

Illocutionary Speech Acts in Gendered Language: Examining Miscommunication and Relational Dynamics in Nwapa's *Efuru*

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Abstract

This paper explores gendered communication styles of marital conflicts in selected dialogues of five characters in Nwapa's *Efuru*. It utilizes Tannen (1990) report and rapport talk aspects of genderlect theory and Yule (1996) illocutionary speech acts to analyse five excerpts in two marital conflict situations in the text in order to examine the report and rapport talks and their effects, thus, how these communication styles contribute to miscommunication and relational dynamics in their marital lives. It adopts qualitative and quantitative descriptive research methods to analyse the selected dialogues, focusing on the frequency and impact of different speech acts on their relationship. The findings reveal a predominance of directive speech acts (56.6%) used by the characters to command and influence each other, while the report talks as used by Efuru (61%), Adizua (19%), Gilbert (10%), and Nkoyeni (10%) are used to indicate assertion of control, abrupt end of conversations, curt response and deeper engagement avoidance respectively. Efuru shows a strong inclination towards rapport talk (89%), which contrasted with her mother-in-law's minimal use (11%). This indicates that Efuru's attempts towards emotional conversational engagement and provision of clarity are often met with resistance, leading to emotional disconnection and unresolved conflicts. Adizua and Gilbert's preference for brief and factual communication exacerbate misunderstanding and relational tensions. The study underscores the need for a balanced use of speech acts to foster better communication, emotional connection, and conflict resolution, thereby providing insights into gendered interactions in family life.

Keywords: *Gendered Communication, Miscommunication, Report and Rapport Talks, Illocutionary Speech Acts, Relational Dynamics, Nwapa's Efuru.*

1. INTRODUCTION

Flora Nwapa's *Efuru* is an African literature that explores the themes of gender, culture and social dynamics in Nigerian society. The novel provides different views of interactions that reflect the dynamics of marital relationships and communication patterns, which is a critical aspect of human relationships and social life. Gender issues in Africa are far more nuanced, complex, and varied across different communities and countries in the continent, thereby reflecting the continent's diverse traditions, cultures and historical experiences. Nwapa's *Efuru* is a reflection of the South-Eastern Nigerian's historical experience and tradition. It depicts the traditional gender issues and values in the people, and especially, in the people's marital life. Gender is the most important lens through which we view people and life (Alami, 2016). Meller (1993) says that there is a linguistic distinction between sex and gender. Sex is the difference between male and female reproductive organs while gender is the socially constructed roles

and functions allotted to an individual on the basis of perceived sexually difference. Language plays a critical role in shaping and reflecting gender norms and stereotypes. The ways in which men and women use language, the representation of gender in various forms of communication, and the efforts to promote gender-neutral language all highlight the complex relationship between language and gender.

Language and gender are linked with various studies highlighting how language reflects and reinforces gender roles and stereotypes. Cameron (1992) posits that language is not only a medium for communication but also a social practice that shapes and is shaped by societal norms and gender. Gendered language – different speech patterns, word choices, and communication styles used by men and women – serves to perpetuate existing power dynamics and social expectations (Tannen, 1990). For example, Holmes (1995) agrees that women are often socialized to use language that is more polite, tentative, and supportive, while men tend to use language that is more assertive and competitive. Gender differences in language use can be seen in various contexts such as in the workplace, where men and women may employ different communication strategies to manage professional relationships. Following Lakoff (1975) postulation, women use more hedges, tag questions, and qualifiers in their speech, which can sometimes undermine their authority and contribute to the perception of women as less confident compared to men. This trend is partly rooted in socialization processes that encourage women to prioritize harmony and cooperation, while men are encouraged to assert dominance and authority (Coates, 2004).

The impact of language on gender extends beyond spoken communication to written forms and media presentations. Language used in textbooks, adverts, and literature constantly reflect gender biases. The use of male pronouns as the default and the portrayal of men in active and authoritative roles and women in passive or supportive roles reinforce traditional gender stereotypes as Spender (1980) says. The Sapir-Whorf hypothesis suggests that the structure of a language influences its speakers' worldview and cognition, indicating that gendered language can shape how individuals perceive and internalize gender roles (Whorf, 1956).

Efforts to promote gender-neutral language aim to reduce the reinforcement of gender biases and promote equality. Gender-neutral language avoids the use of gender-specific terms and pronouns, instead, it opts for inclusive alternatives such as 'they' instead of 'he' or 'she' and 'firefighter' instead of 'fireman'. According to Sczesory et al. (2016), the adoption of gender-neutral language can contribute to changing perceptions and attitudes towards gender roles.

From the foregoing, it is a fact that gendered language and differences in male and female communication styles have been significantly studied in the past, gendered language (Lakoff, 1975; Holmes, 1987; Tannen, 1986) among others, and the differences in communication styles between male and female on different text types: on spoken language - (Keune, 2013; Tannen, 1994), written language - (Newman et al., 2008; Khaldi & Boukhentach, 2020; Piersoul & Van de Velde, 2022), and political speeches (Ayodabo, 2017; Mahartika & Hanafiah, 2019).

This findings has underscored the reality that men and women have differences in their communication structure. To this, Tannen (1990) concurs that men and women often have divergent approaches to dialogue. Concurrently, these differences are evident in the interactions between couples in Nwapa's *Efuru*. However, this study aims to elucidate the broader implications of gender and communication in marital relationships by investigating instances of report and rapport talks, the inherent speech acts and effects, and how these

communication styles and their resultant effects contribute to miscommunication and conflict escalation in the fictional work. Conflict situations here are defined as instances in the text where there is disagreement, confrontation or clash of interests between characters.

2. REVIEW OF STUDIES IN NWAPA'S *EFURU*

Flora Nwapa's *Efuru* has been extensively studied since its publication in 1966, therefore, garnering a significant attention for its pioneering role in African literature. The novel has been analysed through various lenses, including feminist and gender studies (Ogunyemi, 1988; Ogundipe-Leslie, 1994; Sanjo, 2018; Tambani, 2014), postcolonial studies (Nnaemeka, 1997) and sociolinguistics (Ezeigbo, 1990). Sanjo (2018) posits that Nwapa's *Efuru* made great contributions to the ideas of ecological consciousness and environmental protection using theories of ecocriticism and feminist criticism. He notes that Nwapa inculcates her novel with the theme of feminine and natural liberation from dominance and violence and foresees the establishment of symbiosis, in which there is no male oppression or environment oppression. In the same vein, Tambani (2014) also notes that *Efuru* is a symbol of a redefined, regenerated and great social awareness among women of the developing society and urged female authors to create greater awareness amongst the womenfolk for them to know what their rights are, and to exercise them for self-emancipation mentally, socially and psychologically from inhuman cultural practices just as *Efuru* did when she left Eneberi, her second husband.

Ogunyemi (1988) and Ogundipe-Leslie (1994) praise Nwapa for presenting strong and complex female characters, who defy patriarchal norms. *Efuru*, the protagonist, is depicted as an independent and successful woman, contrasting with the stereotyped portrayal of women as submissive and dependent on men. Ezeigbo (1990) examines the way characters address each other, the use of proverbs, and the subtleties of politeness strategies which contribute to the understanding of social interactions in the novel. Nnaemeka (1997) avers that the novel is seen as a reflection of Nwapa's effort to reclaim African narratives and assert the value of indigenous knowledge systems. According to him, through her characters and their interactions, Nwapa critiques the lingering effects of colonialism on Nigerian society, particularly on gender relations and cultural practices. This paper, however, is a departure from the previous studies as it focuses on speech acts and their effects in gendered communication and how the effects contribute to misunderstanding and conflict escalation among the five major characters in the novel. By so doing, it tries to fill a gap in the literature by providing a detailed exposition of how miscommunication during marital conflicts and relational dynamics can influence conflict resolution in marriages and, generally, in social life.

3. THEORETICAL FRAMEWORKS

The study employs an eclectic research approach. It adopts Deborah Tannen (1990) genderlect theory, concentrating on her report and rapport talks and George Yule (1996) illocutionary speech acts.

3.1 Tannen's Genderlect Theory: Report and Rapport Talks

The notion of genderlect has been proposed to account for some of the apparently systematic differences in the ways men and women use language (Schmitt, 2010, p.150). This difference is what Tannen (1990) views as 'male-female conversation is cross-cultural communication.' In her book, *You Just Don't Understand*, she seeks to explain why men and women often talk past each other. Men and women's pattern of speaking are so fundamentally

different because they belong to different communities of practice and cultures. She defines these different speech styles of men and women as report-talk and rapport-talk. Women tend to use conversation for intimacy, giving support and to reach consensus, hence the term rapport-talk. Report-talk (task-oriented) is for information and achieving higher status and power in conversations. It is used to maintain superiority and dominance over others. In conversation, men negotiate to maintain the upper hand and shield themselves from any attempt to bring them down. These characteristics of report and rapport talks are analysed in conflict situations to know how well they are employed by male and female characters in *Efuru*.

3.2 Yule's Illocutionary Speech Acts

The speech act theory was postulated by J.L. Austin in his 1962 posthumously published in his book, *How to Do Things with Words*. His idea of speech acts was based on the conception that people perform certain actions when they speak. Language is used for doing things and not only for saying things. He identified three levels of action. They are: locutionary act (what is said), illocutionary act (what is done) and perlocutionary act (effect of what is done). Following Austin's classifications, Searle (1969), Bach and Harnish (1979), Traggot and Pratt (1980) and Yule (1996) made significant contributions to illocutionary acts. This paper focuses on Yule's (1996) illocutionary acts. He listed five types of illocutionary acts humans perform with words – declarations, representatives, expressives, directives and commissives. Declarations bring about a change in the external situation through the utterance itself. Examples are resigning, christening, declaring war. Representatives are the kind of speech acts that commit the speaker to the truth of the expressed proposition. They convey information, describe state of affairs or assert facts about the world. The speakers represent the world as they believe it is. Examples are affirming, reporting, stating, concluding and predicting. Expressives convey the speaker's psychological state or emotions. Examples are thanking, apologizing, congratulating, expressing sympathy. Directives are attempts by the speaker to get the listener to do something. Examples are requesting, commanding, advising, suggesting. Commissives are speech acts that commit the speaker to a future cause of action. Examples are promising, offering, vowing. In this context, analyzing illocutionary speech acts helps to see the characters' use of language to perform actions, assert authorities, express emotions and go through socially constituted norms during conflict.

4. METHODOLOGY

The study uses qualitative and quantitative research approaches to descriptive and content analytical procedure to analyse five excerpts on marital problems in two different conflict situations involving five characters, Efuru and Adizua (couple); Gilbert, Nkoyeni and Efuru (polygamy) and Efuru and her mother-in-law. Data for the study are purposively selected dialogues of the above mentioned characters and analysed using insights from Deborah Tannen (1990) genderlect theory, while concentrating on her report and rapport talks and George Yule (1996) illocutionary speech acts. These theoretical frameworks are adopted because they are found to provide a better understanding of the communicative strategies employed in these conflict situations by the characters and also highlighting the connections or relationships between gendered communication styles and the performative nature of speech. Furthermore, the identified conflict situations are coded according to Tannen's concept of report and rapport talks. Each character's utterance is further analysed to determine its illocutionary force. The study further integrates the findings from genderlect analysis and the illocutionary speech acts analysis by cross-referencing the use of report and rapport talks with the identified illocutionary

acts to understand how gendered communication styles influence the performative aspects of speech in conflict situations. Their usage frequency is analysed to show the implications of these gendered language and their speech acts in relational dynamics

Findings and Discussions

This section presents an analysis of the novel in line with the identified genderlects – report and rapport talks and the illocutionary speech acts, namely: declarations, representatives, expressives, directives and commissives. Each of these elements is analysed with reference to how they influence the relational dynamics of the characters in each of the conflict situations in the novel discussed.

Excerpt 1 (The beginning of Efuru and Adizua’s marital conflict as provided by the narrator and followed by the characters’ dialogues)

At this time, Adizua was missing many meals. He would return from the market, have his bath and disappear. Efuru would wait for him and when he did not return, she would eat without relish. Then she would go to bed very sad. At midnight, Adizua would come back and knock. Efuru would get up quickly and open the door. ‘Have you returned my husband?’

‘Yes.’

‘Shall I bring food to you?’

‘No, I am not hungry.’

Efuru would then go to bed and think. (p.50)

Efuru’s question ‘*Have you returned my husband?*’ is a rapport talk that shows concern for Adizua’s well-being and attempts to engage him in a conversation. This she does using a directive speech act of requesting for information. Her second question ‘*Shall I bring food to you?*’ again reflects her role in maintaining the relationship by offering to care for her husband’s needs. Her questions aim to establish a dialogue and offer care, reflecting her focus on relational maintenance. Her speech acts are directed towards engaging Adizua and addressing his needs, showing a relational and supportive approach. On the other hand, Adizua’s brief response, ‘*Yes*’ provides the necessary information without engaging in further conversation. His second response, ‘*No, I am not hungry*’ is direct and task-oriented, focusing solely on the information requested. Both responses are representative speech acts stating a fact about his current state of being home and not hungry.

Efuru’s use of rapport talk and directives expects reciprocal engagement and emotional connection. However, Adizua’s report talk and representatives do not meet these expectations, leading to a potential sense of neglect or rejection for Efuru. This lack of emotional engagement from Adizua contributes to miscommunication. Her attempts to maintain the relationship through caring gestures are met with minimal interaction, which may escalate her frustration and feelings of isolation. Efuru represents a typical rapport talk style, focusing on relational connection and emotional support. Her speech acts aim to foster intimacy and care within the relationship. While Adizua exhibits a report talk style, emphasizing brief and factual communication. His speech acts prioritize information exchange over relational dialogue. The differing communication styles create imbalance and highlights the potential for conflict arising from misaligned communication styles.

Excerpt 2 (Efuru confides in her mother-in-law about her husband's sudden strange attitude)

She decided to take her mother-in-law into confidence. So one evening, she went to her. 'I want to tell you something,' she began.

'Is it all right with you and your husband?' her mother-in-law asked.

'It is bad, but not very bad,' Efuru said and hissed. 'My husband is not happy with me. I don't know what is wrong. He comes home late and won't eat my food. I don't know what to do.'

'You are sure you have not offended him in any way?' Efuru's mother-in-law asked.

'I am sure I have not offended him in any way. I have not quarrelled with him for not eating my food. For a long time, we have not lived as husband and wife...' (p. 50)

The dialogue here are all instances of rapport talk. Efuru initiates a conversation to share her concerns '*I want to tell you something*,' her emotional state and seeks understanding and advice, '*It is bad, but not very bad. My husband is not happy with me. I don't know what is wrong. He comes home late and won't eat my food. I don't know what to do.*' Her mother-in-law's use of rapport talk is seen when she expresses concern for the relational aspect of Efuru's issue and seeks to understand the relational dynamics and possible causes of the conflict. Efuru's communication emphasizes her focus on emotional expression and relational understanding. Her opening speech in this excerpt, '*I want to tell you something*' is a directive speech act initiating conversation and seeking the mother-in-law's attention. She goes further to use expressive speech act, '*It is bad, but not very bad. My husband is not happy with me. I don't know what is wrong. He comes home late and won't eat my food. I don't know what to do...I am sure I have not offended him in any way*' to share her emotional distress and confusion and also a representative speech act, '*He comes home late and won't eat my food... I have not quarrelled with him for not eating my food. For a long time, we have not lived as husband and wife*' to provide information about the situation. Her mother-in-law's concern for her relationship is seen in her use of directives to ask for clarification and details of their relationship and also probing for possible causes of the issue, '*Is it right with you and your husband? You are sure you have not offended him in any way?*'

Efuru's communication emphasizes sharing her feelings and the state of her relationship, reflecting her focus on emotional expression and relational understanding. Her expressive speech acts reveal her distress and need for support, while her representative speech acts aim to provide a clear picture of the situation. The mother-in-law's questions are aimed at understanding the relational dynamics and potential causes of the conflict. Her directives seek to clarify Efuru's actions and the state of her marriage, showing concern and a desire to help. Efuru's detailed sharing of her emotional state and situation, combined with the mother-in-law's probing questions shows an attempt to understand and resolve the problem. However, the persistence of the problem despite these efforts can lead to frustration and further conflict if the underlying issues are not addressed.

Excerpt 3:

But many nights her husband was not home and most of his meals were not eaten. So Efuru refused to cook any more meals. One night, he returned and demanded his food.

'I did not cook anything for you. For weeks now, you have not asked for your food, and tonight you have returned demanding your food. I have wasted a lot of money cooking food that you never ate.'

'I want my food tonight,' Adizua said quietly and went to his room.

Efuru went to the kitchen and prepared something for her husband. When it was ready, Adizua was called and when there was no reply from his room, Ogea was sent. The room was empty. Efuru left the food on a tray and went to bed.

When she returned from the stream in the morning, she heard some sounds in Adizua's room and knew that he was in. She went straight in. 'Where did you go last night?' she asked very quietly. She was surprised to notice that despite all her anger the night before, she was quite composed and far from losing her temper. Adizua did not answer. He was busy examining a blunt knife. It was Adizua's silence and indifference that made her mad. 'Don't you hear me?' she raised her voice. 'Adizua, don't you hear me? Where did you go last night and why did you get me up from bed to cook for you only to go out before I finished cooking?'

Adizua made no reply.

'Adizua, are you deaf? Why don't you answer me? Adizua was still busy examining the blunt knife. He was looking at it as if his whole life depended on the result of his examination.

'You are deaf and dumb, I wish you will continue being deaf and dumb. And I tell you, you are going to be sorry for this behaviour,' Efuru left the room. (pp. 51-53)

Efuru's reply to Adizua's demand for food is a report talk showing authority, facts, giving information and providing a detailed account of the situation. She gave specific information about her actions and the practical consequences. This she does using representative speech acts, '*I did not cook anything for you. For weeks now, you have not asked for your food, and tonight you have returned demanding your food*' to state facts and provide information about her actions and the situation, and expressive speech acts, '*I have wasted a lot of money cooking food that you never ate*' to express her frustration and her emotion. Her expressions are met with Adizua's direct and task-oriented request (report talk), '*I want my food tonight.*' This he achieved by using a directive speech act of requesting. Efuru engages in rapport talk, focusing on emotional expression and relational maintenance. Her use of report talk in this excerpt marks a significant deviation, indicating a shift in her communication strategy. She attempts to communicate in a style Adizua is more comfortable with, given his preference for factual and brief exchanges. This shift could also be an effort to bridge the communication gap and elicit a response from her husband which in turn becomes fruitless as Adizua makes the same brief demand, '*I want my food tonight.*' After repeated attempts to engage her husband emotionally have failed, she resorts to factual statements, indicating that relational strategies have been exhausted.

The interaction between them the following morning is report talk. Efuru's question, '*Where did you go last night?*' is a direct request for information, fitting the report talk style. She is seeking specific details about Adizua's actions using a directive speech act of requesting. By not responding, Adizua is not engaging in the information exchange that report talk values. This lack of response can be interpreted as withholding information because of a reluctance to share details. Efuru continues with her demand of specific information about Adizua's actions and his reasons, '*Don't you hear me? (Raising her voice) Adizua, don't you hear me? Where did you go last night and why did you get me up from bed to cook for you only to go out before*

I finished cooking?’ and also expressing her frustrations clearly *‘Adizua, are you deaf? Why don’t you answer me?’* This direct and detailed request for information aligns with report talk. Adizua’s continued silence fails to provide the information Efuru seeks, creating a barrier to communication and escalating the conflict. Her use of directive speech acts in the repeated commands for Adizua to respond to indicates her need for an explanation and communicates her feelings of frustration and disrespect. She further expresses her frustration in anger, *‘You are deaf and dumb, I wish you will continue being deaf and dumb.’* And uses her words to commit to a future consequence of her husband’s actions, *‘And I tell you, you are going to be sorry for this behaviour.’* This vowing here is the use of commissive speech acts. The combination of these speech acts emphasizes her intense frustration and signals the escalation of the conflict while the commissive speech act indicates a warning that his continued silence will have negative consequences.

Excerpt 4 (In Efuru’s second marriage, she could not give birth to a child, she therefore married another woman for her husband. Her husband, Gilbert, left one day and did not return for six months. He was in jail but refused to inform his wives. Efuru heard it and asked him which he agreed but did not give the details. His second wife heard the story outside and confronted him.)

Nkoyeni was not a child. She demanded an explanation from Gilbert who flatly denied it all. *‘Go and ask your mother, Efuru,’* Gilbert told his wife. *‘And don’t annoy me any further.’*

Nkoyeni seeks to engage emotionally and understand the situation, an indicative of a rapport talk, which aims at relational maintenance and emotional connection. Gilbert’s response is a direct, factual and dismissive one. He avoids emotional engagement and seeks to end the conversation. This is a characteristic of report talk, which focuses on conveying information and maintaining independence. Nkoyeni’s request for information and explanation from her husband is a directive speech act which indicates her desire for communication and clarity. On Gilbert’s side, he uses directive speech acts of instructing to Nkoyeni to seek information elsewhere, *‘Go and ask your mother, Efuru,’* and commanding to stop Nkoyeni’s questions, aiming to close the conversation and assert control, *‘And don’t annoy me any further.’* Nkoyeni’s demand for an explanation highlights her need for communication and understanding, while Gilbert’s dismissive response underscores a significant emotional disconnect. His avoidance and directive to stop questioning him intensifies the relational tension and contribute to miscommunication.

Excerpt 5

Nkoyeni was not satisfied when Efuru told her that the story was not true. She threatened to leave but Efuru tried to calm her down.

‘Nkoyeni!’ Efuru said one evening after a quarrel between Nkoyeni and Gilbert, *‘Nkoyeni listen to me. You are a child, a mere child. You do not understand. If your husband went to jail, will you leave him? If he committed murder today, will you desert him? Tell me frankly, will you? I have told you that the story is not true. Our Eneberi (Gilbert) did not go to jail. Jail for what? Is our husband a thief? I know how you feel but I have told you that it is not true...’* Nkoyeni was not convinced. She made a lot of trouble and alluded to the scandal at the slightest provocation until Gilbert and Efuru were thoroughly disgusted with her. (pp. 211-212)

Efuru’s use of rapport talk in her opening speech is an attempt to establish authority and a relational connection by addressing Nkoyeni’s emotions and perceived immaturity, *‘Nkoyeni! Nkoyeni listen to me. You are a child, a mere child. You do not understand.’* She continues by

using another feature of rapport talk, the hypothetical qualifier *'if'* to ask questions to appeal to Nkoyeni's loyalty and understanding of marital commitment, *'If your husband went to jail, will you leave him? If he committed murder today, will you desert him?'* This invites Nkoyeni to consider the situation without feeling attacked or judged. She goes further to provide factual information and reassurance to dispel the rumour. This is her use of report talk, *'I have told you that the story is not true. Our Eneberi did not go to jail.'* and immediately reverts to rapport talk, *'I know how you feel but I have told you that it is not true.'* by acknowledging Nkoyeni's emotions and comforts her. She uses the directive speech acts by commanding Nkoyeni to listen and asking her questions to provoke thought and loyalty; the expressive speech acts *'You are a child, a mere child. You do not understand.'* by expressing her frustration and perceived authority over Nkoyeni; the representative speech acts *'I have told you that the story is not true. Our Eneberi did not go to jail.'* to clarify the situation and concluding with another expressive to acknowledge Nkoyeni's feelings while reinforcing the truth, *'I know how you feel but I have told you that it is not true.'*

Efuru's use of a mixture of report and rapport talks attempts to appeal emotionally to Nkoyeni while also providing factual reassurance. Her directive and expressive speech acts aim to establish authority, provide comfort and dispel rumours. Her approach is designed to make Nkoyeni see through emotional appeal and factual clarification. Her acknowledgement of Nkoyeni's feelings seeks to address the emotional aspect of the conflict, while her authoritative stance underscores her role as a more experienced wife. Despite Efuru's efforts, the narration indicates that Nkoyeni remains unconvinced and continues to cause trouble. This suggests a gap in effective communication where Nkoyeni's emotional state prevents her from accepting Efuru's reassurances. The analysis of Excerpt 5 reveals that through directive, expressive and representative speech acts, Efuru employs both report and rapport talks, highlighting her comprehensive approach to dispute resolution. The fact that Nkoyeni is still in doubt, despite her attempts to offer factual certainty and emotional consolation shows the difficulties in bridging emotional disconnects through authoritative communication. It emphasizes the need for a more sophisticated approach to addressing emotional validation to effectively resolve conflicts and enhance relational understanding.

Implications of Findings on Report and Rapport Talks

Personnel	Report Talks	Freq.	Rapport Talks	Freq.
Adizua	4	19%		
Gilbert	2	10%		
Efuru	13	61%	17	89%
Nkoyeni	2	10%		
Efuru's Mother-in-law			2	11%
Total	21	100%	19	100%

Report Talk: Adizua's relatively low use of report talk (19%) indicates that he prefers direct factual communication in certain contexts but does not dominate conversations with it. This aligns with his generally withdrawn and non-communicative behaviour in the dialogues contributing to the emotional disconnect and miscommunication with Efuru. On the other hand, Efuru's predominant use of report talk (61%) is significant. It suggests that despite her inclination towards rapport talk, she often shifts to report talk, possibly in attempts to clarify misunderstandings, assert control, or convey important information. These duality reflects her adaptability in communication styles but also highlights her struggle to be understood and resolve conflicts through factual statements. Gilbert's minimal use of report talk (10%) reflects his preference for brief, factual communication, often aimed at ending conversations or

avoiding deeper engagement. This contributes to relational tensions and his authoritative, yet emotional distant demeanor. Finally, Nkoyeni's minimal use of report talk indicates that she rarely resorts to factual communication. Her interactions are more emotionally driven, which aligns with her frequent need for emotional validation and support.

Rapport Talk: Efuru's predominant use of rapport talk (89%) underscores her strong inclination towards emotional engagement and relational maintenance. She frequently seeks to connect on an emotional level, provide support and maintain harmony. This dominant use of rapport talk highlights her empathetic nature but also her frustration when faced with non-reciprocal communication from Adizua and Nkoyeni. Her mother-in-law's use of rapport talk (11%) suggests that while she occasionally engages in emotional support, it is not her primary mode of communication. Her role is more supportive and pragmatic, stepping in to provide guidance and resolve conflicts when necessary.

Distribution of Speech Acts in the Dialogues

Speech Acts	Frequency	Percentage
Expressives	6	20%
Declarations	0	0%
Commissives	1	3.33%
Directives	17	56.67%
Representatives	6	20%
Total	30	100%

The predominance of directive speech acts in the analyzed dialogues, constituting 56.6%, alongside 20% representatives and expressives, 3.33% commissives, and the absence of declarations, has several implications for understanding the communication dynamics and relational outcomes in Nwapa's *Efuru*. The high percentage of directives indicates a communication style heavily oriented towards controlling interactions and influencing the actions of others. This suggests that characters often seek to direct or command each other rather than engaging in open, reciprocal exchanges. This dynamic can contribute to power struggles and exacerbate relational tensions, as seen in the conflicts between Efuru and Adizua, and Gilbert and Nkoyeni. With only 20% representatives and 20% expressives, there is a limited exchange of information and emotional expressions. Representatives are crucial for conveying facts and clarifying misunderstandings, while expressives are essential for sharing emotions and building empathy. The relatively low usage of these speech acts indicates that characters may not be effectively communicating their thoughts or feelings, leading to misunderstandings and unresolved emotional issues.

The 3.33% occurrence of commissives suggests that characters did not commit to future actions or promises. It was only seen when Efuru vows that Adizua would regret his actions in the future, '*And I tell you, you are going to be sorry for this behaviour.*' This lack of commitment can undermine trust and reliability in relationships, as there is little assurance of follow-through on intentions or promises. It reflects a communication style that may be more reactive than proactive, focusing on immediate directives rather than long-term relational commitments. The absence of declarations, which are speech acts that bring about a change in the external situation (e.g., making decisions, announcing changes), implies a lack of authoritative or transformative communication. This could indicate that characters are not taking decisive actions or making binding decisions, which might be necessary to resolve conflicts or bring about significant changes in their relationships or situations. The dominance of directives leads to an escalation of conflicts, as characters feel coerced or controlled rather

than understood and supported. This is evident in the persistent conflicts and emotional disconnects in the dialogues, where attempts to direct or command often result in resistance and frustration.

The low use of expressives means that characters struggle to connect emotionally, further widening the gap in understanding and empathy. Efuru's efforts to engage emotionally are often met with factual or directive responses, leading to her frustration and feelings of isolation. The limited use of representatives and the absence of declarations suggest that conflicts are not being effectively resolved through clear communication or decisive actions. Misunderstandings persist due to insufficient factual clarification, and the lack of transformative declarations means that conflicts and relational issues remain unresolved.

5. CONCLUSION

The analysis of the five major characters' dialogues in Nwapa's *Efuru* with insights from Tannen's report and rapport talks and Yule's illocutionary speech acts reveals distinct gendered communication styles and their significant impact on relational dynamics and miscommunication. Efuru predominantly employs rapport talks, which are characterized by her efforts to engage emotionally and maintain relationships. She frequently uses expressive and directive speech acts to convey her feelings, seek support, and address relational issues. However, when faced with persistent conflict, Efuru shifts to report talk, providing factual recounting to elicit a response and address practical concerns. In contrast, Adizua and Gilbert exhibit a preference to report talk – brief, factual responses and avoidance of emotional engagement. Their use of directive speech acts often seeks to end conversations and maintain control, which aggravates the emotional disconnection and miscommunication between Efuru and Nkoyeni. This stark difference in communication styles between the characters highlights the challenges of addressing relational issues when emotional needs and communication approaches are mismatched.

The interactions demonstrate how Efuru's attempts at emotional connection and clarity often clash with Adizua and Gilbert's avoidance and factual responses, leading to frustration and unresolved conflicts. Despite her efforts to bridge the communication gap, Efuru's reliance on rapport talk and occasional shifts to report talk highlight how difficult it is to negotiate gendered communication styles. The discomfort and lack of assurance that Nkoyeni experiences further highlight how challenging it is to satisfy emotional needs with only authoritative and factual solutions or responses. The study highlights the importance of striking a balance in communication systems to promote effective dialogue, emotional understanding, and conflict resolution in family relationships, offering valuable insights into the dynamics of gender roles and interactions in domestic contexts.

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