A Stylistic Explication of Linguistic Innovations in Chimamanda Adichie’s Americanah

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ABSTRACT

This article investigates the features of style in Chimamanda Adichie’s Americanah. It focuses on the identification of features of style in line with contemporary stylistics and the analysis of the same features through graphophonological, syntactic and lexico-semantic parameters, in which certain linguistic features are given foregrounded realizations. Deploying descriptive-analytic method and using over a hundred stylistic innovations identified in the novel, the study affirms that meaning in a text is realized through the levels of style explications and that the identified features add value to the text and increases its tenor.

1. Introduction

Stylistics offers an objective analysis that could be shared, compared, and evaluated on the basis of explicit criteria. One consequence of this fact is that engaging in stylistic analyses often enriches the reading experience: the stylistician-reader gathers together perspectives from others and could make imaginative leaps into different viewpoints and feelings about a literary work. According to Leech and Short (1981), stylistic theory as a theoretical framework offers that an analysis of style involves analysis of levels of style ranging from the graphological, phonological, syntactic and the semantic levels (119). More so, Simpson (2004) further breaks it down that within

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the three levels we have phonological and phonetic levels, lexicology and pragmatics (5). This study examines how these features are represented at the graphophonological, syntactic and lexico-semantic levels and how meaning is realized through them. Simpson (2004) provides that the levels of style that constitute linguistic structure are an important index of the function of the text. Hence, through the analysis of the levels, one could realize the meaning and not the structure alone. Leech and Short (1981) propose that in studying style one looks at language as a code.

Crystal and Davy (1969) explain that stylistics is viewed differently by different scholars. For instance, one could define style as some or all the language habits of one person as when we talk of Shakespeare’s style or the style of James Joyce or when we discuss questions of disputed authorship (9). Style, hence, is mistakenly said to be a man or his thought. More often, it refers in this way, to a selection of language habits; the occasional linguistic eccentricity which characterise an individual’s uniqueness. Leech and Short (1981) explain that language as a means of spoken communication is regarded both traditionally and in modern linguistics as a system for translating meanings in the speaker’s mind into sounds, or conversely for translating sounds into meanings in the hearer’s mind. Whether we think of the encoding (meaning-to-sound) or the decoding (sound-to-meaning) process, syntax is the formal code which mediates between structures of meaning and structures of sound (121). This study is basically structured on this argument.

Leech and Short (1981) further argue that language is open-ended in that it permits the generation of new meanings and new forms. For example, metaphorical meanings and neologisms, which have no clearly defined boundaries as to what is in the code and what breaks the rule. It is this creative extendability of the linguistic code that the researchers formed as a basis for this study. Foregrounding refers to the salient features in a text which receive this salience through prominence (Leech and Short 1981, 120). What is prominent is what is recurrent in a text. This study borrows a lot from this definition because it aims at investigating features that have been given prominence in the text. Oha and Uwaegbute (2010) conceptualise foregrounding as a linguistic-stylistic toolkit which seeks to highlight noteworthy linguistic patterns in a work and then more, in a responsible scholarly fashion from description to interpretation and finally to evaluation (98). The patterns are deviation, repetition and parallelism.
According to Simpson (2004), stylistics is a method of textual interpretation in which primacy of place is assigned to language. Language in this case is important to stylisticians because the various forms, patterns and levels that constitute linguistic structure are an important index of the function of the text. The text’s functional significance as discourse acts in turn as a gateway to its interpretation. While linguistic features do not of themselves constitute texts ‘meaning’, an account of linguistic features nonetheless serves to ground a stylistic interpretation and to help explain why for the analyst, certain types of meaning are possible.

2. Americanah: The Story Behind the Style

Americanah tells the story of Ifemelu, a spirited young girl with strong opinions, and her teenage boyfriend, Obinze, who grow up with romanticised notions of the west, shaped by the literature of Graham Greene, Mark Twain and James Baldwin. When Ifemelu is presented with an opportunity to continue her postgraduate studies in Philadelphia, she takes it. Some years later, Obinze, too, goes in search of a better life, but to Britain. In England, Obinze struggles to get hold of the ever-elusive national security number that will enable him to work legally. The newspapers are full of stories about schools "swamped" by immigrant children and politicians' attempts to clamp down on asylum seekers. Against this backdrop, he is invited to a smug Islington lunch party by Emenike, a former classmate in Nigeria, who has married a high-flying solicitor. The food is served on self-consciously "ethnic" plates brought back from a holiday in India and Obinze is left wondering whether Emenike has become a person "who believed that something was beautiful because it was handmade by poor people in a foreign country or whether he had simply learned to pretend so".

Heather (2005) sees Adichie as a novelist with the intimate ideals (13). This is reflected as the novel progresses in treating the theme of racism. In America, Ifemelu also finds it difficult to get part-time work. She gets turned away from menial jobs as a waitress, bartender or cashier. Her fellow students speak to her with painful slowness, as if she cannot comprehend basic English. In class, she is singled out as someone who will intuitively understand the plight of African Americans because of some half-formed belief in a nebulous, shared "black" consciousness. There is the blond, well-heeled Kimberley who means well but says every black woman she sees is "beautiful", despite aesthetic evidence to the contrary. When Ifemelu buys a vintage 1960s dress on
eBay she realises that when the original owner would have worn it, black Americans would not have been allowed to vote. "And maybe," Ifemelu notes, "the original owner was one of those women, in the famous sepia photographs, standing by in hordes outside schools shouting 'Ape!' at young black children because they did not want them to go to school with their young white children."

Eventually, Ifemelu starts blogging about her experiences. Adichie captures the tone of internet chatter with precision. A recurring theme of the blogs is the politics of black hair – how women are expected to relax their natural curls with toxic chemicals or weave in bits of someone else's hair in order to conform to comfortable white norms. In fact, much of the novel is written in flashback, as Ifemelu has her hair braided in a New Jersey salon in preparation for going home to Nigeria after 15 years in America, during which she has witnessed Barrack Obama’s election victory. The final section of the book follows Ifemelu's return and her reunion with Obinze who is, by now, married to someone else.

3. Linguistic Innovations in Americanah

A. Graphophonological Innovations

Graphophonology is the application of graphological and phonological variations of style to capture foregrounded effects in a text (Lambrou and Stockwell, 2007). Graphological variation is relatively minor and superficial part of style concerning such matters as spelling, capitalization, hyphenation, and italicisation and paragraphing. When a writer makes a graphological choice which is to some degree marked or unconventional such as deliberate misspelling, it becomes foregrounded. There are many graphological markers in the novel. This can be seen through the following:

1. Use of Italicization

a. For Presenting Titles of Blogs, Adverts, etc.

1. “If they asked what she did, she would say vaguely, “I write a lifestyle blog,” because saying “I write an anonymous blog called Raceteenth or Various Observations About American Blacks (Those Formerly known as Negroes) by an Non-American Black” would make them uncomfortable.” (4)

2. “Later, she wrote his online posts on Nigerian Village…” (116-117)

**b. For Recreating Posters, Notes, etc.**

4. “SapphicDerrida, one of the most frequent posters, wrote: *I’m a bit surprised by how personally I am taking this. Good luck as you pursue the unnamed “life change” but please come back to the blogosphere soon. You’ve used your irreverent, hectoring, funny and thought-provoking voice to create a space for real conversations about an important subject.*” (5)

5. “Beside the cheque was a note, in Jackie’s childish writing: *Ifemelu, we’re almost a week late for rent*” (151)

**c. For E-mail and Text Message Presentation**

6. “First, he skimmed the e-mail, instinctively wishing it were longer. *Ceiling. Kedu? Hope all is well with work and family. Ranyinundo said she ran into you some time ago and that you now have a child! Proud Papa. Congratulations. I recently decided to move back to Nigeria. Should be in Lagos next week. Would love to keep in touch. Take care. Ifemelu.*” (19)

7. “…he sent Tendai a text: *Areyou home? Was thinking of stopping by.*” (258)

**d. For Presenting Music/Songs**

8. “Then he proceeded to sing the song with childish gusto. *No one knows tomorrow! To-mor-row! No one knows tomorrow!* (24)

9. “She would remember this moment, sitting beside Obinze in his Range Rover, stalled in traffic, listening to ‘YoriYori’ – *Your love dey make my heart do yoriyori. Nobody can love you the way I do…*” (441)

**e. For Presenting Igbo and non-English Intrusions/Code mixing**

10. “Ha, *o di egwu*, for where?” (24)

11. “You should have heard your father’s big words now! *O di egwu!* (47)


13. “Ah, you want to try me?” She asked, laughing. “*Achoafuadiakon’akpadibia…*” (61)

14. “Your mother is an American, *abi*?” (65)
We have many Igbo lexis and structures in the examples above used in the novel to capture local colour and bring linguistic richness to the novel. However, the word ‘abi’ in example 14 is not an Igbo word but a common Yoruba word used by almost everybody in Nigeria and it means, ‘Is that not so?’

**f. For Recreating of Thought**

15. “On Sundays, she would invite his relatives for pounded yam and onugbu soup and then watch over to make sure everyone was suitably overfed. *Uncle, you must eat o! There’s more meat in the kitchen! Let me bring yet another Guinness!* (28)

16. “May be there was a kind of miracle in those words, *I like you, I want to take care of you, Ifemelu thought….**” (46)

17. “…and he would think: *You can work, you are legal, you are visible, and you don’t even know how fortunate you are.*” (227)

**g. For Mocking Religious Bigotry**

18. “…the congregation would shout “Alleluia!” and other testimonies would follow. *I did not study because I was sick and yet I passed my exams with flying colours! I had malaria and prayed over it and was cured! My cough disappeared as pastor started praying!*” (44)

**h. For Presenting Book titles, Film titles, Cartoons, Magazines, etc.**

19. “…he knew about Lisa Bonet leaving *The Cosby Show* to go and do *Angel Heart* and Will Smith’s huge debt before he was signed to do *The Fresh Prince of Bel Air.*” (67)

20. “He gave her a copy of *Huckleberry Finn …*” (67)

21. “He gestured to the book on the kitchen table, Graham Greene’s *The Heart of the Matter*…” (70)

22. “…Adamu saying there was a journalist from *City People* at the gate…” (87)

23. “…and they had watched some episodes of *Tom and Jerry.*” (107)

24. “…so light, so ordinary, *United States Medical Licensing Examination* printed on it …” (118)
i. For Emphasis on Deeper Lexical Meaning
25. “You are pretty slight…” (131)
26. “I bet you do,” Cristina Tomas said. “I just don’t know how well.” (133)
27. “It had to be that Americans were taught, from elementary school, to always say *something* in class.” (134)
28. “It’s like this *movement* of black women.” (212)

In examples 25-28, the italicized lexical items are emphasizing deeper levels of meanings with the prominent presentation of the words. In example 25, the be-verb ‘are’ is italicized as a sign of warning. In example 26, the adverbial ‘well’ is italicized to show ‘confusion’ in the mind of the speaker. While in example 28, the nominal ‘movement’ is italicized to capture the semantics of ‘seriousness’ of black women groups and advocacy.

j. For Presenting Mimicked Expressions
29. “They mimicked what Americans told them: *You speak such good English. How bad is AIDS in your country? It’s sad that people live on less than a dollar a day in Africa.*” (139)

k. For Presenting Telephone Conversation
30. “Her mother liked to take the phone out to the verandah, to make sure the neighbours overheard: *Ifem, how is the weather in America?*” (201)

l. For Presenting Public Speeches
31. “They watched Barrack Obama…as he spoke… *“And that is why, in the shadow of the Old State Capitol, where Lincoln called on a divided house to stand together, where common hopes and common dreams still live, I stand before you today to announce my candidacy for president of the united states of America.”*” (328)

2. Uses of Capitalization

a. For Capturing High-tech Objects and Things
32. “…piles of colourful DVDs” (10)
33. “Aisha gestured to the piles of DVDs on the table. (13)
34. “On the TV screen, a father was beating two children…” (10)
35. “…and CNN would be on downstairs” (21)
36. “He had only to drive to a gate in his BMW and the gatemen would salute…” (27)
37. “…sifting through his pile of LPs and singing along to a song…” (48)

b. For Capturing Signs/Signposts
38. “She read the signs on the opposite wall – NO ADJUSTMENTS TO BRAIDS AFTER ONE WEEK. NO PERSONAL CHECKS. NO REFUNDS –.” (12)
39. “…the walls plastered with large posters of braided hairstyles and smaller posters that said QUICK TAX FUND.” (9)

c. For known Abbreviations
40. “…he would thrust yet another CV into their hand” (23)
41. “…and he can give somebody AIDS.” (23)
42. “… and one of them asked his ADC to call Aunty Uju…” (46)
43. “…when the nightly news started on NTA…” (48)
44. “Take the SATs and try for a scholarship” (99)
45. “…so she has been working with Amara’s ID.” (120)

d. For Presenting Serious Missive Content
46. “…and inside the envelope was a tuition bill, and words printed in capital letters: YOUR RECORDS WILL BE FROZEN UNLESS PAYMENT IS RECEIVED BY THE DATE AT THE BOTTOM OF THIS NOTICE.” (132)

e. For Presenting Printed Instructions
47. “She ordered products from women who made them in their kitchens and shipped them with clear instructions: BEST TO REFRIGERATE IMMEDIATELY, DOES NOT CONTAIN PRESERVATIVES.” (212)

3. Use of Cap and Low
It is normal to capitalize the first letter of every content word and use lower case for the first letter of every non-content word but the author violated this rule by using
the application of capital letters on non-content words to present titles of Ifemelu’s blogs. It is used to give prominence to the blog titles. For instance:

48. It would have made for a good blog post: “A Peculiar Case of a Non-American Black, or How the Pressures of Immigrant Life Can Make You Act Crazy” (18)

49. “Understanding American for the Non-American Black: American Tribalism” (184)

In example 48, words like ‘non’, ‘can’, and ‘you’ ought to begin with lower characters while in example 49, the word ‘non’ ought to begin with low character too. These were deliberately capitalised to catch the attention of the readers.

4. Use of Deliberate Misspellings

This refers to violation of rules in regard to spellings and this is done deliberately by the author. Examples include:

50. Afrique- This is deliberately misspelt for the word Africa (124).

51. I hope everything is fine, sah. It is very good to see you again, sah. How is work, sah? (556)

‘Sah’ is deliberately misspelt for the word ‘Sir’. It captures the level of competence of the speaker as an unpolished person. The pronunciation of ‘sir’ is /s3:(r)/ but is violated by the speaker. Adichie captures such linguistic aberration.

52. Americanah (Book title).

This is a deliberate corruption of the name America in order to mock those Nigerian and/or Africans who were frustrated or could not realise their American dream as depicted in the story.

5. Use of Accent

Adachie’s novel is full of conversations that are directly translated from Igbo. This was argued by Yohannes(2012) as being part of the unique style that Adachie uses in most of her works. She does this as a way of identifying herself with her language through the narrator’s point of view. Most Nigerian character in the novel, when they speak, they tend to add an ‘O’ sound at the end of every utterance. It is a phatic habit.
The author also presents the idea of accent as important to Americans who cared a lot about pronunciation to differentiate between Americans and Africans. For instance:

53. “I hope he did not get his mother’s fighting genes o.” (66)
54. “You don’t win by hitting the ball with anger o.” (74)
55. “I told he must buy it in my name o.” (78)
56. “Igbo men take care of women real good”, Aisha repeated. “I want to marry. They love me but they say the family want Igbo woman. Because Igbo marry Igbo always.” (18)

Example 54 was said by Aisha one of the braiders in Trenton. Apart from revealing her accent as a Senegalese, we learn a lot about how desperate the African women were when it came to getting African men whenever they wanted to get married while in America.

B: Syntactic Innovations

This is the abstract grammatical and lexical form of language. Syntax (in the broad sense in which it is commonly used today) is the level of lexico-grammatical form which mediates between the levels of sound and meaning. Thus it includes both lexical choice-choice of words from the vocabulary of the language-and the grammatical choices involved in combining these words. The following are examples from the text under investigation:

(i.) Use of Parallelism

Adachie uses parallelism for effective communication of the themes which could be seen through the following:

57. Princeton in the summer, smelled of nothing and although Ifemelu liked the tranquil greenness of the many trees, the clean streets and stately homes, the delicately overpriced shops and the quiet, abiding air of earned grace, it was this, the lack of a smell, that most appealed to her, perhaps because the other American cities she knew well had all smelled distinctly. Philadelphia had the misty scent of history. New Haven smelled of neglect. Baltimore smelled of Brine, and Brooklyn of sun-warmed garbage. But Princeton had no smell. (5)
The parallel structures from the above extract are as follows:

…the tranquil greenness of the many trees \( S = D + E + E + \text{Prep Phrase} \)
…the clean streets and stately homes \( S = D + E + N + \text{Noun Phrase} \)
…the delicately overpriced shops \( S = D + E + E + \text{Noun Phrase} \)
Philadelphia had the misty scent of history. \( S + P + C \)
New Haven smelled of neglect. \( S + P + C \)
Baltimore smelled of Brine, \( S + P + C \)

The linguistic part of this is the repetition of phrases and clauses to bring out the description of the major towns in America. The parallelism here brings in chiming and it is a source of rhythm in the novel. It helps in reemphasising issues and lays bare the pictorial being created.

58. Young and old, rich and poor, Democrat and Republican, black, white, Hispanic, Asian, Native American, gay, straight, disabled, Americans have sent a message to the world that we have never been just a collection of red states and blue states. We have been and always will be the United States of America. (456)

The parallel structures from the above extract are as follows:
Young and old…Americans \( S = n(\text{adj.}) + n(\text{adj.}) \)
rich and poor… Americans \( S = n(\text{adj.}) + n(\text{adj.}) \)
Democrat and Republican… Americans \( S = n(\text{adj.}) + n(\text{adj.}) \)

The repetition of these modifiers to describe the nominal ‘Americans’ creates room for options and in the ideology being dispelled. It helps in presenting juxtapositions of facts and figures.

59. She wrote about the views from her bedroom window…She wrote about the announcers on radio stations…. She wrote about the tendency of Nigerian women to give advice…. She wrote about the waterlogged neighbourhood…. (475)

The parallel structures from example 59 are as follows:
She /wrote /about the views/ from her bedroom window… \( S + P + C + A \)
She wrote about the announcers on radio stations…. S + P + C + A
She wrote about the tendency of Nigerian women to give advise…. S + P + C + A
She wrote about the waterlogged neighbourhood….” S + P + C

The effect of this kind of parallelism is to foreground the relation between parallel words and phrases which fill the variable positions. The chiming effects are commendable. It builds the rhythm of the text.

(ii.) Use of Transitivity

According to Wabende (2014), “The particular grammatical facility used for capturing experience in language is the system of transitivity.” (48) Thus, transitivity here refers to the way meanings are encoded in the clause and to the way different types of processes are represented in language. Transitivity normally picks out three key components. The first is the process itself which is typically realized in grammar by the verb phrase. The second is the participants associated with the process typically realized by noun phrases.

The transitivity patterns described so far reflect the typical way of expressing situations and encoding experience. Actors or agents do things that affect other participants. Lambrou and Stockwell (2007) explain that sensors perceive phenomena, and entities are assigned attributes. In addition, processes are realized by verbals, entities by nominals and attributes by adjectivals. Adichie uses various processes to describe the characters in the novel as well as for thematic purposes. The processes as defined are used as follows:

(a) Material Processes

These are processes of doing. Associated with material processes are two inherent participant roles which are the actor, an obligatory role in the process, and a goal, a role which may or may not be involved in the process. The examples of material processes follow the standard notation conventions which place the textual example above its individual transitivity roles. The choice of the material processes by the narrator is deliberate in order to show how Ifemelu, the main character was desperately looking for any job in America for survival. The processes below describe how Ifemelu
left her employer’s home after being given an odd job that did not match her academic qualifications.

60. Her skin (Actor) prickled (process: material)
   She (Actor) was watching him (process: material), waiting for his explanation (circumstance)
   She (Actor) shifted (process: material) on the chair (Attribute)
   She (Actor) walked (process: material) back to the station, mourning (process: behavioral) the train fare. (179-180)

(b) Mental processes

The mental processes reflect the characters’ minds and their world view. Ifemelu had a lot of hopes when she left for the United State (US), a good job, a nice house, a nice car and generally a comfortable life. She, however, does not get this which is reflected in the mental processes:

61. Ifemelu (sensor) imagined (process: mental) her (phenomenon) working in a market in Dakar…
   Ifemelu (sensor) thought (process: mental) little of Nollywood (phenomenon).
   She (sensor) wondered (process: mental) why there was no place she could braid her hair (phenomenon) She (sensor) still wondered (process: mental) if he had read it (phenomenon). She (sensor) hoped (process: mental) so. (16-18)

Related to the material and mental processes are behavioural processes that whatever Ifemelu did reflected her conscious mind, such as in example 62 below where she wondered how different America was from Nigeria.

62. She (actor) stared (process) at buildings and cars and signboards (circumstance), all of them matt, disappointingly (process) matt; in the landscape of her imagination, the mundane things in America were covered in a high-shine gloss. (9)

(c) Processes of Verbalisation

These processes represent what Ifemelu said and this also shows her point of view about life in America. This could be seen in the following examples:

63. He (speaker) mentioned (process) Fela(verbiage) casually, intimately, as though it was something…. (187)
64. Kimberly (actor) hired somebody else but she (speaker) said (process) she’ll keep you in mind (verbiage). (187)

65. “If I get this job, I will give you my first month’s salary,” (verbiage) Ifemelu (speaker) said (process), and Ginika laughed. (189)

(d) Relational Processes

These are processes of being in the specific sense of establishing relationships between two entities. An example is the Intensive Relational Process which posits a relationship of equivalence; an ‘x’ is ‘y’ connection between two entities as in:

66. “I’m chair of the board of a charity in Ghana.” (211)

This is said by one of the women from Africa and it is a contradiction because there’s no proof that the lady was actually the chair. Though this demonstrates that African ladies lived in denial when in the US because what they expected when they left for America was not what they got.

C: Lexico-Semantic Innovations

At this level, as other levels, a writer exercises choice in terms of ‘a grammar of possibilities’. But this codification, or structuration of meaning, applies only to meaning narrowly, though centrally, defined as conceptual or logical meaning. There is a whole range of language communication, particularly that which involves the interrelation between speaker and hearer, which could not be fitted into this conceptual view of semantics (Leech and Short, 1981, 122). The following features are represented at this level:

(i) Use of Imagery

The imagery used widely in this text is simile. What is important about this kind of imagery is the explicit meaning of what it is likened to. The following (67 and 68) are examples:

67. “She looked improbable like sunlight.” (80)
68. “She began over time to feel like a vulture hacking ….” (8)

The ‘she’ referred to in this simile is Kimberly, a lady who employed Ifemelu as a babysitter once she was in the US. She looked unreliable and of course she sends
Ifemelu parking. This is a representation of how the others behaved especially to the desperate Africans who seek jobs in the US. In example 68, Ifemelu felt guilty of the blog posts because she would mostly talk about people’s characters especially the non-Americans.

Another prominent imagery used by the author is Metaphor. This is an indirect comparison but very powerful imagery is realised therein. For example:

69. “Chief Omenka is a 419 and everybody knows it. This church is full of 419 men.”

Another imagery used in the novel is Personification. This is where a non-living thing is forced to behave like a living thing. For instance:

70. “….his body bowed with the humility that poverty had forced on him” (246)

(ii) Use of Symbolism

Symbolism, according to Oha and Uwaegbute (2010) is “frequent use of words, places, characters, or objects that mean something beyond what they are on a literal level.” (49) It exists whenever something is meant to represent something else. Ifemelu uses ‘hair’ as a symbol of racial discrimination. She describes how the blacks struggle to make their hair look like that of Americans through the use of relaxers. The symbol of the hair is used singly and all through the novel, for example it can be realized through the following conversations:

71. She touched Ifemelu’s hair. “Why don’t you have a relaxer?”
   “I like my hair the way God made it.”

The hair is an issue in America and that is why African ladies struggle to have their hair relaxed so as to be like the whites. This is ironical because in her stay in the US, Ifemelu struggled so much without having her natural hair done as compared to other Africans who struggled to relax their hair. In another incident when she goes to look for a job she is told to alter her hair because in America ‘hair’ is something that is taken seriously during employment which shows the discrimination. For instance, when she told Ruth about the interview in Baltimore, Ruth said:

72. “My only advice? Lose the braids and straighten your hair. Nobody says this kind of stuff but it matters. We want you to get that job.” (252)
73. “Doris was staring at her computer screen, cradling in her palms a mug that said I ♥ FLORIDA” (414)

In example 73, we notice the pictorial symbol of love used on the mug to elevate the perception of the people about Florida as a state in the United States of America. The use of the symbol makes the mug so endearing to those who truly love Florida. Pictorial symbols add aesthetics to the depiction of a scenery or milieu.

(iii) Use of Selection Restriction

Selection restrictions, also referred to as selection constraints or sortal constraints, can be defined as “semantic constraints which a predicate imposes on its arguments” (Soehn, 2005, 1). The phenomenon of “Selectional Restriction Rules” (SRR) was first described by Chomsky (1965) as a “selection relation between two propositions in a sentence” (114). Selectional (collocational) restriction is the co-occurrence constraint or possibility which exists between lexical items. It is the constraint on the combination of senses of lexical items indicated by certain semantic features which they have (Fowler, 1996), since in the normal use of language, linguistic forms do not freely co-occur with one and other. We see this linguistic innovation in Adichie’s Americanah:

74. “…abiding air of earned grace” (5)
75. “New Haven smelled of neglect.” (5)
76. “…each click brought yet another story of a young person who had recently moved back home, clothed in American or British degrees…. (9)

In example 74, ‘air’ is [+physical feeling] while ‘grace’ is [+abstract disposition]. More so, in example 75, ‘New Haven’ is [+location] while ‘neglect’ is [+behaviour]. Example 76 contains another selection restriction where the word ‘cloth’ is given a new semantic function. Thus, these selections are arbitrarily done to create visual prominence in the novel.

(iv) Use of Functional Conversion

Functional conversion is usually used to describe the situation where a change in word class is not as a result of affixation, but is only signalled by its overall
grammatical context (Halliday, 1978). A nominal may be converted to function as verbal and vice versa in an expression. There are examples of this usage in *Americanah*:

77. He had hated it so much that he Googled the black American-and why should she give him the man’s full name if not because she wanted him Googled? (26)

The word ‘goggle’ is the name of an internet search engine. It is a nominal but used here as a verbal with the addition of ‘ed’ to realise the past tense form.

78. “…he lounged in……” (65)

79. “An editor from *Baltimore Living-*mailed to say that they wanted to include her…” (304)

Here, the words ‘lounge’ and ‘e-mail’ which are nominals have been converted to function as verbals with the addition of ‘ed’ to create the past forms.

(v) Use of Code Mixing

Code-mixing is a sociolinguistic phenomenon. It occurs without changes in situations of utterances. Bradford (1997) calls this situation “conversational code-switching,” (39) involving a situation, where a fluent bilingual talking to another bilingual changes code without any change at all in situation. Code-mixing occurs randomly due to the inability of the speakers to find suitable words or expressions with which to express the ideas they intend to pass across. Wabende (2014) adds that, It is therefore, intra-sentential, that is, occurring within sentences. The author uses Igbo, a Nigerian language for aesthetic purposes and more so to keep in touch with her Igbo root. She once said in an interview that her Igbo language is beautiful and adds more meaning to her creative works (35). Code mixing is part of lexical choice in the extracts 80 and 81 below:

80. “He still thinks that one day I will agree for him. Ha, o di egwu, for where?” (30)

81. “Obinze’s cousin said this with an intention to take Obinze who had hustled for quite some time after coming from America. Ahnahn! *O gini?* Are you the first person to have this problem?” (30)
This was said by Obinze’s cousin to encourage him to face Nigeria as it was after he had come back from England.

**(vi) Use of Colloquialism**

This is the use of informal language which makes the novel conversational. For instance:

82. “To size up” (93). This is more like a verbal group and is used in informal situations to form a judgment or an opinion about someone or something.

83. “Aren’t you hot in that jacket?” (68) - The word ‘hot’ has been used informally to mean ‘smartness’.

84. “Coz, this was the bestest day ever with you.” (68)

The words ‘Coz’ and ‘bestest’ are formed from the words ‘cousin’ and ‘best’. ‘Coz’ is an informal and speedy way of saying ‘cousin’, while ‘bestest’ which is a superlative form becomes a lexical violation since ‘best’ is the superlative degree of ‘good’. We observe here a creative attempt by Adichie to realise the American phatic compositions in order to capture the linguistic changes the characters are undergoing in America. Thus, the choice of the vocabulary is motivated by the informality of the conversations. The other words used in this form in the novel include: SATs - a short form of certificates, ID - Identity cards, LOCS - dreadlocks, The hall rep - the hall representative, Paper ad - paper advertisement.

**(vii) Use of Corrupted English, Nigerian Pidgin and Popular Nigerian English**

Adichie’s use of Nigerian Pidgin (NP), popular Nigerian English (PNE) and corrupted English (CE) in her writing is a reflection of the various Nigerian classes living in America. It is clearly seen that a combination of NP, PNE and CE was spoken by people of the lower classes. In the prison for example, we get the following conversations:

85. “Last year my father die and I don’t go. Because of papers. But maybe, if Chijioke marry me, when my mother die, I can go. She is sick now. But I send her money” (364)

86. “I don’t know why Chijioke not call to me,” she said
“How you get your papers?”
“Me, I try an American when I come, to marry. But he bring many problems” (365)

87. He had lost his accent and now spoke Nigerian English. “Let me tell you, there are many people in your situation” (50)

88. “Na for work wey they get me o”
“E get one guy wey they deport, him don come back get him paper. Na him wey go help me” (281).

Examples 85 and 86 show a form of CE which could neither be said to be NP nor PNE. However, 87 reflects the use of PNE while 88 indicates a conversation that has an NP tenor. CE, PNE and NP are used to capture the social classes of the characters in the novel.

The attempts by Nigerians to go into fake (deceitful) marriages in order to get the necessary immigration documents for permanent residency in the US are addressed here.

(viii) Use of Coded Expressions

This is a kind of register otherwise known as euphemism. The following are examples of taboo words used in the novel:

89. Ifemelu tells her Aunty, “We ate the food a week ago” (113). She says that because she suspected that she was pregnant.

90. “He can still score a goal at his age.” (101) That meant that he was not too old to impregnate women

91. “But you should do something for him, no matter how small,” Obinze is told to give out some money. (98)

92. “Obinze got on the next Okada and was soon speeding behind her…” (113) A motorcycle in Nigeria is referred to as ‘Okada’ and this is what the author uses in the text without a translation.

(ix) Use of Transliteration

Transliteration is an attempt at translating a language to realise its surface meaning. There are many instances of transliteration of Igbo expressions. For instance:
93. Iloba spoke up in Igbo. “Vincent, my brother here is trying to save money and do his papers. Thirty-five is too much…” (50)
94. “You know some people take half. Yes, he is in a situation but all of us are in a situation. I am helping him but this is business.” Vincent’s Igbo had a rural accent. (50)

(x) Use of Antilanguage

Halliday (1978) explains that antilanguages are typically characterized by references to proscribed drugs to alternative sexual behaviours or more generally to the various activities of a criminal underworld (65) . While Wabende (2014) further explains that “Antilanguages are the semi-secretive languages born out of subcultures and alternative societies. These societies, ‘antisocieties’ are consciously established as alternatives to mainstream society such that their relationship to the dominant social order is one of resistance, even active hostility” (34). The following examples (95, 96 and 97) in the novel illustrate this:

95. “Chief Omenka is a 419 and everybody knows it. This church is full of 419 men.”
People who defraud others are referred to as 419 in Nigeria.

96. Americanah is a word used to mock the returnees from America since most of them return to their countries with ‘make-believe’ foreign accent.

97. Chicks. This is a word used to refer to young girls or ladies of a certain character that is not likeable to others. They could be prostitutes or drug addicts. (99)

(xi) Use of High Tech Language

The language of internet and information technology is common among people of all ages nowadays and Adachieis keen on the choice of these words and phrases in order to realise verisimilitude and the time of the story as occurring incontemporary society. Adachie uses language from digital discourse to make her work realise modern conversational discourse. For instance:

98. “To send a text.” (20) This means to send a message through the mobile phone.
99. “To compose an e-mail.” (20) This means to send a message through electronic mail.

100. “He stared at the BlackBerry.” (25) This is a type or make of mobile phone.
101. “He Googled the black American.” (483) This refers to search for information through google search engine online.

102. “I am going to put this one up on Facebook” (483) Facebook is a social site.

103. “He clicked delete and empty trash.” (299) This means he deleted the messages.

104. “She scoured Nigerian websites, Nigerian profiles on Facebook, Nigerian blogs, and each click brought yet another story of a young person who had recently moved back home, clothed in American or British degrees….” (9)

4. Conclusion

Adichie’s third novel, Americanah, is laden with linguistic innovations which resulted from her attempts at realizing verisimilitude. According to Oha and Uwaegbute (2010), verisimilitude is, “The sense that what one reads is ‘real’ or at least realistic and believable.” (50) Thus, the most potent means of realizing this is through the linguistic applications in the text. From the lexical choices to the syntagmatic arrangements, there are conscious efforts to realise the American milieu from the eye-view of the African immigrants. Thus, the Africans would not go of their linguistic repertoires in their new environment, but the influence of the new environment is overwhelming as they struggle to belong. The linguistic features identified are revealed in this research through a dissection of the language in the different levels of style, which emphasises that stylistics is not only about patterns and forms but also about meaning. The stylistic explications revealed more textual meanings which are captured through analysis of the graphophonological, syntactic and lexico-semantic applications in the text.
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