

**The Reformed Womanist Ideology: Linguistic Indicators in
Sefi Atta's *Everything Good Will Come* and Ezeigbo's
*Trafficked***

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Abstract

*Gender-based novelists present a miscellany of linguistic indicators used within and outside their respective countries in their literary performance. They depict the sociolinguistic situation of their countries, and implore the pragmatic use of English in explaining their ideas. Despite this, the majority of studies on the use of language in gender-based Nigerian novels, for example, have not paid critical attention to the confluence of linguistic indicators and reformed womanist ideology. Therefore, this paper examines how reformed womanist ideologies are represented through linguistic indicators in Sefi Atta's *Everything Good Will Come* and Akachi Adimora-Ezeigbo's *Trafficked*. Insights from aspects of womanist ideology and critical discourse analysis are deployed in the analysis. Two classes of ideologies are identified: activist ideology and modest ideology. These ideologies uphold the confrontational as well as humble attributes of womanism. The study largely reflects the traditional, social and religious roles of men and women in the larger Nigerian society.*

Key words: Linguistic indicators; reformism; womanism; ideology; gender-based novels.

Introduction

Ideology is a form of social cognition, shared by the members of a group, class, or other social formations (van Dijk, 1997). It is "not formed in isolation; it is a social construction, a product of interpersonal communication" (Rothwell 2000, p. 6). Since it is a shared construction, the implication is that ideology is embedded in language and, is thus, implicitly spoken or written in the practical use of language (Fowler, 1981). Language as a means of keeping up a correspondence of ideology, also sustains honour and power. As a form of communication, language is the "bearer of the matrix of privilege and domination" (Hussein 2005, p. 60). Womanism on the other hand, is a form of feminism that acknowledges women's natural contribution to society. As "feminism posits that women should have equal rights and chances with men in every aspect of human experience: political, legal, economic, social, etc." (Ezeigbo 1999, p. 30), language projects its connotations and preoccupations. To adapt their fight to the particularities of their race, black women relate themselves rather to womanism which is a black outgrowth of feminism. Therefore, womanism encourages meaningful union between women, men and children, and advocates for change from the chauvinist position of men. Walker (1983, p. XI) sees the womanist as one "committed to the survival and wholeness of entire people, male and female." Comparable to Walker who considers that womanism a more relevant concept that upholds the respect for the family unit by Africans both on the continent and the diaspora, Hudson-Weems (1994) advocates that men and women should make harmony their mutual concern; and this harmony should be in the home and society at large.

Consequently, a close reading of contemporary Nigerian novels in English demonstrates the presentation of the woman using various linguistic items, perhaps to uphold her identity promote her cause, Arguably, we can say that gender-based Nigerian novels treat womanist vows with miscellaneous use of linguistic indicators. The understanding of such views, which are covertly and overtly expressed, lies on the interpretation of the confluence of linguistic indicators and womanist ideology. Such views/ideas are termed "reformed" as a result of the novelists' consciousness in expressing their suppressed feelings, owing to the apprehensive political ambiance in Nigeria. As language becomes an indispensable hub that is explored in the construction of this reformed womanist ideology, it is therefore pertinent to shade in variable degrees the linguistic indicators that portray the ideology in gender-based Nigerian novels. It is against this backdrop that this paper examines how reformed womanist ideologies are represented through linguistic indicators in Sefi Atta's *Everything Good Will Come* (henceforth *Everything*) and Akachi Adimora-Ezeigbo's *Trafficked*. One can therefore state that writers' use of language for instance, is, by and large, a manifestation of their culture since the linguistic indicators that depict the reformed womanist ideology largely reflect the traditional, social and religious roles of men and women in the larger society.

Methodology and Design

Two Nigerian novels, namely, Atta's *Everything* and Adimora-Ezeigbo's *Trafficked* were purposively sampled. The two novelists are contemporary Nigerian female writers, and are, therefore, considered appropriate for this study. They are also gender-based novels that largely produce linguistic indicators with ample womanist ideologies. Their language use in those works reflects a reformed womanist ideology in expressing issues pertaining to women or the female gender. For analysis, insights were particularly deployed from aspects of womanist ideology and critical discourse analysis.

Womanism/Womanist Ideology and Critical Discourse Analysis

Womanism is the feminist term, the neologism coined by the American Alice Walker in her book *In search of Our Mothers Gardens: Womanist Prose*. She uses the word to describe the perspective and the experiences of "women of colour." Walker states that a womanist as black feminist, talks back to feminism, brings new demands and different perspectives to feminism, and compels the expansion of feminist horizons in theory and practice. Her construction of womanism and different meanings she invests in the word is an attempt to place women in history and culture, while, at the same time, seeking to rescue her from the negative and inaccurate stereotypes that mask women in literary works. According to Walker (1983. pp. xi- xii), a womanist is:

A black feminist or feminist of color... A woman who loves other women, sexually and/or nonsexually appreciates and prefers women's culture, women's emotional flexibility (values tears as a natural counterbalance of laughter), and women's strength. Sometimes loves individual men, sexually and/or non-sexually committed to survival and wholeness of entire people, male and female. Not a separatist, except periodically for health. Traditionally, universalist... loves music. Loves dance. Loves the moon. Loves the spirit. Loves struggle. Loves the folk. Loves herself. Regardless; womanist is feminist as purple is to lavender.

Alternatively, Hudson-Weems (1998) believes the African womanism is an ideology created and designed for all women of African descent. It is grounded in African culture and focuses on the unique experiences, struggles, needs and desires the African womanist. Womanists construct and emphasize the significance of America's social environments and selected adaptation strategies that they have employed to achieve psychosocial wellbeing, including the actualization of their authentic gender role identities. Similarly, Hudson-Weems outlines eighteen characteristics of an African womanist as follows:

(1) A Self-namer and (2) A Self-definer; (3) Family-centered, (4) Genuine in sisterhood, (5) Strong. (6) In concert with male in struggle, (7) Whole, (8) Authentic. (9) A flexible role player, (10) Respected, (11) Recognized, (12) Spiritual, (13) Male compatible, (14) Respectful of elders, (15) Adaptable, (16) Ambitious. (17) Mothering and (18) Nurturing. (1998, p. 143).

Consequently, an African womanist is fixed on family-centred values and on the fact that the womanist desires positive male companionship which is supportive and an integral part of positive African family values. Hudson-Weems (1998) strongly believes that the process of the development of the womanism theory should be viewed in three ways: as the celebration of black women's long historical struggles and the strength they have gained from their plight; the critique of various manifestations of black women's oppression, and lastly; the construction of black women's theological views and the content of womanism theory which bears the distinctive mark of black women's assertiveness and shows their resourcefulness in the face of all who inflict oppression on them. Additionally, Ogunyemi (1988, p. 65) avers that:

Womanism is black centred; it is accommodationist. It believes in the freedom and independence of women like feminism; unlike radical feminism, it wants meaningful union between black women and black men and black children and will see to it that men begin to change from their sexist stand.

From the above, we can see that womanism serves as the rallying-point of the women of African ancestry in their struggle to effectively assert their humanity in the face of the malevolent attitude of the menfolk towards their self-fulfillment in life. However, it does not emasculate the self-pride of men; rather it lures them into accepting to live harmoniously with them by abandoning their self-perception as superior partners in the collective struggle for a better society. Therefore, the womanist woman has always been visible and active.

Critical discourse analysis (CDA) stems from a critical theory of language, which sees the use of language as a form of social practice. It provides special guides for human action, enabling the analyst of text to transcend the micro (linguistic form) to study the macro (non-linguistic form). CDA is defined as being "fundamentally interested in analysing opaque as well as transparent relationships of dominance, discrimination, power and control when these are manifested in language" (Wodak 2006, p. 4-5). This implies that CDA aims to investigate critically social inequality, as it is expressed, constituted and legitimized by language use. Additionally, CDA takes account of the social context and explores the links between textual structures and their function in social interaction. It considers language as a form of social practice and sees the context of language use as very important.

The model of CDA adopted for this study is the socio-cognitive approach. The choice is based on its socio-cognitive slant. Thus, the socio-cognitive approach to CDA links language practice to social cognition. It focuses the fundamental importance of intuition and society in the critical analysis of discourse. According to van Dijk (2001), discourse and social structure are mediated by social cognition. In essence, the human mind is a very significant dimension in the socio-cognitive approach. The central claim of the socio-cognitive approach is that the relation between discourse and social structure necessitates that the micro-level (discourse) and macro-level (social structure) is mediated by ideology and social cognition. It is a systematic and context based model such as the socio-cognitive model that can account for the diverse nature of the language use in literary texts; hence, we have chosen it over other models of CDA. This approach is very crucial in the comprehension and explanation of gender discourse.

Studies of Gender-Based Literary Discourse

Much of the studies on gender-based literary discourse have come from cultural and sociological perspectives. Basically, Cousin's (2004) discussion of marriage in fiction in the essay "Submit or Kill Yourself: Your Two Choices" focuses on more common representations of "wives who find that they cannot remain in marriages without equality and autonomy". The paper assumes that in most African countries, oppression in marriage is institutionalised through cultures that are detrimental to the wellbeing of women. Although, the paper does not provide alternatives to the issue of oppression in marriage in the society, it centres on rejecting roles designed for women in marriage, such as those of "slaves, wives, mothers and mistresses". Cousin's concentrations on marriage issues in Africa and the African diaspora detects that the attempts made by African women at redefining themselves and their aesthetics are only significant outside the continent. The paper argues that critics of gender and literature often ignore the shared cultural values regarding the representation of gender roles, particularly in marriage.

Amouzou (2006) studies how Flora Nwapa's fiction has so far contributed to a redefinition of the female gender and a counter identification to men's voices in literature. In his "Reconceptualizing Gender in Nigerian Literature: the Dynamics of Womanist Ideology in Flora Nwapa's fiction," Amouzou presents Nwapa's female characters as not just women, but new women, different from the stereotypes with negative images that the reader is familiar with in male-authored texts. The researcher discovers that Nwapa has identified the need to be the voice, the consciousness and the center of consciousness of her gender; she has adopted a self-repossession strategy, proceeding to an awareness-raising and at times to subvert the demeaning myths being spun by the patriarchal society about women.

Equally, Azubuko-Udah's (2013) study on "Literary discourses on women's evolving social status in Nigeria" examines the literary works produced by a crop of Nigerian academics and feminists, which subsequently helps the understanding of the complexity of women's positions. She claims that studies on women's status in post-colonial countries like Nigeria often fail to acknowledge the multifaceted nature of women's station and role in the society. Therefore, Azubuko-Udah posits that, applying a blend of post-colonial and feminist theories in the study of literary works produced by Nigerian academics and feminists promotes the understanding of the complexity of women's positions. The researcher explores depictions of the legacies of colonization in three Nigerian novels and uncovers an underlying stream of in the way all three writers to represent women and men, their relations,

and their navigation of societal norms and traditions, which reflect the sequence of changes in culture. It is thus clear that rare are the studies that have addressed the confluence of linguistic indicators and reformed womanist ideology in Atta's *Everything* and Ezeigbo's *Trafficked*. As part of its scope, this study is charting a new path in the linguistic investigation of the womanists' impacts on contemporary Nigerian novels, examining the extent to which the language has sustained or promoted womanism in literature.

Analysis and Findings: The Reformed Womanist Ideology in the Sampled Novels

In the sampled novels, the real life conditions and experiences of men and women that express the reformed womanist ideology are mirrored. In as much as in most Nigerian communities, oppression against women is institutionalized through cultural practices, the reformed womanist ideology identified in these novels promotes and projects the confrontational as well as humble attributes of womanism. It is classified into two: activist ideology and modest ideology. These ideologies and instances of their occurrences in the sampled texts are examined in turns.

Activist Ideology

An activist is a campaigner, an advocate or a protester; somebody who works to achieve political or social change. In this ideology as evident in the sampled novels, the woman or her supporters use vigorous campaigning to bring about change in her unpleasant situation. There are instances of such belief in the sampled novels and the linguistic indicators used in portraying it are proverbs, lexical innovations, idiomatic expressions and metaphors. An example from Atta's *Everything* is shown below:

"...Anyone who bullies you, beat them up," my father said. "And join the debating society, not the girls' guide. Girl guides are nothing but *kitchen martyrs* in the making" (*Everything*, p. 42).

It is a fact that Nigerian novelists are extending or operating across national boundaries in the revelation of the "new woman." In the context of the above excerpt, Atta presents Mr Taiwo as a man who supports and advocates gradual reform rather than abolition or revolution. As a supporter or advocate of gradual reform, he opposes the idea of his daughter, Enitan joining the girls' guides which invariably produce *kitchen martyrs*. A martyr is a person who is killed because of their religious or other beliefs. Therefore, kitchen martyrs are persons who display or exaggerate their suffering or discomfort in order to obtain sympathy or admiration, specifically in the kitchen. Since the womanist believes that the vital unity of the people evolving a philosophy of life acceptable to both men and women is better than a "debilitating and devastating political struggle for women's liberation, independence, and equality against men, to prove a feminist point" (Ogunyemi 1996, p. 121), the writer's use of *kitchen martyrs* strategically demonstrates the importance of collaboration among the sexes and proves thus a womanist point. Therefore, Atta uses the lexical innovation, *kitchen martyrs* to create a "new" woman who should resist exaggerated misery, thereby moving the construction towards neither of man's world nor a woman's, but human world. In *Trafficked*, Adimora-Ezeigbo presents a similar view as shown below:

... some male lecturers had sexually harassed her; it had been the same in London when she lived in DimgbaAnadu's room in a badly maintained house where another Nigerian, DotunAnibaba, had a room. Both men had tried to lure her to bed but she had resisted with vigour. She had fenced with

their demands, neither saying yes or no, fearing that Dimgba would chuck her out of the house. It was like living with a cobra and an adder and trying to evade the deadly attack of both (*Trafficked*, p. 157).

Adimor-Eeigho's creative sense in the above excerpt must have been gingered by the realization that it is women's responsibility to reconstruct womanhood and recreate her image. The courageous and positive reaction of Nneoma at Dimgba's house in London, as presented above, is an attempt to reconstruct the female image in contemporary Nigerian novels, representing women and their realities. Generally, women are presented as the weaker sexes who are easily gullible. However, reverse is the case in Nneoma's situation, as evident in the above excerpt. The writer uses both idiomatic expression and proverb to indicate that a woman could be an activist who is strong and futuristic. The expression, *She had fenced with their demands* idiomatically indicates how Nneoma tactically fought not to be treated as a sex object. Proverbially, she lives with two *dangerous animals (cobra and adder)* and succeeds in evading their toxic violence (greed for sex). Nneoma becomes dynamic and refuses to comply: as both men (in London) tried to lure her to bed (have sex with her). Therefore, Nneoma's former helpless position as a trafficked sex worker does not deter her from moving to a state of self-empowerment and decency. Such a woman is presented as respectful in the society, thereby confronting the distribution of power (such as activism) to men alone. Similarly, in *Trafficked*, Adimora-Ezeigbo identifies Nneoma's unacceptance and vehement objection towards her husband's intention to be initiated as an *ozonkwu*.

"Why would I joke about a thing like this? The tradition has resided with our family since time immemorial. My grandfather and great-grand father were *ozonkwu*."

"Must you be *ozonkwu* because they were? Suppose you get hurt or fall from the tree?"

"No, an *ozonkwu* cannot fall down. It has never happened. I will be properly dosed with the proper herbs, like my father."

...This is 21st century, remember! I won't marry you if you're going to become the next *ozonkwu*. I will not live the rest of my life trapped in Ihite-Agu by an outdated tradition. I'll despise you for that" (*Trafficked*, p. 77-78).

The traditional presentation of Ofomata as the next *ozonkwu* in Ihite-Agu is unpleasant to his wife, Nneoma and she expresses her abhorrence for it without delay. Subsequently, she advocates for a change, making her intentions known to Ofomata: *This is 21st century, remember! I won't marry you if you're going to become the next ozonkwu*. The idiomatic expression, *I will not live the rest of my life trapped in Ihite-Agu by an outdated tradition* connotes her activist belief in expressing her views. Culturally, in the Nigerian society which the writer depicts, women are meant to be seen and not heard. However, the "new woman" has broken this culture by attributing womanhood with boldness and bravery, especially in making her views known. This activist ideology is also mirrored in Arin's speech below from Atta's *Everything*:

"The day your brother died, your father was out. I took your brother to church. We were praying. Your father wouldn't forgive me, kept talking about hospital. Why didn't you take him to the hospital? What can hospital do? Hospital can't take sickle cell out of a child, hospital cannot make a

dying child live. I am not an ignorant woman. There isn't a mother in the world who wouldn't believe that faith can heal her child after medicine has failed" (*Everything*, p. 173),

The fact that Black women have been taught from childhood that one way to survive is through marriage or within a male-female relationship does not mean that she is docile in the process. Obviously. Seti Atta allows her female characters (as shown in Arin's case above) to take part in important dialogue about marital union, child bearing and catering. Atta exposes Arin's essence of promoting her identity as a caring mother in her (Arin) metaphoric expression: *I am not an ignorant woman*. This is a figurative expression in form of litotes; it depicts the belief of a woman in caring for, and nurturing her child in modern African society. Litotes is metaphorical; an ironical understatement in which an affirmative is expressed by the negative of its opposite. Through its use in the example above, the writer shows the lifestyle of a modern African woman by illustrating the challenges of balancing domestic fulfillment of being a good wife and a religious mother. Evidently, Atta presents another metaphorical stance of a "new woman" in Nigerian society in the excerpt below:

"What? How come your husband let you out of the house any way?"

I laughed. "I'm not a pet."

"You modern wives." "I see everything is a joke to you." He folded his arms. "Humor is all I have left" (*Everything*, p. 192).

Atta's description of Enitan in the above context seems to be a reaction against what can be seen as the relegation of women to the background and the restriction of her movement. The novelist situates the woman by strategically presenting her as free as man even in the context of marriage. Enitan is married to Niyi; she visits her father without her husband's consent. Inasmuch as Mr Taiwo (Enitan's father) is in awe concerning how Enitan leaves her house without her husband's consent, Enitan's response makes him more bewildered. Invariably, he could not fathom how a wife can be as free as a husband in their patriarchal society, as presented by the writer. The metaphorical statements that equate Enitan as a "non pet" as well as "modern wife": *I'm not a pet. You modern wives. I see everything is a joke to you* imply that freedom of movement is meant for man and woman, husband and wife alike. In essence, by breaking the model of the traditional African woman of taking permission from her husband before leaving the house, the writer has recreated and represented womanhood to reflect the changing realities of African women. By implication, Enitan's status in her marital home is at equilibrium with that of her husband. All these indicate reformism.

Modest Ideology

Modesty has to do with the quality of not talking in a proud way about one's abilities and achievements. A person who is modest is relatively moderate, or limited, avoiding indecency or impropriety. Therefore, modest ideology presents unassuming and inconspicuous beliefs of women in the estimation of their abilities. The linguistic indicators used in portraying this ideology are proverbs, idiomatic expressions, metaphors, and rhetorical questions.

In *Everything*. Atta presents an instance that indicates how proverbs are used to portray a woman's modesty in her home:

"I was not born into this family. I married into it. The Franco men are difficult. But you know my dear, when two runs meet head on nothing can happen until one backs down."

"I know, ma"

'... you must learn that a woman makes sacrifices in life. It shouldn't take anything out of you to indulge your husband for the sake of peace in your house (*Everything* p. 291).

In the above excerpt, Enitan is having a discussion with her mother-in-law, Mrs Franco. Meanwhile, the author's use of the proverb, *when two runs meet head on nothing can happen until backs down*, undoubtedly, defines a search for identity. And, searching for one's identity has remained a frequent position in the literary production of contemporary gender-based Nigerian novels. As one of the functions of proverb is to help users to say unpleasant things in an ameliorated way, Mrs Franco, Enitan's mother-in-law, uses it to make her daughter-in-law understand that she should be submissive, as well as modest to make things happen peacefully in her marital home. The Franco men are described as difficult; yet Mrs Franco lives happily with her husband. She therefore, urges Enitan to exhibit such attribute of easy goingness for the sake of peace in her home. The ideological content of such proverbial linguistic items is well explored in the above excerpt and it portrays the modest ideology of a womanist. Subsequently, Adimora-Ezeigbo presents Adaeze, Ogukwe's wife, as a woman who continuously struggles to rebuild her family.

He knew, of course, that his wife, Adaeze, an energetic market trader, brought in more income than he did. But these things are not voiced, for a woman's wealth belonged to her husband and she could lay no claim to it at any time in her lifetime or even after she died... Was it not the ancestors who pronounced that a woman who neglects or disrespects her husband will become a destitute? "This proverbial saying holds sway today and will continue to do so forever," Ogukwe Eke said time without number (*Trafficked*, p. 9).

Equally, the use of proverb to explain the modest nature of women is evident in the above excerpt. Adaeze is described by her husband, Ogukwe as an energetic market trader who is virtually the breadwinner in her marital home and still respects her husband. Invariably, she does that without any feeling of resentment because of her modesty, her belief that the relationship between man and woman is symbiotic. Despite the proverbial saying that pronounces her as a destitute when *she neglects or disrespects her husband*, she believes in living in a close physical association with her husband as a wife, and in a way that is advantageous to both of them. Obviously, Adimora-Ezeigbo uses Adaeze to promote the humble and unassuming nature of some women in upholding peace in their homes. It simply depicts an ideology that basically sustains womanism in literature.

The next instance is taken from Adimora-Ezeigbo's *Trafficked* during Ofomata's description of Dr Chindo Okehi, a university lecturer as an honest and supportive woman:

...There were a few lecturers who were okay. There was Dr Chindo Okehi in the department of Science Education. Students talked about her honesty and commitment. Each time he had come away with the conviction that female lecturers were more honest and supportive than their male counterparts. Could it be because many of them were mothers? (*Trafficked*, p. 34)

Ofomata, after experiencing great distress in the hands of his male lecturers concludes that his situation is not completely hopeless simply because there are "reformed women" who are exemplary mothers. Based on Ofomata's classification, womanhood and motherhood connote

great virtues such as love, care and honesty. This is evident in Ofomata's use of rhetorical question cum idiomatic expression; *could it be because many of them were mothers?* Perhaps, this is used to indicate an honest and supportive attribute of womanhood in the society. This rhetorical question simply highlights women's sincere, compassionate, and indispensable powers and roles in the society. In this way, female writers and their adherents wish to correct the prejudicial presentation of women by most male writers. Strikingly, Adimora-Ezeigbo uses the linguistic indicator (rhetorical question) to promote strong capable female characters such as Dr ChindoOkchi, not suffering as passive victims on social inequities but women who made their communities take note of their creative force.

In *Everything* Atta uses rhetorical question and metaphor to heighten the feminine philosophy of modesty in the society:

I finally understood why she turned her mind to church with such fervour. Had she turned to wine or beer, people would have called her a drunkard. Had she sought other men, they would have called her a slut. But to turn to God: who would quarrel with her? "Leave her alone", they would say, "she is religious" (*Everything*, p. 177-178).

The above excerpt succinctly captures the religious remedy of Arin in her marital union with Mr Taiwo. The excerpt shows the true nature of woman, her role, and her contribution to the development of herself, her home and her society. The womanist ideology presented in Arin's situation above is integrative rather than solely woman-centered: *she turned her mind to church with such fervour. Had she turned to wine or beer, people would have called her a drunkard. Had she sought other men, they would have called her a slut. But to turn to God: who would quarrel with her?*" The rhetorical question and metaphor as used above boost the feminine ethos of modesty in the society. One can therefore state that religiosity is one of the attributes of modest ideology of womanism. In essence, the metaphorical use of such rhetorical question, *who would quarrel with her?*" as evident in the excerpt describes a woman's modest believe in God and His mysterious powers, especially in ameliorating her marital situation. A similar instance is evident in Sheri's use of proverb and idiomatic expression in *Everything* to universalize a specific incident in her family:

Sheri once taught me a lesson when she knelt to greet her Uncle who had tried to disinherit her family. "How could you? I asked: "It's easier to walk around a rock, she said, "than to break it down, and you still get where you are going." I saw that in the past I'd been inclined to want to break rocks, stamping my feet and throwing tantrums when I couldn't. (*Everything*, p. 246)

In the context of the above, Sheri is presented as a reformed womanist, kneeling to greet her Uncle who had tried to disinherit her family. Her modest action surprised Enitan: *Sheri once taught me a lesson...* and when requests for her reason for portraying such act, Sheri answers with a proverb indicating that she is modest in fighting her cause and must win the fight: *It's easier to walk around a rock than to break it down, and you still get where you are going.* And so, the proverb is linked with the traditional wisdom or attitude of womanhood. The writer's use of proverb and idiomatic expression depicts an attribute of wisdom possessed by a woman. She is modest in fighting her cause and in achieving her goal thereby reducing harshness in her actions. Sheri uses such linguistic items to express her ideas, and adequately

articulates her world view and struggle with modesty. This equally amplifies the role of language in sustaining womanist identity even in the face of dehumanization.

Conclusion

This study has examined Atta's *Everything* and Adimora-Ezeigbo's *Trafficked*, revealing how markers are used in picturing womanist ideology to portray reformism. Linguistic Indicators such as proverbs, idiomatic expressions, lexical innovations, metaphor and rhetorical questions are used to portray two reformed womanist ideologies: activist and modest as identified in the sampled novels. These ideologies uphold the confrontational as well as humble attributes of womanism. Through these classes (activist and modest) of womanist ideology. Atta and Adimora-Ezeigbo create strong capable female characters that make their communities take note of their creative force. Equally, this denotes the fact that contemporary gender-based Nigerian novelists use language as a reflection of socio-cultural and religious identity. Thus, the sampled novelists have presented imaginative women of courage and flexibility who know how to pool their resources together in marital unions. struggle to remodel their families and modernize societies; spiritual women who are adaptable, ambitious, mothering, nurturing and respectful of elders, ameliorating their struggles and values into friendliness.

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