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Narrative Devices and Style in Akachi Adimora-Ezeigbo's Trafficked, Chimamanda Adichie's Americanah and Chika Unigwe's On Black Sisters' Street

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Abstract

Postcolonial Nigerian novels are weaved around themes such as disillusionment, migration and illusion, identity, etc., and these thematic thrusts are achieved through certain narrative devices and style. However, the deployment of these devices for theme development and characterisation in these texts have not been given any serious scholarly attention. With insights drawn from the concept of narratology and situational context, therefore, this study examines the various narrative devices and style in Akachi Adimora-Ezeigbo's *Trafficked*, Chimamanda Adichie's *Americanah* and Chika Unigwe's *On Black Sisters' Street* in order to show how these devices contribute to theme development and characterisation. The study revealed that the narrative and stylistic devices deployed in the novels comprise proverbs and idiomatic expressions, Nigerian Pidgin English and Nigerianisms, figures of comparison, intervening Igbo expressions, and characterisation as aesthetics of identity. These devices are deployed in the texts to weave distinctly Nigerian stories, create unique Nigerian characters and to build thematic thrusts of migration and the illusions that characterise the experience in different parts of the world. The study concludes that these devices were effectively deployed by the novelists to weave a distinctively Nigerian story.

Keywords: *Narrative Devices, Style, Trafficked, Americanah, On Black Sisters' Street.*

1. INTRODUCTION

A distinctive feature of literature is its capacity to use words in creative ways to give expression to the existential realities of man as a fundamental element of society. It follows that the success or failure of any creative writing enterprise is weighed, not just by the story as it is told, but by the creative writer's ability to manipulate the linguistic repertoire available to him or her during the creation of a literary text, in an artistically appealing manner. Creative writers explore the density of language – which is constructed within the context of culture (Merabti and Benzoukh 2022) to achieve certain artistic goals. Nwachukwu-Agbada (2001) affirms this when he says that:

> … unlike the other arts whose raw materials are physical objects, creative writing is an imaginative act whose expression is dependent on words. The painter uses his brush; the carver his knife, the sculptor, his clay or wood, but the creative writer – equally an artist – makes use of words as his medium of expression. Through the use of the imagination, he [she] selects, orders, and interprets life experiences employing words as his basic tools. (2)

Literature is simply a communicative art (like the other forms of arts), but it can only be effectively realized through the proper and adequate handling of the language of expression. By 'the proper handling of the language of expression,' we mean that the language of a creative

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work should encapsulate the linguistic nuances and patterns that are unique to the culture that produces it. In the case of African literature, proverbs, idioms, folktales and other witty sayings form part of the linguistic repertoire which the writer draws from and which authors, as fictional creators, give to their characters. Despite being confronted with colonization, modernity and globalization, proverbs and idioms originating from African oral tradition still form the corpus of the linguistic pool from which the modern writer draws.

However, in the African literary landscape, there has been a protracted conversation on the issue of language for use in the fictional universe. This is a function of the continent's multilingual nature *vis-a-vis* its colonial background. Some scholars have argued that since every culture codifies its values in its own language and that through the systems of their myths, anecdotes, stories, proverbs and other wise sayings, values are defined and good-bad differentiations are specified, no other language can capture all these nuances except the language of the culture that created them. Prominent among the proponents of the view is Obiajunwa Wali. For this group, literature in the African continent, written in a foreign language – especially a colonial language – cannot be called African literature because it can only perpetuate the culture of colonialism. Arguing strongly that African literature should be written in an African language, Wali insists that "the whole uncritical acceptance of English and French as the inevitable medium for educated African writing is misdirected, and has no chance of advancing African literature and culture" (14) He therefore cautions that "until these writers and Western midwives accept the fact that any true African literature must be written in African languages, they would be merely pursuing a dead end, which can only lead to sterility, uncreativity and frustration" (14). As a crusader of this belief, Ngugi Wa Thiong'o has written primarily in his native language, Gikuyu.

On the other side of the divide are those, like Chinua Achebe, who argue that writing in the native African languages will restrict the readership of works produced in the continent. Achebe (1975) explains that, "the works of a vast majority will be closed to the rest of the world, forever, including no doubt, the work of some excellent writers" (59) if they are strictly written in the writer's foreclosed native language. He advises rather, that:

> The African writer should aim to use English in a way that brings out his message best without altering the language to the extent that its value as a medium of international exchange is lost. He should aim at fashioning out an English which is at once universal and able to carry his peculiar experience. (61)

With this campaign for academic/creative writing aimed at widespread access, the Achebe group opines that the creative writer should also use his or her creative skills to fashion out a unique kind of English that will adequately reflect the Africanness of their writing. Onyerionwu (2017) corroborates this stance when he argues that "despite the nobility and the desirability of creating African literature in indigenous African languages, certain strategic circumstances have conspired to make it a very difficult, if not nearly impossible venture" (264). Those "strategic circumstances" are mainly the restrictive tendencies of those native languages, which is a germane consideration. Consequently, African writers now have to bear the burden of arriving at that linguistic compromise in a bid to give apt expression to their artistic thought, and the artistic value of a creative writer's work is weighed on this scale.

Akachi Adimora-Ezeigbo, Chika Unigwe and Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie, the selected authors, are of the Igbo ethnic extraction from the Eastern part of Nigeria, and like many other Nigerians of their generation, were exposed to the English language at an early stage of their

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lives. Understandably, they acquired their native language which is Igbo and have also learnt/acquired proficiency in the English language. These are two languages with two cultural backgrounds. And having been exposed to the western education, their artistic consciousness is dominated with the colonial language, and like other African writers faced with a similar dilemma, they have to use the English language as a vehicle to still transmit the African indigenous culture and thought system, by dexterously encapsulating the nuances of their socio-cultural background into their creative works written in English. They have evidently achieved this through an eclectic use of English, their indigenous language (Igbo), hybrid languages/expressions, such as pidgin, code-switching, code-mixing, etc., all in a bid to arrive at the intended artistic and aesthetic goals.

As has been stated earlier in this study, proverbs, idiomatic expressions and other forms of expressions constitute an integral part of the linguistic repertoire available to the African writer. In this paper, our focus is on the deployment of proverbs and idiomatic expressions, Pidgin English and Nigerianisms, figures of comparison, the use of intervening Igbo expressions and transliteration in order to see how these are used as narrative and stylistic devices in the novels. These narrative and stylistic devices are considered as critical tools for achieving theme development and characterisation. However, no serious scholarly attention has been given to these aspects of the selected novels. They have mainly been examined as texts that discussed issues of migration, human trafficking, diasporic displacement, etc. The aim of this study, therefore, is to examine the narrative and stylistic devices deployed by the novelists to weave their stories in a bid to show how these devices contribute to theme development and characterisation in the selected novels.

2. LITERATURE REVIEW

The literature shows that the three texts selected for this study have enjoyed some valuable critical attention. For example, woks (e.g. Nadaswaran, 2014; Nder, 2013) on Akachi Adimora-Ezeigbo's *Trafficked* focus on the issue of human trafficking, including the transcendental aspects of trafficking. Others recount the bizarre experiences of Nigerian women caught in the web of international sex trafficking, focusing on the reasons and rationale behind the ugly venture of sex trafficking. Furthermore, there are some works (see Urama & Nwachukwu, 2017; Odinye, 2018; Nutsukpo, 2019; Ozo & Ihueze, 2019) that see Adimora-Ezeigbo's *Trafficked* as excavating the agonizing experience of the girl-child in a society which cares less for her wellbeing but regards her body as an article of trade. They argue that Adimora-Ezeigbo takes the role of the visionary socialist writer in the novel, who points the way out of the socio-economic quagmire of trafficking by suggesting the training and rehabilitation of repatriated victims of trafficking, not forgetting others that expose the corruption inherent in Nigerian institutions of higher learning through the text.

Scholars view Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie's *Americanah* from different critical perspectives. While some (e.g. Onukaogu & Onyerionwu, 2010; Kabore, 2016; Rosenqvist, 2023; Rokaya, 2023) see the text as a cornucopia of migration literature, meaning that it exposes in no small measure, the reasons for postcolonial migration and hybridity, others (like Villanowa, 2018; Ikeagwuonu, 2018) dwell on the efforts by Adichie to debunk the single story pattern in African narration, that is, the misrepresentations and stereotypical views of the African, especially the postcolonial African migrant. They argue that by exploring the themes of migration, diaspora, displacement, racism, and borderlessness, Adichie presents an authentic story of the African from the African perspective. Oha and Anyawu's (2018) work is an attempt

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to examine the structure of linguistic innovations in the novel. Other studies identify some survival strategies immigrants deploy to survive in their new locations, while others look at the issue of identity manipulation as a survival strategy deployed by the migrants. These studies mainly utilize Postcolonial theory to discuss these issue in the novel.

Critical works on Chika Unigwe's *On Black Sisters' Street* seem to focus more on the issues of sex slavery and prostitution, especially their ethical and capitalist underpinnings. These works (e.g. Kamalu & Ejezie, 2016; Chukwudi-Ofoedu, 2017; Ibeku, 2018; Reinares, 2019) project the prevalence of domestic and international dimensions of sex slavery in the text, while Orabueze (2013) argues that such an act infringes on the fundamental rights of women and depicts a failure of the security apparatus in Nigeria. Eze's (2014) work is a notable study on the text which utilizes the tenets of existentialist philosophy to ascertain the quest for an authentic life in the text while another applies Marxist-feminist approach to analyse the text in the light of exposing some individuals in the society who derive enormous wealth and power from the illicit sex trade and calls for women to rise against such individuals in the society.

What is evident from the works reviewed is that serious attention has not been given to the narrative devices deployed in these novels. The narrative devices deployed in the novels can provide valuable insight into theme development and characterisation. These will help readers gain understanding of the socio-cultural context of the novels. This study therefore discusses the narrative devices and style in the novels in order to show how they aid theme development and characterisation.

3. THEORETICAL FOUNDATIONS AND METHODOLOGY

In examining narrative and stylistic devices in the selected texts, theoretical insights are gleaned from pragmatic notion of interactional context and the concept of narratology. Pragmatics is a branch of linguistics which studies meaning in the interactional context – how context contributes to meaning. It is concerned with how people comprehend and produce a communicative act; that is, what a speaker implies and a listener infers based on contributing factors like the situational context, the individuals' mental states, shared previous knowledge or cultural background of the interlocutors as well as their relationship with both their language and cultural environment (Carnap, 1955; Thomas, 1995; Udofot, 1998; Akwanya, 1999; Liu, 2005).

According to Jahn, narratology as a concept has its origin in Plato's (428-348 BC) and Aristotle's (384-322 BC) distinction between 'mimesis' (imitation) and 'diegesis' (narration). The study of narrative, according to Fludernik (2006), has to do with narrative theory. Narratology or narrative theory concerns the study of narrative as a genre. Its goal is to describe the variables and combinations that define narratives. Initially put forward by Tzevan Todorov, narratology has been discussed as the theory of the structures of narrative (in Phelan, 2006). Various scholars have defined the term the same way. The general idea that is evident from the way scholars have discussed the concept is that it has to do with the formal features of a narrative. However, Schmid (2010) is of the opinion that scholars should not confine themselves to just the analytic dimension of the concept as he claims that this will result in objective descriptions only which will limit free interpretation. This outlook hints at the idea that narratology should make its borders larger. It suggests that the scope of the concept should be widened to provide more insight into the structure of narratives. Here, we appropriate the concept to denote the various narrative elements, which are deployed by the novelists to weave their unique Nigerian stories together in a way that show their distinctiveness.

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The selected texts are subjected to qualitative analysis hinging on the theoretical concepts of context and narratology. Instances of the deployment of the narrative and stylistic devices are extracted from the novels and analysed qualitatively with insights from the theoretical foundations provided above.

4. DATA ANALYSIS AND DISCUSSION

The narrative devices and stylistic features identified in the novels selected for this study comprise proverbs and idiomatic expressions, the deployment of Pidgin English and Nigerianisms, figures of comparison, the use of intervening Igbo expressions, and characterisation as aesthetics of identity. These devices are deployed in the texts to build thematic thrusts of migration and the illusions that characterise the experience in different parts of the world. These devices are discussed in the sections that follow.

4.1 Proverbs and Idiomatic Expressions

Proverbs are statements which aim at philosophical proclamations through the use of wit, allusion and imagery which can be found in virtually all cultures of the world. They are short witty statements of widely accepted truths about everyday life, with more or less fixed forms (Abrams 2012; Finnegan 2012). They are an embodiment of wisdom and more sublime in semantic density than ordinary everyday conversation. By this, we mean that proverbs signify the deep meaning of words/expressions and communications are always backed with these wise sayings. People who do not have adequate mastery of the language spoken in their culture, do not use or interpret proverbs. This underscores the general belief that only elders use proverbs. Although proverbs are simple and concrete sayings that are well-known and repeated in speeches whether public or interpersonal, their use resides exclusively with the veterans or seasoned users of a language. The reason being that proverbs are often products of a creative use of language, hinging on common sense, imaginative thinking and/or the practical experience of humanity.

The meaning of proverbs is culture-bound and they have connotative and figurative implications which transcend the scope of pure semantics (Egbuta, 2011). For Nwachukwu-Agbada (2002), when a speaker uses a proverb correctly:

> First, he assures his listener that he is sane and articulate. Second, he shows that he knows what a proverb is and what its discourse functions are. Third, he displays his awareness of the cultural recipe associated with the proverb usage and gives a signal to his own expectation from his auditor. Fourth, he has advanced the discourse as well as conferred artistic significance on what he has said. (212)

A proverb draws attention to an event or incident outside of it, “such that even a non-metaphorical saying is an encapsulation of a course of action or an observation which is the summary of the view of tradition” (Nwachukwu-Agbada, 2002, p. 194). Proverbs form an integral part of the linguistic repertoire of Africa because of its capacity to communicate in most profound and sublime ways than in a flat demoralizing and unappealing manner.

Despite the artificial boundaries that have been created by the colonizing agents in Africa, and the negative influence on the cultural patterns of the continent, the diverse nations that inhabit the continent still share in common the body of proverbs that pervade their linguistic universe and African literature draws largely from this linguistic repertoire.

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African proverbs and idiomatic expressions create a discursive approach that fashions the African fiction and shapes its peculiarity. Therefore, African fiction in English as a convergence of African culture via the foreign language forms a hybrid discourse that harmonizes the indigenous/native language, the English language and other linguistic forms. In Nigeria, proverbs are important aspect of the linguistic environment and "they are used to emphasize the words of the wise and are the stock in trade of old people, who use them to convey moral lessons and give advice to the young people" (Agu et al., 2018, p. 2). Being "the Hotbed of African Literature" (Lindfors quoted in Onyerionwu, 2017, p.71), proverbs, unarguably, are copiously used in the literary texts written by Nigerian writers as evident in the selected novels for this study. They are not just deployed preponderantly, but they are also suitably contextualized. According to Egbuta (2011), "a good user of the Igbo proverb does not use it amiss; he[she] places it appropriately considering context and intention" (26). Adimora-Ezeigbo, Adichie and Unigwe have skilfully incorporated proverbs and idiomatic expressions into their selected novels which spice up their discourse as both a communicative and a performative act; as well as a literary/linguistic device used to foreground thoughts, express concern, give advice, instruct, etc. They have also sufficiently displayed their *Igboness* through their skilful utilization of proverbs, which confirms Achebe's (1975) submission that, "among the Igbo, the art of conversation is regarded very highly and proverbs are the palm oil with which words are eaten" (5).

In the novels studied, both proverbs and idiomatic expressions are deployed preponderantly to recreate the authors' socio-cultural affiliations, add deeper meaning to their diction and give their texts a flavour peculiar to African writers of Nigerian/Igbo extraction. These are the defining variables for the authors' style and uniqueness. An instance of the deployment of proverbs and idiomatic expressions in the novels can be seen in Extract 1:

Extract 1

A foolish chicken overlooked the knife that cut its throat

and got angry with the pot cooking it. (*Trafficked* p.4)

The context of the proverb above is at Murtala Muhammed Airport, Lagos, Nigeria and it is used by the omniscient narrator to foreground thought. Nneoma is a deportee, together with fifteen other girls, who have been trafficked under different guises to Europe basically for sex trade and economic exploitation. They have just arrived at the Murtala Muhammed airport in Lagos, Nigeria and she is uncomfortable with the disdainful looks of the usually friendly aircrew. This unsettles her and prompts the urge in her to abuse the stewardess for that look of condemnation. In that state of mind, the omniscient narrator leverages on Nneoma's stream of consciousness to situate the proverb, reminding her that she should not transfer her anger to the poor woman as she is not the cause of her ordeal. Rather, her anger/grievance should be directed to the successive governments in Nigeria which over the years created unfavourable socio-economic conditions which trigger growing quest among the citizens to migrate abroad in search for improved livelihood or at least for survival, not minding the attendant risks of such journeys.

Traditionally, a chicken is killed by first cutting off its throat with a knife and plucking out the features with the aid of hot water. It is only a dead chicken that is cooked in a pot. By using this proverb, the omniscient narrator is saying that the blame game should begin, figuratively speaking, with the knife not the pot. In Nneoma's case, the harm has already been done before her contact with the airhostess. She is therefore advised to look for the root of her

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predicament and address it, rather than transferring her aggression to a secondary factor. Through the use of this proverb, the omniscient narrator foregrounds Nneoma's thought beyond the immediate. The proverb is also used to describe Nneoma's state of mind because she (Nneoma) may not have the capacity to summarize her mood and plights in such a wise saying.

Another instance of the deployment of proverbs is presented in Extract 2.

Extract 2

A cricket hides in a corner when a bigger creature invades its hole. (Trafficked p.44).

The proverb above is used to express ill fate/ill luck by Nneoma's father, Ogukwe. Ogukwe has faced many challenges in life. First, there is a sudden disappearance of his favourite daughter, Nneoma, at her prime: "He lost her at the height of her youth and beauty: a ripe maiden of eighteen" (p.42). Second, Ogukwe, together with his wife and children, has been "confined to a narrow, two-roomed hut" belonging to their late mother, while his elder brother, the first born has inherited the "spacious six-room bungalow" which both of them jointly built. His brother has forcefully appropriated the property to himself and his family at the demise of their father, and now he (Ogukwe) has retired from active service without any hope for his retirement benefits. Even after his elder brother's death, his widow holds onto the property, unwilling to share. This also causes Ogukwe pain, as he lacks the wherewithal to build or secure a more befitting apartment for his family. Third, his elder daughter, Hannah, leaves his house to cohabit with one "Prophet Elias without any bride price paid on her head." She has gone to be a part of Elias' harem and worse still, join "the gang that destroyed the shrine of *arunsi* udo," the deity of the community. The emotional burden becomes overwhelming to Ogukwe, constraining him to view himself as that cricket whose habitat has been invaded by a greater being. In that state of helplessness, he can only succumb to the fate that has befallen him. The proverb is used to aptly capture his state of despondency.

The philosophy of cause and effect is profoundly expressed in Extract 3 which involves a discussion between Ifemelu and Obinze in Adichie's *Americanah*.

Extract 3

A frog does not run in the afternoon for nothing. (*Americanah* p.61).

The proverb makes reference to a living thing "a frog". which invariably collocates with the verb 'jump' instead of 'run'. The frog naturally croaks and jumps around especially at night in waterlogged areas. It is not its nature to start running (not jumping) in the afternoon. It is part of the belief among the Igbo that a frog jumping around in the afternoon is either in pursuit of something or being pursued (by something).

The proverb, therefore, means that an unusual incident brings about an unusual reaction, that is, cause and effect, and serves as a pointer to the socio-economic challenges, those push-factors that compel Nigerians to seek refuge, survival and comfort in the diaspora.

4.2 The Deployment of Nigerian Pidgin English and Nigerianisms

It is evident that the colonial enterprise played a strategic role in shaping the historical development of Nigeria, influencing every facet of the Nigerian socio-political and economic structure. To foster the interest of the colonialists and fill the gap created by Nigerian multilingualism, the English language (the language of the colonialists) was introduced as a language of compromise. It was, therefore, adopted as the country's lingua franca, and official language for use in education, politics, commerce and many other formal engagements.

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Consequent upon the fundamental role which the Nigerian constitution ascribes to English, it becomes indispensable in the lives of Nigerians (Babarinde & Ahamefula, 2020), relegating the over five hundred Nigerian indigenous languages to a remote status (Emeka-Nwobia, 2015). According to Igbokwe et al (2018):

> The colonial administration in Nigeria worked so hard to entrench the English language in the consciousness of the natives, even though it meant that the original indigenous languages of the Nigerian peoples were subdued and subjugated. This is hardly surprising, as the overall objective of colonialism was an uncompromising and serial cultural and socio-political domination. And for one to be able to dominate another in this fashion, language will have to play a huge role as an instrument of communication. (209-10)

However, in the process of acquiring competence in the English language, peculiar challenges arise which border on the fact that there is a considerable resistance by the native Nigerian speakers to the total, overlap free internalization of the foreign language – a language that cannot adequately communicate indigenous knowledge. The aftermath of such linguistic situation is the domestication of the English language to reflect certain local colour and texture, and to transmit indigenous knowledge as part of its communicative functions.

Part of the manifestations of the over-lap or languages-in-contact situation is the deployment of the Nigerian Pidgin English (NPE) and Nigerianisms. The NPE is used for convenience especially among illiterates or even the very educated but mostly in informal settings. This is because the general feature of the NPE is that it has no strict rules guiding its usage unlike the Standard English where one has to abide by the rules of concord, syntax, phonology, and semantics, among others. For Akande (2010):

> The Pidgin English is an English-lexifier contact variety which emerged due to the contact between Nigerians and the British (and other Europeans) probably as far back as the seventeenth century. [It] is spoken by more than half of the total population of Nigeria today … and also used in the media and many creative writers … have used it in their literary works either to signal characters' educational background or to express a character's ideological stance towards English. (5)

Many of the characters in the selected novels use the NPE at one point or the other to communicate. On the other hand, Nigerianisms are the deployment of peculiar lexicons used by Nigerians to express their thoughts, including some culture-specific vocabulary items, coinages and colloquial expressions that reflect the Nigerian ethno-cultural experiences in their English usage. Nigerianism is a term used to promote linguistic nationalism and the nation's linguistic milieu and culture (Jowit, 2000).

In other words, Nigerianism is a product of the interplay between language use and social variables in the Nigerian linguistic arena or the result of extended contacts between groups of heterogeneous peoples who share no indigenous language. In this study, the notion is used to refer to the expressions used by the migrant characters in the diaspora, which single them out as Nigerians.

Although the three novels are not entirely set in Nigeria, partly set in diverse Europeans countries, the language used by the characters reveals their peculiar socio-cultural background as well as the cosmopolitan texture of the novels.

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In *Trafficked*, the NPE form is used in a conversation involving Nneoma, Efe and Alice who are Nigerian deportees from different parts of Europe:

Extract 4

"Leave am now, if she no wan go …. Haba, na by force? (*Trafficked* p.57)

Alice uses the Nigerian Pidgin English expression to advise Efe to leave Nneoma alone. Nneoma is an Igbo girl, Efe is Benin, while Alice is from the Delta region. Alice uses the Nigerian Pidgin English form to bridge the linguistic gap created by their heterogeneity and also to stamp her Nigerian Delta linguistic background.

Another instance of this can be seen in Extract 5. Alice and Fola, also inmates at Oasis are engaged in a fight, while the other girls try to separate them. The noise attracts the attention of the security guard who arrives the scene and orders them to retire to their rooms.

Extract 5

Abeg make una go sleep. Una dey look fight. Wetin dem de fight for sef? … Na so so fight for dis country every time …. Na so so wahala. Una wan bring am come Oasis? Abeg, make una no put me for trouble. (*Trafficked* p.138).

The expressions above are used by the security guard probably because of his level of literacy or incompetence in the use of the Standard English. Despite this, he is able to achieve communicative competence through the use of the NPE to highlight important issues that border on restiveness and insecurity in different parts of the country.

Extract 6 contains the deployment of NPE and Nigerianisms like 'oya', 'shuku', 'oyibo', which are infused directly into the narratives to engender a distinctively Nigerian flavour and sociocultural identity for the storylines and characterisation.

Extract 6

"Oya! Make am beautiful. She dey go abroad …

You wan braid am? You get good hair, …

Braid? I tell you say she de go abroad, you wan do *shuku* for am. Put relaxer. Make she look like *oyibo* woman! …

Una butcher meat for dis chair? Dis chair dirty plenty! …

So you dey go abroad? …

Wetin you dey go abroad go do? …

She dey go work. You wan go too? You wan go abroad too?

If you wan commot from dis our nonsense country, come see me make we talk." (*On Black Sisters' Street* p.31-2)

The interlocutors here are mainly Dele and Chisom. Chisom has gone to a street beauty salon to make her hair. The salon is a public place, which is open to people of different backgrounds and social status, especially young women. At the salon, Chisom sees a young girl who came to make her hair. She was accompanied by a man named Dele. Dele was the one who initiates the conversation in NPE, directing the hair stylist to make the young girl's hair to look like that of a white woman because she would be travelling abroad. He uses this as an appropriate language for his intended communicative effect, which is to advertise his

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racketeering business of human trafficking. Chisom, who is part of the target audience, becomes his victim just like the majority of other Nigerian youths hoodwinked by sinister human/drug traffickers, who capitalize on the poor economic situation of Nigeria as well as the obsession of the youths to leave the country at all cost, to send them abroad for modern slavery. Many of them are trapped in Libya, Morocco, Algeria *en route* the West, while hundreds of desperate youths drown in the Mediterranean Sea. Out of such desperation, Chisom asks the girl why she is travelling abroad but Dele answers that she is going to work. He also encourages Chisom to visit him at his office for further discussion if she intends to migrate too. He gives Chisom his complimentary card.

4.3 Deployment of Figures of Comparison

Another aspect of the narrative techniques identifiable in the three novels is the deployment of the figures of comparison. They include simile, metaphor, personification, hyperbole, onomatopoeia etc. Simile involves the comparison of one thing with another of different kind to make a description emphatic. It uses the words 'like" or "as' to show similarities between two divergent things. As observed by Romano (2017):

> From a formal point of view, a simile is a conceptual and discursive process of analogy that follows the structure of literal comparisons, that is, it consists of two elements (A and B) prototypically marked by the comparison marker *like*. A stands for the target, topic or *comparandum*, i.e. the entity described by the simile, and B is the source, vehicle or *comparatum*. A third element, E, the property shared by A and B or *tertium comparationis*, can be implicit or explicit. (2)

In a simile, the comparison or transference of idea is clearly depicted as something is related to another in order to aid the mind in reconstructing the picture projected. In Americanah, simile is deployed as a device to capture the strong bond between Obinze and Ifemelu in Extract 7.

Extract 7

> … he wore their relationship so boldly like a brightly coloured shirt. (*Americanah* p.63).

Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie's *Americanah* is basically a love story between Obinze and Ifemelu from a bildungsromanic perspective, as we follow through their relationship from Nigeria to their travels abroad and ultimately their return migration. Their relationship begins from their secondary school days, then to their university days at the University of Nigeria, Nsukka campus. But owing to incessant strikes Ifemelu relocates to the United States of America and Obinze travels to London after his graduation. This leads to their separation but eventual reconnection when both return back to Nigeria. In the example above the strong bond between the duo which is able to survive their years of separation is compared to 'a brightly cololoured shirt', which is usually a center of attraction. This is because of the premium which Obinze places on their relationship, which Ifemelu reciprocates.

Also, Brother Cyril, Ama's step-father in Unigwe's *On Black Sisters' Street* uses the simile in Extract 7 to compare Ama's movement in the house to "floating" and her ''being' to a "ghost". These two words are symbolic because they encapsulate the excruciating pains deeply buried in Ama's psyche.

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Extract 7

> "If you had spent some time studying for your exams instead of floating around the house like a ghost, you'd have passed! (*On Black Sisters' Street p.*147).

These words have haunted her for years, owing to the abuse she suffered in the hands of Brother Cyril. She has been a victim of sexual abuse by the psychotic and hypocritical Brother Cyril. Those are the experiences that have shaped her personality and outlook in life: child abuse, rape and incest. Her vituperative response to Brother Cyril after this comment leads to her being forced to relocate to Lagos and later informs her decision to migrate to Belgium for sex trade.

Metaphors are also used as part of the narrative devices in the novels. Metaphor is a figure of comparison which categorically states that one thing has become another even though they are not actually same. While there is an overt comparison in a simile, that of a metaphor is covert as there is no word to indicate it. That is why Nwachukwu-Agbada et al, (2011) argue that "a metaphor canvases the similarity between two things by insisting that one thing 'is' another. Note that the comparison in a simile is direct and open, while that in a metaphor usually indirect and implied" (1). It is then obvious that metaphorical statements give meanings that go beyond their literal meanings as their understanding relies more on their implied perspective. This can be seen in Extract 8.

Extract 8

> Peter's flat was a shrine to an accumulation of incremental achievements that did not camouflage … the fallacies of those successes. (*On Black Sisters' Street* p.27)

In the above example, Peter, a graduate of Mathematics and a secondary school teacher, is Chisom's boyfriend in Lagos. He takes pride in his profession and displays his "framed certificates" and awards in his sitting room. However, Chisom thinks that Peter does "not have the passion to dream", describing his life as "a cul-de-sac". With that mentality, she concludes that "she was outgrowing him" (28). It is in that dismissive mood that she refers to Peter's flat as a "shrine". For her, Peter has no prospects and no future with her, therefore all his promises to make life better for her fall on deaf ears.

The deployment of personification as a narrative/stylistic device is also noticeable in the novels. In personification, non-animate/lifeless object or an idea is given human attributes. Nwosu (2004) observes that it is "the act of making human out of non-human elements [which] generally makes non-human and non-living things to act like human beings" (45-46). An instance is evident in Extract 9.

Extract 9

(1) The weeks crawled past. (*Americanah* p.91)

(2) Degema street was alive … (*Trafficked* p.282)

The narrator attributes the slowness of a baby's crawling to the way time passes during strike periods, making life very boring and miserable to students as shown in the novel. Also in example 2, 'Degema' which a place is said to be 'alive', apparently because it is one of the overpopulated and boisterous streets of Lagos peopled by those referred to as the poor masses.

Onomatopoeia is also used as narrative device in the novels. It is a situation where words are used to represent the characteristic sound emitted from an object or action in other to create

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a vivid imagery. According to Abrams (1971), onomatopoeia "is applied to a word, or a combination of words, whose sound seem to resemble the sound it denotes" (118). Udeh (2000) also says that 'it is an approximation of an idea using the likeness of the sound produced by the initial object" (197). It means that through the sound made by the word or expression, the meaning can be derived or deciphered. Instances of this in the novels are presented in Extract 10.

Extract 10

1. … She turned up the volume on the CD player flooding the room with *twang boom bam* of a high life tune. (*On Black Sisters' Street p.* 7)
2. A student started hitting the bonnet of the car with a club: *Gboo-aa-ii*! *Gboo-aa-ii*! (*Trafficked* p.173)**.**

In example (1), we are presented with Ama, one of the four protagonists in *On Black Sisters' Street*, whose background is marred by a wicked stepfather, loneliness and dejection. These factors culminate in shaping her into an angry and nasty personality who is not bothered about the effects of her actions on others. The noisy environment she creates by tuning the volume of the radio very high, which creates a '*twang boom bam*' sound, is a defence mechanism against a deeply traumatized psyche, made worse by the kind of life imposed on her as a commercial slave sex worker in Belgium. **Ex**ample (2) captures the violent action of the riotous students of Lagos State University who during their protest over the state of affairs in their country, repeatedly hit hard on the bonnet of a lecturer's car, focing it to make '*Gboo-aa-ii*! *Gboo-aa-ii*!' sound.

4.4 Use of Intervening Igbo Speech Idioms and Transliteration

That language contextualizes literature is a point that cannot be overemphasized. However, the kind of language which creative writers appropriate to their characters reveal an aspect of their ingenuity. The novelists whose works are studied share the same socio-cultural and linguistic background of the Nigerian Igbo. This is evident in their novels. However, the copious influence of the Igbo language in their creative works is not just a representation of their attempt to draw an acceptable truce between their linguistic orientations, but also a means of reflecting the expanded scope of the Igbo culture in which they are rooted as well as enhance the aesthetic quality of their prose. Their narratives are filled with Igbo expressions and transliterations that are significant at the lexical, phrasal and sentential levels of language use. Evidently, the English language as used in the novels is a little more than a conveyance of their Igbo thought patterns. The aim is, probably, to foreground the 'Igboness' of the writers and to achieve a particular kind of dignity for their indigenous Igbo language. Volpe (2021) says that "this can be understood through the lens of diglossia … [which within the context of the three writers under review] is the practice of introducing words and phrases from Igbo into predominantly English language narration. This allows… readers to absorb Igbo into their 'working vocabulary'…. This helps readers to build up their reading vocabulary of Igbo, largely through context" (3). On the other hand, transliteration occurs when Igbo thoughts or ideas are directly expressed in the English language. This is in line with the view of Regmi et al. (2010), who see it as "a process of replacing or complimenting the words or meanings of one language with meanings of another as sometimes exact equivalence or exact meaning might not exist" (18).

The language use of the characters reveals their ethnic and linguistic orientations. Instances of the use of intervening Igbo expressions are evident in Extract 11.

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Extract 11

1. *Ka chi fo*, may the day break well. (*Trafficked* p.47)
2. *Nne m*! My mother. (*Trafficked* p.47)
3. I've been chosen as the next *ozo nkwu*. (*Trafficked p.*77)
4. *Nsogbu adighi*. There is no problem at all. (*Trafficked* p.38)
5. *O di egwu-o*. It is terrible. (*Trafficked* p.39)
6. *Aka ji ya*. She is a captive somewhere. (*Trafficked* p.42)
7. You are the *odu nwa*, the last born and by our tradition, you are to inherit our mother's belonging. (*Trafficked* p.43)
8. "*Nnamukwu*, my lord, lie well." (*Trafficked* p.68)
9. They are waiting for us to give them the go-ahead to fix a date for the *igba nkwu*. (*Trafficked* p.75)
10. You disgust me. *I na-aso m oyi*! (*On Black Sisters' Street (OBSS)* p.147)
11. Just shut up…. *Mechie onu gi kita*. (*OBSS* p.150)
12. Count your teeth with your tongue, *welu ile gi guo eze gi onu*… (*OBSS* p.164)
13. Darling, *kedu ebe I no*? His wife, Kosi, always began her calls to him with those words." (*Americanah* p.21)
14. "*Adi m ime*." She said simply. (*Americanah* p.83)
15. "Darling, *ndo*. I know you're tired." She said. (*Americanah* p.458)
16. The Yoruba man is there helping his brother, but you Igbo people? *I ga-asikwa*. (*Americanah* p.456)
17. … The woman with *obi ocha*. (*Americanah* p.457)
18. "I had bookhead, *isi akwukwo*." (*OBSS* p.19)
19. Let dog lick the eyes of whoever started this rumour. (*Trafficked* p.112)
20. His mind and his heart were arguing. (*Trafficked* p.226)
21. The king's Kola is in the king's hands. (*Trafficked* p.214)
22. Lebechi and her senses have parted ways. (*Trafficked* p.216)

Examples 1, 2, 4, 5, 6, 7, 8, 10, 11, 12 and 18 are some of the Igbo expressions that appear side-by-side their English versions, while in examples 3, 9, 13, 14, 15, 16 and 17, the author merely frames the meaning of the intervening Igbo expressions into the narrative itself. The English translations are therefore not strictly close, either to the right or left of their Igbo versions. The reader is expected to rely on the wider conversational context in order to understand the expressions which are embedded in the narrative. The expressions in 19, 20, 21 and 22 are examples of transliteration where Igbo thought patterns and indigenous knowledge are rendered in English. In this context, English functions in the capacity of just a vehicle to convey the message articulated in Igbo.

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4.5 Characterization as Aesthetics of Identity

Characters are the 'people' we 'meet' in the fictional world. They are the human and animal entities created by the author, in whom he/she inputs language in order to achieve the artistic and/or aesthetic intentions of the text. Characterization is the totality of the characters in a text as well as the way in which the personality of a character is developed by the author. It allows the reader to identify or empathize with the characters and then have the feeling that what is happening to the people in the story is vicariously happening to them. This gives the reader a sense of verisimilitude, or the resemblance of living reality. It affords the reader the opportunity to explore the characters' hearts and examine their motivations, through what they say, do, the relationships they keep and how they react to situations. It is actually characterization that drives the plot of a story. Authors use effective character delineation, the credibility of the characters and the suitability of their communication or actions to amplify the stylistic and aesthetic value of their work. Writers carefully and aptly create the characters and imbue them with psychic power and appropriate humanity which enable them to convey the artistic message they embody.

For example, in *Trafficked*, Nneoma, Efe, Fola, Alice and other young women are trafficked abroad, abused and dehumanized in different western countries and are eventually deported. Evidently, the novelist takes time to build credibility into these characters and after then she consistently positions them to fit into the world of her novel. However, for the space constraint, Nneoma and Efe, two of the major characters in the novel will be examined to highlight the aesthetics of their identity in the novel, with a view to situating the subject of migration and illusory vision.

Nneoma is the protagonist of the novel. She is intelligent, beautiful, vivacious and adventurous but migration experiences turn her into a brooding, sceptical, traumatized, humiliated and stigmatized woman. Before her irregular migration and as a child, the narrator presents her as follows: "She had been a happy child, avidly exploring the world around her and finding fun in all she did. She teased her teachers, annoyed her classmates and irritated her two sisters and brother. Even visitors did not escape her inquisitive questions, some of them embarrassing, to say the least" (7).

Efe is Nneoma's friend and fellow victim of human trafficking and deportation. She is a young woman who refuses to let anything or any circumstance get the better of her, rather she displays an aura of positivism in the novel. She is full of life and light-hearted, welcoming and friendly. Above all, she is one to find good things in worst places/situations, never afraid of lunching out after her deportation and proves to be of reliable character. Efe displays her sense of friendship to Nneoma and suggests discussing their past as psycho-therapeutic. She tells Nneoma:

> I know we've both been hurt. Terribly hurt. I see it in your movement, in your silences. I'm sure you also see it in me, however much I pretend all is well. Nneoma, you brood too much. You must let go and move on. I don't know what happened to you, but it's not healthy to be so bitter, to punish yourself like this …. I just want to be your friend in the real sense, to carry some of your burden, if you allow me and also get you to share some of mine, if you're willing. Nneoma, we're all broken inside. Look, why don't we just tell each other what happened to us? Perhaps finding our voices will help us heal. (97)

She successfully persuades Nneoma to talk about her ordeals as a trafficked person for the therapeutic effect. She also encourages her to realize that despite their difficulties and

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disappointments abroad, they should not give up but try to make use of the opportunities provided by their rehabilitation in Nigeria to reorganize their lives to succeed. Efe proceeds to tell her story in using the first person narrative technique:

> I was born in Benin where my parents had lived all their lives. I assume they still live there if they are alive. I was out of the country for about seven years. My family was poor; it was a struggle to put our meals on the table. Only my elder sister and I went to college. My three brothers dropped out before they finished primary school. I have a younger sister and I hope she is still in school. She was only ten when I left home. I was nearly nineteen. (98)

After telling her story, Nneoma confesses to have been hugely relieved. Her countenance changes and Efe tells her: "Nneoma, do you realize this is the first time I have seen your face cheerful and your voice light?" (100). this disposition helps Nneoma to heal. Throughout the novel, Efe becomes Nneoma's confidant and even after she has left the Oasis Centre, she still keeps in touch with Nneoma, thereby displaying exemplary friendship in the novel.

Chika Unigwe also creates memorably convincing characters in *On Black Sisters' Street* (*OBSS*). The four female protagonists are all migrants whose experiences of the West are a product of the vicissitudes of the life to which each of them is subjected by socio-cultural and economic forces beyond them. The women – Sisi, Efe, Ama, and Joyce are all round characters. Having come from different backgrounds, they are united by a common goal – the will to survive in the red district of Belgium. They are brought together by a conspiracy of fate, with the sinister, Dele, as their common enemy. The women remain strangers to one another, with each of them hiding their unpleasant past experiences. However, the sudden death of Sisi (Chisom) changes the other three completely. They begin to share their stories and as well appreciate one another as family. With this psychic, they consequently relate more closely with one another. In what follows, this study will examine two of the four main characters with emphasis on their histories, the factors responsible for their personality formation, the illusory vision that informs their migration, and their experiences/resolutions in the diaspora.

Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie in telling the love story that defines the plot of *Americanah* creates both static and dynamic characters that truly reflect real life figures. Their essential humanity, character strengths and weaknesses, ambitions and regrets, optimism and pessimism, successes and failures are constructively portrayed. Most importantly, she succinctly explores the psychology of her characters, the workings of their mind and the internal motivations of their actions. Through effective characterization, Adichie interrogates the push-factors responsible for migration from Nigeria as well as the genuine hardships and perspectives of being an immigrant in the diaspora. The work also covers the return migration of some of the characters. This study will examine the migrant characters whose odysseys are relevant to the present discourse. They selected characters are Ifemelu, Obinze, and Aunty Uju. Ifemelu is the protagonist in *Americanah*, a denizen who struggles to adjust or transmute as an immigrant in America. Ifemelu had been given the recherché opportunity to further her education in the United States of America, which holds astronomically immense significance for the majority of Africans and Nigerians, whose educational background is bedevilled by incessant strikes which truncate academic progress.

Obinze is another major character in the novel. He is small, calm but an intelligent young man who is trained by his mother – a professor. He is Ifemelu's boyfriend who has always dreamt of America as "where he was destined to be" (233). Uju is Ifemelu's Aunty. She enjoys

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a relatively comfortable and successful life in Nigeria, as a "consultant at the military hospital in Victoria Island" (45), living in a "new house in Dolphin Estate" with nice belongings; and she socializes with the higher social classes, all because she is The General's concubine, with whom she has a son (Dike) (85). Her life takes a different but unanticipated turn when the General dies in a plane crash, a week after Dike's first birthday (86), and his relatives come to evict her from the Dolphin residence. Aunty Uju is forced to relocate to America with her son. In America, her life becomes the very opposite of what it has been in Nigeria: she lives in a "one-bedroom apartment", works three jobs, takes examinations to become a doctor again, gets married to Bartholomew, who is parasitic and does not belong to her social class. In a nutshell, her living conditions are generally poor. For Uju and her kind of immigrants, America is a leveller, as many highly skilled professionals, including those who have abandoned their decent jobs in Nigeria and travelled to the West in search of greener pastures, have to resort to menial jobs in order to survive and pay their bills in the diaspora. Her diasporic experiences again highlight the illusoriness of migrants' visions.

CONCLUSION

The aim of this study was to examine the narrative devices and style deployed in Akachi Adimora-Ezeigbo's *Trafficked*, Chimamanda Adichie's *Americanah* and Chika Unigwe's *On Black Sisters' Street* in order to show how these devices contribute to theme development and characterisation. The main deduction made from the qualitative analysis of the three novels is that the authors' basic language is English, which is imbued with a distinctive Nigerian character through the deployment of peculiar Nigerian linguistic forms. There is also a heavy presence of expressions rendered in indigenous African languages especially Igbo which reveal the socio-cultural and linguistic backgrounds of the authors. There is also the use of other indigenous languages such as Yoruba, Hausa as well as Nigerian Pidgin English. The experiences and personalities of the migrant characters who are mainly Nigerians by birth are captured in the languages they use which portray both the multilingual and cosmopolitan texture of the narratives. It is therefore concluded that the authors' success as creative writers and the success of their novels as canonical are solely as a result of their success in appropriately deploying and manipulating the repertoire of the languages at their disposal.

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