

## CONVERSATIONAL IMPLICATURE AND THEMATIC DISCOURSE IN CHIMAMANDA ADICHIE'S *PURPLE HIBISCUS*

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### Abstract

Literature remains a valuable mechanism for pursuing and attaining new world orders, change, revolution, innovation, social constructs, identities, and so on. Writers deploy different stylistic devices, including conversational implicature, to drive home their messages to the audience. This study explores thematic concerns and conversational implicature in Chimamanda Adichie's *Purple Hibiscus*. The novel, *Purple Hibiscus*, constitutes the primary data source. The secondary data are drawn from the library and the internet. Qualitative tools and techniques are employed for the data analysis. The study is anchored on Halliday's Systemic Functional Grammar (SFG), which describes the functionality of language in discourses, texts and varied contexts with references to grammatical structures and semantic impulses at both semantic and pragmatic contexts of usage. The analysis shows that the novelist uses conversational implicature to portray arching themes of domestic violence, patriarchy, negative parenting, Catholicism and religiosity, culture and political turbulence. The study concludes that the themes of literary texts are encoded, conveyed and revealed using conversational implicature, among other linguistic and literary mechanisms.

**Keywords:** Conversational implicature, Themes, *Purple Hibiscus*, Language, Chimamanda Adichie

### Introduction

As Okuyade (2009) has observed, "colonialism and post-colonialism are the twin sources of inspiration to African writers," for which they write (p. 245). To that end, the twentieth century African literature is said to have "operated on a narrow canvas" (Nnolim, 2006, p. 2). Also, Jones (1996) is of the view that African literature focuses on intense political concerns, while "the writers are intensely fighting for the true liberation of their countries..." (p. 3). The fight is more intense among writers of the ex-colonies. Of course, there is no doubt that Chimamanda Adichie is one of those writers doing so. This means that she aligns with other writers in advocating for the genuine liberation of Nigeria in the postcolonial era. To that end, this study seeks to explore Adichie's stylistic use of conversational implicature in *Purple Hibiscus* to illustrate arching themes that reflect the fight for true liberation from neo/colonialism and ill practices in Nigeria.

According to Irele (1981), the modern African writers have to be preoccupied with "immediate history" (p. 69). This study notes that doing so implies making African history contemporary using the different genres and forms of literature. Thus, the thematic concerns of African write-ups large revolve around the aforementioned thematic concerns. It means that African writers familiarise and preoccupy themselves with happenings of their societies, times, and interests, as indigenous to them and as obtained elsewhere across the globe. Chimamanda Adichie is one of those African writers, whose works are typically preoccupied with such concerns. Studies confirm that the major thematic concerns of Adichie's *Purple Hibiscus* are patriarchy, gender and domestic violence, tradition, religion and Catholicism, the impact of colonialism, family and parenting, feminism, retarded development and

socio-political plagues brought upon Nigeria and the citizenry by the leaders (Giwa, 2022; Abonyi et al. 2021; Oshindoro, 2019; Duran, 2017; Ndula, 2017; Mteje, 2016; Olusola, 2015).

More so, Denkyi-Manieson (2017) emphasises that the overarching themes of Adichie's novels include marginalisation, marriage, childbirth, fertility and female education. Getting out of these implies getting liberation. In view of the foregoing, this study sets out to dissect Adichie's use of conversational implicature to portray some age-long practices, which constitute some literary themes or thematic concerns requiring liberation and new world orders. The thematic concerns of Adichie's *Purple Hibiscus* include gender, religion, politics, and happenings and practices in society. That is, the study seeks to analyse the conversational implicature of the themes of Adichie's *Purple Hibiscus*.

### Theoretical Framework

This study adopts Halliday's (1985) Systemic Functional Grammar (SFG) for its theoretical grounding. In his SFG, Halliday (1985) theorises language use in texts and other contexts. His SFG describes the structure of language, its functions and the properties of discourse. He considers a formal feature as a stylistic once it has a specific meaning, value or effect. SFG describes language use in texts and the purpose of usage therein. The central point made by SFG is that any linguistic feature or resource worth describing must be put to use by describing and interpreting the situational factors that prompted its usage. Oha (1994) observes that SFG upholds the correlation among style, meaning and context of situation, insisting that context must be the second, not the third, variable in stylistic analysis. SFG does not only theorise grammar but also semantic and phonological elements too.

Within the confine of SFG, the function of language is analysed from three angles viz: ideational, interpersonal and textual, which are regarded as metafunctions of language. The ideational metafunction is synonymous with discourse, which concerns subject matter, propositions (ideologies) therein and the context of language use. The context of use concerns whether the language is used in political, social, religious or cultural context. Adeyanju (2008) has stated that language use in texts highlights the functions language play as an instrument for encoding and decoding, and articulating and expressing ideas. The interpersonal or interactional function of language concerns discourse, which involves tenor (Ogunsiji, 2001). This influences language use, as it aids the establishment of social relations.

The textual aspect concerns mode, internal organisation of a text and the communicative nature of a text. Leech and Short (2007) are of the view that the textual function of language concerns the ways in which language is used "to organise, understand and express information for effective communication" (p. 209). Similarly, Adeyanju (2008) sees the textual function of language as being concerned with the internal structure of a text that makes it possible for a writer or a speaker to construct coherent and contextually appropriate texts. The implication of the foregoing is that the textual metafunction of language revolves around the constructed ideas in a text, which include the thematic concerns and the conversational implicature. The conversational impulses include the symbolic meanings constructed in the text, using different pragmatic elements of language analysis. Given the foregoing exposition, it is quite clear that SFG aptly suits this study, as its theoretical framework.

### Related Studies

Urujzian (2023) makes a critical exposition of proverbial and metaphorical expressions in Chimamanda Adichie's *Purple Hibiscus* and *Half of a Yellow Sun*, and Achebe's *Things Fall Apart* and *Anthills of the Savannah*. She concludes that proverbial and metaphorical expressions are discursive elements of pragmatics that serve as conversational strategies. The submission follows the reality that the situations portrayed in the novels replicate those of the macrocosmic Nigerian situations from the leaders to the citizenry. Although the study relates to the present one, it differs in its scope concerns and approaches or techniques. It is more of a literary than linguistic study of *Purple Hibiscus*. By looking at conversational implicature, a thrust of pragmatics, the present study is rather than linguistic than literary. Yet, it embodies both linguistic and literary engagements.

Oshindoro's (2019) "Solidarity between women in Chimamanda Adichie's *Purple Hibiscus*" relates to the present study. The article examines African women's solidarity in the face of male preponderance and man-tailored gender ills. In discussing these themes, Oshindoro (2019) agrees that Adichie chronicles the African woman's predicaments caused by patriarchal ideals grounding gender profiling of women, in a complex manner. Beatrice Achike, also called Mama, suffers gender-based violence and deprivations from her husband, Mr. Eugene Achike. Meanwhile, the same Eugene fights for human rights in the public. By doing so, he exhibits hypocrisy, which characterises the lives of many of the faithful of different religions.

The study concludes that breaking out of gender ills and domestic, such as those suffered by Mama and her children in the hands of Mr Eugene, requires self-determination to repel such acts from an oppressor, because it was until Mama decides her fate along with that of her children much later in the novel that becomes free from all that she suffered erstwhile from her husband. Thus, the study relates to the present one on thematic concerns, but falls short of the coverage of conversational implicature undertaken by this present study.

The study by Olusola (2015) relates to the present one, which explores the stylistic features and ideological elements in Chimamanda Adichie's *Purple Hibiscus* and Chinua Achebe's *Anthills of the Savannah*. The study argues that the elements are figuratively premised on both influences and parallel inclinations. It shows that the two authors share some words in common, but differ in their gender ideological concessions. The study submits that given the differences and similarities in the two novels, which reflect the authors, it is quite evident that friendliness and condescension likely manifest in literary style, ideological beliefs.

Okuyade (2009) examines the growth process of the protagonist of Adichie's *Purple Hibiscus* in the character of Kambili as regards struggling to have a say in her father's totalitarian temperament home. She struggles to assert herself from shackles of gender ills, which are politicised and 'normalised' by patriarchy, culture and religion or belief. Okuyade (2009) agrees that Adichie allegorically relates the growth process of the protagonist of the novel to Nigerian growth over the years. In the words of Okuyade (2009), "Kambili begins as the teller in the tale, and at the end she becomes the tale, which eventually intercepts that of the nation" (p. 245).

Linguistic studies of Adichie's *Purple Hibiscus*, such as Osipeju (2014), Lawal and Lawal (2013), Udumukwu (2011), Osunbade (2010a), engage with pragmatics of discourse and textual representations. Implicature, implicit and contextual meanings, discourse styles, features and impacts, and reference markers in Adichie's *Purple Hibiscus* are examined by Osunbade and Adeniji (2014), Osunbade (2013a), Osunbade (2010b), Jegede (2010), and others. Furthermore, Olaluwoye (2019) discusses the sociolinguistic use of language, which implies looking at language in texts beyond the semantic phase of meaning to the pragmatic meaning or usage of language. Osunbade and Ononye's (2017) study of implicit meanings in Adichie's *Purple Hibiscus* shows impulses of conversational implicature in textual conflict discourses. Murundu (2017) examines silence and power disposition in *Purple Hibiscus*. Osunbade (2013b) examines implicature as a mechanism for understanding the thematic concern of domestic violence in Adichie's *Purple Hibiscus* among other themes.

Earlier studies do not really differ on the treatment or analysis of Adichie's themes and stylistics in *Purple Hibiscus*. A few examples would suffice here. Bruce (2006) examines the relationship between women and silence in the novel. He considers silence as one strategy deployed by women to survive oppressive patriarchal situations in which conversation would rather aggravate or lead to their gendered plights. For Bruce (2006), silence is women's resistance strategy to oppression. Kambili and Mama typify the strategy of silence in the novel. In fact, Jaja too does same, as he takes to silence when he is expected by his father to talk. For example, when expected to remark on the food brought forth for tasting by his father's workers, Jaja keeps quiet. When his father asks whether or not he would not make a comment, he said there's no word in his mouth.

Tunca (2008) looks at the predominant stylistic and grammatical features of *Purple Hibiscus*. The linguistic style of code-switching and code-mixing between two languages obtains in the novel, as Igbo is code-mixed with the English language. Mindset, silence, speech and representation of thoughts are noted to be the linguistic and literary features combined to convey the author's themes, language use, and literary devices in the novel. Ibhawagbele and Edokpayi (2012) affirm the use of code-switching and code-mixing by Adichie in *Purple Hibiscus*. The study done by Oha (2007) shows how Adichie's themes revolve around issues of gender, freedom, religion, ethnicity, development, and politics and governance in Africa. Like many other studies, the themes of family and parenting style are left out. The present study takes cognisance of these themes that are largely neglected by many studies.

Highfield (2006) makes an analysis of *Purple Hibiscus*, engaging with the issue of gender-based violence in Africa, portrayed by African novelists in their novels. He narrates how Adichie uses young characters to typify the domestic violence suffered by African wives along with their children. This account is commonly shared by many writers and scholars. The violence, Highfield (2006) points out, causes the victims' physical and psychological afflictions. Kambili, Jaja and Mama (Beatrice) suffer these afflictions from Eugene in *Purple Hibiscus*. Just like Ike (2020), Highfield (2006) also notes that history and culture are the other major themes of the novel, *Purple Hibiscus*.

### **Conversational Implicature in *Purple Hibiscus***

Here, the essay attempts an exposition of how conversational implicature is portrayed thematically in *Purple Hibiscus*. It is imperative to start by emphasising that crisis runs through *Purple Hibiscus*, right from the beginning to the end. This study argues that the conflict invented or deployed literarily has conversational implicature. The overall implicature (implication) of the conflict is that of portraying conflicting situations and conflicts between individuals and groups, including the family level. The novel narrates the psychological and physical development of Kambili and her brother, Jaja, whose father gives no liberal atmosphere and subjects them to "a world stuffed with materialistic wholeness" (Okuyade, 2009, p. 246). In that atmosphere, conflict takes precedence and runs through the text. It is such that the conflict adversely affects Kambili at school and her social life too.

Thematically, the novel goes beyond its primary theme of growing up or coming-of-age (Abonyi et al. 2021; Heather, 2005) to portraying the socio-political growth of Nigeria along with the attendant issues. Different stories, which are of varied concerns, are told in the novel. The discussion paints a symbolic picture of the inherent situations in Nigeria and typifies the relationship between the leaders and the populace of Nigeria. In that regard, Kambili represents her brother and other members of Eugene's family under represents the Nigerian populace, while her father represents the Nigerian leaders in political, religious and social spheres. The social sphere includes education sphere (sector). The political sphere includes the military regime in Nigeria.

Obviously, the kind of education Eugene wants for his children is not just strenuously demanding, but also dehumanising. Eugene considers child education to be all about training the intellect, disregarding emotional, social and other phases of education. Kambili and Jaja are reduced to nothing or made slaves in their own father's house by the man who is their biological father. For Eugene, that was a way of ensuring that his children get the education he did not get, as his words to that end read, "I didn't have a father who sent me to the best schools" (Adichie, 2006, p. 49). Ifechelobi (2014) captures the situation viz: "Members of Eugene Achike's household do not have a mind of their own; instead they live at his mercy and according to his dictates" (p. 21). Motherly bond is what enables Kambili, Jaja and their mother to survive the domestic dilemma and bigotry detects and exuberances, which they suffer perpetually from Eugene. Also, the naive mothers, who Beatrice claims push their daughters at Eugene to impregnate, even without a bride price, typify some parents who exhibit bad parenting style.

Osisanwo (2003) agrees that conversation involves talking verbally or non-verbally, symbolically and otherwise. This means that conversations are made in texts too. Be it so, conversational implicature obtains in texts, as in Adichie's *Purple Hibiscus*. Nnamani and Ugwu (2022) confirm that conversational implicature is a viable mechanism for analysing textual discourses. Conversational



implicature is evident in *Purple Hibiscus* in various regards. In the novel, conversational implicature is made manifest in stylistics and ideological concerns. These have the following elements: diction, narrative technique, code-mixing, dialectics, meta-language, figurative language, and oral tradition, with heavy reliance on myths and folklores (Ibhawagbele & Edokpayi, 2012). As Olusola (2015) notes, the sole aim of stylistics is to move from formal description of styles to rhetorical interpretation of texts” (p. 3). This justifies the focus of the present study on themes rather than styles. It concerns itself with thematic rather than stylistic concerns.

Huntson (1993) notes that stylistics depends on some features of a text to describe the language characterising the text in question, identifying the function of the language used and its effects on the text. This statement points at why the present study pays little attention to stylistics and much attention to themes (thematic concerns). The view that conversational implicature is an aspect of stylistics has been given credence by Budagov (1967), who avers that every complex modern national language has three major styles: (i) (neutral) conversational style, (ii) a higher and formal style and a lower formal style, and (iii) a lower familiar and colloquial style. Similarly, Alo (1998) points out that the descriptive examination of style revolves around the analysis of language resources across all levels of language analysis: phonetics, phonology, morphology, syntax/grammar, semantics, pragmatics and orthography (graphology). Therefore, given the espoused styles, this study seeks to dwell on the conversational style from the angle of linguistic pragmatics. This task is additional to that of exploring the thematic concerns of Adichie’s *Purple Hibiscus*.

Conversational implicature is evident in Auntie Ifeoma’s traits and character role in the novel. For example, in her conversation with Papa Nnukwu on the attitude of Eugene, one realises her disposition of conversation implicature. She tells Papa that she also had Western education, not Eugene alone. So, one cannot blame his misogynistic attitude and religious excesses on the Western education he acquired. By saying she went to the same school or had the same Western education, Auntie Ifeoma implies that although they are both formally educated siblings, the differences in their acts, actions, decisions and words have little or no bearing to their Western education, but individual personality traits. This is a case of education or what had been learnt in pragmatic context beyond the classroom setting. Papa’s words to Ifeoma: “but you are a woman. You do not count” (Adichie, 2006, p. 83) imply that because she is a woman, she does not matter unlike Eugene, and her traits differ from those of Eugene, a man. It implies that Papa had sensitised and socialised Eugene earlier that he matters, as a man, but Ifeoma and other women do not matter, merely because of their feminine gender.

Such thinking as well as orientation is wrong and misleading. It is because it is really wrong that Papa persuades Ifeoma with soothing words, when he notices that his words make Ifeoma to feel bad. His soothing words read: “I joke with you Nwam. Where would I be today if my Chi had not given me a daughter?” (Adichie, 2006, p. 83). The implication is that if Ifeoma had not reproached Papa for saying that she does not matter, merely because she is a woman, he would have likely continued the conversation on that basis. This implies that other people can stop devaluing you when you react to their words and actions of denigration. Thus, in a conversation, one has to respond accordingly to and show mood and other paralinguistic features that pass across the communicative content or impulses of the communicator.

Interestingly, Ifeoma tactically deployed pragmatic techniques as well as conversation principles to reprimand her father for such denigrating words. The father, in turn, got the pragmatic (non-verbal) cues, and adjusts with immediate effect. With code-mixing, Papa rather expresses gratitude to his God (Chi) for giving him a daughter (Nwam) in the person of Ifeoma, wondering where he would have been if he never had Ifeoma. In addition, the theme of religion, which centres more on Catholicism, has pragmatic conversational elements of symbolism such as Palm Sunday, church building and materials, home, school, Enugu, Nsukka, Papa’s traditional religious items, etc., which all bear pictorial symbolism and imagery. Eugene only grants his children audience with their grandfather for fifteen minutes. He paints his father, Nnukwu, black to his children and makes them avoid him.

Ifeoma complains about how her brother had caused her nephew and niece some social interaction issues, including being unable to converse freely and fluently in the public, unlike her own children who have had exposure to free social life and conversations. Father Amadi succeeds in changing their mentality about Catholicism— that learned or experienced from their father, Eugene. They get to realise that Catholicism is not mechanical and dictatorial, as their father had made them to believe it to be. Upon being convinced and converted by Father Amadi, Kambili responds to his question about whether or not Kambili loves Jesus, she confesses to him thus: “Yes. Yes, I love Jesus” (Adichie, 2006, p. 176). Also, before Ifeoma travels out of the country, Kambili’s psyche and personhood transformation became complete. She falls in love at last, which shows liberation that has symbolic bearing to the pragmatics of conversation. The implicature of the conversations she had in Nsukka are the realities that differ from the otherwise state of being she was into while in Enugu under her oppressive father. The rigid and oppressive attitude of Eugene is evident in some of the excerpts lifted from the novel (Adichie, 2006, pp.12-13), to show conversational implicature here below:

Kambili (T1): It’s very good, Papa.

Eugene (T2): (happily) yes yes.

Mama (T1): It tastes like fresh cashew. Just like white wine...

Kambili (T2): Yes.

Eugene (T2): (Staring pointedly at Jaja) Jaja, have you not shared a drink with us, gbo? Have you no words in your mouth?

Jaja (T1): Mba, there are no words in my mouth.

Eugene (T3): (annoyingly) What?

Jaja (T2): (defiantly) I have nothing to say.

Beatrice (T2): Say the juice is good Jaja.

Eugene (T4): (Annoyingly) Let him be.

## Conclusion

From all indications, the arching themes of the novel are domestic violence and its attendant effects, gender, patriarchal and parenting issues, religion, culture and socio-political wrongs in the Nigerian society. Unlike other extant studies, this study dwells elaborately on themes of parenting that remains neglected in the literature volumes on Adichie’s *Purple Hibiscus*. The scholastic tradition exhibited by the other studies is that of analysing the parenting Kambili and Jaja get from Eugene, their father, merely as an issue of patriarchy. The present study dwells on parenting and patriarchy as separate themes that conflated along with other thematic concerns by the novelist. Following analysis done and the evidence drawn from other related studies, the study concludes that the themes of literary texts are encoded, conveyed and revealed using conversational implicature, among other linguistic and literary mechanisms. By implication, literary and linguistic representations are nuanced in textual representations and discourses.

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