

Ideational representation of prostitution and social meaning in Chika Unigwe's *On Black Sisters' Street*

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Abstract

Previous studies on Chika Unigwe's On Black Sisters' Street (OBSS henceforth) have focused mainly on the thematic concerns of the text – prostitution, sex trafficking and sex slavery, without paying considerable attention to the role of language in the projection of the phenomena. This study critically examines ideation as a linguistic tool for inferring or retrieving the social meanings encoded in the text under study. This study also explores how the resources of language can be used in establishing social and power relations in discourse encounters and how their manifestation in literary discourse represents social experiences in real life situations. Working within the tenets of M.A.K. Halliday's Systemic Functional Linguistics (SFL), this study engages in the project of using insights from critical discourse analysis (CDA) and sociolinguistics to ascertain the mental and physical state of the victims of sex slavery, the attitude of their clients, and that of other powerful social actors that inhabit the creative universe of the text under consideration. The significance of this study lies in its demonstration of how the writer's linguistic choices bring about an understanding of the social experiences and ideology that underlie the text under study

Keywords: prostitution, sex trafficking, sex slavery, Nigeria, Chika Unigwe

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Introduction

Prostitution as an integral aspect of urban life has received the attention of many Nigerian and other African writers. Nigeria's Cyprian Ekwensi, popularly regarded as the patriarch of African urban literature, was the first to depict prostitution as an integral component of social life in the city. Charles Nnolim identifies money, sex and power as the compelling principles in the lives of the urban characters in Ekwensi's fiction. This explains why Nnolim (2009:92) describes Ekwensi as "Nigeria's novelist of the city". Ekwensi's *Jagua Nana* (1961) was so critically received by the Nigerian readership that its moral content had to be debated on the floor of the Nigerian parliament on the grounds that it tended to promote immorality. The neo-Platonists in the parliament argued that sex (a tabooed locution in African tradition) and sexual images were brazenly employed in the text by the writer. This, they contended, was capable of injuring public morality.

Ekwensi in his texts on prostitution tries to portray the profession as a debased, dehumanising and hazardous art (occupation), which unfortunately has been essentially sustained under different guises by some depraved but highly placed individuals in society. Some of the prostitutes in *Jagua Nana* like Jagua and Mama Nancy are economically independent women who have sufficient wealth and social connections to contemplate sending their younger boyfriends overseas for further studies. This implies that some of the prostitutes of the twentieth century were, to a large extent, economically independent. This, however, is not the case with the twenty-first century prostitutes we encounter in the works of Chika Unigwe and Ifeanyi Ajaegbo. The young women are mere bonded sex machines who must first satisfy the economic interests of their masters and mistresses before they can obtain their freedom and independence. Many suffer varying degrees of deprivation and losses in the process of working for their freedom and self-actualisation. The construction of prostitution by some twenty-first century writers such as Amma Darko, Unigwe and Ajaegbo is therefore not a mere intertextual extension of the discourse as established in the works of writers like Ekwensi, Ngugi wa Thiong'o, Meja Nwangi, Chinua Achebe, and several others. It is a shocking revelation of how brutally exploitative and internationalised the trade has become in the present century.

Previous studies on Unigwe's *On Black Sisters' Street* have focused mainly on the theme of prostitution without exploring the ideological motivations for the thoughts and actions of discourse participants. Thematic studies are associated chiefly with literary criticism. This study differs significantly from traditional literary criticism by drawing strongly from the linguistic resources of CDA and SFL in the investigation of ideation and tenor in the text under consideration. The study aims at revealing the socio-psychological experiences of the discourse participants involved in

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trans-continental prostitution and sex slavery, and the role of language in framing such experiences. The linguistic and cognitive resources deployed by the writer enable the reader to perceive the inhuman and degrading conditions of victims of the trade and the ideological motivations of the powerful social forces behind the business. The language of the powerful social actors and that of their victims show that sexual exploitation, as a social activity, is a form of dominance. It is a form of dominance because it involves participants who share unequal power relations in which one group maintains a hegemonic control over the other and justifies acts of deprivation and violence against members of the subordinated group. Discourse situations reveal how powerful social actors use language to deceive, seduce, cajole, coerce, threaten and manipulate the weak and the vulnerable in the process of legitimisation. In the end victims are delegitimised and stripped of their basic humanity and identity. The ideology that underlies the text under consideration enables the reader to infer the asymmetrical power relations between the dichotomous groups involved in social interaction as well as the tacit endorsement of sex slavery and exploitation by agencies of the law. Chinyere Nwahunanya observes that prostitution thrives because of the institutional support it receives from agencies of the state. He notes that some countries “see prostitution as a source of income to government coffers, since a number of tourists may find the availability of youthful prostitutes a good reason to travel to those countries where prostitutes operate without legal restrictions” (Nwahunanya 2011: 349). Consequently, a country like South Africa, according to Nwahunanya (2011:348), “is about to introduce a legislation that legitimises prostitution. It is expected that this would give a wider operational space for prostitutes and their clients.”

The text under study shows that a cabal of power is behind prostitution and sex trafficking as a lucrative domestic and international business. This study, therefore, undertakes to unearth how the resources of language in a literary discourse enhance our understanding of how individuals and groups establish or negotiate their identities, legitimise their actions, enact their social experiences, and establish intergroup and interpersonal relationships. Language has always been the medium through which thoughts, feelings, ideologies, and other human experiences are expressed. Language is considered the most viable means of communication; whether spoken, written or gesticulated. It is through the resources of language that individual and group identities and ideologies are construed and expressed. Writers exploit this fascinating nature of language to relate social experiences to their readers through conscious choices made from available linguistic features at every level of language structure. The distinctive way a writer conveys a message constitutes that writer’s style. It is therefore through the instrumentality of language that we see a writer’s ability to conjure pictures and sounds, and imply meaning in the world of his or her text.

The notion of ideation as a linguistic term emanates from the tenets of systemic functional linguistics (SFL) of M.A.K Halliday. The ideational function of language expresses the content or speaker’s experience of the real world, including the inner world of his or her own consciousness. The ideational function or metafunction is sub-divided into two: the experiential (an expression of the user’s experience of his/her real world) and the logical (an expression of the language user’s experience of the internal world of his/her own consciousness). Ideational metafunction is about the natural world in its broadest sense. It is concerned with “ideation”, the resources for construing our experiences of the world around us and inside us. This involves the use of language to represent things, ideas and relations or states of affairs. According to John Haynes (1992: 23), “It is this function which allows us to label things in a situation, to indicate categories and connections among them, and to show more abstract relations such as negation and causation.” Language enables its users to express their knowledge of their cultural and social world, including the inner world of their own consciousness. Stefan Sonderling (2009: 86) argues that “our knowledge and experience of the world are words and meanings mediated by language. The way we organise and articulate our experience is an interpretive process that takes place mainly in, and through, language.”

The functional view of language perceives language as a social resource that enables its users to express ideational meanings, interpersonal meanings, and textual meanings in social and cultural contexts. Suzanne Eggins (2004:11) contends that the fundamental purpose that language has evolved is to enable us to make meanings with each other. In other words, language users do not interact in order to exchange sounds with each other, nor even to exchange words or sentences. People interact in order to make sense of the world and each other. The overall purpose of language, then, can be described as a semantic one, and each text we participate in is a record of the meanings that have been made in a particular context.

The above reinforces the communication of meaning as an essential component of human interactions. SFL takes a sociological view of language and argues that every text, whether structurally complete, grammatically correct or otherwise must make meaning in context. Ideational meanings are about how we represent experience in language. According to Eggins (2004:12), “whatever use we put language to, we are always talking about something or someone doing something.” Interpersonal meanings are meanings about our role relationship with other people and our attitudes to each other. Similarly, whatever use we put language to we are always expressing an attitude and taking up a role.

Textual meanings are meanings about how what we're saying hangs together and relates to what was said before and to the context around us; hence, whatever use we put language to we are always organising our information (Eggins 2004:12). Again, the study of ideation as part of a writer's style is essentially aimed at unearthing the writer's ideology and the social meanings so carefully embedded in the work through the instrumentality of language. In other words, we are considering that very distinct manner in which a writer expresses his or her ideas about subject matter in the world of his or her text. Through the interconnectedness between language and art, a writer is able to communicate to us the flux of goings-on in his or her society, proving succinctly that meaning does not reside in linguistic codes alone, but also in the context wherein said codes are used. One understands this by looking at the text from the angle through which a story is presented or told, the socio-political motivations of the story, the identity of the narrator, the cultural and historical contexts of the narrative, and so on. We can infer the ideational meaning of a text by considering the identities of the participants in a discourse event, their relationships with one another, the background knowledge we have about our social world and the world of the narrative, and the context within which the discourse event takes place.

Ideational representations in OBSS

Ideation is concerned with the resources for construing our experiences of the world within and around us, which involves the use of language to represent things, ideas, and relations or states of being. Halliday however says that ideational meaning does not work in isolation; it also involves the construction of interpersonal and textual meanings. To Eggins (2004:12), "These three types of meaning are expressed through language because these are the strands of meaning we need to make in order to make sense of each other and the world." At the level of lexico-grammar, ideational meanings are expressed in transitivity – the grammatical resource for construing our experiences. A few examples of how Unigwe constructs the social experiences of some of the discourse participants are examined below:

Ama, Joyce and Efe – were at that very moment preparing for work, rushing in and out of the bathroom, swelling its walls with their expectations: that tonight they would do well; that the men would come in droves; that they would not be too demanding. And more than that, that they would be generous ... There was time before they had to leave, but they liked to get ready early. Some things could not be rushed. Looking good was one of them. They did not want to turn up at work looking half asleep and with half of their gear forgotten at the house (Unigwe 2009: 3-4).

This text helps readers understand the nature of the trade and the extent to which the prostitutes have to prepare for the day's "work". The use of relational processes (were and was) is to clearly depict a state of being – in this case, the act of prostitution. In the competitive world of prostitution, one has to constantly repackage and rebrand yourself outstandingly in order to attract customers. Material processes such as "rushing" and "swelling" underlie the seriousness with which the discourse participants take the trade. The linguistic representation of actions with the material processes performs the semantic role of enabling the reader to perceive the women as doing what is needed in that circumstance to survive against all odds. This makes an appeal to the sentiment of the reader. The word "expectations" underscores the mental state of the women as they prepare for the day's work. Also worthy of note is the euphemisation of prostitution, an undignified profession, as "work." The expression presents prostitution, an ignominious act, as something noble. The ideology that underlies its use in the text is to show that both the women and their sponsors no longer see prostitution as something evil, sinful, and despicable, hence the women have to "rush", "swelling the walls with their expectations." The entire description also leads us to infer some of the negative social experiences the women encounter in the course of doing the job. Such negative experiences include nights when men are less generous, or do not come in droves, and nights that men make serious and sometimes inhuman demands on them. Thus, tonight, the girls' mental being orients towards having a better outing.

Ama thought he was a ghost and would have screamed if he had not pre-empted her by covering her mouth with one broad palm and smothering the scream in her throat. With the other hand he fumbled under her nightdress, a cotton lavender gown with a print of a huge grinning bear ... The walls could sketch her stories. They could tell of how she wished she could melt into the bed. Become one with it. She would hold her body stiff; muscles tense as if that would make her wish come true. When she did this her father would demand, 'What's the fifth commandment?' (Unigwe 2009: 131-2).

The use of mental processes like "thought" and "wish" and material processes like "covering", "smothering" and "fumbled" in the text above delivered by the narrator depicts the victim's physical and mental ordeal in the hands of a man she calls *father*. The psychological damage she sustains in this awful encounter informs her passive attitude to everyone and everything around her in her adult life. The encounter also distorts her emotional stability, particularly to men, even as a prostitute. The intertextual reference to the fifth commandment by Brother Cyril while in the very act of raping Ama does not just show profanation of the highest order but also shows a case of double standards and hypocrisy

on his part as a self-acclaimed child of God. The material processes (“covering”, “smothering” and “fumbling”) reveal the processes of an illegitimate act – rape initiated by Brother Cyril, the victim’s foster father, while the mental and relational processes show the victim’s physical and emotional being. In all, the author uses the victim’s mental and psychological state to index rape as an act of violence against innocent and vulnerable victims. The processes show that rape is a physical and psychological violence against women and children. In the text below, one of the women uses relational processes to assert their humanity and challenge the oppressive social actors responsible for their inhuman conditions.

We’re human beings! Why should we take it? Sisi is dead and all Madam can think of is business. Doesn’t Sisi deserve respect from her? What are we doing? Why should she treat us any how and we just take it like dogs?
(Unigwe 2009: 289).

The text above is a discourse of resistance against an oppressive social order. Joyce, one of the prostitutes, uses a chain of interrogatives to challenge the hegemony and insensitivity of their matron prostitute and oppressor (known in the text as Madam) by using relational processes like **are** and **is** to affirm their humanity in spite of their dehumanised social conditions. Her use of the processes to reflect her emotional state reveals how depressed she is as a result of Madam’s obvious insensitivity to her slavish conditions. Even though she is unable to initiate any physical revolt against Madam her questions indicate a conscious recognition of her social condition and that of the other women in the hands of a cabal of power that dominates, exploits and dehumanises them.

Syntactic codification of social experience

Sentence structures can be used by writers to reveal social situations such as confusion, fragmentation, turmoil, and meaninglessness in the world of the text as well as in the real world. Unigwe uses the structure of some sentences to portray the state of mind of discourse participants, their experiences, and their social conditions as can be seen in the texts below.

Yes. Yes. You Africans are soooooo good at this. Don’t stop. Don’t stop. Please. You. Are. Killing. Me.
Mmmmm. Mooi! (Unigwe 2009: 36)

The syntax or structure of the above text is used to encode experiential meaning, which is that of pure ecstasy and mental disorientation. It reveals the state of mind of the speaker in a sexual encounter with one of the African prostitutes. His use of one-word sentences and fragmented structures depict the level of confusion and disorientation the speaker feels at the time. The disjointed utterance is further used to represent the moral and social disorderliness in the society where this act takes place. The speaker’s use of an imperative expression – “don’t stop” is mitigated by the use of “please”, an article of politeness to encourage his partner to sustain the tempo. Psychologically, it shows the enormous influence of sex on the human mind. The speaker uses pronoun of exclusion “you”, as in “You Africans” as a racial identity marker to show that he is non-African and also to underscore the assumption or claim that some races are better sexually than others. Here, the speaker rates African women (or prostitutes) very highly. Unigwe apparently feels that syntactic disorientation or distortion is the best form to capture the speaker’s state of mind at the peak of sexual ecstasy and experience. Unigwe also uses syntactic fragmentation to depict the psychological state of Ama in the text below:

Ama hissed, turned and walked out.

What did he take her for? She wanted a better life but not that badly.

But.

Wait.

Maybe.

What if?

So?

At night, when she tried to sleep, mosquitoes buzzed in her ear and kept her awake, and being unable to sleep, she thought. But. Wait. Maybe. What if? So? And one night she thought and then she laughed. Maybe she was going crazy. (Unigwe 2009: 166)

The structural arrangement of the text above shows the mental anguish and confusion this character is passing through. Unigwe uses the syntactic patterning of the text to convey the mental and emotional state of the character whose mind is being mirrored. The graphological design of ‘But. Wait. Maybe. What if? So?’ in both the vertical and horizontal dimensions, shows the several ways this character has considered the issue under engagement and her inability to wriggle out of her confusion and social condition as a victim of sex slavery. The vertical dimension or paradigmatic (angle of selection) form of the words represents a conscious choice of words made from several alternative words available to the speaker. The paradigmatic angle of language permits the language user to make lexical choices from so many other words that are open to selection. The vertical structure of the words appears meaningless in isolation but stylistically appealing. It is essentially intended to draw attention to Ama’s state of mind. The horizontal or syntagmatic (angle of combination)

form of the words would have gone unnoticed but for its fragmentation. Unigwe uses the syntactic arrangement of the text to foreground the social experiences of the discourse participant. Also significant in the understanding of the speaker's mental and psychological being is the use of rhetorical questions by the speaker. The questions, "what if" and "so", appear meaningless in the discourse context and give the impression that actually "she was going crazy." The ideology that underlies the entire text gives the impression that her dehumanising conditions in Europe are beginning to consume her psychologically.

Again, the dominant use of one-word or two-word sentences shows the mental orientation of the character and her inability to articulate her thoughts coherently. The author uses Sisi to depict the mental and emotional disorientation of other victims of the trade. In the text below, Sisi expresses her state of mind and condition thus:

Could I?

Should I?

Would I? (Unigwe 2009: 277)

The structural arrangement of the three items above indicates the speaker's psychological state. A horizontal or vertical arrangement of texts in context represents the writer/speaker's flow of thought at the moment. It helps the reader/listener to situate the mental and psychological orientation and disposition of the individual. In the text under consideration, Sisi chooses to situate each word on a separate line as a way of making them stand out or be prominent. Besides placing each word on a separate line, the words are italicised as way of foregrounding them. The stylistic design of placing each word on a separate line and italicising it is intended to attract the attention of the reader and to depict the state of mind of the speaker. In a related event, the narrator reports Ama's thoughts in fragmented syntactic structures thus:

Ama remembered that Mama Eko complained about Enugu. She said it was too small. Too dead. Too quiet.

She said, people here walk as if they're on their way to their graves. (Unigwe 2009: 151).

The syntactic pattern of this excerpt shows dislocation in thought which reflects the speaker's mental or psychological state. The fragmented structure shows her attitude towards Lagos in contrast to Enugu. It also reveals her attitude towards both cities. Enugu is the carrier of the negative attributions "too small", "too dead" and "too quiet" which implicitly contrasts with Lagos. Mama Eko obviously chooses to present Lagos more positively so as to convince Ama to leave Enugu, a city presented as the land of the living-dead. The expression perhaps influences Ama's later decision to travel to Belgium to have a better life.

Enactment of interpersonal meanings

Interpersonal meaning refers to tenor and the social distance between participants in a discourse event. Tenor comprises three components – the speaker/writer, the social distance between the participants, and their relative social status. Social distance tells how close the speakers are while relative social status asks whether they are equal in terms of power and knowledge about a subject. In linguistics, a speaker's role in a discourse event could range from making an assertion, giving orders, demanding goods and services, asking questions, expressing happiness, doubt and fear. The focus here is on speech acts and roles – who chooses the topic of discussion, turn management, and how capable both speakers are at evaluating the subject. The grammatical resource for the expression of interpersonal meanings is known as MOOD. The mood system enables the language user to make choices from a range of options such as declaratives, imperatives, interrogatives, all of which are employed to show power relations in speech encounters.

The use of declaratives

Declaratives are used by speakers to state facts, or their biases, thoughts and feelings towards someone or something. Rhetorically, they are not used to conceal ideas. Their rhetorical force lies in presenting facts convincingly and in a forceful manner. Whether used to reveal or conceal meaning, declaratives are carriers of ideology in discourse. The declaratives in the texts show varying degrees of bias, ideology and opinion. The following from the text under consideration are used to show power relations and social distance between discourse participants:

"Useless girl. *Ashawo*. May a thousand fleas invade your pubic hair. Useless goat. Shameless whore, *ashawo*."
(Unigwe 2009:70).

The text shows the asymmetrical power relations between the speaker and the addressee. Besides being impolite, the speaker's statement also threatens the autonomous face-wants of the other. Negative expressions such as "useless girl", "ashawo" (prostitute), "useless goat" "shameless whore" and so on used by the speaker is to enable her represent the other as being thoroughly evil. The speaker wants her audience to perceive the other as wayward, indecent and thoroughly bad. The speaker's outrage and anger at the situation is shown in her use of one and two-word sentences to

confront the other and to demonise her. She draws out her statements in such a way that one sees the underlying anger and the social distance between both participants.

“I am not your father, you stupid lying girl ... I want you out ... As God is my witness, you shall leave my house today!” (Unigwe 2009: 148-9).

In the excerpt above the speaker explicitly denies his fatherhood of the addressee after she accuses him of rape. The speaker (Brother Cyril) labels the other (Ama – a rape victim of Brother Cyril) a liar the moment she resists his verbal assault by telling her mother that he had been raping her. It is convenient for him to do this because he realises the powerlessness of the victim and her mother. His denial of the act and intimidation of the victim are presented in a style that makes appeals to the reader’s emotions.

“*Umu nwoke bu nkita*. Dogs! That’s what men are! ... Men cannot keep those things between their legs still. And it is men from homes who do this” (Unigwe 2009: 139).

In the third example, the speaker is certain about the fact that men are generally flirtatious. She metaphorically frames men as dogs (*nkita*), because, in her estimation of the opposite sex, they lack self-restraint, sexually. The sweeping generalisation made by the speaker is ideologically motivated in that the female speaker’s intention is to present men in the negative by metaphorising them as dogs.

“Stupid African Slave!” (Unigwe 2009: 190).

The speaker in the excerpt above asserts the ideology of racial superiority. The text implicitly reveals the speaker is not of African descent and thus perceives his origin to be superior to that of the other who is the carrier of the attribution “slave.” Being a slave implies that the addressee (Alek) cannot be treated with full human dignity. The speaker (a member of the *Janjaweed* militia group in Sudan) in the discourse reveals the age-long hatred the Arabs have for black Africans. The declarative shows the *Janjaweed* militia wield enormous social and political power, so much so that they could execute both physical and verbal assaults on other groups as a form of self-legitimation and dominance.

The use of interrogatives

This is another grammatical resource that reveals interpersonal relations in communication encounters. It shows the power relations that exist between participants in a speech event, their identity as well as their ideology. This can be found in the following examples:

Just take a look at yourself. Small girl like you, what were you doing with a man? At your age what were you doing spreading your legs for a man, eh? Which girl from a good home goes around sleeping with a man who is old enough to be her father, eh? Answer me, you useless idiot. I see you can’t talk any more. You have gone dumb, *abi*? And you have the cheek to show your face. You were not afraid to come into my home with that *thing* in your hands, eh? You were not scared to ring my doorbell and show your face, eh? (Unigwe 2009: 70).

What did he look like? Where was he? What was his name? How tall was he? What was his name? How short? Did he have a beard? A moustache? Did she have another family? Brothers? Sisters? What did they look like? Did they know about her? (Unigwe 2009: 149)

Besides being impolite, the first speaker (Titus’s wife) also threatens the autonomous face-wants of the other. She wants her audience to perceive the other as wayward and indecent, while implicitly concealing her husband’s direct role in the grand show of shame. Unigwe depicts Titus as a married man who takes pleasure in luring young girls into sex and abandoning them once they become pregnant. His massively built wife throws insults at the victims of her husband’s recklessness whenever they show up at his home pregnant or with their babies. We can glean from the text that the rich control discourse and power while the poor remain hopelessly powerless. Knowing full well that the victim is a minor from a less privileged background, the speaker does not criticise her husband’s indecency in ruining her (Efe’s) life; rather, she takes side with her husband and calls the child a “*thing*”. This is what Paul Chilton (2004: 47) refers to as delegitimising the other. Chilton argues that the extreme form of delegitimation is “to deny the humanness of the other.” Titus’s wife does not consider Efe’s child human since it was born out of wedlock by an indigent under-aged girl. The victim is also denied the opportunity of self-explanation. This shows that interrogatives can be used to underscore social relations, social power and instances of dominance.

The second, Ama’s rhetorical questions, reveal her emotional turmoil and confusion about her father’s identity. This comes after the only man she had known and called father (Brother Cyril) rapes her, denies the act and eventually warns her never to call him father anymore – “Do not call me that. Do not call me father. I am not your father, you stupid lying girl” (148). The fact that she knows nothing about the identity of her biological father and her mother’s conspiratorial silence on the matter are psychologically damning to her. The questions therefore are an elusive search for identity and self-discovery.

The Nigerian pidgin as discourse and identity marker

The Nigerian Pidgin (NP henceforth) is employed in the text under consideration to index the speakers as Nigerians, facilitate communication between discourse participants, and reveal their social class and educational background. Examples include:

“Ah, these people just dey disturb me! ‘Oga Dele dis’, ‘Oga Dele dat.’ Ah, to be big man no easy at all! ... But I no dey do charity o. So it go cost you. Taty t’ousand euro it go cost you o” (Unigwe 2009: 34).

This excerpt does not only index the speaker (Dele) as a Nigerian of Yoruba ethnic group, it also shows his level of education, social class and moral standing. He is obviously a shrewd businessman who assumes a lot of self-importance for making his fortune from transporting young Nigerian women across Europe for prostitution and sex slavery for a fee of “taty t’ousand euro”. His use of language presents him as a pimp or scout of willing young women who would want to make quick money through prostitution. He brags about being disturbed by prospective prostitutes to assist them get across to Europe but affirms he doesn’t do such for charity. Unigwe uses him to show that the trade thrives because of scouts like Dele who make their fortune by deceiving innocent young Nigerian and African women.

“Dat man na only himself he sabi. He no dey talk to anyone. No dey do anything. But him dey do good with hammer. Na him dey fix everytin’ around here” (Unigwe 2009: 105).

The example above prefigures the character of Segun, who is being discussed by Efe and Sisi. From the speaker’s perspective, Segun is perceived by the women as a self-absorbed taciturn and a jobless fellow. Yet, he is said to handle the hammer with dexterity. Unigwe uses this conversation to foreshadow events that will unfold later in the narrative. Though the women keep wondering what exactly Segun does around the house, they ironically hint at his ability to “fix everytin’ around here,” which is exactly what he does. By “everytin” the author means inconveniences and odd jobs that include killing the women if they err. He eventually fixes Sisi with the hammer when she tries to assert her freedom from the cabal of power that owns her life in Belgium (293). The use of Nigerian Pidgin in the conversation facilitates communication among speakers who have common social and cultural background.

Code switching, code mixing and identity construction

Code here refers to any language and the system that makes it up, be it French, English, Igbo, Hausa and so on. Code switching refers to that alternate use of two languages in a single discourse event, while code mixing is the simultaneous use of two languages in a sentence, such that one language interpolates at intervals. Code switching and code mixing are not mutually exclusive. They are used in literary discourse to show cultural context, identity, status and ideology. Unigwe code switches and code mixes as a stylistic device as well as a way of situating discourse events within cultural contexts. All the excerpts below indicate the speakers are from Igbo ethnic group in South-eastern Nigeria. Beyond this, their use of Igbo language gives ethnic identity to the discourse participants, enhances understanding and constructs linguistic and social affinity between participants. It also enhances some form of interpersonal relationship between the author and the reader. The writer’s choice of language, as Eggins (2004: 11) points out, expresses the writer’s role relationship with the reader, and the writer’s attitude towards the subject matter. The use of language involves the construction of ideational, interpersonal and textual meanings. The use of one evokes the use of the other. Unigwe also tries to provide the direct English equivalents (or translation) of the expressions in Igbo so as to accommodate non-Igbo readers.

“She can make even palm fronds tasty. *Eziokwu ka m na-agwa gi*. I’m telling you the truth” (Unigwe 2009:156).

In the text above, Mama Eko uses Igbo language as a way of convincing her listener of the veracity of her claim. The listener can also perceive the elements of hyperbole in the discourse because it is an impossible feat to make palm fronds tasty. However, we can infer from our cultural knowledge that she is trying to communicate the fact that the person in reference is a good cook.

“Small but mighty. *Obele nsi na-emebiike*. She is the small shit that causes a grown-up to strain and groan” (Unigwe 2009:155).

This second example also leans towards being an exaggeration that has elements of truth in it. It is a proverb in Igbo that literally translates as ‘small but mighty.’ The speaker therefore means to inform that despite the fact that the subject is short or diminutive, she more than makes up for this with her culinary abilities. The Igbo expression gives more rhetorical force to the statement than its English equivalent.

“Mother, you have to believe me [...] I’m not lying. He raped me. *Eziokwu*, Papa raped me” (Unigwe 2009:148).

The text above is a desperate plea by the speaker (Ama) to convince her mother to believe the fact that she (Ama) has been raped by her husband (Brother Cyril – Ama’s step father). *Eziokwu* is used by Igbo speakers to affirm their sincerity when what is being stated appears doubtful.

“You crawl around like lizard, *ngwere*, how do you expect to pass JAMB? You think passing JAMB is drinking *akamu*? Get out of my sight, *ka m fu uzo*, let me see road” (Unigwe 2009:147).

This fourth example compares the addressee’s sluggishness to that of a lizard (*ngwere*). For the speaker, the addressee makes little or no effort to pass the examination. The addressee is being accused of underestimating the examination which she thinks is as easy as drinking pap (*akamu*). The comparison here appeals to our visual sense of perception and the “*ka m fu uzo*” that follows shows the speaker’s indignation at the addressee’s behaviour. The Igbo use the expression when they believe the addressee’s argument has no merit or the addressee’s behaviour appears foolish. It is used to register a speaker’s disapproval at something or somebody.

“*Umu nwoke bu nkita*. Dogs!” (Unigwe 2009: 139).

The example above is a declarative that shows the speaker’s disposition towards the opposite sex. Her metaphorical comparison of men to dogs shows that she is not favourably disposed to the opposite sex, especially where issues of sex are concerned. The speaker’s claim gives the impression that all men are as shameless as dogs – a position that most men will contest. Igbo women usually use the expression “*Umu nwoke bu nkita*” to support the argument that men have no self-control in matters of sex. It is also to be noted that Unigwe translates only the attribute “*nkita*” (dog) and leaves out the carrier/subject (*Umu nwoke*- men) and the process/verb (*bu* – is) in their Igbo language forms. This gives the impression that her emphasis is on the attribution – the attribute the Igbo culture associates with dog in terms of sex which is being mapped on men.

Intertextuality as a discourse strategy

Unigwe also makes intertextual references to situations in Nigeria to properly situate the novel within Nigeria’s socio-cultural milieu. Intertextuality is a discourse process that is associated with the notion of textual re-creation, reiteration and interpretation. Critical studies do not see intertextuality as involving mere textual borrowing or referencing; they look closely at how both texts communicate with each other ideologically. Meriel Bloor and Thomas Bloor (2007:52) contend that “intertextuality involves both the intrusion (or adoption by the speaker/author) of aspects of previous texts into a new text either through citation, attribution or reference, and also the hybridisation of one genre or text type with another.” In the text below the speaker makes intertextual reference to a highly critical and satirical song by the popular hip-hop artiste, Eedris Abdulkareem, about the dismal social situation in Nigeria. She refers to the song to justify the argument that the situation in the country is unbearable and therefore justifies the decision of any young woman willing to go to Europe for a better life. As the speaker puts it:

People knew the risks and people took them because the destination was worth it. What was it the song said?
Nigeria jaga jaga. Everytin’ scatter scatter. Nobody wanted to stay back unless they had pots of money to survive the country (Unigwe 2009: 82).

The reference to the nursery rhyme below also supports the speaker’s earlier claim about the level of social anomie and disjuncture in Nigeria. The reference to London is a rhetorical strategy to convince the women that leaving for Europe is a better option than staying back in Nigeria. The narrator informs the reader that the mere mention of Belgium and London sends Rita into a dream world in which ‘seeing in her mind’s eye two big doors, one beside the other, with Belgium marked on one and London marked on the other’ (83) convinces her that the decision to leave Nigeria is a good one. She prefers to be in London where its bridge is said to be falling down than to live in Nigeria where everything is scattered and disorganised (*‘jaga jaga’* and *‘scatter scatter’*). Thus, the evocation of intertextual resources by Rita after her conversation with Dele shows she is already a victim of mind control. The promises of a better life for the women in Europe are discourses of deceit constructed by the cabal behind sex slavery to mislead the gullible and to sustain the lucrative but inhuman business transaction.

London Bridge is falling down
 Falling down
 Falling down
 London Bridge is falling down
 My fair laaaadddyyyyy
 Pussycat, pussycat, where have you been?
I’ve been to London to visit the queen (Unigwe 2009: 83).

Conclusion

The social evils of prostitution, sex trafficking and sex slavery have been of great concern to governments, individuals and groups. Literary discourse as a form of representation also draws attention to the same phenomena. Consequently, a linguistic study of ideational meanings in the text under consideration enables the analysts to deduce how the writer’s

linguistic choices serve as a means through which social meanings and experiences can be expressed and understood. The significance of this study lies in its demonstration of how the writer's linguistic choices bring about an understanding of the social experiences and ideology that underlie the text under study. Thus, the ideology encoded in the text helps us to discover and understand issues of character depiction, identity, sexual violence and gender roles and asymmetry in Nigeria and Belgium. The use of linguistic resources in the projection of social disjuncture in the text under study is a confirmation of the crucial importance of literary imagination and its linguistic analysis in the project of creating deeper understanding about identity, inter-group relationships and humanistic pursuits of the common good.

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