

## ORIGINAL RESEARCH ARTICLE

# Countering gender inequality: The use of free indirect discourse in Adimora-Ezeigbo's *Children of the Eagle*

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## Abstract

Contemporary writers have taken enormous steps in an effort to re-define and focalize on the prejudiced presentation of the African woman in African literature, with themes that advocate and improve the state of the woman to fully partake in and undeniably, lead socio-political struggles in her society. The study, therefore, aims to explore the Feminist approach to Stylistics as a theoretical framework in addressing the issue of gender inequality by identifying the linguistic features of Free Indirect Discourse in the novel, *Children of the Eagle* (2002) by Akachi Adimora-Ezeigbo. Major findings from the study include; Adimora-Ezeigbo's use of Free Indirect Discourse is dynamic in her representation of women in the text; education is an important tool for accomplishing the goals of gender equality, advancement and unity. Women must also be encouraged and integrated in the areas of leadership, political activities and electoral process by providing leadership skills through gender-sensitive training. (*Afr J Reprod Health* 2021; 25[5s]: 97-105).

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**Keywords:** Gender inequality, free indirect discourse, feminist stylistics, Akachi Adimora-Ezeigbo

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## Résumé

Les écrivains contemporains ont fait d'énormes pas dans un effort pour redéfinir et se concentrer sur la présentation préjugée de la femme africaine dans la littérature africaine, avec des thèmes qui prônent et améliorent l'état de la femme pour participer pleinement et indéniablement, mener des luttes sociopolitiques dans sa société. L'étude vise donc à explorer l'approche féministe de la stylistique en tant que cadre théorique pour aborder la question de l'inégalité entre les sexes en identifiant les caractéristiques linguistiques du discours indirect libre dans le roman, *Children of the Eagle* (2002) d'Akachi Adimora-Ezeigbo. Les principales conclusions de l'étude comprennent: d'Adimora-Ezeigbo l'utilisation Discours Indirect Libre est dynamique dans sa représentation des femmes dans le texte. De même, l'éducation est un outil important pour atteindre les objectifs d'égalité des sexes, de promotion et d'unité. Les femmes doivent également être encouragées et intégrées dans les domaines du leadership, des activités politiques et du processus électoral en leur fournissant des compétences en leadership grâce à une formation sensible au genre. (*Afr J Reprod Health* 2021; 25 [5s]: 97-105).

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**Mots-clés:** Inégalité de genre, discours indirect libre, stylistique féministe, Akachi Adimora-Ezeigbo

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## Introduction

One of the most common form of social behaviour used in fostering public and private interactions, determining interpersonal relationships and the social institutions we are part of, is language<sup>1,2</sup>. Language has always depicted virtually everything a writer or speaker is saying in different situations. In politics, business, social, cultural and religious situations, the ability to use and manipulate language in communication has always been seen as an asset. Indeed, it gives voice to our deepest feelings, emotions and desires<sup>3</sup>. The availability of

linguistic resources used in negotiating for power relations and to construct meaning which is also a nexus for human empowerment is language<sup>4</sup>. "When people use language, their language acts produce – construct meaning"<sup>5</sup>. Thus, the use of language is specific to the meaning-making devices employed, and the various ways in which the text is communicated to the recipient<sup>6</sup>. The crucial point is that language is fundamental to the meaningful interpretation of a literary text. The study of the patterns of language use in this context is therefore central and quintessential<sup>7</sup>. Gender inequality has been examined from various fields of study such as

the Social Sciences like Sociology, Economics, Psychology, Arts and other humanities. Scholars have argued on the best possible ways to eradicate the subject of gender inequality in a society as it replete in most of the African narratives produced or reproduced<sup>8-13</sup>. However, to a large extent, this has continued to be a major concern and a debatable topic that has regaled the African readership and society today. An effort to project and readdress the skewed representations of the African woman in African literature is what this study attempts to achieve<sup>14</sup>. Such representations include: female characters were projected in traditional and pastoral roles like reproduction, home care and community services. Her duties vary from preparing meals for her immediate family and the entire household, struggling for an inheritance, getting a suitor, satisfying her husband's sexual urges, struggling to defeat barrenness and the chagrin in the lack of fruitfulness<sup>15,16</sup>. Free Indirect Discourse (FID thereafter) has been explored as a useful linguistic device to relay events, present similar and diverse points of view, portray characters and explore thematic concerns in prose fictions<sup>17-20</sup>. Nonetheless, there exists a gap in the literature to account for how FID can be employed in prose fiction to re-examine the subject of gender inequality. The motivation for this study is, therefore, to examine the linguistic features of FID in Adimora-Ezeigbo's *Children of the Eagle* (COE thereafter) by explicating its resourcefulness in carving out the thematic realities of gender inequality and women oppression in the text.

### **Literature review**

#### ***Gender inequality: The female image in African fiction***

The term 'gender' refers to 'a social construct' or an identity associated with a male or female in society<sup>21</sup>. Gender inequality refers to the prejudicial treatment or perceptions of individuals based on their gender. It arises from differences in socially constructed gender roles<sup>22</sup>. Gender relations are the outcome of the way social practices act on a specific biological group and construct social relations amongst them. From an egalitarian perspective, gender relation is considered fair if, males and females within those relations have equal power and equal free will. However, this is not always the case. Historically, research indicates

that gender inequality and women domination are engineered by religion<sup>23,24</sup>. Culture thrives on religious beliefs and these beliefs to a large extent govern the administration and development of the society either positively or negatively. The myths about gender are dogmas and ideas that are culturally and socially constructed about men and women, which explain the roles and responsibilities disseminated to each biological group (male and female) and the power exercised over their sexuality. The biblical principle that guides the relationship of a man and a woman is embedded in patriarchy. The patriarchal culture predates the Christian religion in assigning roles and responsibilities to men and women. In this context, it is a cultural expectation that men be in control of the female sexuality and reproduction because of the kinship systems preoccupied with the purity of descent<sup>23</sup>. However, modern development, technological and scientific advancements, education tend to make women more enlightened and resilient to some cultural roles assigned to them. The African Ecclesiastical Review describes the rebellious demonstration of Iran women against Islamic clerics in 1963<sup>24</sup>. The women argued that Iranian culture and Islamic religion treated them like third-class citizens. Likewise, the feminist movement comprising of many layers (liberal, radical, social, etc.) serve as a platform for advocating for the freedom of women from religious and cultural oppression. It promotes equal access to opportunities and full participation of women in politics, economics and religious spheres. Cultural expectations, attributes and behaviour appropriated to men or women, and the gender relations between them are now constantly been reviewed<sup>25</sup>.

These instances of gender inequality as a result of culture and tradition are dominant in African narratives or literature. This is reinforced in certain traditional structures as one of the forces that perpetuate violence against women<sup>26</sup>. The imbalance in power relations between male and female has resulted in discrimination against and domination over women and the inadequacies linked to women's full advancement. Similarly, gender inequality and women oppression is enhanced by cultural and religious patterns, that is, certain customary practices and all acts of extremism fosters the lower status ascribed to women within the family, the workplace, the community and society as a whole<sup>23</sup>. Gender

inequality is thereby aggravated by social groups that are unwilling to condemn certain acts that discriminate against women's access to legal information and protection, inadequate efforts by public authorities to encourage awareness of and impose existing laws on women violence, intellectual violence displayed in academia against women and the absence of educational and other media to inform and readdress the foundations and consequences of gender inequality. Irrespective of some positive adjustments on how women are portrayed in literary texts, the portrayal of women subjected to certain responsibilities such as making household meals, getting a suitor, struggling for inheritance or competing with her co-wives, childbirth, child and home care and community services is still much dominant in contemporary African literary texts. These characteristics were majorly in trend in the early novels of African male writers<sup>26</sup>. Their prejudiced approach was interspersed by the encounters of the period which demanded the heralding of the macho traditions<sup>27,28</sup>. In Achebe's *Things Fall Apart* (1958), the "phallogocentric notion" that women must birth strong, male offspring in order to be esteemed within their cultural environ is emphasized<sup>29</sup>. In *The Joys of Motherhood* (1994), Buchi Emecheta's reinforces that gender inequality, most especially in the Igbo society is reliant on the values of the gender socialization process, both customary and traditional practices.

Writers like Buchi Emecheta, Flora Nwapa, Ama Ata Aidoo, Mariama Bâ, S.A. Dazela, Nawal El-Sadaawi, Tsitsi Dangaremba, Akachi Adimora-Ezeigbo, Grace Okereke, Sembene Ousmane, Ngugi Wa Thiongo, Wole Soyinka, Cyprian Ekwensi, Ayi Kwei Armah, Chinua Achebe, and contemporary writers like Chimamanda Adichie, Helon Habila etc. are encouraging a re-think to the gender question by giving it a critical dimension<sup>12</sup>. Sembene Ousmane in *God's Bits of Wood* (1970) amid a male-oriented and male-dominated world, presents women carrying out leadership roles and challenges the stereotype that women are incapable of becoming potential leaders or do not possess an organizational capacity. Ngugi in *Petals of Blood* (1977) is renowned for his deliberate effort to rewrite women back into the African literary landscape. His female characters are portrayed as having strength, foresight and perseverance. The late Chinua Achebe move from the marginal role women take

up in his earlier novels to playing a central role in influencing and arbitrating the realms of power in *Anthills of the Savannah*<sup>15</sup>. In *Anthills of the Savannah* (1988), Achebe recompenses for feminist criticisms of his female character management in his earlier fiction by portraying a professional woman working on the same capacity and stratum as most powerful men in the land. Wole Soyinka's depiction of his female characters has also been an area of interest to feminist scholars. His plays have been reviewed to reveal a changing trend from the negative to the positive and a socially genuine portrayal of women<sup>13</sup>. For example, unlike Soyinka's previous representation of women as in the case of Amope, Chume's wife in *The Trials of Brother Jero* (1964) as weak and vulnerable to both domestic and sexual violence, in *The Interpreters* (1996), Soyinka portrayed women as independent of ethnic customs, economically viable, educated and distinctive members of their society.

Similarly, Ogundipe-Leslie restated that her intentions, when she suggested STIWANISM, an acronym from 'Social Transformations Including Women in Africa' as a name to substitute feminism, was to take focus away from debating the imitation of western feminist women of desiring to become men; or the hatred of men, to "the actual visions and desires of women and what needs to be done for them in the positive transformation that is undeniably needed on our beloved continent"<sup>10,25</sup>. This is also revisited in the opening speech of the former President of Malawi, Joyce Banda in a conference, titled: "Driving Africa's Future: The Challenge of Leadership". She re-evaluates her definition of feminism by emphasizing on the need of an Africa where men and women can work amicably to foster a gender-unbiased society. She further observes that men have also stood up for women; and that women empowerment cannot be achieved successfully without the support of her male counterparts<sup>30</sup>. Adimora-Ezeigbo in her own brand of feminism defined as 'Snail-Sense Feminism', maintains that feminism is basically the notion that womankind be given the chance to be nurtured and be established in the society<sup>41</sup>.

### ***Free indirect discourse (FID)***

In literary discussions, particularly in the late nineteenth century, the emphasis is placed on objectivity in a narrative<sup>31</sup>. Objectivity simply

implies showing with evidence or proofs over mere saying. In other words, authors should narrate their story with vivid descriptions of the action rather than imposing on the reader certain values or judgements which, according to the author need to be made. In other to do this, authors tend to tone down the first-person narrator's own interpretation of the other characters and events in the narrative, thereby introducing a narrative style known as the Free-Indirect Discourse (FID)<sup>32</sup>. Previous studies on FID have been carried out by many scholars. Blinova in his FID analysis of Hemingway's short stories took 37 samples of FID which revealed a connection between the formal features and stylistic functions. The article mentioned that the use of FID in Hemingway's short stories is to distance the narrator from the character or virtually merge the two together<sup>33</sup>. Similarly, in *To the Lighthouse* by Virginia Woolf, free indirect discourse is one of the ways Woolf shows the character's inner world, incoherence and surface unity<sup>34</sup>. The use of FID allows the narrator to reveal the character's flow of thoughts and to take the reader into the consciousness of the character in the novel by their feelings, thoughts, and memories<sup>34</sup>. The importance of FID as a narrative technique is evident in the existence of numerous other terms for it, such as 'interior monologue'. Stylisticians are particularly interested in the impression that FID gives of both a character and narrator speaking simultaneously through a kind of 'dual voice'<sup>18</sup>. Modern writers like Jane Austen in *Pride and Prejudice* used FID to alternate between the literary world and viewpoints of the character and the narrator, yet this transition remained smooth and grammatically coherent<sup>35</sup>. This 'flexible' approach relies largely on the reader's interpretative role, which explains why the style is so valuable to writers of both fiction and non-fiction<sup>18,19</sup>. FID is a speech that is unmediated by a narrator. The use of past tense marks the technique. The readers are invited to conclude the 'voice' of the sentence<sup>36</sup>. It is normally thought of as "a freer version of ostensible indirect forms"<sup>37</sup>; the reported marker 'that' is omitted.

These general principles of FID apply to third-person narratives<sup>38</sup>; the third-person (Omniscient) narrative effect on FID allows the reader have an objective view on the role played out by the character, thereby, creating two sides in the novel; the authorial point of view and the character's point of view<sup>31</sup>. FID is essentially a

mixture of direct discourse (reproduces the original words verbatim) and indirect discourse (characterized by a tense shift, and a less literal reproduction of the original wording). FID makes use of deictic elements such as *now, these, this, hence, here, there*, etc., that are assigned from the point of view of the character, thus leading to odd combinations of the past tense with present time adverbials<sup>32,17</sup>. Pronouns, independent clauses of initial conjunction, repetitive phrases and clauses, past progressive verbs, modal auxiliaries, independent clauses with exclamation and interjection are also features of FID commonly found in prose fiction<sup>38,37,32</sup>. Modal auxiliaries in FID examples are used to indicate character's certain moods such as certainty, doubt, obligation, ability, habitual action and that of necessity. Similarly, rhetorical questions as a significant feature of FID is used as an instrument in stylistics that is maximally used by authors to create empathy from the reader towards the character<sup>4</sup>.

### ***Theoretical framework***

#### ***Feminist stylistics***

Stylistics is a branch of general linguistics that describes a particular way writer expresses himself or herself, most commonly in works of literature. The purpose of stylistic analysis is to explore language, especially creativity in language use<sup>36</sup>. Identification and categorization of elements of language used is the main purpose of doing stylistics analysis or interpretation in linguistics. However, in literary studies according to Simpson, the purpose is to aid in the comprehension, exegesis, and interpretation of a literary text<sup>38</sup>. Feminist stylistics is often traced back to the works of Deirdre Burton, Sara Mills as well as the French feminists like Jacques Lacan, Helen Cixous and Luce Irigaray. Feminist stylistics contends that regardless of the chauvinistic nature characterized in literary works, it is important that women must be given respectable roles that enunciate their social commitment in the society. Feminist writers, therefore, seek to construct a genuine counter-image of women through their literature. More so, a work of art such as prose fiction is seen basically as a mechanism for the foregrounding of female experiences and the destruction of gender stereotypes against women<sup>39</sup>. Through language, therefore, general concern and position of the

powerless attributes given to female characters in contrast to the dominance of the male protagonist can be re-written. By so doing, the relevance of women is portrayed from a feminist point of view. This depicts that women subjugation in the society are vividly represented and have a correlation with how language is used and it is imperative that not only to expose these linguistic correlates but to eradicate them. This approach to stylistics spread across a wide range of issues and skills in the analysis of text which stimulate and buttress on feminist principles, ethics or ideology. This type of stylistic is both linguistically and politically motivated as it seeks to create an awareness of how the female gender is represented in literary texts.

## Methods

### *Brief biography of Akachi Adimora-Ezeigbo*

Akachi Adimora-Ezeigbo is a Professor of English and a prolific writer. She was born into the family of Joshua and Christiana Adimora on November 2, 1947. She was nurtured as a child in the Eastern part of Nigeria but eventually relocated to Lagos. She has experience of both the rural and urban which is mostly reflected in her writings. She obtained a Bachelor of Arts (B. A.) and Master (M. A.) degrees in English from the University of Lagos and her Ph.D. from the University of Ibadan, Nigeria. She also has a Postgraduate Diploma in Education (PGDE) from the University of Lagos. A retired lecturer, writer, novelist, critic, essayist, Ezeigbo-Adimora has written several works of literature which include; *Echoes In The Mind* (1996) (short stories), *Roses and Bullets* (2011), *The Buried Treasure* (1992), *The Slave Girl* (2010), *The Last of The Strong Ones* (1996), *House of Symbols* (2001), *Children of the Eagle* (2002), and *Trafficked* (2005). She is also the author of the highly referenced non-fiction book titled, *Gender Issues in Nigeria and The Feminine Perspective* (1996).

### *Children of the Eagle (2002)*

In *Children of the Eagle*, Adimora-Ezeigbo intends to reconstruct the identities of the African women and de-authorize the chauvinistic ideology that has reigned the African readership<sup>40</sup>. The story is narrated in both the first-person and third-person narration. It centers on three major events: the

memorial celebration of Osai, Eaglewoman's birthday and a family reunion. From these events, the reader is taken to a textual world that portrays the realities of war, sexual exploitation, the overvaluation of men over women, and the discriminatory experiences that women face in typical African society. However, in the text, Adimora-Ezeigbo reviews these social issues and readdresses them by portraying her female characters as empowered, vibrant, intelligent, and capable of driving a positive change in their society. The eagle thus becomes symbolic; an authentic metaphor through which the unseen strength of the woman is portrayed. The preference for the daring, defiant, audacious and the excellent in women stresses the author's effort in textual elevation of womanhood in the novel.

## Results and Discussion

The analysis focuses on exploring the Feminist approach to Stylistics in addressing the issue of gender inequality by identifying the linguistic features of FID as realized in the text. As a common device in fiction, FID is used mainly as a means of characterization, to portray a character's thoughts or speech and to reveal pertinent subjects that are of major concern to the society. It makes the text objective and evaluative, acting as a means of revealing the author's intention or message. The discussion begins with the role of FID in the narration of the events in the text. It examines the feature of the third person narration in FID.

- 1) "Some nights Eaglewoman lies awake, pondering over the justice of some Umuga customs and traditions. What if she did not even have a son at all? She asks herself. Her mind tells her she knows better than to ask such a foolish question. Did she spring from the sky? Is she not a daughter of Umuga to be thinking such thoughts, asking such questions?" (p. 50)
- 2) "Sometimes I wondered: what would be the fate of the family property in Umuga if there were no Nkemdirim? Would we be kicked out from our home by greedy relatives after Papa died? The family has many plots of land in Umuga bought with Papa's and Mama's savings. What would happen to all the land if this lad did not exist? In Umuga's thinking, he is the symbol of continuity of the Okwara family tree descending through our father. This,

I told myself, is all the sense of justice there is in this town. Yes, this is what Umuga's sense of justice amounts to in a house of *five* daughters and *one* son. Astonishing!" (emphasis mine) (p. 184).

The evidence of the 'dual voice' between the author and Eaglewoman shows the seamless narration of the event in excerpt (1). This clearly indicates that the narrative voice, as often displayed in the majority of FID examples, is third-person omniscient while the views of the character in the excerpt are also very noticeable. In excerpts (1) and (2), with the elements of indirect discourse, and the author's phrasal expressions, a gender-biased discourse is revealed. The interpretation of women oppression and emotional mutilation is given as the female characters ponder on the injustice evident in some certain traditions and customs in Umuga. The overvaluation of sons is highly pronounced here. Motherhood is often validated by the number of sons a woman is able to have in her husband's house. Umuga is a patrilineal society and so, it is expected that a male child is birthed in the family to continue the ancestral lineage and for inheritance sake, since women are not allowed to own land or properties either (p. 41, 49, 85).

3) "Nenne tells herself that women should break loose from the prison of low self-esteem, which blights their psyche. Submerged by culture, women inevitably become self-effacing, lacking self-confidence. Consequently, most of them abhor individual action or self-determination, except the few brave ones who emerge once in a while like new moon. But when they come together, they are a force to be reckoned with, she tells herself." (p. 92)

In extracts (1) and (3), lexical items such as *justice*, *customs and traditions*, *submerged culture*, *low self-esteem*, *self-effacing*, *self-confidence*, *abhor* are used to stress the supposed gender inequality prominent in the text. The text discloses the degree of inhumanity inherent in some cultural traditions. Both men and women are intellectually and constructively critiqued by the author without so much preference for one than the other. Adimora-Ezeigbo loathes some machismo behavior that relegate women, she does not also overlook some patriarchal attitudes by which women cheapen

themselves. *COE* is also used as a discourser against the 'herd mentality'- "women bonding together in uniform at formal and informal gatherings, seeking cheap recognition" (p. 92). The text provides a way out by advocating that women should be self-determined, motivated and desist from hating on one another's successes. The author recommends through the voice of her character that unity, love, strength and bravery are all that is needed for women to triumph and be self-empowered. For Adimora-Ezeigbo, the feminist fight is not only external; against patriarchy, but also internal; a change of mind-set.

*Children of the Eagle (COE)* is most prominently a novel of a social construct. The author addresses some social issues and the uneven relations between the men and women in the text. Some of these social issues include the settlement of the land dispute which was compounded by the fact that Ogunano Ezeala, the highest council in Umuga, discourages women to actively participate in the decision-making and leadership of the community (p. 75). The 'Nluikwa' tradition (in a family without a male child, it is required that one of the daughters, often the last born should remain at home to preserve her father's name by birthing a son(s) to inherit his property) is also a factor for degradation of women in the text (p. 440). The gender prejudice is vividly evident in the incident at which chieftaincy titles and special awards are granted to honour respectable Umuga citizens, however, women's impeccable contributions to the growth and development of Umuga town are not acknowledged. Nenne complains of such an occasion where fifty citizens of Umuga are revered by Eze-Oha II in partnership with the Umuga Progressive Union and not even one of the recipients is a woman. Gender inequality is also inherent in the conduct of marrying off the female child to a man at an early age. Women are likely scorn in the society for delayed marriage, "*so, I chose marriage because it wasn't quite easy for a woman to operate or survive in our society outside marriage*" (p. 308). Marriage, in this case, is a means for survival as well as societal acceptance. This puts women to a large extent, in unbecoming situations to always be at the mercies of men. Divorcees are also not left out; divorced women and their daughters are often stigmatized when compared with the men. The fear of social stigma makes Eaglewoman's eldest daughter, Ogonna to

endure a bad marriage with Uzoma because of the stereotype. The daughters of such divorced women are no exception either, “*They say such girls cannot make happy homes*” (p. 126).

Author's use FID to transcend the text beyond mere account of the social-cultural delinquencies against the female gender to tactfully establish through the lives of the female characters the ways out of such suppression is one of such greatest achievement developed in the novel. All five Eaglewoman's daughters do not just lament the contemptible portrayal of women in Umuga; rather they map and carry out schemes that successfully changed the state of affairs. For instance, in extract (4), Ogonna's FID portrays the character of her husband, Uzoma. He is selfish, irresponsible and chauvinistic. The author described him as a failure. His failure however serves as a motivation for Ogonna's successes. She ventured into different jobs: a secondary school teacher and selling of all kinds of clothes. The profits from her sales and her wages (though hardly enough) as a biology teacher were used to cater for her children. Ogonna becomes liberated and self-fulfilled, ‘*I no longer have a problem with money, for I'm able to meet my needs with the money accruing to me... I relax when I can. I derive joy from the purposeful life that I live*’ (p. 313). Women should not be allowed to give in to the unequal stratum of the society, especially when they feel cheated or denied. Adimora-Ezeigbo elevates the female gender capabilities to survive in unpleasant situations. Unlike most men, women are easily persuaded to be the best at what they do due to their effeminate instinct to nurture and meet the needs of those they are responsible for.

4) “Uzoma failed on both counts – as a husband and a father. Perhaps I was wrong to compare him to my late father, but what else could I do... Uzoma earns more money than I but insist I should be solely responsible for the provision of food for the family. Month after month, he denies me housekeeping money.” (p. 310)

Also, most importantly, the novel is used to break the orthodox belief that women are limited in certain professions or spheres of life. The medical profession is a big sector in Nigeria that estimates a fewer number of female doctors compared to the larger figures of men in the profession. This also applies to the political domain. However, Chiaku breaks this limitation, ‘*Chiaku is a medical doctor*

*who practices medicine in London* (p. 4). Obioma, despite the shameful incident she experienced during the Biafran war; she was sexually exploited (p. 256-260) and was advised to give away her illegitimate son, Nkemdirim to her mother who nurtured him as her own in order to hide the truth about his birth and to save her face in the society. Obioma rose above her fears and the guilt of this mother-son betrayal. She becomes a church leader, pastor and evangelist ‘*yes, she feels free; she knows she is free at last. Peace engulfs her...*’ (p. 444). Nnenne is also an exceptional character portrayed in the text through the use of FID.

5) “Could it be the fact that I was expecting a baby? Could it be that my round belly might have irked him because there was no man around me whose presence might give a clue to the paternity of my unborn child? ... It was not possible for his befuddled *prejudiced* mind to understand how a husband could allow his young wife to embark on the NYSC programme unattended.” (p. 392)

With the use of rhetorical questions, the character's thoughts and impression of another character is evaluated. Presented in the form of FID, excerpt (5) reveals character's emotional displeasure to what she is experiencing because she is a ‘woman’. The reader is allowed to form an opinion about the mediocrity behaviour portrayed by the male character, Mr Edet. Here, FID serves the usual purpose of withdrawing the author from her character. A satirical tone is given to the narration by portraying a man who is intimidated by the success of a woman. The evaluative adjective ‘*prejudice*’ functions as a character discourse marker and brings to the fore an objective assessment of the male character's attitude to the event. Nnenne is a strong-willed, self-motivated, spirited woman. Through her character, the author accentuates her idea of feminism- ‘*Snail-Sense Feminism*’<sup>41</sup>:

I concluded also that he was displeased with my self-confidence and self-assurance, for I spoke to him with my head raised, without casting down my eyes. I looked him in the eye each time I appeared before him to take instructions or to make a request or lay a complaint. There was also the fact that female graduates were a rarity then, especially in that part of the country

where he was located and reigned as a monarch. Perhaps he couldn't forgive me for not only owing a degree but also a good one. I tended to value this deduction above the others after I found out that Mr Edet did not have a degree but rose to his elevated position through the ranks (COE p. 392).

To the author, women must learn to adapt like the snail. Although, to some persons, it is interpreted has been extremely timid or incompetent. However, it is not the sluggishness that is being accentuated in this principle, but the snail's sense (intelligence) to live within its environs with negotiation; it is an alternative way of saying harmonizing. A healthy communication has to occur between men and women for society to move forward. Likewise, women must give support to each other in order to succeed and overcome the issue of gender inequality.

## Conclusion and implication of findings

From the foregoing, the stylistic value of FID to the study of a prose text has been explored. Specifically, the study shows that FID examples run through the entire text and that the author employs certain linguistic choices to relay her proposition against gender inequality and women oppression. This study concludes that Adimora-Ezeigbo's style of language is dynamic towards her representation of women. Furthermore, from the textual analysis, findings show that education is an important tool for accomplishing the goals of gender equality, advancement and unity. By education, cultural impairments that deny a girl child from accessing good training can be addressed. Equal relationships between men and women can also be enhanced if discrimination is eradicated in the pursuit of education. Women literacy is also encouraged for improving health and empowering women to actively participate in the decision-making of their society and political life<sup>42</sup>. Women's involvement in science and technology, and their contribution to the process of industrialization should be promoted. The unequal access to education and its opportunities can be addressed if governments and relevant individuals actively create a visible strategy of implementing policies that engenders female enrollment to school without any form of imbalances<sup>43</sup>. Moreover, the

girl child must be treasured by her family and society for her crucial role in social development, and any kind of investment made on her should not be seen as a waste of effort or resources. Media programs that educates on women's reproductive health such as family planning must be integrated in the society. These programs must also emphasize the elimination of harmful cultural and religious practices and attitudes, including female genital mutilation, son preference which results in female infanticide and antenatal sex selection, early and forced marriages, sexual assault, and gender-based violence. Women must be encouraged and integrated in the areas of leadership, political activities and electoral process by providing leadership skills through gender-sensitive training. Economically, employment policies should be advocated to enhance gender balance in senior and middle level management. Also, the society must ensure increase incentives and on-going training in the workplace for unemployed women, single parents, and for those re-entering the labour market. Wage structures must be reviewed in female-dominated professions such as teaching, secretarial work, childcare and nursing, with a view to raise the low status and earnings, thereby, promoting the equal sharing of responsibilities of both men and women. Lastly, gender-biased attitudes to division of labour in the family and work environments must be discouraged.

The relevance of this study is thus to educate prose fiction writers on the resourcefulness of FID to prose writing in discussing salient topics such as women empowerment, women oppression or gender inequality that are of relevance to the development of a society.

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