
THE LANGUAGE OF NIGERIAN FEMALE NOVELISTS: A STUDY OF FLORA NWAPA'S EFURU, IFEOMA OKOYE'S MEN WITHOUT EARS AND GRACE AKPAN'S SPIDERWEB

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Abstract

This study on the language of female novelist focuses on Nwapa's Efuru, Okoye's Men without Ears and Akpan's Spiderweb. It set out to examine the linguistic features employed by these writers to extent that the points of similarities and departures are identified. M.A.K. Halliday's Systemic Grammar model was adopted for this paper. It identifies simple, compound and complex sentence types were generally used by these female writers and that the simple sentence type was more predominantly used. The pragmatic effect of the device is that it allows for simplicity and clarity in the presentation of all issues, events and situations in the novels.

One would start with the assumption that every writer has something to say and says it in a special way. The way writers say what they have to say is certainly an outcome of a number of factors basically, the content of any literature produced by a writer is largely determined by the writer's social experience. The writer is influenced by social, cultural and political institutions, which use language, a social creation as their medium. Language itself has been described as man's most precious possession (Gbenga, 1999).

Today, writers need language to communicate their experiences and happenings in the world around them. Writers such as Flora Nwapa, Ifeoma Okoye and Grace Akpan seek to change the world through their communicative activities, and in turn change the behaviour of the audience in response to the message received. In contemporary society, where male chauvinism reigns supreme, female writers have come up to lend their voices to the bias among the male writers. Thus, the female folk choose the literary form as a medium of expression, to reinforce societal attitude. They try to fight sexism in language.

Research Questions

The study was guided by three research questions as follows:

1. How do the female writers studied present their messages?
2. What are the syntactic patterns in the novels of these writers?

3. What are the peculiarities in these writer's style?

Theoretical Framework

This paper depends on M.A.K. Halliday's systemic grammar model. This theory was propounded by M.A.K. Halliday who was influenced by J.R. Firth's theory. In his explication, Halliday upholds that situations are set up to recognize use. He does accept two aspects to the approach of meaning; first he recognizes the order of expectant items between the lexical items, which he calls collocation, and second, he recognizes colligation as having to do with the relation between the grammatical categories of which lexical items are exponents.

Feminist Language

The novels by these female writers have something in common; a tendency to project females who defy male authority and chauvinism and succeed in their own way. There is also a tendency to complain bitterly about female marginalization and ill treatment. Consequently their stories portray a gender war evident in the use of abusive diction and preponderance debased language which present the male characters in an unflattering light.

To assert themselves, the imperative occurs often while copious rhetorical and direct questions also features as a way of asserting the presence and authority of the women. There are clear evidences to suggest that the female writers are calling the attention of every reader to the plight of women and suggesting to the women folk that they can take their own destinies into their hands irrespective of what the male dominated society wants them to do. The three female writers under study seem to be saying that women can break away from Chinua Achebe's kind of woman in *Things Fall Apart*, who is an object of punches and bed-warmer for the man.

It is also clear that there is a female language which is consciously learned in style preferring the use of standard structures to local ones while incorporating current colloquist usages and descriptions that suggest their sex. Also evident in this feminine style is the use of direct statements and simple sentences mixed with complex sentences. A lot of parallel structure and repetitions are also used not only to emphasis the points made but also as a way of creating music and beauty to assert their femininity which of course is synonymous with beauty of form or is it a way of asserting that what men can do women can do even better.

Syntactic Structures in *Efuru*, *Men without Ears*, and *Spider Web*

Simple Sentences in *Efuru*

In Nwapa's *Efuru*, the author uses simple sentences as a predominant type. Examples of such simple sentences are as follows.

- She was a remarkable woman (p. 1)
- This is an abomination (p. 55)
- The woman was embarrassed (p. 37)

- I came home with only nine pence (p. 171)

Compound Sentences in Efurú

- Her husband was not known and people wondered why she married him (p. 7)
- She was given the glass by her husband and the people shouted (p. 23).
- She still loves that imbecile husband of hers and she is gone in search of him (p. 87)

Flora Nwapa has employed language in the novel in the emancipation and reconstruction of femininity. Okereke (1997) said “Flora Nwapa in her novels exhibits a progressive growth of female protagonist from a largely domestic, husband- minded, child- hunting creative, to a liberated entity through the heroines’ use of language”.

“She was a remarkable woman”. In this story, she Nwapa presents Efurú as a very assertive young woman who exercise her personal choices. She decides whom she wants to marry in defiance of the men of her family and goes to her husband without a dowry. It was not only that she came from a distinguished family but she was distinguished herself.

Nwapa provides a feminine perspective of African womanhood and gives a more complex treatment of a female character. Through appropriate use of words and sentences, she successfully delineated her message. She gives her heroine a name Efurú. Efurú is a proper and concrete noun with the qualities (FEMALE + CONCRETE + HUMAN).

She was given the glass by her husband and the people shouted kneel down (p. 23). Here, Efurú is made to submit to the painful clitorodectomy and is made to kneel to her husband during the marriage rites. This is an abomination, the vacillation between independence and dependence, masculinity and feminism, characterizes Efurú’s existence up till the end of the novel.

Nwapa’s reliance on these two types of sentences is because her story carries a simple plot. She is interested in creating a world of women and subtleness and she does this with the simple and compound sentence.

Grace Akapan presents a story that deals with male deception and infidelity. It shows male resistance to female authority until they have no choice but resign themselves to the truth, unpalatable to them. This idea is presented in a beautiful language adorned with sound devices and linguistic foregrounding. Her use of words which describe the man (priest) in despicable terms showing hypocrisy, callousness, and selfishness.

Simple Sentences in Spider Web

Uduak broke the silence (p. 11)

She had no patience with fools (p.16)

Compound Sentence in Spiderweb

The day was enduring fast and the sun had traveled its daily course (p. 188).

Complex Sentence in Spiderweb

- It is difficult when one leaves home (p. 203)
- As soon as she read the letter, she ran.

From **Spiderweb**, the complex sentence is recognized, “it is always difficult when one leaves home” (p. 65). Uduak regretted her having to leave home for Calabar. In Calabar she becomes a stranger and lacks parental care. The absence of this induces her to sleep with Father Tobias, she gets pregnant and that ends her dream of getting qualitative education.

Her language is presented in simple, compound and complex sentence structures, used to reflect the broken lives of the victims.

Simple Sentences in Men without Ears

- She shook her head vehemently (p. 43)
- He has been away for a long time (p. 29)

Men Without Ears is a fictive recreation of a sad episode in our national life, especially manifested in the second republic with its false fronts vulgar life style, ostentatious display of wealth and sharp business practices. To effectively handle this theme, the writers prefer the use of compound sentence structure. This choice is to balance the issue of corruption and anticorruption. Thus as seen from the sentences, one idea is effectively balanced with the other; the issue of corruption represented by Uloko and that of sanity and civility represented by Adaba.

From the analysis so far the three female writers depend largely on the use of simple sentences to convey their messages. Their choice of this variety is for clarity and simplicity.

It is also established that they used other sentence types, the switching from one sentence type to another I was to add beauty and effectiveness to the novels.

Their use of complex sentences was particularly to make important ideas to stand out, and the less important are subordinated. The effect shows the authors consciousness in the struggle to bring women to the forefront while men are given the less prominent position for change.

Conclusion

In conclusion, Nwapa, Okoye, Akpan write about the ills in our society with the view to correcting these abnormalities. They successfully reconstructed the image of the African woman through language. Gender inequality is an issue that is constantly

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perpetuated and sustained through language. Efurū, Uduak and Anny the female characters in the three novels and described in the language that can be semantically analysed with positive attributes. They make themselves voices for the voiceless (women) and use language in a simple but creative way to capture the oppressive tendencies of our men who prey on the women, thereby increasing their pains and woes. They make use of simple sentences which made their work more accessible and the problems presented more glaring.

Recommendations

Having studied the language of female writers, it is recommended that a lexical analysis of the language of the novels under study be researched.

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