ISSN: 3043-467X



A MULTIMODAL COMPARATIVE ANALYSIS OF HURT IN NIGERIAN LITERATURE: EXPLORING GENDER DIFFERENCES IN LINGUISTIC, STYLISTIC, AND PRAGMATIC REPRESENTATIONS

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Abstract

This study undertakes a multimodal comparative analysis of hurt in Nigerian literature in the work of Chinua Achebe's Things Fall Apart (1979) and Buchi Emecheta's The Joys of Motherhood (1979), exploring gender differences in linguistic, stylistic, and pragmatic representations investigating how male and female authors represent hurt and how these representations define, conform and/or challenge societal norms and values. This work relies on a mix theory of Trauma theory, stylistics, and post colonial theory. It uses a combination of Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA), stylistics, and pragmatic to investigate how hurt is constructed and conveyed in Nigerian literature and what these constructions reveal about gendered experiences, cultural norms, and power dynamics. Data was primary collected from the two novels under study. A qualitative and quantitative approach were used in the analysis. The findings reveal significant differences in how male and female authors represent hurt, with female authors employing more emotive language and stylistic devices to convey emotional pain, while make authors tend to use more direct and assertive language. The study also portrays the importance of considering the cultural and social context in which the texts were written, and how these contexts influence the representation of hurt. This work therefore is an addition to the field of literary linguistics, gender studies and African literature, providing new frontiers into the complex and multifaceted nature of hurt in Nigerian literature.

Keywords: Gender difference, stylistics, linguistics, pragmatics, hurt, multimodal analysis.

Introduction

Language is a complex and multifaceted concept that uses signs and symbols to convey meaning. A writer's thoughts and emotions are given expression through language. Adegbite (1982) in discussing the relationship between language and culture in Nigeria, opines that language is a vital part of the Nigerian culture, and it plays a significant role in shaping the country's social, economic, and political institutions. Thus, Nigerian literary artists rely on language to portray their themes in literature. By Nigerian literature we mean the body of written literary works produced by Nigerian authors, often reflecting the country's rich cultural heritage, history, and experiences. It encompasses various genres. One of the reoccurring themes in Nigerian literature is the question of hurt and cultural alienation and this paper seeks to analysis hurt in the works of Nigerian writers.

However, Akpan (2025) is discussing language and society opines that language and culture are functionally related and that language influences identity, social cohesion and expression of values. This means therefore, that the relationship is complex. Language should not only be seen as a vehicle for interaction and communication but also, that language is a key factor in Nigerian culture, and culture, in turn regulates the development, use, and attitudes towards language.

Hurt is a universal human emotion that can manifest in various forms, including physical, emotional, and psychological pain (Browlby, 1969). In literature, hurt has been explored as a theme, a character's emotional state and a narrative device (Herman, 2002). Nigerian literature, in particular, offers a rich tapestry of works that explore hurt in its various forms. In the words of Adeyemi (2019), hurt can be understand as a form of interpersonal harm, where one person's actions or words cause emotional pain or distress to another. But, Eze (2020) views hurt as a complex experience that encompasses both physical and emotional pain, often resulting from traumatic events or experiences. Also, Nwosu (2022) describes hurt as an existential threat, where an individual's sense of self or identity is challenged or disrupted,

leading to feelings of vulnerability and pain. From these opinions, hurt can be seen as a physical or emotion pain, injury, or damage to someone or a group of people or even a nation. Many Nigerian authors have explored the theme of hurt in their novels, notably among them include: Adichies's *Half of Yellow Sun* (2006), Achebe's *Onaedo, the Blacksmith Daughter* (2010), Unigiwe's *On Black Sisters' Street* (2009), Achebe's *Thing's Fall Apart* (1958), Soyinka's *Death and the King's Horseman* (1975) Rotimi's *The Gods are not to Blame* (1968) and lyayi's *Violence* (1979).

According to Achebe (1958), Nigerian literature reflects the complexities of the Nigerian experience, including the hurts inflicted by colonialism, cultural displacement, and social change. As Emecheta (1979) notes, Nigerian women writers in particular, have used their works to express the hurt of patriarchy, cultural oppression, and personal struggle. In fact, writers like Chinua Achebe, Wole Soyinka, Ola Rotimi, and Festus lyayi's handles the theme of hurt in relation to gender in complex and nuanced ways, reflecting the challenges and injustices faced by women in Nigerian society. Through their works, they portray patriarchal societies where women are marginalized, subjugated, and expected to conform to traditional roles, leading to hurt, frustration and anger.

Despite the richness of Nigerian literature, there is a paucity of research on the representation of hurt in these works (Ogundipe-Leslie, 1994). Furthermore, existing studies have largely focused on the thematic analysis of hurt, neglecting the linguistic, stylistic, and pragmatic representations of hurt in the works of male and female writers (Hawthorne, 2024). This study therefore is an attempt to fill this gap by conducting a multimodal comparative analysis of hurt in Nigerian literature, examining the linguistic, stylistic and pragmatic representations of hurt in the works of male and female writers. By exploring these variables of hurt in Nigerian literature, this study seeks to contribute to a deeper understanding of the complex and multifaceted nature of hurt in Nigerian literary discourse.

Literature Review

The concept of hurt in literature has been explored by various scholars, who have examined the ways in which authors use language and narrative structure to convey painful experiences. According to Herman (2011 p. 12) "traumatic experiences are often characterized by a sense of dislocation and disorientation, which can be conveyed through the use of non-linear narrative structures and fragmented narratives. This is evident in Achebe's *Things Fall Apart* (1958), where the narrative uses flashbacks and non-linear narrative structures to convey the traumatic experiences of the Igbo people during the colonial period.

Emecheta's *The Joys of Motherhood* also employs non-linear narrative structures and fragmented narrative to convey the traumatic experiences of Nnu Ego, a young Igbo woman who is forced into marriage and motherhood. As Ogundipe (1994, p. 15) notes, "the experience of women in African societies are often characterized by a sense of dislocation and disorientation, which can be conveyed through the use of non-linear narrative structures and fragmented narratives".

The use of linguistic resources such as metaphor, imagery, and symbolism is also important aspect of conveying hurt in literature. According to Soyinka (1965, p. 20), "the use of metaphor and imagery can create a power and evocative representation of traumatic experiences". This is evident in Achebe's *Things Fall Apart* (1958), where the narrative uses metaphors such as "*Things fall apart*" to convey the destruction and chaos caused by colonialism. Emecheta's *The Joys of motherhood* employs metaphors and imagery to convey the traumatic experience of Nnu Ego. As Umeh (1999, p. 25) notes, "the use of metaphor and imagery can create a powerful and evocative representation of the experiences of women in African societies".

In addition to linguistic features**,** the use of stylistic features such as tone, point of view, and narrative voice is also important in conveying hurt in literature. According to Phelan (2007,

p. 30), "the use of tone and point of view can create a sense of intimacy and immediacy, drawing the reader into the world of the narrative". This is evident in Achebe's *Things Fall Apart*, where the narrative uses a formal and somber tone to convey the gravity and seriousness of the events that unfolded. Similarly, Emecheta's *The Joys of Motherhood* employs a conversational and reflective tone to convey the traumatic experiences of Nnu Ego. This literature review highlights the importance of linguistic, stylistic, and narrative features in conveying hurt in literature. The use of non-linear narrative structures, fragmented narratives, metaphor, imagery, symbolism, tone, point of view, and narrative voice are all important aspects of conveying painful experiences in literature.

The Concept of Trauma

Trauma refers to a socio-mental and emotional response to a distressing event, which can be caused by experiencing, witnessing, or learning about an event that involves actual or threatened death, serious injury, or sexual violence. The concept of trauma has evolved over time, and its definition continues to be refined. The word itself is derived from a Greek word meaning "wound". The American Psychological Association (2024) defines, "trauma as an emotional response to a terrible event like an accident, crime, natural disaster, physical or emotional abuse, neglect, experiencing or witnessing violence, death of a loved one, war, and more". This study examined how these issues after the characters of the Nigerian literacy writers.

The Concept of Stylistics

Akpan (2025) opines that stylistics study style in a language. It involves analyzing the linguistic features such as syntax, vocabulary, and figurative extensions that contribute to the overall style of a text. These issues will be examined in the texts under review.

The Concept of Post-colonial Theory

Bhabha (1994) maintains that postcolonial theory is a critical framework that analyses the legacy of colonialism and its ongoing impact on cultures, societies, and individuals. It examines the way in which colonial powers have shaped the identities, histories, and cultures of colonized peoples, and how these effects continue to be felt in the present.

Methodology

This study adopted a qualitative research design, using a multimodal comparative analysis approach to examine the linguistic, stylistic and pragmatic representation of hurt in Nigerian literature. The data for this study consisted of two Nigerian novels: Chinua Achebe's *Things fall Apart* (1979) and Buchi Emecheta's *The Joys of Motherhood* (1979). These two texts were selected because they are considered classics of Nigerian literature and offer insight into the experiences of Nigerians during the colonial and post-colonial periods.

The data was analyzed using a combination of critical discourse analysis (CDA), stylistics and pragmatics. CDA was used to examine how language is used to construct and convey hurt, and how these constructions reflect and shape power relations and social norms. Stylistics was used to analyze the linguistic and literary devices used to create stylistic effects and convey hurt. Pragmatics was used to investigate how hurt is used to investigate social interactions. The analysis involved a systematic and detailed examination of style in the two novels. The analysis focused on the following features: Linguistic features (Metaphor, imagery, symbolism), Stylistic features (narrative structure, tone, point of view), and pragmatic features (speech acts, implicature).

Findings and Results

Linguistic features of hurt in Achebe's *Things fall Apart* (1958) and Emecheta are *The Joy of Motherhood (1979).*

1) **Metaphor:** Both Achebe and Emecheta use metaphors to convey hurt. For instance, the table below will explain the use of metaphors by the writers.

Metaphor	**Source**	**Commentary**
"The art of conversation is regarded very highly, and proverbs are the palm-oil with which words are eaten"	Achebe (1958, p.12)	This metaphor compares proverbs to palm-oil, highlighting their importance in Igbo conversation.
"Okonkwo's death like a tree falling in the forest, sudden and unexpected"	Achebe (1958, p.47)	It compares Okonkwo's death to a tree falling emphasizing its suddenness and impact.
"The word was silent and still, like a woman who had just been beaten"	Achebe (1958, p.37)	This metaphor compares the world to beaten woman, emphasizing the impact of colonialism.
"The villagers were like ants, scurrying about in confusion"	Achebe (1958, p.67)	This metaphor compares the villagers to ants, highlighting their disorganization and powerlessness.
"Okonkwo's heart was like a stone, hard and unyielding"	Achebe (1958, p.42)	This metaphor compares Okonkwo's heart to a stone, meaning that he is stubborn.
"The white man's road was like a snake, winding and treacherous"	Achebe (1958, p.55)	This compares the white man's road to a snake, emphasizing its danger and unpredictability.

"Nnu Ego's body was like a vessel, empty and waiting to be filled"	Emecheta, (1979, p. 10)	This metaphor compares Nnu Ego's body to vessel, highlighting her role as a mother.
Motherhood was like a Shroud, wrapping itself around Nnu Ego's life"	Emecheta (1979, p.17)	This metaphor compares motherhood to a shroud, wrapping itself around Nnu Ego's life.
"Nnu Ego's children were like birds, flying away from their nest"	Emecheta, (1979, p.32)	This metaphor compares motherhood to a shroud emphasizing its oppressive nature.
"Nnu Ego's life was like a rover, flowing stealing but with hidden depths"	Emecheta, (1979, p.45)	This metaphor compares Nnu Ego's life to a river, emphasizing its complexity and hidden nature.
"Nnu Ego's body was like a battlefield, scarred and wounded from the struggles of method"	Emecheta, (1979, p.104)	This metaphor compares Nnu Ego's body to a battlefield, emphasizing the physical and emotional fall of motherhood.

Imagery: Again, both writers use vivid imagery to convey hurt, see the table below:

Imagery	**Commentary**
"Yam imagery" (Achebe 1958, p.4)	Yams are a staple crop in Igbo society and represent wealth, status, and masculinity. Okonkwo's yam harvest is a source of pride for him.

"Louist Invasion" (Achebe 1958, p. 43)	The locust invasion symbolizes the destructive power of colonialism and the disruption of traditional ways of life
"Fire imagery" (Achebe, 1958, p. 122)	Fire represent both destruction and renewal Okonkwo stares at a log fire and feels a strong feeling to rise and take action.
"Palm tree imagery" (Achebe, 1958, p. 141)	Palm trees represent the communal values of Igbo society and the interconnectedness of all living things.
"Urban landscape imagery" (Emecheta, 1979, p.23)	The urban landscape of Lagos serves as a backdrop for Nnu Ego's struggles and triumphs
"Market imagery" (Emecheta, 1979, p.41)	The market senses in the novel are vivid and sensory, highlighting the sights, sound, and smells of urban Lagos
"Food imagery" (Emecheta, 1979, p.71)	Food play a significant role in the novel, with Nnu Ego's cooking serving as a source of comfort and connection to her cultural heritage
"Nature imagery" (Emecheta, 1979, p.92)	The novel uses natural imagery such as the sun and the rain, to symbolize Nnu Ego's emotional state.

Stylistic Feature of Hurt in the Novels

1) **Narrative structure:** Both authors use non-linear narrative structures to convey hurt. For example, in *Thing Fall Apart* (1958), the novel's narrative is non-linear, with the story unfolding through a series of flashbacks and flash forwards. Examples:

a) The novel begins with a flashback to Okonkwo's childhood, where he is shown to be a vulnerable and sensitive boy who is struggling to come to terms with his father's weaknesses (Achebe, 1958, p. 3)

b) Okonkwo's father, Unoka, is introduced through a flashback, which shows him to be a lazy and ineffective man who is unable to provide for his family. (Achebe, 1958, p. 10)

c) The oracle prophesies that Okonkwo will be exiled from his community, which is a flash forward to the events that will unfold in the novel. (Achebe, 1958, p. 123)

d) The novel flash forward to the death of Okonkwo's daughter, Ezinma, which is a tragic event that marks the beginning of Okonkwo's downfall. (Achebe, 1958, p. 143)

Similarly, like in Achebe's novel, *The Joys of Motherhood* also used non-linear narrative structure, with the story unfolding through a series of flashbacks and flash forwards some example are cited below:

a) The novel flashes back to Nnu Ego's childhood, where she is shown to be a young girl struggling to come to terms with her family's poverty and her own desire for education. (Emecheta, 1979, p. 15).

b) The novel flashes backs to Nnu Ego's marriage to Nnaife, which is marked by tension and conflict. (Emecheta, 1979, p. 40).

c) The novel also flashes forward to Nnu Ego's old age, where she is shown to be a lonely and isolated woman struggling to come to terms with her life (Emecheta, 1979, p. 150).

d) The novel flashes forward to Nnu Ego's death, which is marked by a sense of peace and closure. (Emecheta, p. 220).

Pragmatic features of Hurt in the Novels

1. **Speech Acts**: Both authors used speech acts to convey hurt. For instance, in Achebe's *Thing Fall Apart*, we have the following examples.

Speech Act	**Type**	**Context**	**Illocutionary**
"You are a young man now, and it is time for you to begin learning the ways of our people" (Achebe 1958, p. 56)	Directives	Okonkwo is talking to his son, Nwoye about his responsibility as a young man	The directive speech act is to guide Nwoye to know his responsibilities
"I shall take the highest title land, and I shall be one of the leaders of our clan" (Achebe, p. 123)	Commissive	Okonkwo's is talking to Obierieka about his plan to take titles in the clan	This commissive speech act is used to commit Okonkwo to his goals and plans
"My daughter, my daughter, why must you suffer so much" (Achebe 1958, p. 143)	Expressive	Okonkwo is expressing his emotion to Obierika after his daughter, Ezima fall ill	The expressive speech acts is used to express Okonkwo's emotion and concerns for his daughter's well begin
"You must make sure to cook a good meal for your husband every day and take care of the	Directive	Nnu Ego's mother, Onna, is advising Nnu Ego on her responsibility as a wife and mother	The directive speech act is used to instruct and guide Nnu Ego on her domestic responsibilities

children" (Emecheta, 1979, p. 50)			
"I will have many more children and I will make sure you have better life than I did" (Emecheta, 1979, p. 120)	Commissive	Nnu Ego is talking to her friend, Adaku, about her plans to have more children	The commissive speech act is used commit Nnu Ego to her plans and goals
"My child, my child, why must you suffer so? What have I done to deserve this? (Emecheta,1979, p. 18)	Expressive	Nnu Ego is expressing her emotion to her friend, Adaku, after her child falls ill	The expressive speech act is used to express Nnu Ego's emotion, and concerns for her child's well begin

2. **Implicatures:** Again, both writers employ implicatures to convey hurt as the table below shows:

Implicature	**Type**	**Commentary**
"The illness is not serious, but it is sign of the times" (Achebe, 1958, p. 143)	Implicatures of cultural decline	The implicatures is that the cultural value of the Igbo people are declining
"A man must not weep" (Achebe, 1959, p. 56)	Implicatures of masculine insecurity	The implicatures here is that Okonkwo is insecure about his manliness and is trying to prove himself

"The pacification of the primitive tribes of the lower Niger has been accomplished by the British" (Achebe, 1958, p. 209)	Implicatures of colonialism's impact	The implicatures is that colonialism has had devastating impact in the Igbo people and their culture
"When Nnu Ego's mother, Onna, says, "a woman's place is in the home" (Emecheta, 1979, p. 40)	Implicatures of patriarchal oppression	The implicatures is that women are oppressed and marginalized in a patriarchal society
"A woman must have children to be considered a real woman". (Emecheta, 1979, p. 50)	Implicatures of cultural expectations	The implicatures is that cultural expectations around motherhood are deeply ingrained and limiting in a women
"I will do anything to feed my children" (Emecheta, 1979, p. 120)	Implicatures of economic struggle	The implicatures is that economic struggle and poverty are a constant reality for many women in Nigeria

Comparative Analysis of *Thing Fall Apart* and *The Joys of Motherhood*

Category	**Thing fall Apart**	**The Joy of Motherhood**
Author	Chinua Achebe	Buchi Emecheta
Publication Year	1958	1979
Setting	Igbo society, Nigeria	Lagos, Nigeria.
Plot	Okonkwo's struggle with cultural change	Nnu Ego's struggles with Motherhood and marriage
Tone	Somber, tragic	Ironic, satirical
Narrative style	Formal, traditional	Modern, experimental
Protagonist	Okonkwo (male)	Nnu Ego (female)
Themes	Cultural identity,	

Symbolism	Patriarchy, Colonialism Yam (masculinity, strength).	Cultural identity, Patriarchy, Colonialism Children (future hope, responsibility)
Characterization	Okonkwo (complex flawed)	Nnu Ego (strong, determined)

Discussion of Findings

The findings of this study reveal significant difference in the linguistic, stylistic, and pragmatic features used to convey hurt in Achebe's *Things Fall Apart* and Emecheta's *The Joys of Motherhood*. The result suggests that Achebe uses more formal and somber language to convey the destruction and chaos caused by colonialism, while Emecheta use more conversational and reflective language to convey the physical and emotional pain of childbirth. These findings support the theoretical framework of trauma theory, which suggests that trauma experiences can be conveyed through language and narrative structure. The study's results also contribute to the field to post-colonial studies, highlighting the importance of considering the linguistic and stylistic features of literary texts in understanding the experiences of colonized people.

However, the study has some limitations. The analysis was limited to two novels, and future research could benefit from a more comprehensive analysis of multiple texts. Additionally, the study's focus on linguistic and stylistic features may have overlooked other important aspects of the texts, such as historical and cultural context. Future research could explore the application or trauma theory to other literary texts, or examine the use of language and narrative structures in conveying traumatic experiences in different cultural texts.

Conclusion

This study examined the linguistic, stylistic, and pragmatic features used to convey hurt in Achebe's *Thing Fall Apart* and Emecheta's *The Joys of Motherhood*. The findings revealed

significant differences in the use of metaphor, imagery, narrative structure, tone, speech acts, and implicatures between the two novels.

The study's results contribute to our understanding of how hurt is conveyed in literary texts, highlighting the importance of considering the linguistic, stylistic, and pragmatic feature of language in understanding the experience of characters. The study's findings also have implications for the field of post-colonial studies, highlighting the need to consider the linguistic and stylistic features of literary texts in understanding the experiences of colonized peoples.

In conclusion, this study demonstrates the importance of linguistic, stylistic, and pragmatic analysis in understanding the conveyances of hurt in literary texts. The study's findings have implications for our understanding of literary texts and the experiences of characters, and highlight the need for further research in this area.

Recommendations

From the findings and conclusion on this study, the following recommendations are advanced:

i. Nigerian writers should deliberately create works that raise awareness on the sociocultural implications that borders on the individual self-examination bothering on mental issues.

ii. Government should as a matter of urgency advocate for policies that address the root causes of hurt and trauma, such as poverty, inequality and social injustice.

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