Journal of Arts and Linguistics Studies
ISSN Print 2959-0957 ISSN Online 2959-0965
Volume 2 Issue 1 2024
Pages 343-359

Open Access

A Feminist Critical Discourse Analysis of Speech Acts in Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie's Selected Novels

Publication Details
Paper Received:
December 25, 2023
Paper Accepted:
Feburary 27, 2024
Paper Published:
March 15, 2024

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Abstract
This article explores male hegemonic structures embedded in speech acts employed in Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie's novels, Purple Hibiscus, Half of a Yellow Sun and Americanah. Feminist critical discourse analysis (FCDA) has been applied with an aim to illustrate that female characters in these novels are able to create and sustain their space in a male dominating society through linguistic acts of resistance. They are successful in disintegrating the power of the males as they essentialize the part played by them in society. Selective types of speech acts like expressives, commissives, directives, assertives, emphatics and imperatives given by the Oxford Philosopher, John Langshaw Austin, have been used in foregrounding the concept of feminism which help in breaking the stereotypes of the masculine society.
Keywords: hegemony, dominating, essential, foregrounding, feminism, stereotypes.

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Introduction:

Patriarchy asserts male authority and ascendancy while females are expected to be subservient. This assertion becomes an ostensible phenomenon in Adichie's novel, *Purple Hibiscus, Half of a Yellow Sun and Americanah*. The novels reflect those oppressive measures through which females are denied their basic rights and the privileges they deserve. For instance, they are not given shares in their property and are expected to follow the dictates of patriarchy blindly as illustrated

in *Purple Hibiscus* in which Eugene turns out to be an oppressive father. However, Adichie also presents in her novels such as *Americanah* and *Half of a Yellow Sun* ideals of independent women who struggle to break the notions of patriarchy as they avail their socio-economic rights to an extent possible.

This article mainly focuses on the objectives that how certain speech acts in the novels depict male hegemony and how through feminist critical discourse female characters are shown to have carved out a liberating space for themselves in the selected novels. The major speech acts which have been explored in the three novels are expressives, commissives, assertives, directives, emphatics and imperatives. These speech acts share a linguistic connection with the protagonists of all the three novels.

Research Questions:

1. How do the speech acts depict male hegemony in the selected novels?
2. What role is performed by speech acts which help female protagonists in carving out a liberating space for themselves?

Literature Review:

Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie, a contemporary Nigerian novelist, studied medicine and pharmacy at the University of Nigeria. The Nigerian civil war in which she lost her grandmother had a great impact on her personality, imagination, and writings. She was a direct witness to the issues of starvation and malnutrition, especially the sufferings and deaths of children. Adichie went to the United States when she was nineteen years old with an aim to study communications and political science at the University of Drezel in Philadelphia. Several short stories and non-fiction works have been produced by Adichie which show her acute sensitivity and understanding about her culture and society. Her works include four books, *Purple Hibiscus* (2003), *Half of a Yellow Sun* (2006), *Americanah*

(2013), and *Dear Ijewele, A Feminist Manifesto in Fifteen Suggestions* (2017) and a collection of short stories, *The Thing Around Your Neck* (2009). Adichie's latest work, *Dear Ijewele a Feminist Manifesto in Fifteen Suggestions* (2017) talks about a novice mother who plans to raise her baby girl to be a powerful feminist in the society. This work foregrounds the perception that a woman must be bold and independent.

Adichie has also spoken in many Tedx talks in which she emphasizes the rights of women and in her talk titled, "The danger of a single story," which she presented in July 2009, she talks about her passion for writing. She highlights the negative consequences which a single story may have in the lives of people. In another Tedx talk entitled "We should all be feminists" (2012), Adichie emphasizes the need to be called a happy African feminist or become a true feminist. She vociferously discusses the concept of feminism and its manifestations and reception in society.

Various themes have been discussed by Adichie in her writings such as male hegemony, identity, religion, and domestic violence. The notion of identity is apparent in Adichie's novel, *Americanah* as the leading character constantly struggles for her identity. In *Purple Hibiscus*, the notion of identity is accentuated through Kambili's behaviour. She strongly retaliates against her father's religious values which he tries to enforce upon his children. She refuses to accept them and claims her individuality. In *Americanah,* the protagonist Ifemelu presents an example of a character with a strong identity which she explores in a new country, America, where she grows both economically and socially. In *Half of a Yellow Sun*, Olanna's character is a portrayal of her exploration of her identity for which she moves to Nsukka as a lecturer in a university.

The concept of men's callousness towards women rights has been highlighted by sociologists such as Raewyn Connell. Female characters in Adichie's novel face

a similar indifference. In *Half of a Yellow Sun*, Olanna is highly affected by the actions of her lover, Odenigbo. Adichie lays emphasis on the fact that women must prosper both socially and economically to play an essential role in the society. Women's immense importance is conspicuously illustrated through the character of Olanna in the novel.

The discourse on African feminism contrasts with Western feminist writings. Western feminism mostly ignores issues like racism whereas in African feminism, racial concerns inform the position of African women. Western feminism talks about men and women as equal, whereas the roles and positions are defined but equally powerful in African feminism. However, like any other group of women, African women are also looked upon as being inferior and they are bound to follow the dictates of patriarchy. From the perspective of the west, Mary Wollstonecraft strongly advocates in her book, *A Vindication of Rights of Woman* (1792), that women are equal to men. African feminist writings talk about the traditional role of a woman but fail to find this equality. Barbara Smith in her book "*Towards a Black Feminist Criticism*" discusses the issues that women have to face, and she conjectures the solutions to these issues as well. Her main concern is about the black women who have been considered an outcast in the society. Subsequently, African womanism was conceptually formulated by Clenora Hudson Weems in the 1980s which is based on Afrocentrism (Dove, 1998) and it highlights the endeavours made by the black women. It also talks about African mothers who are involved in continuous struggle in the regaining and reconstruction of their identities. Weems asserts that African women have also played a vital role in resisting European persecutions.

African feminist literature highlights the concepts of reformist, transformative and radical African feminism. Transformative and radical feminism strongly criticize patriarchal notions. Radical feminist literature states that women are

destined to be treated harshly by men. Writers like Grace Ogot and Flora Nwapa emphasize the importance of giving equal rights and opportunities to women. Ogot in her novel, *The Graduate,* talks about giving more privileges to women. She asserts that women can manage their career and family life simultaneously. Adichie's novel, *Americanah,* also presents her protagonist, Ifemelu, as a strong woman who prospers economically as she settles herself in a new country. Nwapa also accentuates the importance of female rights. She argues that women must be given the authority to choose their marriage partner. Her writings reveal the longing a woman has for her husband's affection. Nwapa's work traces a close connection with Adichie's novels as Adichie also reveals the same perception in *Half of a Yellow Sun* in which the leading female character, Olanna is affected by her lover, Odenigbo's acts. She is disturbed when she finds out that he has started taking interest in another girl.

Another Nigerian writer, Akachi Adimora Ezeigbo calls attention towards women's rights. Through her stories, she strongly expresses the presumption that a woman should not be deprived from her rights. Through her characters, she shows a woman as a strong individual who is ready to stand and speak for her own self. Mariama Ba is also of the opinion that women are a significant part of the society, and they should be given the right to avail their freedom. Buchi Emecheta also raises similar notions in her writings. She talks about the fact that men are dominant, and women must follow and act according to their orders. Emecheta's works and ideas share a close resemblance with Adichie's novel, *Purple Hibiscus*. In her novel, Adichie presents Eugene as the authoritative figure who expects his children to bow before him blindly. Micere Mugo in her book, "Writing and Speaking from the Heart of my Mind" highlights the stance that women must be given the chance to write. Bessie Head, one of Botswana's writers, denounces the patriarchal concepts in her writing.

African writers present a remarkable picture of their characters before the reader. Like Chinhua Achebe's Okonwo, Adichie's Eugene in *Purple Hibiscus* is presented as a zealous religious extremist. The theme of male hegemony plays an eminent role in all the three novels. *Half of a Yellow Sun* exemplifies male hegemony through the character of Odenigbo. In fact, in all her novels, her male characters stand out as domineering and conspicuously influential.

Coming to the speech acts which form the backbone of FCDA in this paper, the works of two scholars, Austin, and Searle, are significant. Their main concern was with speech acts in general rather than those speech acts used in literature. Austin asserts that the meaning is not only contextual, but there are also many other functions of language in speech. Speech acts are used for performing different roles. One of the functions performed by speech acts is that it is used for the augmentation of social relations (Di Pietro, 1994). According to J. Hillis Miller, speech acts are distinguished from other speech acts in the world by their method of citation. Miller further states that literature is itself a portion of a speech act. According to the philosophy of language and linguistics, speech act is something demonstrated by an individual that not only gives information but performs an action too. Speech acts are used to serve their function once they are conveyed. Acts such as apologizing, promising, ordering, requesting are all included in speech acts.

Expressives are used to search an individual's psychological state. They demonstrate a person's feelings at a given point in time. Commissives are those speech acts in which speakers commit themselves to a certain action such as promises and pledges (Yule, 1996). Emphatics are used when a character searches for himself/ herself in the novel. These are used to interpret and analyze the inner self of the characters. For instance, Kambili gradually discovers herself in *Purple Hibiscus*. The reader is able to access Kambili's inner self through her

actions. Assertives help the characters show their authority. Directives are used when a speaker commands someone else to do something. With the help of FCDA, the functions of these speech acts in Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie's *Purple Hibiscus*, *Half of a Yellow Sun* and *Americanah* will be elaborated.

Many types of speech acts are used for the elaboration of literary texts. This article develops a connection between speech acts and their literary texts. Performative speech acts have been used in the novel, *Portrait of a Lady*. Expressives have been used profoundly by Chariton in his works, Henry James in his novel, *The Awkward* Age, and Mathew Arnold in his novel, *The Reason You're Alive*. Expressives are also used by Bapsi Sidhwa in her novel, *An American Brat*. The use of commissives is prevalent in Chaucer's works, while Shakespeare uses directives in his plays, such as in *King Lear*. This study focuses on those speech acts which promote feminist agenda of the writer.

Research Methodology:

This article uses the feminist critical discourse analysis (FCDA) as the methodological approach to analyse the texts. FCDA emphasizes the notion of gender as a subjective composition which divides people into two different categories, men and women. Women are considered as subservient while men are privileged in all respects. Liberal feminism states that women are subjugated in society because they are not considered equal to men (Jagger, 1983). The focus of feminist critical discourse analysis is on the functioning of power and doctrines in terms of dispositions of gender. It demonstrates females as strong individuals who refuse to bow before masculine dictation. According to the perception of feminist theorist, Michelle D. Lazar, the theory of feminist critical discourse analysis is used for the formation of our realities (Lazar, 2005). Lazar is also of the opinion that the concept of power is linked with our societal norms (Lazar, 2007). In her book, *Gender, Power, and Ideology in Discourse* (2005), Lazar

discusses about men's domination over women and how women show their resistance towards power structures.

In this study, FCDA has been combined with various kinds of speech acts to address the research questions posed earlier. The female characters make an extensive use of expressives and emphatics in their dialogues. The use of such kinds of speech acts by the female characters adds to their significance and superiority as true feminist individuals. Qualitative research is used in this paper for the application of FCDA under speech acts found in the selected three novels.

Lazar, the major proponent of FCDA, brings to the reader's attention the digressive power found in social relations. Ifemelu is an example of a digressive character in *Americanah* who struggles for her social and economic amelioration. The novel demonstrates that regardless of a person's race, s/he can still flourish and achieve success as Ifemelu endeavours to build her social and personal identity in the US. The novel, *Purple Hibiscus,* rejects the notion of patriarchy. Through the dialogues of the protagonist, Kambili, the reader sympathizes with her state of repression from which she struggles to break away. *Half of a Yellow Sun* presents a bleak and melancholic picture through its narration. The novel deals with the Nigerian civil war and its devastating effects which leave an unsettling impact on the minds of the reader. The novel also accentuates the themes of marriage and romantic relationship between Olanna and Odenigbo which run parallel with violence and bloodshed and help provide an insight into gender dynamics.

In this article, a connection has been made between speech acts and the concept of male hegemony. Speech acts such as expressives, directives, commissives, assertives and imperatives are identified and linked with Adichie's texts. We have chosen expressives, commissives and imperatives as the major speech acts

in these three novels. The kind of expressives which have been used in the novel, *Purple Hibiscus*, reveal Eugene as a strong and enforcing male dominating character who expects everyone else to obey him: "Everytime Aunt Ifeoma spoke to papa, my heart stopped, then started again in a hurry" (Adichie, 77). This expression reflects Kambili's fear of her father when he had a conversation with her aunt. Expressives are also used to reflect the influence and eminence of feminist thoughts: "'Thanks be to God'. It was what Jaja, and I said what papa expected us to say when good things happened" (Adichie, 20). This expressive is a strong indication of Kambili being an influential female character. Another expressive which accentuates feminist authority of Aunty Ifeoma is reflected in her retort to her brother: "'Eugene, let the children come out with us!' Aunty Ifeoma sounded irritated" (Adichie, 77). This expressive feature the importance, centrality, and influence of feminist ideology prevailing in the novel. Aunty Ifeoma forces Kambili's father to allow his children to spend time at their aunt's place, thus, she counters the influence of patriarchy by carving out a place of comfort for her niece and nephew.

The use of commissives also reflects the significance of feminist thoughts and ideas. For example: "'God will deliver us', I said, knowing Papa would like my saying that" (Adichie, 26). This commissive is an attempt by Kambili to please her father while gaining importance. Other commissives are a portrayal of male dominance and patriarchy: "We are going to publish underground now,' Papa said. 'It is no longer safe for my staff'" (Adichie, 43). In this commissive, Kambili's father, Eugene makes a commitment that he will publish the newspaper secretly. Although Eugene is active in political matters, he treats his children brutally at home. When he finds out that Ade Coker, an editor has written about the importance of freedom in his newspaper, *The Standard*, he becomes conscious that the public may find out about his activities, i.e., about the way he treats his

wife and children. This hypocritical attitude becomes a hallmark of patriarchy. Other commissives also exhibit authority of the male members: "Your mother will be back tomorrow; about the time you get back from school. She will be fine," he said (Adichie, 34). In this commissive, Kambili's father shows a protective side to his personality. However, even in his assurance lies his authority since he considers himself to be the only person resorting to any means of consolation for his childre Imperatives are also prevalent in *Purple Hibiscus*. The use of imperatives accentuates patriarchal dominance as well as eminence of feminist ideas: Papa looked at my report card for a while longer; then he said, "Come down for dinner" (Adichie, 40). This imperative is an example of the performative force of Eugene's words. As a strong male individual, his commanding position makes Kambili helpless, and she has no choice than to be obedient. Other imperatives are also used to reflect patriarchal influence: "'Maybe the next time they are on a holiday', Papa said firmly (Adichie, 97). In this imperative, Kambili's father represents himself as a potent patriarch. He is speaking to his sister and rejects her request to take his children to her home, so they get an opportunity to meet their cousins. The children have a desire to go to their aunt's place because they feel confined in their own home. An imperative has also been used to give value to female desires: "'I plan to go on pilgrimage there with the children,' Aunt Ifeoma said. 'Maybe Kambili and Jaja can go with us' " (Adichie, 99). In this imperative, Aunt Ifeoma is shown as an influential female who convinces Eugene to let him take his children along with her.

Speech acts have also been used in Adichie's novel, *Half of a Yellow Sun*. This novel revolves around the Nigerian civil war. The use of expressives in this novel aligns with the perspective of male hegemony. Richard, a male character in the novel develops a strong affiliation with his lover, Susan. His fervent feelings towards Susan are expressed by his dialogues: "'Susan, I care very much about

you', he said in a rush" (Adichie, 66). The expressives used in the novel also correspond with the concept of feminist critical discourse analysis because the female characters express retribution towards the male characters through their dialogues. Kainene, a female character in the novel feels contented in demeaning her father's position: "'I once spat in my father's glass of water', she said. 'He hadn't upset me or anything. I just did. I was fourteen. I would have been incredibly satisfied if he drank it, but of course Olanna ran and changed the water'" (Adichie, 114). Another expressive is an illustration of Aunty Ifeka's attitude towards Sarduana who is shown as a dominating male character. For e.g. "'The Sarduana was an evil man, ajommadu', Aunty Ifeka said" (Adichie, 130).

The commissives in the novel are a strong portrayal of male dominance in *Half of a Yellow Sun*. Some of them also reflect the importance of feminist ideas: "'We'll leave for Umuahia tomorrow,' he said" (Adichie, 194). In this commissive, the master is making a commitment that he and Ugwu will leave for Umuahia the next day. He establishes his dominating position in society by the use of this commissive. Here is an example of another commissive which indicates male authority: "'I will enroll you in the staff primary school,' Master said, still tapping on the piece of paper with his pen" (Adichie, 11). This commitment is a derogatory comment by the Master in which he humiliates his servant. Since the servant is economically dependent upon his master, the commissive reflects patriarchy which holds true for both women and weak men. An example of a commissive which shows female nature and resilience towards hard times is reflected in Olanna's statement: "I'm going to tell Patel. I want him to come and look at you" (Adichie, 160).

The imperatives in *Half of a Yellow Sun* are an illustration of male ascendency and superiority as well. For e.g. "'Biafra will win this war, God has written it in the sky,' said a man with a beard plaited in a single thin strand" (Adichie, 289).

In this imperative, this man is shown as a strong masculine figure who is firm in his ideas. Other imperatives have been used for male dominion: "This will be over soon, nkem, and we will have parties in a free Biafra" (Adichie, 282). According to this imperative, Odenigbo thinks that all the commotion caused by the war will be over and they will celebrate when they get a free Biafran state. The imperative demonstrates Odenigbo as a strong and eminent masculine figure. Some imperatives also reflect the essentiality of feminist thought. For instance, "I want to have a baby boy first, because it will place my feet firmly in Onyeka's house" (Adichie, 119). In this imperative, Anulika, Ugwu's sister thinks that her new born baby will have the right to develop a strong foundation in his father's home which will be his property.

This article also illustrates the manifestations of male hegemony through Adichie's novel, *Americanah*. This novel portrays Ifemelu, the leading character as a strong and valiant female individual who is ready to prove herself a firm and resolute individual despite her race. Though she is black, she struggles to establish her identity in the new country, America. The paramount significance of the male characters is felt by the readers through their dialogues and actions. A boy in a baseball cap expresses his sense of amazement when he finds out that Ifemelu belongs to Africa. It is hard for him to believe this: "That's really cool!" (Adichie, 158). Another example of expressive is when Nigel, a male character, expresses ardent feelings for his lover, Haley: "Truth is, I am not really shagging Haley. I like her, but I don't know how to tell her" (Adichie, 315). This expressive exemplifies the fact that males are capable of showing their feelings too. Other expressives used in the novel show how females create their space in a male dominating society. For example, "Actually my experience has been the opposite. I get a lot more interest from white men than from African American men" (Adichie, 397). This expressive is an indication of the fact that Ifemelu wants to

please the white men, thus she is creating her space by catching the attention of the white men.

The use of commissives in *Americanah* reflect both male hegemony as well as feminine influence: "I've never gone abroad but my father has promised me that I will go for university" (Adichie, 79). In this commissive, Emenike, Obinze's former classmate says that she has never gone abroad but her father has promised her that she will be attending university there. This commissive is made by Emenike's father who is shown as an important male individual here. Other commissives used in the novel portray females as important members of the society. For example, Aunty Uju turned back ejaculates: "He'll change. I'll make him change. I just need to go slowly" (Adichie, 95). In this commissive, Aunty Uju commits to herself that she wants to see a change in Ifemelu's father. She is determined to change him. The commissive undoubtedly illustrates Aunty Uju as an eminent female figure whose views hold significance. Another commissive used in the novel brings forward the idea of female precedence: "Maybe I should stay and finish here" (Adichie, 123). In this commissive, Ifemelu makes a commitment with Obinze saying that she is planning to stay in Nsukka. Ifemelu's mother sees in her dream that there are more chances of her daughter's prosperity in America, but Ifemelu is confused about whether she should finish her studies in Nsukka first or she should go to America to study something new. But then she tells her friend that it is better if she stays in Nsukka.

The imperatives used in *Americanah* also contemplate feminine supremacy. For e.g. "I'll finish my residency and Dike will go to a better school and better day care" (Adichie, 174). In this imperative, Ifemelu commands that her cousin, Dike will go to a better school. Her taking of decisions for her cousin shows her as an influential and strong female character. Some imperatives in the novel are a reflection of females as a notable member of the society: "You are really going

to marry him" (Adichie, 175). Through this imperative, Ifemelu thinks that it is important for her friend, Olga, to get married to Dike. In another example of an imperative, female resilience is projected: "I cannot marry a Nigerian and I won't let anybody in my family marry a Nigerian" (Adichie, 231). In this imperative, Mariama is expressing her feelings of aversion about marrying a Nigerian. She thinks that Nigerians can do anything for the sake of money.

Discussion:

This paper emphasizes that all three novels divulge a connection of speech acts with male hegemonic actions. A connection is made between three speech acts expressives, commissives and imperatives with the principles of Feminist Critical Discourse Analysis. (FCDA). The principle of FCDA which states that feminist thought is central and influential is revealed in Adichie's novel, *Americanah*. Here, the protagonist endeavours to create her space in a male dominating society. Gender relationality is another important term used in the theory of FCDA. It deals with the way of being and doing a woman. The concept is apparent in the novel, *Americanah* through Ifemelu's character. Ifemelu is shown as a strong woman who overcomes all obstacles in her way to attain social and economic fulfillment. The dominant liberal ideology talks about the equality of women. This ideology lays stress on the notions that women are not less than men in any respect. Ifemelu is shown evolving into a bold and courageous girl throughout the novel. When she goes to America, in the beginning, she is mocked by other girls, but she answers their questions and responds to them confidently. Though it is not an easy task for her to find a good job, she never gives up hope.

The speech acts in all the novels revolve around the concept of patriarchy. Male characters are shown as hostile, obtrusive, and belligerent in all the novels. In *Half of a Yellow Sun*, the female characters are shown developing as empowered figures. For instance, Olanna is an eminent female character in the novel who

enforces her commands upon her cousin, Muhammad, at many times in the novel. Anulika, another leading female character in the novel is adamant that she wants to have a baby boy first. The actions and thoughts of the female characters reflect their conflict with patriarchy in the entire novel. Similarly, *Americanah* catches an evocative picture of a female individual who is determined to gain fame and name in a new country. Ifemelu is ready to establish herself socially and economically as she pays no heed to the obstacles she faces during this process. The proposition of FCDA that feminist ideas are prominent and enabling is closely associated with the commissives used in Adichie's novel, *Americanah*. Ifemelu makes a commitment with herself that she will stay in Nsukka and finish her studies. Her perception revealed through speech acts conspicuously illustrates that feminist ideals have been upheld.

Conclusion:

The purpose of this article was to delve into the portrayal of male hegemony with respect to various kinds of speech acts. Moreover, the focus of this article was on how the theory of feminist critical discourse analysis is helpful in carrying out a liberating space for the females. The feminist streak is present largely in all of Adichie's novels. The theory of FCDA brings forward several aspects. First, the notion of gender relationality is apparent through Ifemelu's character as she is shown as a strong woman overcoming all obstacles coming in her way. Second, the concept of gender performativity is revealed through Ifemelu's physical and verbal actions. Theorists like Betty Friedan assert that woman should not only be considered as housewives, but they also have the right to pursue a career and acquire higher education. Feminism is an attempt to highlight experiences leading towards social transformations (Reinharz, 1992). Third, the theory of FCDA sets forth the perception that gender is not responsible for defining our relations, nor is it responsible for giving us recognition as an individual (Lazar, 2005). In

Americanah, the female character vividly expresses her views before the reader. Fourth, proposition of FCDA talks about the liberation of both men and women (Lazar, 16, 2005). The character of Ifemelu in *Americanah* revolves around this abstraction as she makes a continuous struggle for her liberty as all the other major female characters in Adichie's other novels do.

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