

# Lexical Indices of Authorial Gender Ideology in Sefi Atta's *Everything Good Will Come*

by

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## Abstract

The relationship between language and gender has been studied both nationally and internationally. However, there is paucity on how lexical items pick out the ideological commitment of Sefi Atta winner of the inaugural Wole Soyinka Prize for Literature in Africa for her debut novel, *Everything Good Will Come*. This study attempts to fill this gap by examining Sefi Atta's lexical choices, and showing how they are used to reveal authorial gender ideology in the novel. The study adopts aspects of van Dijk's version of critical discourse analysis, lexical semantics, and dominance and social- constructionist theories of gender in the analysis. Atta deploys lexical innovations, antonyms/synonyms and loan words in projecting authorial gender ideology. While lexical innovations and antonyms/synonyms are used in projecting woman as an object of exploitation, loan words and lexical innovations illustrate woman as assertive, and only antonyms and synonyms characterise woman as religious. The result expresses the influence of culture on authorial gender representations and presents a socio-cultural ideology on the difference between the genders.

## Introduction

The notion of authorial gender ideology within literary discourse has perhaps been informed by the assumption that at virtually every point at which language is used it carries with it the loci of experiences of those who use it. It is an already established design that humanity has a firsthand possession of language – language in this sense is relegated to the view that it is a privileged medium through which people make sense of things (Hall, 1997). Therefore, all that an individual says, does and conceives, which consequently characterise his or her writing, are necessarily by-products of the interaction of his or her mental processing of social activities that occur around him or her on a regular basis, and the already constructed and established ideals and opinions towards his or her existence and life experiences. And so, literature depends primarily on language; it is language put in action or practice. This is connected to the fact that language is a recipe for the process of living.

From the early 1980s to date, the issue of gender consciousness (female consciousness of their equality with their male counterparts and how their male counterparts respond to such agitation), has continued to interest literary discourse analysts of linguistic persuasion (Acholonu, 1995). This implies that the role of language in displaying gender and power relations has been given significant attention by linguistic scholars. Kendall and Tannen (2001) for instance, observe that early language and gender research focus on (1) documenting empirical differences between women's and men's speeches, especially in cross-sex interaction; (2) describing women's speech in particular; and (3) identifying the role of language in creating and maintaining social inequality between women and men. Various studies on the cultural influences on gender, language and society investigate gender differences as communication, gender related patterns of talk, the 'difference' and 'dominance' debates, interaction between gender and other social identities and categories such as ethnicity, social class and sexuality (Lakoff 1975; Coates, 1986). These researchers seek to describe the linguistic means by which men dominate women in interaction. West, Lazar, and Kramarae (1997) use dominance approach in constructing gender asymmetries within specific socio-historical contexts just as Maltz and Borker (1982) develop lists of what they describe as men's and women's features of language. On the other hand, some studies have established that sex or gender-based binary opposition cannot be rapidly dismissed (Cameron 1998). By implication, most early post-colonial writings are ascribed masculine interpretations.

There are also researchers who only look at women's issue in some fictions, for instance, Ogunleye (2008) uses Caryl Phillips novels in projecting such issues while Jegede (2008) counters the misrepresentation of women in fiction, using *The Beggars' Strike* and *The Triumph of the Water Lily*. Oha's (1996) is a study of language and gender conflict in Buchi Emecheta's *Second Class Citizen* and Fashina (2009) is a new reconstruction of gender meanings on Gabriel Okara's post-colonial African fiction, *The Voice*. The paper examines the subject and theory of bi-gender meanings in an African male writer's novel, using Okara's *The Voice* to posit a radically balanced gender ideology anchored on co-sexual liberation. Most of these investigations, except for Oha (1996), are steeped in literary analysis. The foregoing seems to suggest that symbolic studies have ascertained the intricate relationship between power and gender, but an analysis that shows how lexical items pick out the ideological commitment of the Wole Soyinka Prize for Literature in Africa inaugural winner Sefi Atta in *Everything Good Will Come* seems to be lacking, thus this study intends to fill that gap.

## **Language, Culture and Gender Ideology**

Language as a form of communication is also the "bearer of the matrix of privilege and domination" (Hussein 2005: 60). In a gendered society, language is used to express how people should behave, and relate with one another. In a patriarchal society like Nigeria where it is assumed that men dominate women, language is used to facilitate men's oppression of and prejudice against women.

This prejudice against women and patriarchal ideology is manifested through the use of sexist language. For instance, the use of generic term to refer to both genders as in 'Man proposes, God dispossess.' Therefore, language has aided in putting women to positions of subordination. Gender, on the other hand, is a set of characteristics distinguishing between male and female. Depending on the contexts, the distinguishing characteristics vary from sex to social role and to gender identity. It is a socially constructed definition of women and men (Coates, 1986). It is ideology that erects hierarchies of male and female to consolidate patriarchal domination and continue the oppression of women in society. The concept of gender ideology is defined as a belief and feeling system about manhood, womanhood, and marital roles (Hochschild, 1989). Accordingly, a woman's gender ideology determines where she wants to base her identity, within the home, at her paid work, or both. On the other hand, gender ideology is "a set of beliefs that governs people's participation in the gender order, and by which they explain and justify that participation" (Eckert and McConnell-Ginet, 2003: 32). Gender ideology therefore, comprises a set of ideas, values and norms accorded to men and women, which then serve as a basis for according different spheres of life and specific productive roles to each of the two sexes.

On the other hand, a close relationship exists among gender, language and culture. Gender is a socio-cultural construct which permeates all levels of society from the domestic to the global realm. It is overtly expressed through language. Gender is also reinforced by custom, law and specific development policies. Subsequent theorists of culture have argued that culture should be understood as broad trends and general causes that add up to a "whole way of life" (Hebdige, 1979: 359) that can be studied by examining the meanings and values that make it up. As language pictures the world, it constitutes a vital force for understanding peoples' cultural and social practices. Thus, language and culture are interwoven; people's beliefs and ideas are shaped by the society in which they live. Since gender is socially and culturally constructed, the gender roles assigned to women and men in society differ from one culture to the other. In essence, as language helps in shaping peoples' culture, culture on the other hand, influences language.

## **Research Methodology**

Excerpts for this study are collected from Sefi Atta's *Everything Good Will Come* (2005). Sefi Atta is a recent novelist and *Everything Good Will Come* (henceforth *EGWC*) is her debut novel. Extracts from the text are randomly sampled through the selection of only the features that will bring out what we intend to achieve in this study. Moreover, the novel is selected because it projects the writer's historical, political and social-psychological views on gender issues. *EGWC* is also preferred among other Nigerian novels because it provides an array of lexical indices that project the recurrent issues on gender beliefs in society. However, only portions of the text where the author's perceptions on gender issues are portrayed (not through the characters) are sampled.

## **Theoretical Framework**

The paper adopts van Dijk's socio-cognitive approach to critical discourse analysis, gender theories of dominance and social construct and Cruse's (1995) lexical semantics as its theoretical framework.

## **Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA)**

Critical discourse analysis stems from a critical theory of language which sees the use of language as a form of social practice. The idea critical linguistics holds is a notch above the conventional description of linguistic structures and the possible senses they carry in social situations. Among the scholars whose works have profoundly contributed to the development of CDA are Teun van Dijk (Socio-cognitive model), Ruth Wodak (discourse-historical), and Norman Fairclough (socio-cultural). van Dijk's socio-cognitive approach focuses on the fundamental importance of society and cognition in the critical analysis of discourse. Fairclough's socio-cultural CDA upholds that discourse is a social practice while Wodak's discourse historical method believes that language "manifests social processes and interaction" and "constitutes" those processes as well (Wodak & Ludwig, 1999: 12).

van Dijk's approach to CDA is preferred to other approaches because its methods are socio-cognitive in nature. This socio-cognitive approach to CDA links language practice to social cognition. This approach focuses on the fundamental importance of intuition and society in the critical analysis of discourse. According to van Dijk, discourse and social structure are mediated by social cognition. In essence, the human mind is a very significant dimension in the socio-cognitive approach. He defines social cognition as "the system of mental representations and process of group members" (van Dijk, 1995: 18). He further states that "although embodied in the minds of individuals, social cognitions are social because they are shared and presupposed by group members" (van Dijk, 1995: 257). In that case, social cognitions are socially shared mental representations and have semblance with what van Dijk calls social memory. Social cognitions can be characterised more abstractly as ideas, belief systems or ideologies. The central claim of this approach is that the relation between discourse and social structure necessitate that the micro-level (discourse) and macro-level (social structure) is mediated by ideology and social cognition.

## **Gender Theories**

There are four main ideologies of gender: deficit, difference, dominance and social-constructionist but only dominance and social- constructionist theories are essential to this framework. All these frameworks found reflection in the studies that investigate the relationship between style and gender. In the deficit framework, women are presented as inferior language users.

The deficit approach was severely criticised in the study of language and gender for assuming a male-as-norm language standard and thus problematising women; for treating women as an undifferentiated group; and for postulating a one-to-one mapping between linguistic phenomena and their meaning (Cameron, McAlinden, & O'Leary, 1988; Holmes, 1984). To account for these oppressive practices, an alternative interpretation of women's language use was offered by the dominance model. Though similar to deficit theory, this approach differs by explaining that men dominate and control both interactions with women and the language system itself (Goddard and Patterson, 2000: 96). Feminist linguists, in their critiques of the dominance model, pointed out that this approach fails to recognize social, historical, and political situatedness of power, the effects of which are mediated not only by gender, but also by class, race, ethnicity, and sexuality (Cameron, 1992; Eckert & McConnell-Ginet, 1992).

The difference model highlights the differences in language use of men and women based on the different subcultures both were socialised in. The approach was championed by Maltz and Borker (1982), and Tannen (1990). Women and men come from different sociolinguistic subcultures. Cameron refers to it as cultural difference model in which analogies are made between gender and other social divisions such as ethnicity. It focuses on the segregation of the sexes during childhood and adolescence for socialization purposes (1995: 33). As opposed to dominance, the difference theory holds that inequality is not the issue. Boys and girls live in different subcultures and in effect they grow up with different conventions for verbal interactions (Eckert and McConnell-Ginet, 2003: 2). Tannen (1990) argues that men and women are socialised to emphasise either solidarity or power. While men monitor their interactions for aspects of power, women monitor theirs for signals of solidarity or intimacy.

Theorists in language and gender have recently turned their attention to the notion of gender as a performative social construct, following Butler's (1990) innovative work. She maintained that femininity and masculinity are not what we are nor traits we have, but effects we produce by way of particular things we do. Therefore, gender is constantly re-affirmed and publicly displayed by repeatedly performing particular acts in accordance with the cultural norms, which defines masculinity and femininity. In summary, the model stresses the place of society. In addition to the biological labels (male and female) that we are born with, society does its marking by structuring and systematising individuals as men and women. The roles that the society performs (structuring and systematising) build the repertoire from which men and women draw from to construct their gendered person, whether to maintain or change the established norms. This implies the recognition of the way in which gender is continuously reconstructed through simple everyday actions.

Opting for dominance and social-constructionist theories, insights are taken from other models when necessary. As, CDA encourages borrowing from neighbouring linguistics, the analysis integrates van Dijk's principles of ideology and cognition, Cruse's notion of lexical semantics, and the dominance and social-constructionist theories of gender.

Lexical semantics mediates between grammar (lexical category) and meaning, accounting for the connotation of individual lexemes. The dominance and social-constructionist theories therefore augment the meaning of the sampled lexical categories which are in tune with the authorial gender ideology. A combination of these theories aid us in designing a functional model that accounts for our standpoint that Sefi Atta's authorial gender ideology, which stems from both social and personal experiences is constructed, represented and presented in discourse.

## **Authorial Gender Ideologies**

Authorial gender ideology simply means a writer's own beliefs concerning gender. The authorial ideologies may be different from the global gender ideology. However, there may be some cases of authorial refusal and/or recognition in the global gender ideology. The authorial ideologies are summed up in the following expressions: woman as an object of exploitation, woman as religious and woman as assertive.

## **Woman as an Object of Exploitation**

The author portrays woman as being at the mercy of man through the use of lexical innovations and lexical relations. This in a way explains some cultural notions in Nigeria that woman whether single or married lives for man.

Lexical innovation is a way in which old words are used in an innovative way to explicate an experience or event in a vivid manner. Sometimes, there are deficiencies in the existing words to explain things. The writer therefore, resorts to creating words that will capture the peculiar experience s/he discusses. In most instances, there is an ideology behind the usage, because such words/phrases do not obey the rules of word formation, and when they do, they do not indicate what they stand for. It follows that there must be an ideology behind their usage. Such items are apparent in this authorial ideology. And so, lexical innovations portraying woman as an object of exploitation are exemplified below:

Example 1:

Prettiness could also make a woman lazy, if she were congratulated for it too often and remunerated too long, Sheri was the Nigeria man's ideal. Now she was a kitchen martyr, and may well have forgotten how to flaunt her mind.  
(107)

Example 2:

Living with Sheri, I saw how she survived as a sugary girl. She limited her involvement in the family business to please her brigadier. (157)

Example 3:

In a bizarre household arrangement that appeared incestuous to me, Brigadier Hassan's wives were trying *to recruit her* as a third wife. (158)

The above examples are used in the text to portray Sheri and her relationship with Brigadier Hassan. For instance, the first example *kitchen martyr* describes Sheri, in the context of the text, as the ideal woman for Nigerian men. Her beauty is the indices for her consideration as an ideal woman. In spite of her beauty and ability to do things, Sheri ends in the kitchen as a martyr. A martyr is a sacrificial victim. *Martyrdom* means the martyr's suffering or death and a martyr is sometimes known as innocent. This reveals the unfair reality of society. Ideologically, the woman is portrayed as a 'sufferer', 'victim', in the hands of men. Evidently, the author projects a culture that mandates the woman to be in the kitchen always for the man. Therefore, *kitchen martyr*, a coinage, means a woman who suffers or sacrifices herself to cook for a man, the superior gender. Coinages or neologisms are newly coined words resulting from the prevailing sociolinguistic experience of people in a particular culture or custom. However, Brigadier Hassan's position as an army officer also contributes to the title given to Sheri as a *kitchen martyr*. This is because most military officers in Nigerian contexts are womanizers; they exploit every woman that comes their way. However, the author tries to foreground the view that cooking is not meant for women alone as it is practiced by most Nigerian cultures.

Similarly, the noun phrase, *Sugary girl*, a coinage, is used in the context of the text to describe a girl whose sexual ideology centres in having affairs with men who are above her age bracket. She indulges in sexual relationship with such men because of the financial and material rewards she derives from the men. The phrase, based on the context of the text, creates the impression that the concept is viewed in an insincerely pleasant way. Although it happens in some cultural contexts, the ideology here is that the younger girl is being exploited and used by the Brigadier. In the relationship, Sheri participates less in her family business to satisfy her male counterpart who has other wives. When her friend, Enitan advises her to start a catering business, her response uncovers the kind of restriction she is placed on by the Brigadier; "I can't come and go as I like" (107). By implication, the Brigadier limits her movement for his personal exploitation and perhaps because of the financial benefits he provides for her.

Another view of the manipulation of the woman is made manifest in the use of the word *recruit*. The author foregrounds the exploitation of women in the hands of men. Ideologically, the author condemns such self-effacing sociocultural practice: Brigadier Hassan's wives are aware of their husband's numerous girlfriends and yet they plan to 'recruit' another wife for him. The author, however, pictures a cultural practice that is evident in the Northern part of Nigeria. By implication, the society does not frown at the polygamous nature of man but sees a woman's extra-marital or pre-marital sexual affairs as taboos. The lexical item *to recruit*, which means to enroll, connects the Brigadier's behaviour with his wives interest: an interest based on the shared cultural ethos to unquestionably accept the husband's womanising disposition, and to help in connecting him to other women. Therefore, the author uses the speech act of criticising to illustrate the negative portrayal of Sheri as an object of 'fun' in the hands of Brigadier Hassan.

Equally, there are lexical relations that portray woman as an object of exploitation. Meanwhile, lexical relations deal with sense relations like synonyms, antonyms, polysemy, hyponyms, acronyms, etc. However, this section focuses only on synonyms and antonyms because they are the most prevalent in the sampled text. Some of these lexical relations and how they are used to express this authorial gender ideology are examined below:

Example 4:

A boy loved a girl and he called her his wife. A girl loved a boy and she stayed at home on weekends to cook for him, while he went out with some other girl. We are going out and staying in. (81)

Example 5:

As I left her home, it occurred to me that I was glad I was not pretty. Prettiness could encourage people to treat a woman like a doll, to be played with, tossed around, fingered, dismembered and discarded. (107)

The first example illustrates the cultural positioning in which women are made to naturally depend on their male counterparts. Such ideological positioning projects the woman as a docile and passive observer in a world ruled by man. Evidently, the author's representation of male chauvinism is drawn from the society which provides materials for the composition of her art. The powerlessness and the disadvantaged position of women, as expressed by the author, are encapsulated in the lexical items *going out* and *staying in*. This metaphorical presentation of the inconsistent nature of women is encased in the ideological sentiment that women are objects which men, the powerful of society, manipulate, at will. Moreover, the 'ing' in 'going' and 'staying' (present continuous tense verb) illustrates the inconsequential as well as dehumanised position of women who have no consistent place in society.



These verbal phrases are antonyms, implying the superiority of man over woman; how the woman is culturally placed to serve the man whether outside or within a marriage. The antonyms also indicate the authorial belief on the sociocultural position that the life of a woman must revolve around a man. The lexical items project the man as a shield for the woman. By implication, the author's use of 'we' (an inclusive pronoun) foregrounds her inclusion within this suppressed group.

Equally, this cultural inconsequential position of women is also seen in the second example. The derogatory synonyms; *played with, tossed around, fingered, dismembered* and *discarded* describe women as objects that are exploited by men. Women, especially the beautiful ones such as Sheri are maneuvered by men like Brigadier in the satisfaction of their sexual desires. The synonymous expressions capture, in an intriguing manner, the image of an object being toyed with. Among the worst, in terms of exploitation, are the beautiful ladies. By implication, women are not just dependent on men but can be fiddled with, exploited and got rid of by the superior group (man) at will. This is projected in the text by the type of restriction Sheri suffers from her *sugar daddy*, the Brigadier. Probably, because of the culture, as presented by the author, she does not see anything wrong with the way the Brigadier treats her, restricts her movement and narrows her life. Empirically, the woman is presented as a toy: something to be played with.

## **Woman as Religious**

In this ideology, the author portrays woman as a religious being; spiritual and pious especially when there is a problem in her life or family. Only lexical relations characterise this ideology. The lexical relations that categorise this ideology are antonyms and synonyms. Some of these lexical relations and how they are used to express woman as religious are examined below:

Example 6:

She was to give me holy water to drink, since my father would not allow me to stay for cleansing. Then he produced a bottle of it, green and slimy. I had to drink the water in the churchyard, and make myself sick afterwards. (72)

Example 7:

I was their first child, their only child now, since my brother died. My mother joined a church to cure him, renounced Anglicanism and herself, it seemed, because one day, my brother had another crisis and she took him there for healing. (14)

Example 8:

She belongs to a church, a cult actually. One of those, take your money and give you fear. I think she was drawn in because of my brother. (91)

Example 9:

My mother once had thirty-three bottles of perfume on her dressing table, before she started wearing those church gowns smelling of bleach and starch. I could still remember the glamour days, the velvet caftans with circular mirrors. (174)

In the first example, the author uses the synonyms *holy water* and *cleansing* to project the religiosity of Arin. Apparently, these synonyms indicate the devout nature of this woman after her daughter's friend Sheri was raped in the company of her daughter. When the outcome of the rape is made public, Arin, Enitan's mother, believes that 'deliverance' should be carried out on her daughter. The cleansing is to stop her from associating with girls such as Sheri and to shield her from rapists. Since Sheri's father does not allow the cleansing, her mother forces her to drink the holy water for the same purification. Arin's belief in the efficacy of *holy water* and *cleansing* foregrounds her religiosity.

The antonyms *joined a church* and *renounced Anglicanism* explain how some women demonstrate their religiosity by consolidating with a religious group and disengaging from another. Possibly, the authorial ideology behind the use of these antonyms is to lay bare the flexible and emotional nature of women when they are depressed. In essence, some mothers can relinquish everything they have to save their child/children and most importantly when the child is an only son. This is probably because of the sociocultural conception that a male child consolidates a woman's stand in her husband's place and the premium most Nigerian men place on male children over female ones. Arin's affiliation with a new religious group showcases her identity and where she wants the society to locate her. She feels the former religious group does not cater for her 'spiritual' needs. Therefore, she seeks solace in a new one. The writer projects a culture that illustrates the unstable nature of some women in choosing a religious group. The emotional stand of women in handling problems may be attributed to it.

In another instance, the antonyms *a church* and *a cult* showcase the predilection of women to align to a religious group as a place of solace and refuge from harsh realities of troubling marriages. A church is a denomination or a branch of the Christian religion while a cult simply means a group of people who share the same religious or spiritual beliefs regarded by others as misguided or false. The author's description of Arin's religious group as a church and a cult respectively, foregrounds the confused state of women especially when they are troubled. Arin's weakness in handling her marital problems exemplifies the exhibited trait of most women in a marital crisis.

From the writer's point of view, this trait of seeking solace in a religious group is mostly evident in barren women or women who are in search of a male child just like Arin. This is in consonance with the cultural view on the "nothingness" of a childless woman or a woman without a male child in the traditional African setting. Arin, in search of a place in her marriage joins the group and sees it as a church but the writer sees it as a cult, something evil. This is why the writer describes the group (cult) as one of those; *take your money and give you fear*. Apparently, the group collects her money and increases her fear so that she does not leave them. In the bid to save her son which consolidates her marriage, Arin, just like some women in such problem, desperately stays in the group, hoping that her problems will be solved one day.

Correspondingly, this ideology is also made manifest in the author's use of *church gowns* and *the velvet caftans* to make reference to a woman. The antonyms illustrate Arin's fashionable days. The phrase, *church gowns* foregrounds her new religious affiliation while *the velvet caftans* project the old group she disengages herself from. From the text, we understand that Arin's husband is not troubled. Empirically, the ideological difference that exists between men and women is exposed, indicating that women are not strong enough emotionally. This illustrates the socio-cultural attachment of a woman's success in marriage to her ability to bear male children. The author, therefore, ascribes a pious and emotional characteristic to women by describing Arin's religious character swing with the above discussed lexical items.

## **Woman as Assertive**

Globally, women are defined in terms of domesticity. And this liking for family life makes them more emotional, but they sometimes dictate their stand. The lexical devices used in illustrating this ideology are lexical innovations and loan words. Some instances of lexical innovations portraying woman as assertive are discussed below:

Example 10:

She knew exactly what she wanted. She wanted to get married. She wanted to travel. She wanted to work in England. ...Women do that, you know. Dribble past you and score. Phoosch! mental football. (65)

Example 11:

Niyi bullied his brothers the same way he bullied me, but he could easily become vexed in the middle of our playing. Then he would call me aside and warn, 'Better watch what you're saying. Next thing they'll be calling me woman wrapper.' I would have shouting fits about this and he would remain totally silent. He said he wasn't used to arguing that way. (182)

Example 12:

Her birth mother and motherhood taken away from her ...and she wasn't thinking of tearing her clothes off and walking naked on the streets. She was stronger than any strong person I knew. (300)

Example 13:

When the last hush was hushed, I listened. I, alone had beaten my thought down. I believe in infinite capabilities, up to a point; self-reliance, depending. It was an internal sabotage, like military coup. Wherever the malice came from, it would have to go back. (317) ... he wouldn't have had to leave me to do what he wanted. (323)

The author uses the lexical innovation, *mental football* to foreground the intelligent way in which a woman solves her problem, tricks everybody and gets what she wants. Whatever she needs, she plays along with the man until she gets it. This coinage together with the figurative expression, *Phoosch!* (onomatopoeia) that comes before it describe the astonishing and sudden way in which a woman carries out and achieves her plans. The item 'score' depicts the level of determination a woman exhibits when she sets out to do something which she eventually accomplishes with fortitude. This authorial ideology depicts the fact that even when a culture prevents the woman from 'speaking' openly and exerting her power, she does it silently and wisely, and asserts her position.

The expression, *woman wrapper*, a Nigerian innovation for a man who is controlled by a woman, is used by the author to illustrate the powerful position of women: how they control men and make their place known. This neologism is used to encapsulate Sheri's assertion of her position in the house, which makes her husband apprehensive. Just as a woman ties her wrapper into the shape and style she desires, so she is able to manipulate her man the way she wants. The ideological position is that women like Sheri, through subtle ways, assert their individuality as members of the society. Since the culture does not want to 'hear' her voice, she ideologically silences her husband, places him in a likely position of a 'woman wrapper.' This position, according to the text is dreadful for the man. In fact, Enitan's husband is scared of being addressed as a 'woman wrapper,' probably because of his wife's affirmation of her stand even playfully. The expression signifies the author's projection of a woman who through quiet argument asserts her womanhood. And her assertion, however, increases her husband's apprehension of losing his position as the head of the family.

Similarly, the author uses *birth mother* and *motherhood* to illustrate a woman's virginity and womb. *Motherhood* means maternal parenthood while *birth mother* may be described as somebody's biological mother. One can say that the writer does not want to mention the word 'virginity' and 'womb.' That is why she invents new words to describe them. These words *birth mother* and *motherhood* are therefore neologisms which are existing lexical stock in English language. However, the assertive nature of women is made manifest when her 'birth mother and motherhood were taken away from her ...and she wasn't thinking of tearing her clothes off and walking naked on the streets' (300). In essence, the lady dictates her position, a position of leaving a responsible life even after experiencing rape from the opposite sex. The ideological disposition is that after a rape scandal, which may probably short change some people's future, Sheri decides to live a normal life. She still works towards accomplishing her future goals. She does not want the rape scandal to ruin her future. That is why the author defines her as a strong person. In essence, a dehumanising act like rape does not prevent a resilient woman from being assertive thereafter.

The independent nature of a woman is also expressed in the fourth example. For instance, the figurative expression (onomatopoeia) *hush* illustrates a woman's meditation on peoples' advice against leaving her husband. It indicates that her mind is already made up. Since peoples' advice does not change her mind, she takes a bold step, leaves the man because he likes pontificating to her at all times. The writer's use of the phrase *internal sabotage* conveys the intrusion of people's advice in Enitan's personal decision. However, after all the *hush* and *internal sabotage*, Enitan courageously takes a step forward, the way it suits her. Apparently, the author portrays a culture that permits a husband to do what he wants under the cover of marriage but limits a woman, a culture that encourages women to always be subservient to men. Enitan rejects such docile and submissive life style by leaving Niyi, her husband. By leaving her husband, she reorganises the cultural matrix that women are at the mercy of men. Despite the fact that Niyi did not do anything to her, she believes that she cannot achieve all she wants in life by living a subservient life. She therefore, intends to empower herself and rise to the position of bettering her lot.

Certain words and phrases, however, are specifically loaned to portray woman as assertive in the text. Loan words are words adopted from another language, and completely or partially naturalized. They are words from one language that are used in another language without being changed. Basically, they involve the adoption of words from one language and using them in another.

Example 14:

I disagreed with him just for the sake of it. I didn't care much for him, but my brother-in law, I loved. I would kiss each of them... as they greeted me, "Enitan of Africa!" "Obirin Meta!" Three times a girl! "Alaiye Baba! Master of the earth!" (182)

Example 15:

Following Yoruba tradition, Yimika could have been called ‘Yetunde’ ‘mother has returned’ to salute my mother’s passing, but I decided against it. Everyone must walk their own path unencumbered. (310)

The assertive nature of woman is portrayed in the loaned items, *Obirin Meta!* and *Alaiye Baba!* Evidently, *Obirin Meta* is an expression which means ‘three times a girl.’ From the Yoruba culture where it is copied from it is linked to an individual who does extraordinary things, and most times things that are considered creepy. The author, in an attempt to regain power from the male folk, describes the lady (Enitan) also as *Alaiye Baba*. *Alaiye Baba* is a Yoruba expression for male, which translates as master of the earth. As the author uses it (*Alaiye Baba*) to describe the woman, she tactically withdraws the attributes of *Alaiye Baba* and assigns them to a woman. This expression, *Alaiye Baba* connotes negativity and incongruity in Yoruba culture. Evidently, the author depicts Enitan’s assertiveness by describing her with the above borrowed items. Such loaned expressions showcase a woman’s natural propensity to gain her place in the society. From every indication, this predisposition of a woman is sometimes seen and described as bizarre and unusual by society. These lexical expressions, therefore, point at Enitan’s self-assured, forceful and weird character which the society believes is manly.

In another instance, *Yetunde*, a Yoruba name which means ‘mother has returned’ is used to portray the assertiveness of Enitan in the text. She rejects Yoruba’s cultural practice on naming where names connect the giver, the receiver and the event that informs the giving of names. This is solely to dislodge a practice where women are not involved in name giving. Invariably, such an act is to ascertain her place in society. Enitan decides otherwise and gives her daughter another name which she believes suits her better. Based on the context, she wants her daughter to live her own life without having it attached to anyone’s. By implication, her husband could have planned giving the assumed name to the child, hence the woman’s strong decision. In essence, despite the global gender ideology that is assumed to project woman as being subservient to man, this authorial ideology, through the use of some lexical features, projects women as bold figures who can dictate their place in society. It also portrays the woman’s inclination towards her culture; otherwise she could have taught of giving her daughter an English name.

On the other hand, since the use of English by African writers is an instance of culture contact (conflict), the language cannot adequately express African thoughts, expressions and religious beliefs, especially in giving names; Atta therefore attempts to solve this linguistic burden by maintaining a selective fidelity to her mother tongue. Actually, in Atta’s *EGWC*, un-translated words are used to force “the reader into an active engagement with the horizons of the culture in which these terms have meaning” (Ashcroft, Griffiths and Tiffin, 1989:65). To express certain cultural experiences and differences, Atta makes use of some loan words, especially from Yoruba.

However, she sometimes provides English equivalents for the Yoruba words to avoid the effects of the semantic obstruction that some non-Yoruba readers might experience. The novelist may have used this strategy in order to advertise the richness of the lexical repertoire of her indigenous language (Yoruba). Again, she seems to have used the un-translated words to reveal her own African culture and thereby silence the Western culture where the English language originates. Although, linguistically, Atta has deviated from the international literary norms, she has not falsified the tradition she has transferred into the English language.

## Conclusion

The attempt so far has been the exposition of Atta's deployment of lexical innovations, lexical relations and loan words in projecting woman as an object of exploitation, as religious and as assertive in *EGWC*. These three different lexical features are used to reveal the authorial gender ideologies in the novel. While lexical innovations are used in projecting woman as an object of exploitation and woman as assertive; lexical relations (antonyms and synonyms) characterise woman as an object of exploitation and woman as religious; and loan words (from Yoruba) illustrate only woman as assertive. The analysis reveals that lexical choices are necessary tools for portraying Atta's authorial gender representations in *EGWC*. The result expresses the influence of culture on such representations and presents a socio-cultural ideology on the difference between the genders. The paper suggests that lexical items such as the ones examined in this paper can be utilised by authors in projecting their ideological orientations about societal issues or events.

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