

ACCOMMODATION STRATEGIES IN CHIMAMANDA ADICHIE'S *AMERICANAH*

Prof Jane Nkechi Ifechelobi

Department of English Language and Literature
Nnamdi Azikiwe University, Awka
Email: janefechi@gmail.com

&

Chinyeaka, Laretta O.

Department of English Language and Literature
Nnamdi Azikiwe University, Awka
Email: chinyeakalaura@yahoo.com

Abstract

The paper examines accommodation strategies adopted by speakers in their interactions in Adichie's *Americanah*. In oral discourse, the speech of speakers is often similar to the speech pattern of their addressees or they differ from it. The process is referred to as speech accommodation. A speaker is said to converge to the speech of the addressee when it is similar or to diverge when it is away from it. Using Chimamanda Adichie's *Americanah*, this study seeks to identify the accommodation strategies adopted by the characters and the motivations for the strategies. It also seeks to identify the varieties of language the author employed to reflect the social classes of the characters. To achieve these objectives, eight sample excerpts purposively selected from the text were used as data. Findings revealed that both convergence and divergence strategies identified were mainly motivated by the topic under discussion and the setting. Again, convergence strategies identified were motivated by a desire to get on well with others and make them comfortable while divergence strategies were motivated by a desire to be judged less favourably which in turn reflects social distance.

Key words: Accommodation, Speech styles, Speech style-shifts, Power, Convergence, Divergence

Introduction

In social interactions, the speech of the speakers oftentimes tends to be similar to the speech pattern of the persons they are addressing or away from it. This process has been referred to as speech accommodation (Holmes, 245). It usually takes place when the speakers are well disposed towards the people they are addressing or where they stand to gain some social through the interaction. A speaker is thus said to converge to the speech of the addressee when the speech is similar to that of the addressee and to diverge when it is away from the speech pattern of the person he/she is talking to. Convergence behaviour is said to be 'up' if the approval sought is with person(s) of higher social status or 'down' if with someone of lower social status.

According to Holmes (245), people accommodate in different ways. When in a party, a person responds to and develops a topic raised by an addressee; the person is converging in the content of the speech. When people make simple the vocabulary and grammar, they use in talking to children or foreigners 'they are said to be converging

to the lesser linguistic proficiency of their addressees'. When a complex technical message gets translated for someone who is not familiar with the jargon, speech accommodation is taking place. In multilingual countries like Singapore, India or Democratic Republic of Congo-Zaire (Nigeria inclusive) with many varieties to choose from, speakers accommodate to others by selecting the code or varieties they consider most comfortable to their addressees. In written prose like in ordinary face-to-face oral interactions, speech of people engaged in dialogue often is similar or they differ in pattern. When such accommodation processes are not observed as appropriate or if the purpose is misconstrued by the addressee, problems such as feelings of inferiority, rejection, contempt or avoidance may arise on the part of the interactant of lower social status while the one of higher status may display pride, arrogance, insult or prejudice. These may disrupt smooth social interactions and lead to breakdown in communication. This study therefore seeks to examine accommodation strategies in Chimamanda Adichie's *Americanah*. It aims at identifying the linguistic features that encode accommodation strategies in the text, the accommodation processes adopted by the characters and how they conform to the four social psychological theories that underlie accommodation, the motivation for the accommodation strategies and the varieties of language the writer employed to reflect the social classes of the characters.

Synopsis of the Novel

Americanah is Chimamanda Adichie's third novel. It is set in Nigeria, England and America. Ifemelu, the chief character is a Nigerian young lady living in Princeton, New Jersey. Her main source of income has been her blog about race and class. By the time the novel opens up she has decided to shut the business down and move over to Nigeria, where she has a ready appointment at a women's magazine called *Zoe*. She has disengaged her relationship with her boyfriend and shipped her car to Nigeria to the amazement of her friends and family. She has lived in America for thirteen years and to them her actions appear very irrational.

Ifemelu is however determined. She visits Mariama African Hair Braiding, specialists in black hair. The salon is not her favourite. The owner was on vacation and had it closed down in her absence. She doesn't like the stylists at this new salon. Her stylist, Aisha informs her that she has two Igbo boyfriends even though she was looking very unhealthy with sores on her arms. While Aisha works on her hair, Ifemelu attempts to read, she sends a brief email to her ex-boyfriend, Obinze, whom she refers to as Ceiling, telling him of her plan to move to Nigeria.

Obinze receives her mail while stuck in traffic in Lagos. He is now a successful businessman with a wife, Kosi and a daughter, Buchi. He loves his daughter but does not have as much love for his wife. Ifemelu's mail stirs up reflections of the past in him. By this, the readers are taken back to Ifemelu's story. Her father gets fired from a federal agency for refusing to call his female boss "Mummy." Her family is subjected to poverty because of the father's joblessness and they occasionally borrow money from Aunt Uju, a relation who is a mistress to an army general to pay rent. Ifemelu nevertheless continues to excel in school. Ifemelu and Obinze meet as teenagers and both are excellent students. They meet and fall in love in Lagos where Obinze's mother, a university professor is on a two-year sabbatical leave. Obinze's mother approves of their relationship but is concerned about them having sex. She lectures

them about contraceptives when Ifemelu had a pregnancy scare. Obinze enrolls at University of Nigeria, Nsukka and Ifemelu joins him out of love. The frequent teachers' strike causes Ifemelu to enroll later at a college in Philadelphia, Pennsylvania and they part ways planning that Obinze would make his way to America after graduation

On arrival in America, Ifemelu breaks off contact. Her life in America is harder than she expected as she finds it difficult to get work. She finally starts school with the help of Auntie Uju who becomes a doctor after much struggles. She tries to find work to augment her partial scholarship but fails because of her skin colour. She is forced to take up a job as a sex worker but is later hired as a nanny for two children, Morgan and Taylor and gets well paid. She begins to date Curt, a white who is well-to-do and he uses his influence to find her a job at a public relations firm in Baltimore. She later runs into an old friend, Kayode who informs her that he recently heard from Obinze.

Obinze turns out as an illegal immigrant in England. He is unable to secure a visa and he is forced to work using an Englishman's National Insurance number and paying him thirty percent of all his earnings. He gets a job in a warehouse and starts saving for a contract wedding in order to earn citizenship. The Englishman turns him to Immigration authorities for refusing to pay him forty percent cut. He is arrested and deported back to Nigeria. His return to Nigeria is favourable and he becomes a very successful businessman in Lagos.

The focus again is on Ifemelu just after she breaks up with Curt. Being white, he didn't understand her experiences as a black woman living in America and sometimes was himself unconsciously racist. They eventually break up and she is inspired to start her own blog. Due to the popularity of her blog, she is invited to give lectures around the country and soon quits her job and buys a small condominium. Ifemelu reunites with Blaine, an acquaintance at one of her lectures who writes blog about race and popular culture. Their relationship progresses rapidly and she moves to live with him. He is very supportive of her work, but his sister, Shan is very critical of Ifemelu and of everything. Meanwhile Barack Obama and Hilary Clinton are vying for the presidency of the United States. Ifemelu is in support of Clinton while Blaine prefers Obama. Their different political views take its toll on their relationship and Ifemelu parks out to stay with Auntie Uju. They later reconcile. Her blog becomes more popular and political. One day, after reading Barack Obama's book, *Dreams of My Father*, she decides to support Obama and this brings the two of them closer. Ifemelu soon gets dissatisfied with their relationship and longs for Nigeria. She severs her relationship with Blaine, shuts down the blog and sells her apartment, finds a job in Lagos and plans to relocate to Nigeria.

Here, the story gets back to the first chapter of the novel in which Ifemelu sits in a hair salon and sends a quick email to Obinze. He is excited to hear from her and responds. She breaks off again because her nephew Dike attempted suicide. She postpones her move to Lagos until he recovers. When Ifemelu arrives in Nigeria she takes some time to adjust to life in Africa again. She has become, according to her friends an 'Americanah' and has to learn to live the African way again.

She takes up a job as a features editor at Zoe, a new Women's website in Lagos. She is dissatisfied and very critical of the way the site is run. She notices some disarming

things about Nigerian culture and whenever she comments about them her friends tell her that she is Americanized. One day Ifemelu sees Obinze and on sending him a text, they reunite. However, the happiness doesn't last because she has to share him with Kosi, his wife. When Ifemelu demands that he leaves his wife, Obinze hesitates out of a sense of duty to his family. She furiously breaks off with Obinze, calling him a coward. She refuses to speak to him -and spends more time with her friends. She even calls her former friends Curt and Blaine enquiring after them. Then seven months later, Obinze knocks on her door and she lets him in.

Conceptual Framework

Speech Styles

Yule (257) describes speech style as a social feature of language use. Ezeifeka (136) asserts that they are linguistic options open to the speech community for particular events and activity types. She notes that they include: varieties (High/Low, Standard/non-standard, dialects, register choices, formal/informal/casual etc.) and speech events where they are appropriate-political, academic, folk literature, casual conversations; degrees of formality within one standard language. In language use, speakers usually adopt different styles of speaking. They can speak very formally or very informally depending on the circumstances. Wardhaugh (47) posits that ceremonial occasions usually require very formal speech; public lectures somewhat less formal, casual conversations between intimate persons on matters of little importance may be extremely informal and casual. According to him, the level of formality chosen may be related to a variety of factors such as the kind of occasion, the various social, age and other differences that exist between the interlocutors; the particular task that is involved such as writing or speaking, the emotional involvement of one or more of the participants. Holmes asserts that "language varies according to who is using it (239) She notes that the addressees and the context influence our choices of code or variety be it language, dialect or style. A change from one speech style to the other by an individual according to Yule (257) is referred to as style-shifting.

Motivation for Shifts in Speech Style

Speech style-shifts motivate accommodation. Shifts in speech style are motivated by a number of factors. Some of them are addressee, age of addressee, social background of addressee, social distance (Holmes, 240-244), speaker (Wardhaugh, 47), the situation (Hudson,199), and speech event (Ezeifeka, 136).

Accommodation

Accommodation according to Giles and Coupland "at one level, is to be seen as a multiply-organized and contextually complex set of alternatives, regularly available to communicators in face-to-face talk."(61) They note that "it can function to index and achieve solidarity with or dissociation from a conversational partner reciprocally and dynamically." At another level according to them, "accommodation strategies can characterize wholesale realignments of patterns of code or language selection, though again related to constellations of underlying beliefs, attitudes and sociostructural conditions."(61) It has to do with the way individuals and groups relate with one another. Hudson (223) sees it as "the desire to reduce differences in behaviour in order to stress solidarity" He stresses that accommodation is only applicable when there are

contrasting alternatives- i.e.in situations when people with high solidarity need to be contrasted with people with low solidarity.

Accommodation according to Wardhaugh (113) “is one way of explaining how individuals and groups may be seen to relate to each other. He observes that an individual can try to induce another to judge him or her more favourably by reducing the differences between the two. He asserts that speakers sometimes attempt to accommodate to the expectations that others have of them when they speak, noting that they do this consciously and deliberately or be unaware of what they are doing. Yule (258) defines speech accommodation as “our ability to modify our speech style towards or away from the perceived style of the person(s) we are talking to.” Holmes (245) observes that when people talk to each other, their speech often becomes similar. In other words, according to her, each person’s speech converges towards the speech of the person they are talking to. This process she refers to as speech accommodation. She notes that it usually happens where the speakers like one another or where one speaker has a vested interest in pleasing the other or putting them at ease. According to her, converging towards the speech of another is usually seen as a polite speech strategy which means that the addressee’s speech is acceptable and worth imitating. Using the same pronunciation and the same sort of vocabulary are instances she gave which signal that you are on the same wavelength.

The power variable according to Giles and Copeland (73) “is one that emerges often in accommodation literature and in ways that gives credence to the central predictions of the model.” He observes that Hamers adopting role-taking procedures in a bilingual industrial setting in Quebec has revealed convergence to the language of another who was an occupational superior than to one who was a subordinate; foremen converged more to managers than workers and that managers converged more to higher managers than to foremen. He notes also that Van den Berg studying code switching in commercial settings in Taiwan discovered that salespersons converged more to customers probably because the customers in those settings wield more economic powers.

Accommodation theory involves two main processes: convergence and divergence. Convergence has been defined as “a strategy whereby individuals adapt to each other’s communicative behaviours in terms of a wide range of linguistic/prosodic/non-vocal features including speech rate, pausal phenomena and utterance length, phonological variants, smiling, gaze and so on” (Giles and Coupland, 63). Yule avers that divergence is when a speech style is adopted to emphasize social distance between speakers. This he points out can be achieved by adopting forms that are distinctly different. Divergence according to Giles and Coupland (65) “was the term conceived to refer to the way in which speakers accentuate speech and non- verbal differences between themselves and others” They note that there is a hierarchy of divergent strategies available to speakers which ranges from indexical and symbolic dissociation (for example using in-group stereotyped pronunciation) through explicit propositional non-alignment (expressing disagreement or hostility) to physical distancing (ending or avoiding interaction)”(65) Like convergence, divergence according to LaFrance can be displayed in many forms, verbal and non- verbal. (qtd in Giles and Coupland,66)

Motivations for Accommodation

Many factors give rise to accommodation. Wardhaugh (113) observes that a person can try to induce another to judge him or her more favourably by reducing differences between the two. He states that it could also be done to gain social approval of some kind. This is referred to as convergence behaviour. Alternatively, if one desires to be judged less favourably the shift in behaviour will be away from the behaviour of the person or others. This he referred to as divergence behaviour. He gave as an example one putting on airs and graces in order to deliberately disassociate oneself from peers. A desire to get on well with others and make them feel comfortable is another reason for accommodation offered by Holmes (244).

Bell (qtd in Wardhaugh, 113) notes that “one type of convergence behaviour is said to be motivated by how speakers often attempt to deal with listeners through audience design done by orienting their speech toward others through code choices.” He states that speakers associate classes of topics or settings with classes of persons and so they shift when talking on those topics or in those settings as if they are talking to addressees whom they associate with the topic or setting. Topics such as occupation or education, and settings such as office or school according to him cause shifts to a style suitable to address an employer or teacher. Intimate topics or a home setting he adds, also elicits speech appropriate for intimate addressees – family or friends.

Theoretical Framework

This work is based on Accommodation Theory; a Sociolinguistic theory developed by Howard Giles in 1983. Accommodation Theory evolved from the Speech Accommodation Theory (SAT) which demonstrates the value of psychological concepts in understanding the dynamics of speech (Agbedo, 72). The theory posits that when people interact, they adjust their speech, their vocal patterns and their gestures to accommodate to others. It is a theory that seeks to explain shifts in the style of speaking people make such as when a person changes his /her way of speaking to make it sound more or less like the speech of the person they are talking to” (Richards and Schmidt, 5). It has to do with the way individuals and groups relate with one another. “It explores the various reasons why individuals emphasize or minimize the social differences between themselves and their interlocutors through verbal and non-verbal communication” (Wardhaugh, 113).

There are two main accommodation processes described in this theory: convergence and divergence. Convergence refers to the strategies through which individuals adapt to each other’s communicative behaviours, in order to reduce these social differences. Convergent behaviour could be upward if you seek the approval of someone of higher status, or downward if the approval sought is of someone of lower status. Divergence refers to a process in which a speaker linguistically moves in the opposite direction in order to make his or her speech sound more unlike that of the person(s) being addressed.

Underlying this theory according to Thanasoulas, an online source are four social psychological theories that actually constitute it and account for people’s tendency to converge towards or diverge away from the speech of others: similarity- attraction, social exchange, causal attribution and Tajfel’s theory of inter group distinctiveness.

Similarity-attraction theory has it that the more similar our attitudes and beliefs are to certain others; the more likely it is we will be attracted to them. Social exchange theory suggests that speakers and listeners share a common set of interpretative procedures which allow the speaker's intentions to be encoded by the speaker, and correctly interpreted by the listener. Causal attribution theory proposes that when we interact with others, we engage in an interpretative process, evaluating the individuals in terms of the possible motives that we attribute as the cause of their action.

The process of inter group distinctiveness, as theorized by Tajfel argues that when members of different groups are in contact, they compare themselves on dimensions which are important to them, such as personal attributes, abilities, material possessions. In this inter group social comparisons, individuals seek to find ways in which they can make themselves positively distinct from the out group in order to enhance their social groups. Divergence in speech style is often employed to maintain inter group distinctiveness and differentiate the out-group, especially when group membership is a salient issue or the individual's identity and group membership is being threatened. The accommodation theory is very relevant to this research because as posited by Giles (17), "language is not a homogenous, static system. It is multi-channeled, multi-faceted and capable of vast modifications from context to context by the speaker, slight differences of which are often deleted by listeners and afforded social significance."

Research Questions

1. What linguistic features encode accommodation strategies in the text?
2. What accommodation strategies were adopted by the characters and how do they conform to the four social psychological theories that underlie accommodation?
3. What are the motivations for the accommodation strategies adopted by the characters?
4. What varieties of language did the writer employ to reflect the social classes of the characters?

Methodology

The linguistic features that encode accommodation strategies in the selected text were identified. The accommodation strategies adopted by the characters and how they conform to the four social psychological theories that underlie accommodation were highlighted, the motivations for the accommodation strategies adopted by the characters, as well as the varieties of language the writer employed to reflect the social classes of the characters were identified. Eight sample excerpts of the accommodation strategies were used as data

Data Presentation and Analysis

Research Question 1

What linguistic features encode accommodation strategies in the text?

The linguistic features that encode accommodation strategies in the text comprised nativization (plain expressions, idioms, proverbs and parables), vernacular varieties (vocabulary, phrases and sentential forms), standard/non-standard forms, code mixing, code switching and pidginization. Some sample excerpts are as seen below:

Nativization

Excerpt 1

“The man chased and chased me but I refused.” (36)

Excerpt 2

“Bros, how did they get you?” he asked Obinze, with an instant familiarity that Obinze resented. (322)

Excerpt 3

“Then no problem,” her mother said. When will he come to introduce himself? You can plan it so that we do everything at the same time – door knocking, bride-price and wine-carrying – it will cut costs and that way he does not have to keep coming and going. America is far...” (360)

Vernacular Varieties

Excerpt 1

“Ceiling, kedu?... (31)

Excerpt 2

“Darling, kedu ebe I no?” (33)

Excerpt 3

“Sunshine in the evening! Asa! Ugo!” (34)

Code-mixing

Excerpt 1

“...He still thinks that one day I will agree for him. Ha, o di egwu, for where?” (36)

Excerpt 2

“Your mother is an American, abi?” (83)

Excerpt 3

“Why are you looking at me like a mumu? Come on, clean it up!” (100)

Code Switching

Excerpt 1

Impossible, he said, and switched to Igbo. Ama m atu inu. I even know proverbs. (78)

Excerpt 2

“No, I know serious proverbs. Akota ife ka ubi, e lee oba. If something bigger than the farm is dug up, the barn is sold.” (78)

Excerpt 3

“Ah, you want to try me?” she asked, laughing. Acho afu adi ako n’akpa dibia...” (78)

Non-standard (English)

Excerpt 1

... “Why you don’t have relaxer?” (23)

Excerpt 2

“Nigerian film very good now” Aisha said again (26)

Excerpt 3

“No” Aisha made an impatient gesture. “I want marry one. But this is true? Igbo marry Igbo always?” (26)

Pidginization

“Guys, how I go take do?” they all shook their heads vaguely. (286)

Excerpt 1

“Na for work wey they get me o.” (323)

Excerpt 2

“How you get your papers? Aisha asked. (414)

Excerpt 3

“... He could have given you a reduced rent in one of his properties, even a free flat sef...” (449)

Research Question 2

What accommodation strategies were adopted by the characters in the text and how do they conform to the four social psychological theories that underlie accommodation?

One of the accommodation strategies in *Americanah*, is divergence. This is showcased in the following interaction between Ifemelu, the protagonist and Aisha, a Senegalese hairdresser when she was about to braid her hair:

Finally, Aisha finished with her customer and asked what colour Ifemelu wanted for her hair attachments.

“Colour four.”

“Not good colour,” Aisha said promptly.

“That’s what I use.”

“It look dirty. You don’t want colour one?”

“Colour one is too black, it looks fake,” Ifemelu said, loosening her head wrap. “Sometimes I use colour two, but colour four is closest to my natural colour.”

... She touched Ifemelu’s hair. “Why you don’t have relaxer?”

“I like my hair the way God made it.”... (23)

Here, Ifemelu is diverging from the non-standard English of the hairdresser. She does not wish to accommodate to her code and so she speaks Standard English instead. The theory of inter group distinctiveness is reflected here. Ifemelu, who obviously belonged to the upper social class, seeks to make herself positively distinct from the out-group in order to enhance her social group.

In another interaction between Ifemelu and Aisha, there is a further evidence of divergence of speech accommodation strategy as shown below:

(Aisha) “You have boyfriend? You marry?”

“I’m also going back to Nigeria to see my man,” Ifemelu said surprising herself...

“Oh! Okay! Aisha said, excited; Ifemelu had finally given her a comprehensible reason for wanting to move back. “You will marry?”

“Maybe. We’ll see.”

Oh! Aisha stopped twisting and stared at her in the mirror, a dead stare.

“I want you to see my men. I call them. They come and you see them. First I call Chijioke. He work Cab driver. Emeka. He work security. You see them.”

“You don’t have to call them just to meet me.”... (29)

Here again, Ifemelu is still divergent in her speech style especially as the topic of discussion is one, she finds embarrassing. The theory of inter group distinctiveness is still brought to bear. She endeavours to maintain intergroup distinctiveness and differentiates Aisha that belonged to the out-group.

Another accommodation strategy adopted in the novel is convergence which is showcased in the interaction between Ifemelu and Obinze, a boy she met at a party organized by Kayode, one of the big boys in her secondary school s:

“Ahn-ahn! One of my uncles goes to your village all the time!” I have been a few times with him. You people have terrible roads.”

“I know Abba. The roads are worse.”

“How often do you go to your village?”

“Just once a year! I go very often with my mother at least five times a year.”

“But I bet I speak Igbo better than you.”

“Impossible,” he said and switched to Igbo.

“Ama m atu inu. I even know proverbs.”

“Yes, the basic ones everybody knows. A frog does not run in the afternoon for nothing.”

“No. I know serious proverbs. Akota ife ka ubi, e lee oba. If something bigger than the farm is dug up then the barn is sold.”... (78)

In the above interaction, Ifemelu converges to the vernacular introduced by Obinze in a show of contest. The switch to the vernacular is merely to display their proficiency in its use. Wardhaugh (115) asserts that “the code we use on a particular occasion indicates how we wish others view us. If we can comfortably control a number of codes, then we would appear to have an advantage over those who lack such control.” The theory of similarity-attraction and social exchange are displayed here. The attitudes of Ifemelu and Obinze are similar and so they are attracted to each other. Social exchange theory is reflected in the fact that both of them share a common set of interpretative procedures that allow each of the speaker’s intention to be encoded by the speaker, and correctly interpreted by the listener.

Another accommodation strategy adopted in the novel is in the interaction between Aunt Uju, Ifemelu’s aunt and Ifemelu’s parents when she came to confide in them that she was pregnant thus:

She arrived at the flat wearing a sequined boubou that caught the light, glistening like a flowing celestial presence, and said that she wanted to tell Ifemelu’s parents about it before they heard the gossip. “Adi m ime, she said simply.

...”My God why have you forsaken me?”

“I did not plan this, it happened.” Aunt Uju said.

“I fell pregnant for Olujimi in university. I had an abortion and I am not doing it again.”

...”Well I cannot ask about the man’s intentions,” he said finally to Aunt Uju. “So I should ask what your own intentions are.”... (102-103)

In the above interaction, there is evidence of convergence first in the shift in speech style to the vernacular by Aunt Uju and Ifemelu’s parents. Aunt Uju’s disclosure of her pregnancy in the vernacular is because of the shared identity she has with Ifemelu’s parents and perhaps also because of the sensitive nature of the topic. This goes to

confirm the view of Bell that individual speakers use style – and other aspects of their language repertoire – to represent their identity...” (qtd in Wardhaugh 114). The interactants shifted from the vernacular in which Aunty Uju announced her pregnancy to English possibly because it is a more comfortable code under the circumstance. Social exchange theory is reflected here as all the interlocutors share a common set of interpretative procedures which allow each of the speakers’ intentions to be encoded by the speaker, and correctly interpreted by the listener.

There is also accommodation strategy in the interaction between Ifemelu and Aunty Uju when Ifemelu addressed Dike, Aunty Uju’s son in the vernacular thus:

Dike called out from the bedroom, where he had been sent to brush his teeth before bed.

“Dike I mechago?” Ifemelu asked.

“Please don’t speak Igbo to him,” Aunty Uju said. “Two languages will confuse him.”

“What are you talking about, Aunty? We spoke two languages growing up.”

“This is America. It’s different.”

Ifemelu held her tongue. (131)

In the above interaction, there is evidence of divergence on the part of Aunty Uju. Aunty Uju, who lived in America does not fancy Ifemelu speaking their native language to her son for fear that he will be negatively affected in his efforts to learn English, a code the mother obviously prefers for him to learn and use in America. It is note-worthy that Ifemelu’s use of the vernacular is characteristic of Adichie’s inclusion of the vernacular in her language use. Onukaogu and Onyerionwu (269) asserts that it appears to be an attempt to foreground her Igbo identity, an offshoot of her well-rooted Africanist patriotism” Causal attribution theory is reflected here. Both interlocutors engage in interpretative process, evaluating the other’s possible motives that are attributed as the cause of their action.

There is also an accommodation strategy in the interaction between Ifemelu and Ginika, her old secondary school friend from Nigeria, now living in America who came to welcome her when she moved over to Philadelphia in search of a job thus:

“I borrowed my landlord’s car. I didn’t want to come get you in my shit-ass car. I can’t believe it, Ifemsco, You’re in America!” Ginika said. There was a metallic, unfamiliar glamour in her gauntness, her olive skin, her short skirt that had risen up barely covering her crotch, her straight-straight hair that she kept tucking behind her ear, blond streaks shinning in the sunlight.

We are entering University City, and that’s where Wellson campus is, shay you know? We can go for you to see the school first and then we can go to my place, out in the suburbs, and after we can go to my friend’s place in the evening. She is doing a get-together.” (145)

In the interaction above, there is a show of convergence. Here are two old time friends in Nigeria meeting for the first time in America. Ginika’s shift to Nigerian English is possibly to arouse fellows-feeling in a strange land. Social exchange theory is reflected

here. Both the speaker and the listener share a common set of interpretative procedures that allow the speaker's intentions to be encoded by the speaker and correctly interpreted by the listener. Causal attribution theory is also displayed that proposes that when we interact with others we engage in an interpretative process, evaluating the individuals in terms of the possible motives that we attribute as the cause of their actions. Ginika, in switching to Nigerian English wanted to show Ifemelu that America had not changed her much.

There is another reflection of speech style-shift showcasing accommodation strategy in the interaction between Ifemelu and Cristina Tomas, a white lady, who was registering international students in America :

“Good afternoon. Is this the right place for registration?” Ifemelu asked Cristina Tomas, whose name she did not then know.

“Yes. Now. Are. You. An. International. Student?”

“Yes.”

“You. Will. First. Need. To. Get. A. letter. From. The. International. Student. Office.”

Ifemelu half smiled in sympathy, because Cristina Tomas had to have some sort of illness that made her speak so slowly, lips scrunching and puckering, as she gave directions to the international students' office. But when Ifemelu returned with the letter, Cristina Tomas said, “I need. You. To. Fill. Out. A. couple. Of. Forms. Do. You. Understand. How. To. Fill. This. Out?” and she realized that Cristina Tomas was speaking like that because of her, her foreign accent, and she felt for a moment like a small lazy-limbed and drooling.

“I speak English.”

“I bet you do.” Cristina Tomas said. “I just don't know how well.”
(157)

In the above interaction, Cristina Tomas assumes that Ifemelu, being a foreign student in America and a fresher is not proficient in the English language. She therefore simplifies her vocabulary and grammar in talking to foreigner. Holmes (242) observe that this kind of Recast to foreigners who do not speak English very well is distinctive and is labeled 'foreigner talk'. She asserts that it has features that are similar to those that are characteristic of adults to young children. This is downward convergence. She is converging downwards towards the supposedly lesser linguistic proficiency of her addressee. When Ifemelu realized the reason for the slowed speech, she tries to assure her that she speaks English only to be told that she doubts her proficiency. Holmes (246) notes further concerning this that “when people simplify their vocabulary and grammar in talking to foreigners or children; they are converging downwards towards the lesser linguistic proficiency of their addressees.” Gile and Coupland (60) add that accommodative processes can, for example, facilitate or impede language learners' proficiency in a second language. It is the view of the researcher that much as this particular experience may not have impeded the character's language learning proficiency it may no doubt have instilled in her a sense of inferiority. The theory of inter group distinctiveness is reflected here. Cristina Tomas, who sees herself as belonging to a different group from Ifemelu, compares herself on dimensions which are important to her group – in this case proficiency in the English language. Ifemelu

perceives the accommodation gesture as divergent because it is used by Cristina to maintain inter group distinctiveness and to differentiate the out group especially as group membership is a salient issue in America.

Another occasion where there is a display of convergent speech style-shift as accommodation strategy is in the interaction between Ifemelu and Auntie Uju when Ifemelu picked up a call hoping it was a job offer but Auntie Uju turned out to be the caller thus:

“Ifem, kedu?” Auntie Uju said.

...”Fine” Ifemelu said and was about to add, “I have not found anything yet” when Auntie Uju said, “something happened with Dike.”

“What? Ifemelu asked. “Miss Brown told me that she saw him in a closet with a girl. The girl is in third grade. Apparently they were showing each other their private parts.”

There was a pause.

“Is that all?” Ifemelu asked.

“What do you mean is that all? He is not yet seven years old! What type of thing is this? Is this what I came to America for?”

“We actually read something about this in one of my classes the other day. It’s normal. Children are curious about things like that at an early age, but they don’t really understand it.”

“Normal kwa? It’s not normal at all.”

“Auntie, we were all curious as children.”

“Not at seven years old! Tufiakwa! Where did he learn that from? It is that day care he goes to....(167)

In their interactions, Auntie Uju frequently like on this occasion switches to the vernacular, a code that marks the identity both of them share to signal solidarity. Giles and Coupland (61) assert that at one level “accommodation can function to index and achieve solidarity with or dissociation from a conversational partner reciprocally or dynamically.” She does so now in a show of emotion. She is emotionally unstable and gives expression to her feelings by code-mixing English and the vernacular even though they are in America. There is a reflection of social exchange theory here. Both interlocutors share a common set of interpretative procedures which allow the speaker’s intentions to be encoded by the speaker and correctly interpreted by the listener.

Research Question 3

What are the motivations for the accommodation strategies adopted by the characters?

Excerpt 1

“Colour four.”

“Not good colour,” Aisha said promptly

“That’s what I use.”

... She touched Ifemelu’s hair. Why you don’t have relaxer?

“I like my hair the way God made it.” ... (23- 24)

The motivation for the accommodation strategy in the excerpt above was a desire to be judged less favourably, influenced by social distance. Ifemelu, the protagonist who

belongs to the upper social class does not want to accommodate to the linguistic code of Aisha, the hairdresser, which is substandard and who belongs to the lower social class and so she diverges to Standard English instead.

Excerpt 2

“I’m also going to Nigeria to see my man,” Ifemelu said . . .

“You will marry?”

“Maybe, we’ll see.”

“. . . I want you see my men. I call them. They come and you see them. First I call Chijioke, He work cab driver. Then Emeka. He work security. You see them.”

“No, you don’t have to call them just to meet me.”

“No, I call them. You tell them Igbo can marry not Igbo.

They listen to you.”

“No, really I can’t do that.” . . . (29)

The shift in the speech style in the above excerpt was motivated by a desire to be judged less favourably which may be further attributed to the social distance between them. Ifemelu belongs to the upper class and does not wish to accommodate to the speech of Aisha, a member of the lower class and so she diverges to the Standard English especially as the topic of discussion is one she finds embarrassing.

Excerpt 3

“How often do you go to your village?”

“Just once a year! . . .”

“But I speak Igbo better than you.”

“Impossible,” he said and switched to Ibo. “Ama m atu inu . . .” (78-79)

The motivation for the accommodation strategy is the topic. Obinze simply wants to prove his proficiency of the vernacular (Igbo) which he boasted to have more knowledge of than Ifemelu does.

Excerpt 4

She arrived at the flat wearing a sequined bou-bou that caught the light, glistening like a flowing celestial presence, and said that she wanted to tell Ifemelu’s parents about it before they heard the gossip.

“Adi m ime,” she said simply.

. . . “My God why have you forsaken me?”

“I did not plan this, it happened,” Aunty Uju said.

. . . “Well I cannot ask the man’s intentions,” he said finally to aunty Uju. “So I should ask what your own intentions are.” . . . (102-103)

The motivation for the accommodation strategy in the interaction in the above excerpt is the topic under discussion. The interlocutors who obviously share a common vernacular code may have shifted to English perhaps because it is a more comfortable code under the circumstance. Moreso, code switching is a social reality in our multilingual nation, Nigeria.

Excerpt 5

Dike called out from the bathroom, where he had been sent to brush his teeth before bed.

“Dike, I mechago?” Ifemelu asked.

“Please don’t speak Igbo to him.” Two languages will confuse him.

“What are you talking about Aunty?” We spoke two languages growing up.”

“This is America. It’s different.” . . . (131)

The motivation for the accommodation strategy shift in the excerpt above is the setting. Aunty Uju, who is resident in America, does not fancy Ifemelu speaking in the vernacular to her son. This trend is typical of most contemporary Nigerians at home and abroad, mostly of the Igbo extraction.

Excerpt 6

“I borrowed my landlord’s car. I didn’t want to come get you in my shit-ass car. I can’t believe it, Ifemelo. You’re in America!” Ginika said.

“We’re entering University City, and that’s where Wellson campus is, shay you know? . . .” (145)

The motivation for the accommodation strategy in the excerpt above is a desire to get on well with others and make them comfortable. The interlocutors (Ifemelu and Ginika) are two old time friends who are meeting for the first time in America. Ginika’s shift to Nigerian English is for purposes of intimacy and fellows -feeling in a foreign land.

Excerpt 7

“Good afternoon. Is this the right place for registration?” Ifemelu asked Cristina Tomas.....

“Yes. Now. Are.An.International.Student?”

“Yes.”

“You.Will.First.Need.To.Get.A.Letter.From.The.International.Student.office.”..... (157)

The motivation for the speech style-shift depicted through the speech of Cristina Tomas is the setting based on her assumption that Ifemelu, being a foreign student and a fresher is not proficient in the English language. She therefore simplifies her vocabulary and grammar, an act Ifemelu finds very ridiculous when she discovered the reason behind it. Holmes (245) avers that “when people simplify their vocabulary and grammar in talking to foreigners or children, they are converging downwards towards the lesser linguistic proficiency of the addressee.”

Excerpt 8

...”Is that all?”

“What do you mean is that all? He is not yet seven years old! What type of thing is this? Is this what I came to America for?”...

“Normal kwa? It’s not normal at all”.

“Aunty we were all curious as children.”

“Not at seven years old! Tufiakwa! Where did he learn that from?... (167)

The shift in the speech style in the above interaction is the topic under discussion. Aunty Uju is emotionally unstable as a result of the report she got about her son, Dike and she discusses the intimate topic with her niece, Ifemelu through a code-mix of English and the vernacular (Igbo). This lends credence to Wardhaugh’s (114) assertion that “intimate topics or a home setting elicit speech appropriate for intimate addressees – family or friends.”

Research Question 4

What varieties of language did the author employ to reflect the social classes of the characters?

The author used Standard/non-standard English, nativized English, vernacular varieties and pidgin to reflect the social classes of the characters. Some instances of Standard English used are as depicted in the language use of the protagonist, Ifemelu and Blaine, her boyfriend below. Both are well educated.

Excerpt 1

“Color one is too black, it looks fake.” Ifemelu said loosening her head wrap. “Sometimes I use color two, but color four is closest to my natural color.” (23)

Excerpt 2

I think they’re probably confused about a lot of stuff. This is my second year of teaching.” He paused. “Are you thinking of graduate school?” (209)

Instances of nativized English are as seen in the language use of Nneoma, Obinze’s cousin and that of Ifemelu’s mother respectively. Both belong to the Igbo tribe and to the same social class.

Excerpt 1

“The man chased me and chased me but I refused.” (36)

Excerpt 2

“Then no problem,” her mother said. When will he come to introduce himself? You can plan it so that we do everything at the same time – door-knocking, bride price and wine-carrying – it will cut cost and that way he does not have to keep coming and going. America is far . . .” (360)

Instances of vernacular varieties are as seen in the language use of Auntie Uju and Ifemelu below. Both belong to the Igbo tribe and to the same social class.

Excerpt 1

“O na-eji gi ka akwa,” Auntie Uju said, her tone charged with admiration. (254)

Excerpt 2

But what Auntie Uju was saying was O nwuchagokwa, Dike anwuchagokwa. Dike nearly died. (416)

Instances of pidgin are as depicted in the language use of Obinze and that of one of the Nigerian men he met in the TV room in a holding facility in Manchester Airport. They are of different social classes.

Excerpt 1

. . . “Guys, how I go take do?” they all shook their heads vaguely. (286)

Excerpt 2

“Na for work wey they get me o.”

E get one guy wey they deport, him don come back get him paper. Na him wey go help me,” said another (323)

Discussion

In the 1st excerpt from Research Question 1, divergence was displayed as the accommodation strategy.. There, Ifemelu, the chief character, diverges from the non-standard English of the hair dresser. She obviously does not wish to accommodate to her code and so she speaks Standard English. The theory of inter group distinctiveness is reflected here. The chief character, Ifemelu belongs to the upper social class and does not wish to accommodate to the speech pattern of the interlocutor. This is motivated by a desire to be judged less favourably, influenced by social distance and so she diverges to Standard English. The author employed standard/non-standard English to reflect the formal classes of the characters.

In the 2nd excerpt, the accommodation strategy displayed is still divergence. Ifemelu, as in the first sample excerpt does not wish to accommodate to the inferior linguistic code of Aisha, the hair dresser, especially as the topic of discussion is one she finds embarrassing. The theory of inter group distinctiveness is still brought to bear. Ifemelu maintains the theory of inter group distinctiveness and so differentiates speech from that of her interlocutor, Aisha who belonged to the out-group. The motivation for the accommodation strategy is still a desire to be judged less favourably, further attributed to social distances. The varieties of language employed by the author are still standard/non-standard English.

In the 3rd excerpt, the accommodation strategy deployed is convergence. Here, Ifemelu converges to the vernacular introduced by Obinze, a boy she met at a party organized by Kayode, one of the big boys in her secondary school in a show of contest. The switch to the vernacular is just to showcase their proficiency in its use. The theory of similarity – attraction and social exchange are displayed here. The motivation for the accommodation strategy is the topic under discussion. Obinze only wants to prove his knowledge of the vernacular (Igbo) which he boasted to be more proficient in than Ifemelu. The varieties of languages employed by the author here is the vernacular (Igbo) code switched with English expressions.

In the 4th excerpt, the accommodation strategy displayed is convergence. This is reflected in the shift in speech style from English to the vernacular by Auntu Uju and Ifemelu’s parents. Social exchange theory is showcased here. The motivation for the accommodation strategy is the topic under discussion. The interlocutors who obviously share a common vernacular code and a shared identity may have shifted to English because it is a more comfortable code under the circumstance. The varieties of language employed by the author are English and the vernacular (Igbo)

In the 5th excerpt, the accommodation strategy displayed is divergence on the part of Auntu Uju. She lives in America and does not fancy her son learning Igbo for fear that it will have adverse effect on his proficiency in the English language which sadly is characteristic of some parents resident in big cities in Nigeria, especially those of Igbo

extraction. Causal attribution theory is reflected here. The motivation for the accommodation strategies is the situation. The varieties of language employed by the author are English and the vernacular (Igbo).

In the 6th excerpt, the accommodation strategy displayed is convergence. Here, Ginika, Ifemelu's old secondary school friend from Nigeria who is now living in America came to welcome her to Philadelphia where she went to search for a job. Ginika converges to Ifemelu by speaking Nigerian English perhaps to arouse fellows-feeling in a strange land. Social exchange theory is reflected here.

The motivation for the accommodation strategy is a desire to get on well and to make others feel comfortable. The varieties of language employed by the writer are Standard English and Nigerian English.

In the 7th excerpt, the accommodation strategy displayed is convergence (downward). Cristina Tomas, a white lady who was registering international students in America assumes that Ifemelu, being a foreign student in America and a fresher, is not proficient in English and so she simplifies her vocabulary and grammar in talking to her. The theory of inter group distinctiveness is reflected here. The motivation for the accommodation strategy is the setting. The varieties of language employed by the writer here are Standard English and 'foreigner talk'.

In the 8th excerpt, the accommodation strategy displayed is convergence. Aunty Uju as is characteristic of her interactions with Ifemelu converges to the vernacular, a code that marks the identity both of them share in order to signal solidarity. The theory of social exchange is reflected here. The motivation for the accommodation strategy possibly is the topic under discussion. The varieties of language employed by the author here are English and vernacular (Igbo)

From the above discussion, the accommodation strategies displayed by the characters are convergence and divergence. The theories of similarity attraction, social exchange, causal attribution, intergroup distinctiveness are all reflected in the excerpts. The motivations for the accommodation strategies include a desire to be judged less favourably as a result of social distance, the topic under discussion, the setting, a desire to get on well with others and to make them feel comfortable. The language varieties the author employed to reflect the social classes of the characters are standard/non-standard English, vernacular (Igbo) code switched with English expressions and Nigerian English.

Works Cited

- Adichie, Chimamanda N. *Americanah*. Lagos: Kachifo Limited, 2013. Print
- Agbedo, Uchenna. *General Linguistics Historical and Contemporary Perspectives*. Nsukka: KUMCEE- Ntaeshe Press Inc., 2015 Print.
- Chinyeaka, L.O. *Speech Style-Shifts as Accommodation Strategies in Selected Novels of Chinua Achebe and Chimamanda Adichie*. Unpublished PhD Dissertation, Department of English Language and Literature, Nnamdi Azikiwe University, Awka, 2020.
- Ezeifeka, Chinwe. *Discourse Analysis Concepts and Approaches*. Awka: Patrobas

- Nigeria Limited, 2018. Print
- Giles, Howard and Nikolas Coupland. *Language: Contexts and Consequences*. Pacific Grove: Brooks/Cole Publishing Company, 1999. Print
- Holmes, Janet. *An Introduction to Sociolinguistics*. Fourth Edition. New York: Routledge, 2013. Print
- Hudson, R.A. *Sociolinguistics*. Second Edition. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2001. Print
- Onukaogu, A.A and E.Onyerionwu. Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie *The Aesthetics of Commitment and Narrative*. Ibadan: Kraft Books Limited, 2010, Print
- Richards J. and R Schmidt. *Longman Dictionary of Language Teaching and Applied Linguistics* Third Edition Essex: Pearson Education Limited.
- Wardhaugh, Ronald. *An Introduction to Sociolinguistics*. Sixth Edition. West Sussex: Wiley Blackwell, 2010. Print
- Yule, George. *The Study of Language*. Fourth Edition Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2010, Print
- Richards, Jack and Richard Schmidt. *Longman Dictionary of Language TEACHING and Applied Linguistics*. Third Edition .Essex: Pearson Education Limited, 2002. Print
- Schmitt, Norbert Ed. *An Introduction to Applied Linguistics*. Second Edition. New York: Routledge, 2013. Print
- Wardhaugh, Ronald. *An Introduction to Sociolinguistics* Sixth Edition. West Sussex: Wiley Blackwell, 2010. Print
- Yule, George. *The Study of Language*. Fourth Edition Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2010. Print
- Thanasolous, Dimitrios. *Accommodation Theory* TEFL.net: TEFL Articles : Archive: Accommodation Theory