her peers who were so envious. To the amazement of many people; Adesegun, the heir to throne of Alaafin, wooed her, and like a joke the consummation into marriage was royally celebrated.

Omonije became a good mother. She had the first child and subsequently gave birth up to the seventh, whose naming ceremony was to be celebrated when she was about to die. Osunfunke carried her. Now that she was speaking, nobody could fully understand her. Ojeade came in, held her hand, and sat beside his wife. A bright smile spread across her face, and a strange radiance shone boldly upon her. She spoke, although faintly. "Out of love I stayed; out of love I leave. Do not think you can understand the way the heavens work. Can any of you?" She beamed with a smile again, although it appeared arrogant and seemed a stark display of callousness toward the plight of her parents. Then her friends came in a dazzling young lady and a young man summoning her to rise and follow them. Nobody could see them. Even Ojeade could not. They were all perplexed and did not know what to do.

Omonije got up, though nobody knew this, and followed her friends. When they got to a big tree in the compound, they stopped and waited to watch what was going to happen. It was time. Ojeade and Osunfunke discovered that Omonije was no longer breathing. There was a serious commotion. Everywhere was thrown into disarray. Wailing and crying rent the air. Mothers could not carry their children. The children themselves were crying. Men struggled to hold back their tears, but it was impossible; torrents of tears ran down their cheeks. Amidst all this acrimony and confusion sat Osunfunke with the baby who was to be named. She was not crying; she merely stared blankly into space. Many people surrounded her, hoping that she would not harm herself. Ojeade, with remarkable courage, said: "The keg has been broken..." And then he fell silent.

Outside, laughing at the men and women in their ignorant display of grief, were Omonije and her friends. “Is there a need for it?” one of them said. “They must do that because they do not see death as a gate of change,” Omonije replied. They laughed and laughed until they vanished into thin air.