

**LEADERSHIP QUESTION AND CHIMAMANDA NGOZI ADICHIE'S
LANGUAGE USE IN *HALF OF A YELLOW SUN*: THE
ACCOMMODATIONIST APPROACH**

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Abstract

It is generally believed that writers do not write in a vacuum. They draw their inspirations from the society in which they live and are part of. As writers, they are powerful observers with the intention of discovering some societal practices that favour or disrupt normal life. In their bid to capture the society the way it is, and to proffer solutions to all or some of the vices, language becomes a power resource material in their hands. Language is a two edged sword which can be used to detect the social vices and at the same time effect corrective measures. Chimamanda as a literary writer is not left out in these bid. Through her *Half of a Yellow Sun*, a lot of issues about leadership were raised. The researcher purposefully selected five conversations or excerpts to show various leadership attributes of leaders. Four research questions were raised. The accomodation theory formed the theoretical framework under which the analysis was based. Suggestions were proffered as to what constitute good leadership at all levels of the society - the family, the school, the government, the general public, the church, in relationships and so on. This framework which is based on convergences and divergences suggests that in every human relationship, the way each person treats the other person in terms of acceptance or rejection endears them to each other or one another or puts each other/one another off. From the foregoing the researcher discovered that human relationships are sustained when humans accommodate each/one another convergently but when humans diverge, relationships are destroyed and this can lead to conflict in the society which is a threat to good leadership. This suggests why most leaders at all levels of the society have failed in their various leadership positions. Finally, the researcher suggested that leaders at every level of the society should learn to accommodate convergently so as to help them succeed in their various leadership positions.

Key Words: language, accomodation, leaders, leadership

Introduction

Every literary writer has a message or messages to pass across to his/her readers and this is done through a linguistic medium which is language. According to Leech and Short (13), quoting Spitzer, posits that 'the smallest detail of language can unlock the soul of a literary work. Literature is considered an inherent trend in the society which serves the basic purpose of informing, educating, entertaining and enlightening. Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie's novel *Half of a Yellow Sun* is a literary work that exposes the causes and effects of the Nigerian Civil war of 1963-70 through her linguistic manipulation. The researcher was exposed to the levels of devastation in terms of destruction of human and material resources. So many researchers have embarked on the study of her language use in arriving at the theme or taking a

discourse stand. But this study investigates how the leadership question is either positively or negatively presented through her use of language (web) using the accommodation theory. This theory studies language use based on what Howard Giles stipulated and elaborated as the human tendency to adjust their behaviour while interacting. The reason behind this behaviour according to him is to control the social differences between the interactants. He further states that people accommodate their communication activities to get approval and set a positive image in front of the interactant. Their environment also affects the communicative behaviour. The observance of the accommodative behaviour either draws the listener to the communicator or puts the listener off.

A lot of these behaviour were employed by Chimamanda and through them the readers' attention were drawn to the problems that leaders always have with their subjects. The researcher was made to understand also that, to be a good leader one should learn to be accommodative, as this endears one's subjects to one. A lot of leadership questions were raised such as: who is a leader? What is the relationship between the leaders and their subjects? Has the common man or the ordinary citizen ceased to be at the receiving ends of socio-political and economic rumbles? Have we now got selfless leaders who place premium on the unity and progress of the Nigerian nation, and the ultimate happiness of her people? and so on. All these form the focus of this paper.

Conceptual Framework

The Concept of Accommodation

In common parlance, when the word accommodation is mentioned, our minds move immediately go to a building or offering some strangers help by allowing them pass the night in our homes. Very often too, we hear such expressions as: you are not accommodating at all or you are accommodating which could be interpreted ordinarily as being friendly or not being friendly. This term 'accommodation' means different things to different fields of human endeavour. To the physiologist it means the automatic adjustment in focal length of natural lens of the eye.

In linguistics, accommodation is defined as a process by which participants in a conversation adjust their accent, diction or other aspects of language according to the speech style of the other participants. It is also called linguistic accommodation, speech accommodation and communication accommodation. (<https://www.thoughtco.com.>whatisaccommodation> abstracted 30/06/2017). Accommodation most often takes the form of convergence, when a speaker chooses a language variety that seems to fit the style of the other speaker. Less frequently, accommodation may take the form of divergence when a speaker signals social distance or disapproval by using a language variety that differs from the style of the other speaker.

According to Donald "speakers accommodate to the speech of their interlocutors to promote a sense of common identity". It is this linguistic accommodation that gave rise to communication accommodation theory (CAT) developed by Howard Giles in 1991.

This definition by linguist is related to the layman's definition which attributes either positive or negative tendencies – being accommodative and not being accommodative. A language user is accommodative when he/she uses language to make his/her listener feel at home, when he/she uses language to draw his/her interlocutor closer (convergence) but when language is used negatively, abusively to eschew the interlocutor, the language user is being unaccommodating (divergence).

Leaders

A leader can be a man or a woman who is expected to possess certain human qualities that differentiates him/her from others, in a leadership position. According to Adaku quoting Grove and Montgomery, “leaders are people who provide vision and meaning for an institution and embody the ideas towards which the organization strives”. The use of “people” in this definition is an evidence that a leader is not defined based on gender, a leader is genderless.

Another definition of a leader from Wikipedia is that a leader is a person who leads or commands a group, organization or country. Men and women can be leaders. Ordinarily, once a leader is mentioned, the first impression, that we have is political leadership. This is a misnomer, as a leader can be a chief, head, principal, boss, commander, captain, figure head, controller, and so on. The list is endless. In whichever position one finds him/herself, he/she is expected to lead well. Leaders can be born or made. There are certain qualities expected from leaders which help in their choices. These qualities are called leadership qualities and they are tagged “Top 10 Leadership Qualities That Make Good Leadership”. These qualities separate good leaders from bad ones. These are: Honesty and integrity, Confidence, Inspire others, Commitment and passion, Good communicator, Decision-making capabilities, Accountability, Delegation and empowerment, Creativity and innovation and Empathy. Without these qualities, according to Hassan, the leader struggles to succeed. Any good leader should strive to have these qualities in order to survive or succeed.

Leadership

Before I go into what leadership is, it is pertinent to know who a leader is. A leader can be a man or a woman who is expected to possess certain human qualities that differentiates him/her from others, in his/her leadership position. According to Adaku quoting Grove and Montgomery, “leaders are people who provide vision and meaning for an institution and embody the ideas towards which the organization strives”. The use of “people” in this definition is an evidence that a leader is not defined based on gender, that is to say, it is genderless. Any being can be a leader once you have the qualities needed to lead.

Another definition of a leader from Wikipedia is that a leader is a person who leads or commands a group, organization or country. Here, again there is the use of a person which also indicates that both men and women can be leaders. Ordinarily, once a leader is mentioned, the first impression, that we have is political leadership. This is a misnomer, as a leader can be a chief, head, principal, boss, commander, captain, figure head, controller, superior, kingpin, chair, convener, moderator, director, managing director, manager superintendent, supervisor, overseer, foreman,

administrator, employer, master, mistress, foreman, president premier, queen, emperor, prince, princess, lord, elder, patriarch, matriarchy, mentor, boss man governor, etc. The list is endless. In whichever position are finds him/herself, he/she is expected to lead well. Leaders can be born or made.

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Without these qualities, according to Hassan, the leader struggles to succeed. Any good leader should strive to have these qualities in order to survive or succeed. Leadership as a term has attracted so many definitions. As a noun, it means the action of leading a group of people or organization (Wikipedia). Leadership is synonymous with guidance, direction, authority, control, management, superintendence, supervision, organization, government, influence, initiative etc. Leadership is the ability of an individuals or organization to “lead” or guide other individuals, teams or entire organizations (Wikipedia). Susan Ward define leadership simply as the art of motivating a group of people to act towards achieving a common goal. The context that a leader finds himself/herself determines how he/she leads. Every leader should be able to lead well.

According to former U.S president Dwight D. Eisenhower “leadership is the art of getting someone else to do something you want done because he wants to do it. Leadership being an art from this definition implies that it requires the application of human creative skill and imagination. Leaders are supposed to lead with expertise, skillfulness, ingenuity, cleverness virtuosity, know-how, craftsmanship and so on. In all, leaders are born in different homes and most of the good virtues of leaders are gotten from their homes. Just a few developed on their own to become good leaders.

Summary of *Half of a Yellow Sun*

The Novel *Half of a Yellow Sun* is Adichie’s second novel. It is published in 2006 by Knopt/Anchor. The title of the novel is symbolic. It tells the story of the Nigerian Biafran war through the perspective of the characters, Olanna, Ugwu and Richard. The war was fallout of the January 1966 coup championed by Junior army officers of Igbo extraction with the West and Northern regions suffering more casualties. The North claimed it was an Igbo coup leading to the ascension of power by General Aguiyi Ironsi an Igbo officer. Similarly, on July 29, 1966 a counter coup was staged by army officers of Northern extraction bringing Gen. Yakubu Gown to power and leading to the death of Gen. Ironsi. This coup and counter coup generated ethnic tension, acrimony, bad blood and mistrust leading to the brutal killing and massacre of Igbos (pogrom) living in the north.

Lawlessness, molestation, looting of property of easterners by other sections of the country particularly the north were the remote and immediate causes that led Colonel Odumegwu Ojukwu, the then Governor of the Igbo dominated south-eastern region

to proclaim the secession of the south-east and declaring it a new independent Republic of Biafra on May 30, 1967. With this declaration, the rift between the Eastern Region and the rest of the country was total, police action was declared against the Biafran state leading to a thirty month old war that is argued to be Africa's first genocidal wars. The war was characterized by dehumanization, massacres, looting, and wanton destruction of property, brutality and monstrosity at its Peak with the Biafran side suffering more casualties than the Nigerian army referred to as 'Federal Troupes' perhaps owing to military might and financial muscle, population and established structures and nations that were in her favour.

Adichie relies on this history to present this gory story of what has been referred to as genocidal tragedy. According to her "... I wrote this novel because I wanted to engage with my history in order to make sense of my present, many of the issues that led to the war remain unresolved in Nigeria today ...". She successfully marries fiction with facts as she tells Azuka Ogujiba.

... I have a lot of research notes that I did not end up using because I did not want to be stifled by fact. I did not want the political events to overwhelm the human story. It was important that I got the facts that mattered right. All the major political events are factually correct but what was important to me in the end was the emotional truth. I wanted this to be a book about human beings, not a book about faceless political events. (19)

Adichie refreshingly explores some crucial thematic concerns through which the horrific experiences of this novel is highlighted and explored. Majorly, she explores the theme of war which obviously is the central and these with other sub themes emanating from and woven around it. There is also the recurrent theme of love betrayal of love, trust and friendship. All these were presented using different characters in her work. Adichie in *Half of a Yellow Sun* artistically interweaves historical facts.

Research Methodology

This research being a textual analysis of Adichie's novel *Half of a Yellow Sun*, adopted a qualitative study of the work. There was an intentional selection of five conversations relating to leadership after a thorough study of the novel. These speeches were analysed using the accommodation theory.

Purpose of the Study

The major purpose of the study is to find out how Adichie imbued language of leadership in her characters either to serve as good or bad leaders through convergences and divergences. Other purposes are:

1. To know the accommodation principles that can produce good relationships between the leaders and the led.
2. To know if education can create a gap between the leader and the led.
3. To know who is a good leader.
4. To know what effect language use has on the leaders and the led.

Significance of the Study

The study will be of great significance to the populace because leaders and leadership positions are not limited to anybody. Anybody can be a leader, provided you have the leadership qualities. Language is of paramount importance in making or maring one from being a good leader.

Research Question

1. What effect has accomodation on leaders and the led?
2. To what extent can education create a gap, between the leaders and the lead?
3. To what extent can language use make or mar good relationship between leaders and the led?
4. Who is a good leader?

Theoretical Framework

Accommodation Theory

In order to look at the ways the different choice of words affected the leaders and the led in the novel the accommodation approach was adopted. The accommodation theory is a social linguistic theory propounded by Howard Giles, a professor of communication at the University of California, Santa Barbara, in 1991. It argues that when people interact, they adjust their speech, their vocal patterns and their gestures, to accommodate others.

It explores the various reasons why individuals emphasize or minimize the social difference between themselves and their interlocutors through verbal and non-verbal communication. This theory is concerned with the links between “language, context and identity”. It focuses on both the intergroup and interpersonal factors that lead to accommodation as well as the ways in which power, macro and micro-context concerns affect communication behaviours.

There are two main accommodation processes described by this theory: The convergence and the divergence. Convergence refers to the strategies through which individuals adapt to each other’s communicative behaviours, in order to reduce these social differences. Convergence always takes place when the speakers like one another. Converging towards the speech of another person is usually considered a polite speech strategy. It implies that the addressee’s speech is acceptable and is worth imitating.

Divergence on the other hand contradicts the method of adaptation and in this context the individual emphasis is on the social difference and non-verbal differences between the interlocutors. Deliberately choosing of a language not used by one’s addressee is the clearest example of speech divergence. Divergence speech does not always indicate a speaker’s negative attitude towards the addressees. Where the divergent forms are admired, divergence can be used to benefit the diverger.

A speaker may also deliberately diverge both from his own usual speech style and that of his addressees towards the style of a third party for special effect. This is labeled referee design – the third party referred to is not present.

There are also four major assumptions under which this theory is based. These are:

1. While communicating there will be similarity in and difference in the speech and behaviour. The characteristics that people exhibit are based on our experiences and the cultural background that we grew up in.
2. A conversation is evaluated by understanding the perception of the speech and behaviour of the other. Through evaluation people decides to accommodate and fit in.
3. The social status and belonging is determined by language and behaviours, while people communicate they tend to accommodate the behaviours of those who are in the higher social status than them. Norms guide the accommodation process which varies in the degree of appropriateness. Norms define the behaviours of people and they are expected to act accordingly.
4. Finally, we accommodate others by adjusting our communicational behaviour to the requisite roles that participants are assigned in a given context. The study of accommodation theory helps to reveal the extent to which language impinges on our lives resulting in the maintenance or breakdown of human relationships which is a treat to good leadership.

Analysis of the Novel *Half of a Yellow Sun* using the Accommodation Theory

The accommodationist approach is used to analyze this novel. For easy analysis the researcher developed an acronym known as ‘Genspecters’ which is a blend of the initial letters of General and specific and the last letters of characters. The accommodative nature of Adichie can be seen through her specific characters such as Ugwu, Olanna, Richard, Odenigbo, Kainene, His Excellency and many more. Her characters always show either downward convergence or divergence whenever they are dealing with characters of the same Igbo origin. There are always a chipping in of the Igbo words (code mixing). Examples;

Excerpt 1: She told the nurses that she was an old colleague of his.

It’s terribly urgent’, she said, and kept her English accent crisp and her head held high. (divergence)

A nurse showed her into his office promptly, one of the women, sitting in the corridor cursed ‘*Tufiakwa!* (divergence) we have been waiting since dawn. Is it because we don’t talk through our noses like white people?’ (accommodation convergence from the nurse). This is an example of Hospital leadership.

He said, looking into her Dr. Nwala raised his willowy body from his seat and came around to shake her hand. ‘Olanna eyes. (convergence)

How are you, doctor?’ (convergence) phatic language use.

‘we are managing’, he said, and patted baby’s shoulder. ‘How are you?’

‘very well. Okeoma visited us last week’...

‘Baby has been coughing for some days now’,

Olanna said loudly. (convergence)

‘Oh! He turned to Baby. He placed the stethoscope on her chest and murmured *ndo* as she coughed. (Downward convergence).

From what happened in this brief conversation, one can deduce that, the nurses were drawn close to Olanna because of her sound English which the woman referred to as speaking through her nose, that is to say that the nurse accommodated her

(convergence) while she was (diverged) by the older woman. Again, the doctor converged with Olanna knowing that they belonged to the same class while at the same time converged downwardly while referring to Baby by saying *ndo* as she coughed.

The use of '*Tufiakwa!*' by one of the women is a total rejection of the 'impartiality demonstrated by both the nurses and the doctor. To her, turns should be taking in seeing patients and not jumping the line. (divergence) The nurse and the doctor have not rightly played their parts as true leaders in the hospital. Are they the type of people we should entrust our hospitals to?

Excerpt 2: Let's hear Odenigbo as a character. From the description of Odenigbo in this novel, he is seen as an educated elite. From the opening paragraph we have these statements made about him: "Master was a little crazy; he had spent too many years reading books overseas, talked to himself in his office, did not always return greetings and had too much hair... But he is a good man". With his level of education, one would be surprised to hear him speak Igbo to his house boy but in his accommodative nature he downwardly converged to the level of his houseboy by adding some chunks of Igbo expressions. For example 'oh, yes you have brought the houseboy. *Ikpotago ya 'kedu afa gi?* What's your name? '*Ngwa*' go to the kitchen; look here, *nee anya* do you know what that is? The use to which vernacular is put here has two interpretations. One is that Odenigbo knew very well that his house boy is an illiterate and wanted him to feel at home hence, a mixture of the English language and vernacular. (convergence behaviour) Again, vernacular according to Holmes (13) are often used between people who share attitude and values, and who may belong to the same ethnic group. Odenigbo as the head in charge of the home has left a question for us to answer. How accommodating are you in your leadership position? Do you use it to suppress the less privileged? As an educated person in the society how do you relate to the illiterate ones? These attitudes of Odenigbo drew his house boy closer to him. There is no difference between master and house boy, and Ugwu served him with all humility.

Excerpt 3: Lets hear her speak to Ugwu:

He greeted her, his Good afternoon' a mumble, his eye on the floor.

'*Kedu?*' she asked

'I'm well, Mah! (36) (downward convergence).

Again, when Ugwu was about to pour the cold coke into Olanna's glass, she touched his hand and said. (non-verbal convergence).

'*Rapuba*, don't worry about that!' (36) (downward convergence).

In another context, while Ugwu was trying to rinse the bed sheet he washed, Olanna requested to help out and in the process discovers a ripe pawpaw. She smiled and said 'oh, look, those paw-paws are almost ripe. *Lotekwa*, don't forget to pluck them'. Olanna converged in her accommodation behaviour, accommodation convergence so as to make Ugwu feel at home.

As said earlier in this paper, that people can put up divergent behaviour to show or demonstrate their social differences through non-verbal communication, it is

reflected in this paper through the family of Ozobia, Olanna's parents. See the extracts below:

Excerpt 4: 'Thank you, Maxwell, she said. (convergence)
'Yes, aunty', Maxwell mumbled, and moved on with his tray.
Olanna looked around the table. Her parents were focused on Chief Okonji, nodding (convergence) eagerly as he told a story about a recent meeting with Prime Minister Balewa...
None of them thanked Maxwell. (divergence) Olanna wished they would; it was such a simple thing to do, to acknowledge the humanity of people who served them. She had suggested it once; her father said he paid them good salaries, and her mother said thanking them would give them room to be insulting. (divergence)

From this conversation, two levels of accommodation can be drawn, the Ozobia family are well to do politicians who accommodated only people who belonged to the same cadre with them, hence their nodding in support of Chief Okonji who is also a top politician, a finance minister (non-verbal convergence). On the other hand, Maxwell is just an ordinary house boy who is referred to as a steward and hence their non appreciative behaviour when he served them food at a party meant for the "who is who". (non verbal divergence behaviour) The question is: do we have such people in our government? People with this kind of character, are they worthy of being our leaders? (Home Leadership)

Excerpt 5: Let's move further to what obtains in the school using a character in the novel – Ugwu; Ugwu arranged three benches on the veranda for Olanna's class and two by the compound entrance for Mrs. Muokelu's; from his own class with the youngest pupils, he placed two benches near the pile of cement blocks.

'we will teach Mathematics, English and Civic everyday...
we will teach them to speak perfect English and perfect Igbo,
like His Excellency. We will teach them pride in our nation.
(85)

From the way Ugwu used 'we' it showed that they all accommodated one another. 'We' is a sign of solidarity. As teachers, it means that there should be team teaching. (accommodation convergence)

Let's listen to one of the mothers' of the children being taught by Ugwu, Olanna and Muokelu

'Is this one a teacher?' she asked.

'Yes',

'Is he not your houseboy?' Her voice was shrill 'since when has a servant started to teach, *bikokwa*? (divergence)

'If you do not want your child to learn, take her home,
Olanna said (356)

The woman pulled her daughter by the hand and left.
(communication divergence)

Here, there is a big question, who are our teachers? Is it possible that we employ unqualified teachers. As teachers do we accommodate others? As parents, if we

discover that our wards are taught by unqualified teachers what do we do? Are teachers part of our leaders? All these and more are questions we need to proffer answers to. (School Leadership)

To our church leaders, how do we accommodate? Let's exemplify with a passage from a character in the novel Ambrose referred to as Pastor Ambrose.

Pastor Ambrose was praying by the banana trees. His red, long-sleeved robe shimmered in the waning sun. 'Holy Jehovah destroy the vandals with holy-ghost fire! Holy Jehovah fight for us!... (18) (convergence)

Alice slapped away a mosquito 'Ambrose is pretending to be a pastor to avoid the army

This is a communication divergence caused by context. Originally, Ambrose was not a pastor but because of the warring situation, he diverged to use the religious register. This is outright religious bigotry, pretence and deceit. Pastors are meant to be leaders in the church, what do they do? Are they like Pastor Ambrose who adopted the position of a chameleon?

Recommendations and Conclusion

Having looked at Chimamanda's language use in *Half of a Yellow Sun* and how she used her language to depict good and bad leaders through convergence which could either be downward or upward and through divergence, one thing is sure. Our language use should be tilted towards accommodating every member of our society. Leaders should be mindful of the type of language to use so as to create social harmony. Leaders are not just the presidents, governors, at the macro levels but both leaders at the micro levels such as families, churches, schools and so on should try as much as possible to converge with one another so that the society will be a better place for all of us. Let us identify with one another through our language use. Let us drop all the qualities that distract us from others and use language that endears us to others. Let us learn to bear each other and one another's problems like ours (empathy) and not treat others with sympathy.

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