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# GENDER STEREOTYPES IN NIGERIAN DISCOURSE: A CRITICAL DISCOURSE ANALYSIS OF SELECTED LITERARY AND FILMIC TEXTS

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**ABSTRACT**
This study investigates the representation of masculine and feminine identities in '*Things Fall Apart, Efuru and My Mother's Secret'.* It focuses on how the writers use language to construct, negotiate, reproduce and resist gender stereotypes across different domains of discourse especially in literary discourse. The study is anchored in Fairclough's three-dimensional model of Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA), Transitivity System of the Systemic Functional Linguistics (SFL) and Dominance Theory as theoretical framework. It presents how masculine and feminine speakers or writers in the selected texts portray people of different genders with respect to language use and communication style. The data for the study were samples purposively selected from '*Things Fall Apart'* by Chinua Achebe, *'Efuru*' by Flora Nwapa and '*My Mother's Secret',* a video from the Nigerian Movie Industry. The study finds that spoken and written discourses by female speakers and writers are frequently associated with care-giving, submissiveness, obedience and emotionality while discourses by male speakers and writers are scored high on leadership, authority, rationality, aggression and economic power. The finding underscores that male and female speakers and writers differ in their communication strategies with reference to gender roles and societal expectations. The study also finds that writers of the texts present gender as a cultural and social construct, widely different from sex which is a biological conceptualisation of maleness and femaleness. The study is significant for it provides a critical understanding of how language exposes gender stereotypes by showing the disparities in discourses of male and female speakers and writers. Therefore, the study concludes that addressing gender stereotypes requires sustained attention to language reforms, media responsibility, re-orientation of gender expectations and inclusive communication practices.

**Keywords:** Gender stereotypes, literary and filmic texts, masculinity, femininity and Nigeria

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## Introduction

Language is not just a neutral means of communication but a social practice through which individuals and groups construct, negotiate and reproduce their social and experiential realities (Fairclough, 1989). Beyond its referential function, language is also ideological, serving as a site where power relations are enacted, maintained and resisted (Halliday, 1978; 1994; Fairclough, 1989). Consequently, the ways in which language is organised and used not only reflect social experiences but also shape belief system, including notions of gender, masculinity and femininity. Every society constructs beliefs about masculinity and femininity through language use and discursive practices, which in turn inform and regulate how people perceive themselves and others through their linguistic choices (Halliday, 1978; Fairclough, 1989). Gender is particularly significant in this process because it socially constructed rather than biologically determined (Butler, 1990). It is through continuous linguistic choices, interpersonal relations and institutional practices that societies perpetuate and enforce specific gender roles and expectations (Halliday, 1978, 1994). In this regard, language functions as both a mirror and a mediator of gender ideologies, as it shape how men and women are represented, positioned and valued in discourse (Van Dijk, 1993).Thus, the ways in which men and women are represented in discourse may contribute to the construction of particular gender identities and relation of power. Deaux & Lewis (1984) refer to gender stereotypes as simplified beliefs about the attributes, behaviours, roles and abilities considered appropriate for men and women. West & Zimmerman (1987) argue that gender stereotypes are accomplished through repetitive social interactions in which individuals reproduce culturally recognisable expectations of masculinity and femininity. Thus, Eckert & McConnell-Ginet (2013) emphasise that the relationship between language and gender is dynamic and embedded in social practices rather than being reducible to fixed differences between male and female. From a discourse perspective, gender stereotypes may become normalised when particular traits and social roles are repeatedly associated with specific gender categories.

Discursively, masculinity, may be associated with strength, authority, independence, rationality, leadership and economic power whereas femininity may be associated with care-giving, obedience, dependence and domesticity. The examination of the role of language in the construction of masculinity and femininity these texts provides critical insight into the ways power, ideology and identity are negotiated in literary and filmic texts within the Nigerian contexts. These representations become ideologically significant when they are presented as natural, universal or self-evident rather than as culturally produced assumptions. Eckert & McConnel-Ginet (2013) perceive that gender stereotypes can contribute to hierarchical distinctions and inequalities when linguistic and social practices repeatedly position men and women in different ways. Consequently, the relationship between language and gender is therefore closely connected to questions of power and ideology. From critical discourse analysis perspective, discourse constitutes an imperative site where social identities, power relations and ideological assumptions including gender stereotypes are produced, sustained and resisted (Fairclough, 1992). Therefore, analysing gendered discourse requires attention not only to what is explicitly stated but also to the assumptions and social relations that particular linguistic choices presuppose and reproduce. Nigeria, however, is characterised by considerable cultural, linguistic, socio-political diversity and understanding of masculinity and femininity that may vary across ethnic, religious, economic and socio-cultural contexts.

Nevertheless, gendered assumptions can become embedded in everyday communicative practices, literary texts and media representations. Ezeifeka and Osakwe (2013) state that gender

representations in discourse demonstrate how linguistic choices can reproduce a 'male-as-norm' orientation and contribute to the marginalisation or reduced visibility of women in socio-political contexts. Nakpodia et al. (2018) opines that like many other African countries, Nigerian continue to struggle with deep-rooted socio-cultural and patriarchal structures that limit the opportunities for women. Nnaji (2016) state that in Nigeria, women's economic participation is hindered by various factors, including limited access to education, discriminatory inheritance laws, unequal access to resources and cultural stigmatisation of women engaged in economic activities outside the home.

However, gender stereotypes should not be understood as completely fixed or universally accepted phenomenon. It should be viewed as a discourse site where social actors reproduce, negotiate, challenge and/or transform dominant gender expectations through their discourses. This dynamic dimension is important because contemporary Nigerian women increasingly participate in political, professional and economic spaces traditionally dominated by men. These developments create room for the negotiation of alternative roles for male and female in Nigerian context. Butler's (1990) conceptualisation of gender performativity also draws attention to the repeated social practices through which gender identities are constituted while also allowing room for the disruption of established gender norms. Despite increasing participation of Nigerian women in social and professional activities, traditional patriarchal assumptions continue to influence linguistic representation of women in both spoken and written discourse. Most existing studies have focused on the challenges and impediments hindering women's development with little attention to the linguistic disparities and emerging positive discourses on gender equality in Nigeria. Against this background, the study aims at exploring gender stereotypes in selected Nigerian literary and filmic texts with the intention of revealing disparities in male and female discourses as illustrated in the selected texts. The study therefore investigates how spoken and written discourse speakers and writers construct masculine and feminine identities in the Nigerian multi-cultural, multi-ethnic and multi-lingual society. The study contributes to the discourses on gender stereotypes, women emancipation and the broader discussions on women empowerment and gender equality in Nigeria.

**Research Objectives**

i. To examine disparities between masculine and feminine identities in selected Nigerian literary and filmic texts.
ii. To analyse how gender and sex are discursively constructed and differentiated in the selected literary and filmic texts.
iii. To investigate ideological implications of gender stereotypes and how writers promote agency in the selected literary and filmic texts.

**Research Questions**

The study is guided by the following questions:

i. What disparities exist between masculine and feminine identities in the selected literary and filmic texts?
ii. How gender and sex are discursively constructed and differentiated in the selected literary and filmic texts?
iii. What ideological implications arise from gender stereotypes and to what extent do writers promote agency in the selected literary and filmic texts?

**Conceptualising Gender and Gender Stereotypes**

In evaluating masculine and feminine identities in this study, one has to look at traits, characteristics or features that are stereotypically fixed for both genders. However, in discussing

gender stereotype in spoken and written texts, it is, therefore, necessary that we discuss the two terms: gender and stereotype. Gender as a term is used to denote something different from sex. A person is born as either a male or female, hence, sex is a biological concept of men and women while gender is a social or cultural construct of masculine and feminine. Thus, it is the society that makes one either masculine or feminine. In a similar manner, one's role and responsibility enact for him or her particular gender identity. Gender is "behavioural, cultural, or psychological traits typically associated with one sex". Mustapha (2010) opines that our biological labels - male and female are what we are born with, but society does its marking by dressing individuals as masculine and feminine just as humans enact for themselves certain gender identity through their language and societal roles. West & Zimmerman (1987, p.12) see gender as the routine, methodical and recurring accomplishment and it is the activity of managing situated conduct in the light of normative conception of attitudes and activities appropriate for one's sex category. Butler (1990) says that gender is something we do and not something we are. For instance, a young African girl is often being prepared to give baby-care by attending to their young ones, whereas a young African boy, however is trained to take responsibility at home. Gender studies hold that there is a distinction between gender and sex, as gender is a cultural construct while sex is a biological condition of maleness and femaleness (Jule, 2006).

On the other hand, stereotype is generalised view or preconception about attributes or characteristics that are or ought to be possessed by members of a particular social group or the roles that are or should be performed by members of a particular social group. Schneider (2004) opines that stereotypes are widely held beliefs or generalisations about the behaviours, characteristics and roles performed by male and female. It can also be defined as learned, widely shared, socially validated general beliefs about categories of individuals (Nwugo, 2025). Stereotypes are oversimplify and exaggerate attributions made to groups creating distinction between categories which are greater than actual observed differences (Mustapha, 2006). Female stereotypical roles include being emotional, caring and in need of protection. Male stereotypical roles include being rational, logical, career driven, aggressive and strong. These assumptions can be negative, for instance, women are irrational, men are insensitive or seemingly benign whereas, women are nurturing, men are leaders and so on. However, all stereotyping can be limiting and fallacious.

Gender stereotypes associate with certain characteristics, attitudes, abilities, preferences, and behaviour to women and men (Athenstaedt, 2003; Prentice & Carranza, 2002). Stereotypes are not attributions made about individuals, rather; it is a socially shared assumption regarding the social group in general. Gender stereotypes have both a descriptive component (how women or men typically are) and a prescriptive component (how women or men are expected to be) (Heilman, 2012; Prentice & Carranza, 2002). Some of the most common gender stereotypes include that men are (expected to be) agentic, hardworking, confident, competitive, independent, and assertive (Diekman & Eagly, 2000; Fiske et al., 2002). While women are expected to be affectionate, emotional, considerate, warm and submissive (Diekman & Eagly, 2000; Fiske et al., 2002). In addition to these personality traits ascribed to women and men, there are gender stereotypes concerning leisure time activities and occupations (Athenstaedt, 2003; Baron et al., 2001; Nosek et al., 2002). Leadership and management positions as well as interest in activities and occupations in STEM fields (science, technology, engineering, and mathematics) are generally perceived as the domains of men (Baron, et al., 2001; Nosek, et al., 2002). Conversely, social activities, taking care of children and occupations in the arts, language and social science are gender stereotypes associated with women (Baron et al., 2001; Nosek, et al., 2002).

Furthermore, recent studies have repeatedly demonstrated achievement related stereotypes: boys are more interested and achieve higher performance in mathematics (Nowicki & Lopata, 2017; Steffens & Jelenec, 2011). However, reading is generally considered a female domain and associated activities are often seen as female-typed (Nowicki & Lopata, 2017; Steffens & Jelenec, 2011; Watson et al., 2010).

**Review of Related Literature**

Gender stereotypes in Nigeria involve attributes, perception and overgeneralised beliefs related to masculine and feminine identities. Banwo (2021) investigates a comparative analysis of gender stereotypes and traditional connotations in selected Chinese and Igbo women discourse. The study adopts a blend of cultural theories, gender theories and stereotypes theories. The data were sourced through typical case sampling method and were analysed using content analysis. The findings reveal that Chinese and Igbo women behaviour and attitudes are regulated by societal expectations that are based on sex and sexuality. The study also identified stereotypes, discrimination and inequality of sexes and therefore concludes that people find it difficult to disengage from traditional concepts and views. However, this study fails to specify the particular cultural, gender or stereotypes theories employed in its investigation thereby making the analytical procedure vague. Tannen (1990) examines women and men in everyday life conversation. The study is grounded in interactional sociolinguistics and it explores how men and women utilise distinct conversational style often refers to as 'genderlects' and how these differences result in frequent interpersonal misunderstanding. The study adopts qualitative research methods using recorded speech and cultural observation as research instruments. The finding demonstrates that men and women operate under distinct conversational rules, leading to systematic patterns of misunderstanding in everyday interactions. The study concludes that interpersonal conflict between men and women arises because both groups interpret identical conversational signals through different lenses and not because one group tries to manipulate, dominate or hurt the other. Despite the study's contribution to gender studies, it lacks empirical transparency and methodological rigour expected of an academic research.

Lakoff (1975) investigates a comparative study on the portrayal of female and male politicians in the New York Times. The study argues that women use a tentative speech style that reflects and reinforces their subordinate position in the society. The study was anchored in deficit approach to gender and it finds that linguistic behaviour associated with women tends to construct them as less assertive and confident, more polite and deferential, more emotionally expressive, more uncertain or tentative and socially subordinate to men. The study concludes that language both reflects and reinforces women's unequal position in society. Though, the study is useful to gender discourse, its account is largely based on intuitive observations rather than extensive empirical data therefore create a window for further research. Muhammad & Nwabudike (2026) examines a Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA) of feminist gendered language and media representation in the Punch and Blueprint newspapers in Nigeria. Drawing from Fairclough's (1989) three-dimension model of CDA, the study uses qualitative approach to purposively select ten articles from the Punch and Blueprint newspapers between 2021 and 2025. The findings demonstrate that both publications frequently employ stereotypical language that favour male authority and marginalise female concerns. The study emphasises that both publications featured articles that reinforce patriarchal hegemony while describing actions that marginalise women. It concludes that purposeful editorial reforms, inclusivity and gender-sensitive journalistic training would help to address unjust women representation in Nigeria. However, the study's selection of ten articles spanning for a broad four-year window (2021-

2025) is extremely narrow values depth, a corpus of ten articles risks cherry-picking and makes it difficult to comprehensively claim institutional pattern for two major national dailies. This, however, queries the credibility of the research findings.

Dikwal-Bot (2024) examines internalised misogyny and intragroup discrimination in anti-gender equality comments on Nigerian female blogs. The study examines the discursive structures and strategies used by Nigerian female blog users to legitimise gender inequality while using insight from Critical Discourse Analysis as analytical tool. Adisa et al. (2024) investigates ‘‘seen but not heard: the voice of women at work and the mediating role of culture’’. The study contend that patriarchal norms and stereotypes continue to constrain women’s voices in Nigerian workplace. The findings reveal that women’s participation in professional spaces increasingly create opportunities for them and challenge the traditional assumptions of male dominance. It concludes that patriarchal culture, high-power-distance orientations and contextualised religious norms continue to constrain women’s ability to express themselves freely in Nigerian workplace. The study examines the cultural factors that silence women but fails to interrogate how gender stereotypes are linguistically reproduced and challenged in discourse. Qian (2019) investigates how gender stereotypes differ between male and female writings. The study qualitatively analysed differences in how male and female authors portray gender across text corpora. The findings show that writings by females on the average have lower gender stereotype score than the writings by male writers. The study concludes, however, that over the past few decades, gender stereotypes in male writings have decreased. The study perhaps did not clearly state the theoretical foundation and methodological approach used in its investigation and therefore creates room for lack of rigour in the research approach.

Poyton (1989) explores how language constructs and maintains social gender difference. The study adopts systemic functional linguistics (SFL) and the finding reveals that language serves as an ideological tool through which socialisation establishes distinct linguistic behaviours and social hierarchies for men and women. Fishman (1983) examines the work women do. The study demonstrates that woman do the majority of conversational ‘work’’ in everyday interactions with men to keep conversations going. It finds that intimate conversations between couples mirror societal gender hierarchies where women initiate, sustain and close conversations. Spender (1980) investigates systemic prejudice, sexism and structural disadvantage girls and women face within educational systems. The study argues that language is predominantly male-centred, in other words, male experiences are often treated as the norm while women’s experiences are often marginalised. The study concludes that language is shaped within patriarchal social structures and consequently privileges male perspective. These studies (Lakoff, 1975; Spender, 1980; Fishman, 1983; Poyton, 1989; Tannen, 1990; Qian, 2019; Banwo, 2021; Bikwal-Bot, 2024; Adisa et al., 2024; Muhammad & Nwabudike, 2026) and many others surveyed in literature may have not succinctly evaluated masculine and feminine identities in literary texts with reference to evaluating gender disparities and the emerging circumstances in masculine and feminine discourse. The paucity of knowledge in literature has created a window for this research. This study, therefore, evaluates gender stereotypes in selected literary and filmic texts using insights from Fairclough's three-dimensional model of Critical Discourse Analysis and Transitivity System of the Systemic Functional Linguistics (SFL) as analytical tools.

**Theoretical Framework**

This study is anchored in an integrated theoretical framework that combines Fairclough’s (1989) three-dimensional model of Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA), Halliday’s

(1985) Systemic Functional Linguistics (SFL), particularly the Transitivity System and dominance theory to examine the construction, reproduction and negotiation of gender stereotypes in selected Nigerian literary and filmic texts. The integration of these theories is based on the premise that language is not just a means of communication but a social practice through which power relations, ideologies and asymmetrical social relations are enacted, maintained and resisted. Fairclough's (1989) model conceptualises discourse at three interconnected levels: description, interpretation and explanation. At the description (textual analysis) level, attention is paid to linguistic choices, grammatical structures, theme choices and cohesive ties. At the interpretation (discursive practice) level, the study considers how discourses are produced, circulated and consumed within social contexts. At the explanation (social practice) level, the study explores how these linguistic representations and social practices reflect and reproduce gender ideologies and power relations within the broader social system. Halliday's (1985) Transitivity System of the Systemic Functional Linguistics (SFL) examines how gender stereotypes are constructed using the grammar of the clause. Transitivity Systemic concerned with how clauses represent processes, participants and circumstances through material, relational, verbal, mental, behavioural and existential processes; thereby revealing how gender stereotypes are negotiated through agencies in discourse.

Dominance Theory, perhaps, complements these theories by providing an explanation of power relations underlying gendered discourse. The theory is concerned with the ways in which unequal social relations between men and women are manifested and reproduced through language. Dominance theory (Zimmerman & West, 1975; Spender, 1980; Fishman, 1983, Goddard & Patterson, 2000) states that men dominate and control interactions with women and the language system itself. Zimmerman & West (1975, 1987 & Fishman, 1983) state that studies on interruptions, hedges and question tags are used to show where women are negotiating their relatively powerless position in interaction with men. In speech making, men dominate while women subordinate. Spender's (1980) view which states that "man made language", further draws attention to the possibility that linguistic systems and conversations may reflect historically established male-centred structures of power. The interconnectedness of these approaches enables the study to move systematically from linguistic form, to discourse and to ideology and power discourse, making it significant for a critical investigation of gender stereotypes.

**Methodology**

The study adopts a qualitative descriptive research design. The data were drawn from two prominent gender sensitive literary texts in Nigeria: '*Things Fall Apart*' by Chinua Achebe, *'Efuru*' by Flora Nwapa, and one home video '*My Mother's Secret',* a movie from the Nigerian Movie Industry. The corpus for the study consists of five (5) extracts from '*Things Fall Apart',* five (5) extracts from *'Efuru'* and ten (10) extracts from *'My Mother's Secret*' purposively selected to unravel pattern of themes associated with gender stereotypes in the study. The dataset was selected from these three texts as an illustration of spoken and written discourses because of the foundational role the texts play in literary development in Nigeria and their identification of gender roles in the pre-colonial and post-colonial African society. The analysis of texts was done using Braun and Clarke (2006) thematic analysis to show theme pattern, reflexive of gender stereotypes in the discourse of masculinity and femininity in the selected literary and filmic texts. The study adopts a triangulation of Fairclough's three-dimensional model of CDA, Systemic Functional Linguistics (SFL), particularly the Transitivity System and Dominance Theory as theoretical framework. Fairclough's three-dimensional model was underpinned for data analysis.

This is because Fairclough's three-dimensional model like Halliday's SFL's paradigm integrates linguistic tools with discursive strategies in the analysis of texts. The data were coded at the descriptive stage for the analysis of linguistic choices, thematic choices, grammatical structures and cohesive ties. At the interpretation stage, discursive practices such as text consumption pattern, framing strategies, distribution pattern and intertextuality references were examined while the explanation stage investigates how discourse reinforces socio-cultural beliefs on masculine and feminine identities in the texts.

**Data Presentation and Analysis**

The data for this study were presented and analysed qualitatively using insights from Fairclough's three-dimensional model of Critical Discourse Analysis CDA). The samples were purposively selected to evaluate gender stereotypes in the selected literary and filmic texts with the intention to exploring the disparities that exist in the linguistic choices of male and female speakers or writers and how perceptions on sexuality have changed in recent times. This study helps to reveal how linguistic choices contribute to the maintenance of patriarchal hegemony in discourse and/or gradually decolonises the mind on stereotypes about male and female in Nigeria's gender discourse. The analysis of data in the study is conducted in stages (description, interpretation and explanation) to reflect gender stereotypes as presented by authors in the selected texts. Let us examine samples from '*Things Fall Apart*'.

**Sample 1:** Okonkwo ruled his household with heavy hands. His wives especially the youngest, lived in perpetual fear of his fiery temper (13)

**Sample 2:** Men must excel in farming yam, king of crops (23)

**Sample 3:** Dazed with fear, Okonkwo drew his machete and cut him down. He was afraid of being thought weak (61)

**Sample 4:** She should have been a boy (64)

**Sample 5:** Okonkwo's first wife, Nwoye's mother gives birth to her third son in succession, Okonkwo had gathered goat for her, as was the custom (82)

**Description/Text Analysis**

The samples above are extracts from '*Things Fall Apart*' by Chinua Achebe. Text analysis according to Fairclough (1989) focuses on language of the text, lexical choices, grammatical structures, theme choices and cohesive elements. The language of the texts are characteristics of Achebe's linguistic tradition of describing situations and events in simple sentences and the lexical choices vary in degrees and forms. Sample 1 contains two simple declarative sentences and both possess material process verbs **'ruled'** and **'lived'**, expressing the action performed by the subject, Okonkwo and the state of being **'lived'** in his household, constructing the wives as passive recipients of male power. The grammatical structure in the clause denotes **'Okonkwo'** as the subject/Actor/Agent, '**ruled**', '**lived**' (verb) as the material process verbs, **'his household'** as the Goal, '**his**' presents household as entity under Okonkwo's control while **'with a heavy hands'** is captured as the circumstantial element of the clause. It functions metaphorically to suggest physical force and authoritarian control. The phrase 'his wives' positions the women in relation to Okonkwo rather than as independent social actors. In a similar manner, '**fiery temper'** associates masculinity with aggression and violence. Sample 2 is also a simple declarative sentence. The noun **'men'** functions as a generic gender category. The modalisation/modulation '**must**' expressing strong sense of obligation on men to show their strength by farming yam, an important marker of masculine identity. The phrase '**king of crop'** personifies yam through the masculine title '**king'**. This lexical choice contributes to a semantic field of masculinity, authority and superiority. The lexical verb '**excel**' is a behaviourial/materially oriented process that attributes achievement to men.

Sample 3 contains complex and simple declarative sentences. The sample is introduced with an adjunct, a circumstantial element **'dazed with fear'**, functioning as a modifier to the main clause and establishes Okonkwo's emotional state. The main clause contains Okonkwo as the subject/Actor and two coordinated verb phrases joined by the coordinating conjunction **'and'**. The material process verbs '**drew**' and '**cut**' portray Okonkwo as an active and violent agent. The second clause, however, is a simple sentence structure with an embedded non-finite clause **'being thought weak',** in the passive voice, suppressing the identity of the people who might judge Okonkwo weak and was used by the speaker to express masculine ideology which is constructed as something that must be continually demonstrated. Sample 4 is a simple sentence and it begins with the pronoun **'she'** which explicitly identifies the subject as feminine. The phrase '**should have been'** is a modality expressing failed expectation of Okonkwo about Ezinma's gender. The gendered noun '**boy'** functions as the desired identity. The contrast between **'she'** and '**boy**' establishes a gender binary in which maleness is presented as preferable. The expression in sample 5 '**Okonkwo's wife'** and **'Nwoye's mother'** identify women through her relationship with men. In the expression '**gives birth'**, the woman is a participant associated with reproductive process and her social identity, consequently connect to childbearing and motherhood. The ordinal expression '**her third son in succession'** emphasises the important/cultural value of repeated bearing of male child. The agency and material process '**Okonkwo had gathered goat for her'** shows Okonkwo's as Actor in the material process **'had gathered'**, where the woman is the beneficiary of the action. The phrase **'as was the custom'** functions as a cultural legitimation of giving birth to male children. The sample constructs women through marriage, motherhood and the sex of the children they reproduce while men are associated with provision and social action. The thematic choice of the samples comprise the theme of leadership, strength, anger, dominance and patriarchal hegemony drawn to illustrate masculine superior identity.

**Discursive Practice/Interpretation**

As a literary text, the samples is produced and consumed within the genre of African literary discourse. The samples x-ray the Igbo socio-cultural setting before the advent of western colonialism. The samples intertextually delve into multifaceted expectations of masculinity in Igbo culture. The samples demonstrate Okonkwo's obsession with proving his strength as a man because he seeks not to replicate his father's reputation who was considered by his clansmen as weak as a woman. The samples clearly portrays the Igbo cultural obsession to male and relegation of female to the background, thereby shaping people's mental model on gender equality discourse.

**Social Practice/Explanation**

These samples reflect and reproduce patriarchal hegemony within the Igbo socio-cultural discourse. The samples interrogate the expectation of masculinity and the marginalisation of femininity within the Igbo culture and how these customs and traditions shape gender roles particularly in Igbo society and Africa in general. In the samples, Achebe, examines gender (masculinity and femininity) in Igbo cultural worldview not merely as personal attribute but societal imperative. Men are expected to be rational, strong, aggressive, assertive and productive, as they are measured by their ability to acquire titles, farm yam and lead in warfare. This contrast exponentially with the cultural expectation of female as they are considered weak, emotional, sentimental, vulnerable and dependent on men. Achebe in the samples, demonstrates Igbo worldview and conceptualisation of gender by assigning major roles to male characters while assigning minor roles to female characters. In the samples, Okonkwo is depicted as Actor/Agent

who acts and controls situations and events, demonstrating societal value attached to masculine gender in Igbo land while relegating feminine gender to the role of priestess and river goddess, foregrounding the perception of feminine gender in a male-dominated society. Finally, the discourse marginalises feminist demands, frame them as weak, unassertive and failure, thereby preserving the male-dominated framework of Igbo socio-cultural society where men are portrayed as strong, brave, adventurous and possessing economic power.

In furtherance to my analysis on gender stereotypes in written texts, I choose to capture excerpts from the first Nigerian feminist writer, Flora Nwapa's views in the novel '*Efuru*'. The samples are analysed through Fairclough's (1989) three-dimensional model of Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA): text analysis (description), discursive practices (interpretation), social practices (explanation) and the model examines discourse at these three interconnected stages. Let's examine the following samples as there are significant in revealing women's resistance to patriarchal hegemony, marital status, emotional agency and emerging women economic independence in a patriarchal society.

**Sample 6:** I do object of being relegated to the background (53)
**Sample 7:** I want to keep my position as the first wife, it is my right (54)
**Sample 8:** If Adizua does not love me anymore, I too will try to learn not to love him (58)
**Sample 9**: Her hands make money.
**Sample 10**: Anything she touches is money (156)

**Text Analysis (Description)**

Sample 6 is a simple declarative sentence consisting of subject **'I'**, auxiliary verb '**do**', main verb '**object',** preposition '**to'** and gerundial-participial phrase '**being relegated to the background'** functioning as the complement of object. It begins with the first person pronoun **'I'**, which gives the speaker a strong sense of identity and agency. The process-type (verb) 'object' represents resistance rather than passive acceptance. The gerundial phrase **'being relegated to the background'** constructs the difference between the speaker's desired social position and subordinate position her husband wants her to assume. The verb phrase '**do object**' is emphatic as the auxiliary '**do**' intensifies the verb, thereby making women's resistance explicit and forceful. The grammatical structure of the text positions the speaker as an active Senser/Actor who expresses dissatisfaction with the patriarchal social order and the passivised structure **'being relegated'**, however, reveals asymmetrical power relationship in Nigerian gender discourse. Sample 7 repeats the use of first person pronoun **'I'** as the subject of the clause to foreground female agency. The material process verb '**want**' expresses the speaker's desire, while **'keep**' represents an attempt to resist the existing patriarchal hegemony. The phrase **'my position as the first wife'** signifies marital seniority as a source of power and the repetition of the possessive pronoun '**my**' constructs a strong sense of ownership and entitlement. The expression **'it is my right'** employs relational process verb **'is'** to establish cohesive ties between her position and her legitimate right.

Interestingly, sample 8 is phenomenal because it combines conditionality, modality and reciprocity in the discourse of marital relationship. The sample begins with a conditional clause **'if Adizua does not love me anymore'**, which establishes a hypothetical situation upon which the speaker's subsequent action depends (Ayodele, 2020; Nwugo, 2025). Thus, the pronoun **'me**' and '**I'** establish the speaker as both recipient and potential agent within the emotional relationship. The adverb '**too'** creates a sense of reciprocity in the structure, that if Adizua withdraws his love for her, she also would withdraw her own love for him. However, she does not expressly say that she will not love Adizua but she **'will try to learn'** which presents emotional independence, a gradual shift from patriarchal ordered society where women are

completely dependent on men to more emerging society where women demonstrate emotional strength. Sample 9 is a simple declarative sentence and it begins with third person pronoun **'her'** which means the speaker is being represented by another voice. The noun '**hands**' functions metonymically for women's labour, skill, productive and economic power. The material process verb '**make**' is significant and therefore represents women as Actors who produce wealth. Sample 10 also is a simple declarative sentence and it begins with an indefinite pronoun '**anything**', referring to nothing in particular but intertextually denotes any business activity the speaker embarks upon to enable her create wealth. It is a hyperbolical representation of economic productivity and perhaps constructs the speaker as exceptionally successful in her business endeavours. The repetition of '**money**' in Samples 9 and 10 exponentially foregrounds the economic value attached to her ingenuity in wealth creation.

**Discursive Practice (Interpretation)**

The novel '***Efuru'*** is produced and consumed within the genre of marriage discourse in African literary studies. The texts represents woman's attempt to negotiate position or rather resist the power challenging her right as the first wife in her marital relationship. The texts are not merely a personal complaint, rather it participates in the wider discourse concerning the status and rights of women in African society. The novel challenges the expectation that a woman should silently accept a relegated position whenever another woman enters her marriage. However, her objection appropriates the discourse of resistance and challenges the patriarchal order that marginalises women and subjugates them as second class citizens. Discursively, the samples legitimises women resistance to unfair treatment in marital relationships and create a platform for negotiation and representation of African womanhood through productive capacity rather than through marital or domestic identity.

**Social Practice (Explanation)**

Flora Nwapa is reluctant to be seen as a feminist, however, some of her books are noted for advocating women's rights, fairness, equity and justice. In this novel '*Efuru*', she uses female characters to challenge unfair cultural practices that African women have been subjected to due to widowhood and childlessness. The use of her novels to tackle these unfair cultural practices against women remains an inspiration for Nigerian women's rights activists. Thus, the samples expose patriarchal structures that determine women's position in marital relationships. The samples, however, demonstrate a female character who refuses to accept marginalisation, though conscious of the social structures affecting women, takes the responsibility of resisting domination and subjugation through productive activity. Efuru challenges the ideological assumption that women should be passive recipients of decision made by the male counterpart in their marriages, rather resists the ideology that women must remain emotional attached to men regardless of how they are treated in marriage. The samples resist patriarchal economic structure that conventionally positioned men as providers and women as dependants, which the writer demonstrate by assigning major roles to female characters through material process verbs **(do object, try, touches)** and thus exposes women vulnerability within patriarchal system by presenting women's attempt to reclaim control and self-awareness over her emotional life. The samples constructs economic productivity as a source of female empowerment and resistance to the ideology of female economic dependent on men. In all, the samples project women's struggle to bridge the disparities between masculine and feminine identities by showing independence and resistance to traditional social order of patriarchal dominance.

This study also presents gender stereotypes in spoken texts through samples drawn from a home video, '***My Mother's Secret***'. Let's examine the discussion between a husband and wife:

**Sample 11**: Wife: Are you leaving? Why? What about the money I asked you of? Don't you

know that I will be going for shopping later in the day or you don't want me to look good like other women?

**Sample 12**: Husband: I don't have money now, my goods just arrived at the port and I need money to clear them. Moreover, you went for shopping last month, so don't disturb me.

**Sample 13:** Wife: I think I told you that my friend's (Bukky) wedding is coming up in two weeks' time and the colour of the ashoebi is pink and light blue and I don't have those colours in my last collection.

**Sample 14:** Husband: Women do make money too. Have you forgotten that you friend, Christy is a lecturer in a university?

**Sample 15**: Wife: (*After a moment of thought*) I want to start my own business.

**Sample 16:** Husband: That is a great idea. What kind of business interests you?

**Sample 17**: Wife: I want to start fashion business because I have the skill and passion for it.

**Sample 18**: Husband: International fashion designer! I believe in your ability. I will support you as you build the business.

**Sample 19:** Wife: Hmmm, I have the ability to lead in any business I would venture into.

**Sample 20**: Husband: Great.

**Text Analysis (Description)**

At the description level, samples are analysed giving attention to lexical choices, grammatical structures, modality, transitivity, cohesive ties and evaluative expressions through which meanings are constructed and expressed in discourse. The lexical analysis of the samples reveals different gender roles: **money, shopping, look good, women, wedding, colour and collection** are prominent lexical items associated with the wife. The wife was initially constructed to be concerned with appearance, consumption and social events. Whereas **goods, port, clear, business, money, skill, passion**, **designer** appear in the husband's and later the wife's speech. The lexical choice shift the conversation from consumption to economic productivity. The conversation starts with series of interrogative sentences: **Are you leaving**? **Why**? **What about the money**...? and so on. This repeated interrogation places the wife as an active Actor/Agent that demands an explanation of her husband's way about. Thus, the questions are not merely seeking of information but a pragmatic attempts to hold her husband accountable for his actions and then asserts her authority contrary to the patriarchal order. The deployment of rhetorical question **'or don't you want me to look good?'** is a significant rhetoric because the wife uses it to appeal to her husband's social expectation and persuade him to act by meeting up her request. Samples 15, 17, 18 and 19 contain several expressions of modality and personal agency: **"I want to start my own business, I want to start fashion business, I have the ability..., I will support you, I would venture into**", are particularly important in unravelling textual meanings of the discourse. The repetition of first person pronoun **'I'** foregrounds the wife as an agent rather than a passive recipient of financial support from the husband. The material process verbs **'want, start, have, lead and venture'** project the participant (wife) as someone capable of making decisions and undertaking some economic actions contrary to the patriarchal belief system that foregrounds women as passive, weak and economically dependent on men.

The husband's use of modality '**will**' expresses commitment and future intention that moves the husband from initial refusal to provide money towards recognition of wife's capacity for independent economic activity, thereby representing her as an Actor who wants to **start, build, lead** and **venture** into business activity. More so, the use of negative evaluative expression **'don't disturb me'** is contrasted with positive evaluative expression "**that is a good idea, international fashion designer!, I believe in your ability and great!**"; these are constructs that place the wife's entrepreneurial ambition as legitimate and invaluable and therefore project women as emerging professionals and career prospects. The expressions

transform the discourse from one about shopping and dependence into the one about professional identity and economic empowerment. The repeated use of pronouns **'I', 'you'** and **'my'** establishes interpersonal relations between the husband and wife and strongly foregrounds selfhood, ownership and personal agency. Finally, the conversation deploys varied types of sentence structures such as interrogative (are you leaving? why?), rhetorical question (don't you know..., you don't want me to look good?), declarative (I want to start my own business) and exclamation (international fashion designer, great!) that show patterns through which meanings are constructed, reproduced and resisted in discourse.

**Discursive Practice (Interpretation)**

The second stage of Fairclough's model examines discourse as a form of social interaction, focusing on how texts are produced, interpreted and consumed. The samples belong to the genre of marital discourse, consumed by husband and wife. The themes of discourse are money, shopping, profession and business. The conversation begins with the discourse showing financial dependency **'what about the money asked you of?'** and developed into a discourse of entrepreneurship and women empowerment **'I want to start my own business'**. The shift changes the wife's position within the dialogue from requester of money to prospective business entrepreneur. Initially, the wife appears within the frame of consumer-oriented discourse basically concerned about shopping for friend's wedding and gradually enters an entrepreneurial discourse in which she projects herself as a competent business owner. This transformation is achieved through wife's self-realisation of skill and competence **'I have the skill and passion'** needed to venture into business as well as husband's recognition of her abilities **'that is a good idea'** to provide legitimation for her entrepreneurial aspiration. Fairclough views discourse as site where power is both exercised and contested, which is evident in husband's response **'I don't have money, don't disturb me'** to eventual support **'I will support you', 'I believe in your ability',** a dramatic change towards women emancipation. The interaction is a negotiation of power, redirection of conversation towards economic independence rather than a direct overthrow of husband's position. The discourse intertextual reference to **'my friend's (Bukky) wedding ashoebi'** introduces a culturally specific Nigerian discourse of social events, clothing and communal identity. In Nigeria, ashoebi carries cultural meanings associated with participation in ceremonies and appropriate appearance to the occasion. The expression **'Christy, your friend is a lecturer in a university'** underscores the discourse of professionalism and education of women, a construct that challenges the assumption that women should depend entirely on their husbands.

**Social Practice (Explanation)**

The third stage of Fairclough's model reflects how discourse reproduced and resists broader social structures, ideologies and power relations. The texts begins with the traditional patriarchal assumption that positions men (husband) as the primary financial provider, an asymmetrical relationship where women (wife) request for money and (men) husband decides whether he would provider or not. This situation reflects a social ideology that translates into authority within the household. However, the most significant social dimension of this discourse is the obvious representation of the movement from economic dependency of women to societal and economic empowerment. The possessive expression **'my own business'** ideologically foregrounds ownership, independence and self-determination that present the wife (women) as a potential leader and business woman. The discourse promotes ideological position that women can be economically productive, self-reliant and entrepreneurial, thereby challenging the rigid patriarchal conception of men as the only economic decision-maker. Finally, there is important ideological shifts in this study that show emerging, modern gender ideological discourse where

women are beginning to gain voices, assume economic agency, professional careers and political positions against the background of patriarchal hegemony that positions them as merely instruments of domesticity, care-giving and object of dependency. The emerging gender ideology through female agency, particularly in expressions such as **'I want, I have, my own business, my ability'** gives the wife (women) increasing textual prominence as an active agent, thereby projecting a shift from primitive cultural economic dependence of women on men to the contemporary and emerging discourse of women economic emancipation, empowerment and entrepreneurship; which show a balance discussion on gender equality.

**Discussion of Finding**

The present study employs a critical discourse analysis (CDA) perspective to examine the construction and reproduction of gender stereotypes in selected Nigerian literary and filmic texts, with particular attention to the linguistic construction of masculine and feminine identities. The findings reveal differences in the linguistic behaviours associated with male and female speakers or writers. The analysis demonstrates that women exhibit a higher susceptibility for utilising compliments, emotive expressions, questioning, supportive vocalisations such as 'hmmm', and other conversational maintenance strategies more frequently than the male counterparts. This finding is consistent with Poyton's (1989) argument that gender-based differences in linguistic behaviours tend to be salient when there is equality among interlocutors but the greater the equality between interactants, the more likely they are to behave linguistically in parallel or symmetrical ways. From this perspective, gendered language use should not be interpreted as an absolute or biologically determined distinction between men and women, but a linguistic behaviour shaped by the relative social positions of interlocutors, the nature of their interpersonal relationship and the communicative contexts. Nonetheless, the recurrent patterns identified in the selected samples suggest that conventional gender ideologies continue to influence the linguistic representation of male and female characters. The result shows that the tendency of female characters to employ compliments and emotive expressions can be interpreted in relation to culturally constructed expectations of femininity while men are agentive and deploy less emotive expressions. The representation of Efuru's interaction with her husband, Adizua, illustrates how expression of affection and emotional involvement may linguistically associated with feminine identity but Okonkwo's relation with his wives demonstrates lack of affection and emotional involvement in men.

In the circumstances where affection is withdrawn or reciprocation is limited, the female characters demonstrate an orientation towards relational and emotional engagement. This representation contributes to the construction of femininity as caring, relational and emotional but male characters are interruptive, agentive, authoritative, domineering and often determine the direction of conversations. This finding is consistent with dominance theory (Poyton, 1989; West & Zimmerman, 1975; Spender, 1980; Fishman, 1983), which posits that gender roles are socially constructed to maintain male superiority in power relations. However, recent studies (Qian, 2019; Dikwal-Bot, 2024; Adisa et al., 2024) support the study's view that Nigerian women are strategically using digital platforms, access to economic and educational opportunities to assert their voices, take part in decision-making and negotiate power in everyday conversations. This is inconsistent with the traditional claim of male dominance in social interactions (Lakoff, 1975; Spender, 1980; Fishman, 1983, West & Zimmerman, 1987).

In addition, the finding underscores that male and female speakers or writers differ in their communicative strategies with reference to gender roles; women are expressive while men are agentive. To a large extent, it is evident in the roles assigned to characters by authors. For

instance, the portrayal of the major character (Efuru) as an industrious woman who tries to survive against all odds despite the disappearance of her husband, x-rays a woman who tries to exert herself against the prevalent social stereotypes while maintaining her feminine qualities such as care-giving, submissiveness, obedience and emotionality (Nwapa, 1966). On the other hand, Chinua Achebe in '*Things Fall Apart*' assigned major roles to male characters, giving the major character, Okonkwo the features or traits that demonstrate leadership, authority, rationality, aggression and economic power (Achebe, 1987). The perspective with which Flora Nwapa presents her ideas, depicts feminism from a woman point of view and Achebe presents his views from masculine perspective which clearly show disparities in the representation of both genders from male and women perspective. On the other hand, the conversation between husband and wife in '*My Mother's Secret'* demonstrates a shift from the old patriarchal order of gender struggle and/or domination of feminine gender by masculine speakers or writers to a more modern, balance and emerging discourse on gender equality. This observation shows that female authors write in solidarity to feminine gender, ascribing major roles to women, as male authors write in solidarity to male, assigning major roles to men, however, recent discourses on gender depict a situation where women move from being domesticated to being productive (Nwapa, 1966; Lakoff, 1975; Spender, 1980; Fishman, 1983; West & Zimmerman, 1987; Achebe, 1987; Poyton, 1989; Tannen, 1990; Qian, 2019; Adisa et al., 2024; Dikwal-Bot, 2024).

Another significant finding of the study is that gender is a culturally and socially constructed phenomenon, whereas sex refers primarily to the biological categorisation of individuals as male or female. In Flora Nwapa's '*Efuru'*, although Efuru occupies the socially recognised position of a woman, she consistently demonstrates qualities and responsibilities that challenge conventional constructions of femininity. She assumes responsibility for her own welfare, that of her husband, Adizua and her only daughter - Ogonim, thereby demonstrating agency, independence and resilience. Similarly, Ezinma in Chinua Achebe's *Things Fall Apart* is portrayed as a girl who exhibits qualities and responsibilities traditionally associated with masculinity. Her actions lead Okonkwo to express the wish that she should have been a boy, thereby revealing the extent to which particular behaviours and attributes are culturally coded as masculine or feminine. In contrast, Nwoye is perceived by Okonkwo as a disappointment because of his emotional sensitivity, affection and resemblance of his grandfather, Unoka. These qualities are constructed within the patriarchal context of the novel as feminine and consequently, as incompatible with the dominant conception of masculinity. More so, Unoka is characterised as weak and unable to take titles comparable to those held by his fellow clansmen. His preference for music, idleness and less aggressive nature further contributes to his representation as effeminate. The findings demonstrate that characteristics such as strength, courage, assertiveness and unemotionality are socially associated with masculinity, whereas weakness, love, affection and emotional expressiveness are frequently associated with femininity.

This finding is consistent with Mustapha (2010), who argues that although biological categories of male and female are determined by sex, society assigns individuals particular masculine and feminine identities through social practices, language behaviours and cultural prescribed gender roles. Gender, therefore, extends beyond biological construct to encompass socially produced expectations regarding male and female behaviours. The takeaway from this study is that men are unemotional, have high self-esteem, innate desire for adventure, logical, decisive, brave, strong and so on while women are submissive, have low self-esteem, love, affectionate, weak and care-giving. However, the characterisation of Efuru and Ezinma

complicates these binary gender representations by demonstrating that women can also embody qualities such as independence, responsibility, courage and agency which reveal the way patriarchal societies construct and maintain gendered expectations while simultaneously providing spaces through which gender can be negotiated and contested.

Finally, the findings highlight the ideological implications that male and female speakers or writers differ in the representation of their worldviews in discourse as male writers assign agency and active roles to male, while female speakers or writers ascribe agency to female characters. This is consistent with (Halliday, 1994; Baron et al., 2001) that male writers frequently use material process verbs (doing) that position men as Actors/Agents responsible for significant actions in texts and women writers in a similar manner use material process verbs (doing) to position female characters as Actors/Agents in texts. Women are viewed to be more gregarious, caring and lovers of some colours that make them look good and attractive whereas men are adventurous, rational, strong, brave and assertive.

**Conclusion**

This study has demonstrated that spoken and written texts play a significant role in the construction, reproduction and negotiation of masculine and feminine identities in the selected Nigerian literary and filmic texts. The findings revealed the disparities that exist in the discourse of masculinity and femininity in Nigeria as illustrated in the selected literary and filmic texts. The study showed disparities and reinforced the distinction between sex as a biological conceptualisation of maleness and femaleness and gender, a socially and culturally constructed phenomenon. The study indicated that societal beliefs and stereotyped structural constructions being sustained by the patriarchal hegemony present male domination over female in a multi-cultural society but contemporary and emerging discourses on gender have increasingly challenged traditional gender stereotypes by promoting gender inclusive discourse. This study is limited to the selected literary and filmic texts, consequently, the findings may not capture the representation of gender stereotypes across the breadth of Nigerian linguistic, cultural, ethnic and ideological backgrounds; it therefore recommends selection of texts across the six geopolitical zones in Nigeria for future studies. The study concludes that addressing gender stereotypes therefore requires sustained attention to language reforms, media responsibility, re-orientation of gender expectations and inclusive communication practices.

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