

A STYLISTIC ANALYSIS OF CHIKA UNIGWE'S *THE MIDDLE DAUGHTER*

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Abstract

This paper examines elements of style in *The Middle Daughter* by Chika Unigwe. Previous works have not paid adequate attention to how Nigerian indigenous cultural elements generate the employment of a distinctive language, a unique narrative technique, and exemplary literary devices in literary texts. To this end, the study examines Unigwe's use of diction, imagery, and syntax to convey themes of identity, gender, culture, and family dynamics in the African diasporic context. By focusing on the protagonist's journey of self discovery, the paper analyses how stylistic choices enhance the emotional depth and complexity of the characters. The novel's use of a shifting narrative voice, blending both first-person and omniscient perspectives, is explored as a tool for emphasising the protagonist's inner conflict and external struggles. This study adopts Halliday's Systemic Functional Grammar as its theoretical framework. Unigwe's *The Middle Daughter* serves as the primary text. Findings reveal that Unigwe's integration of Nigerian cultural elements, including folklore, and linguistic features from the Igbo language enrich the narrative, providing authenticity to the portrayal of the protagonist's experiences. This study concludes by highlighting how Unigwe's stylistic approach serves not only to engage readers but also to offer a nuanced commentary on the intersection of personal and collective identity within postcolonial African literature.

Introduction

Writers make an array of linguistic choices to effectively communicate their ideas, feelings, ideologies and opinions on certain issues or to convey certain experiences to a wider audience. Succinctly put, "The mere thought of a world without language elicits depressive boredom and retrogression" (Urjuzian & Etuk, 2023, p.271). Etuk and Akpan (2023, p.69) opine that "It is through language that emotions, desires, thought, religious and socio-political views and beliefs of individuals, groups of individuals and that of an entire community of people are expressed". Similarly, Etuk and Urjuzian (2018) aver that "Humans use language, in a distinct way, to communicate their feelings, desires and beliefs" (87). In order to successfully communicate, a literary writer may select a style that they think is ideal for literary communication. As a result of this, a creative writer may be constrained by a few standard linguistic conventions, common cores of language use, and other factors. Conversely, in order to achieve the desired results, a literary writer may also need to intentionally and artistically depart from a number of these conventions.

Nigerians who write in English as a second language approach language in a style that is very interesting. According to Etuk (2021, p.3), "language sets the bounds of a people's perceptual world delineating the limits of objective or ideational representations". Thus, if a writer is Nigerian, with a Nigerian worldview, he or she may most likely think in his or her indigenous language but have to translate these thoughts into the English language while writing. A writer might also be compelled to retain certain words and expressions in the indigenous language so as not to alter their (phono) aesthetic qualities. More so, the experiences relayed are Nigerian experiences, the characters are Nigerians and the works are primarily designed for a Nigerian audience or readership. These could force a writer to adopt specific stylistic decisions that are distinctive and highly alluring to a critical reader; as "style is a combination of the manner and purpose of expressing an idea by an author or a group of authors" (Etuk & Urjuzian, 2024, p.192). This therefore constitutes the problem of this research as it sets out to evaluate the manner in which a writer of Nigerian origin fashions the indigenous languages to meet certain linguistic needs.

Precisely, Unigwe's *The Middle Daughter* (2023) has been singled out from the fold of Nigerian-authored novels, to review the linguistic choices the author makes and how these choices conform to or deviate from the generally accepted conventions of the English language. In any case, whether or not Unigwe deviates, the analysis revolves around the linguistic choices of the author and the motivations behind these choices. Analytical data for appraisal are drawn from Unigwe's *The Middle Daughter* (2023), which constitutes the case study for this endeavour. The study anchors on Halliday's Systemic Functional Grammar for a more systematic and effective analysis.

Objectives of the Study

The specific objectives of the study are to:

- i. identify and analyse the lexico- semantic, syntactic, and the phonological features of English in the selected text;
- ii. investigate the various contexts that influence Unigwe's use of language and;
- iii. examine how the author's style is influenced by the use of local colour in the chosen text and how this use of local colour helps to effectively convey the intended ideas.

Theoretical Framework: Systemic Functional Grammar

Systemic Functional Grammar (abbreviated SFG) is the linguistic model selected for this study. The theory was developed by Michael Alexander Kirkwood Halliday, better known as M. A. K. Halliday. In the words of Urujzian and Etuk (2024, p.313), "M.A.K. Halliday's Systemic Functional Grammar, (is) a theory suitable for the exploration of the function of language as used in a certain context". Here, "Context could be defined according to the function a certain type of communication performs" (Etuk and Umoh (2024, p.379). Halliday explained that this linguistic model examines language as "a network of systems, or interrelated sets of options for making meaning" (1994, p.15). By this, he meant that the components of language: sounds, signs and symbols have a network that connects them in the process of making meaning (out of them) through communication. "Systemic" refers to the idea of language as a structured network of multiple sets of possibilities that are related to each other. Stated differently, language is made up of a multitude of choices that the language user can choose from to best communicate a thought. Halliday (1994) explains this, thus:

Systemic theory gets its name from the fact that the grammar of a language is represented in the form of system networks, not as an inventory of structures. Of course, structure is an essential part of the description, but it is interpreted as the outward form taken by systemic choices, not as the defining characteristic of language. A language is a resource for making meaning and meaning resides in the systemic patterns of choice (p.23).

Halliday's idea here reflects the belief held by contemporary grammarians that by understanding language elements as systems, users can break free from strict rules or principles that restrict them to specific types of usage, allowing for greater creative expression from speakers and writers.

Conversely, the term "functional" embodies Halliday's theory that language is composed of several active roles, sometimes known as metafunctions, that serve to define and categorise the language. Therefore, the term "functional" alludes to Halliday's theory that language takes on its appearance due to the functions it performs in discourse. Halliday distinguished between three primary categories when describing the functions of language: ideational, interpersonal, and textual. He clarified that the ideational is concerned with how language is used to transmit ideas, sentiments, and emotions from one person to another. The interpersonal domain pertains to linguistic decisions that uphold the interpersonal connections among language users in a shared speech community or discourse context.

The core idea of SFG is that grammar is best understood as systems rather than as rules. This is based essentially on the idea that each structural element of grammar is an option chosen from a list of choices that may be represented. Halliday's SFG model best applies to the present study because the study considers Unigwe's choices between linguistic alternatives, choices informed by a crucial need to deploy the best possible medium for passing her intended meaning.

Research Methodology

This research utilises the qualitative approach to assess the inventiveness (or Nigerian-ness) of the writer in her choice of words. It adopts the approach of content analysis to critically study textual features and data. Data from Unigwe's *The Middle Daughter* (2023) are analysed with references made to existing studies from scholars on related issues. Halliday's SFG thus provides the framework that sustains the analysis.

The primary source of data for this study is Chika Unigwe's *The Middle Daughter* (2023). The story is situated in various settings (against the backdrop of different societies and worldviews) and, as such, shows the manifestation of language approach in different stylistic forms. The data for analysis are chosen purposively. Hence, the data collected here were not singled out based on their frequency of occurrence, but based on their relevance, not just to the author's style of writing, but to stylistic scholarship in general. With Halliday's SFG as the linguistic model, the data were analysed with the aim of understanding their function(s) within the various contexts of usage.

ELEMENTS OF STYLE IN CHIKA UNIGWE'S *THE MIDDLE DAUGHTER*

Graphological level of analysis

Graphology considers the layout of a text, exploring items foregrounded. Foregrounding places emphasis on projected items which a writer accentuates in their work. It accounts generally for written features of a text which in turn convey literary meaning. These items could be punctuations, style of font, or physical structure of the text (most often in poetry). Foregrounding considers creative deviation from norms or conformity to norms both in the use of symbols and icons. The analysis at the level of graphology is broken down into the sub-categories that follow.

Italicisation

The major aim of italicisation is to place linguistic highlight on the structure or unit to which it is applied. It marks out the unit for easy notice in order to make it more prominent. Unigwe employs italics in *The Middle Daughter* to lay emphasis on certain items. These items include proper nouns and specific names, as can be seen in the novel where words such as the following are italicised since they are names of books, newspapers and other periodicals: *Ovation* (p.82), *Children's Bible* (p.174), et cetera.

Unigwe also uses italics to express non-English words, or English words that are not correctly pronounced by characters like Ephraim who suffers the L1 interference. Thus, this imputes the cultural relevance of setting into her stories. Other words rendered in italics in *The Middle Daughter* are: *Compretery* (as in completely, p.42), *rove* (as in love, p.144), *srap* (as in slap, p.181).

Italicisation also features at the sentence level where the writer renders utterances such as the following in italics:

- a. *Every time I've heard her sob at night, I was always sure she was mourning Ugo and Doda. Haba! She won't even call Nani by name. I have never once believed that she thought of Nani at all.* (p.97)
- b. *What kind of nonsense dream is this?* (p.132)
- c. *Chinelo was defiled by three boys* (p.90)
- d. *Why's Nani wasting my time? Abi, she wants two of us to be in hot soup?* (p.131)
- e. *No. No. No. You can't make me do anything! Do not push me! Don't you dare!* (p.129)
- f. *How can Nani love this person?* (p.133)
- g. *Toooooow...?* (p.261)

The above italicised sentences are used to reveal the inner, subconscious thoughts of the character that would not be heard if the circumstance in the novel were to be in real life. Through this graphological device, the author succeeds in creating a make-believe world that has a great semblance to reality where human thoughts intercept human conversations.

In all, Unigwe employs italicisation to emphasise or foreground features which she chooses to take out of the background. These features are brought to the fore because of their relevance to the understanding of the entire story. Thus, Unigwe employs italics to reveal titles of dailies, books and other items; to express non-English words and sentences; to reveal the thoughts or inner contemplations of characters, especially when quoting other characters the readers may not have had encounters with; as well as to heighten the meanings of individual words.

Capitalisation

Another element of foregrounding is capitalisation, which is the adoption of uppercase lettering for stylistic relevance. As a norm, sentences are begun with capital letters and Unigwe adopts this convention meticulously. However, to begin every story in the collection, the first letter is superscripted, running into the succeeding line. Examples in the text are: TV (p.95), SAT (p.40), INTRUDERS ARE EATEN ALIVE. ENTER AT YOUR OWN PERIL (p.43). This is aesthetic in concept as it adds beauty to the script. Unigwe uses capitalisation as a graphological tool to highlight aspects of the texts which are seminal to the issues raised in the stories and/or which have aesthetic value.

Punctuations

Dashes

The use of dashes is consistent in the text. The author uses dashes as a syndetic element. This enables the dashes feature in place of two commas. Below are extracts in this regard:

- a. None of the neighbours came to the house – not even the woman with the one good eye, Philo, who had spoken to me once – no friends (p.196).
- b. I would always – unasked – beg Udodi on Ugo's behalf (p.193).
- c. 'What's wrong with teaching my child to read? I haven't taken her to school. All—' (p.181).
- d. 'I'm sorry. I was just—' (p.242).

As can be seen from the sentences provided above, the double dashes are style markers used by Unigwe to enhance her descriptions of characters, settings, events, et cetera. Again, dashes give a work a sense of urgency that conventional commas or even conjunctions cannot, especially because dashes are long punctuation marks which often touch the words they are inserted in between. Unigwe has employed them in her writings for the aesthetic purpose they serve, thus underscoring her literary style.

Inverted Commas

The stories in Unigwe's *The Middle Daughter* also manifest the peculiar use of inverted commas. Inverted commas (“ ”), commonly known as quotation marks, are used primarily to indicate direct speech. In prose texts, they are used to indicate the utterances of characters as dialogue proceeds in the story. The use of inverted commas to mark utterances made by different characters makes it easy to know who exactly is speaking at a particular time.

Brackets

Brackets (()) are used to enclose information, especially if the direct introduction of such information may lead to grammatical or semantic clumsiness. A word, phrase, clause or even a full sentence can be enclosed in brackets in the course of narration. Examples in the text are:

- a. (he hid a toy car which belonged to another child at Bible school in his bag and when it was discovered – Holy had seen it and reported him – had said the child gave it to him) (p.271).
- b. . My sisters were specific in their wants: dolls with hair that could grow (Udodi) (p.35), a house with a swimming pool (Ugo) (p.283).
- c. In my native Igbo, it is ‘afu m gin’anya’ (I see you with (my eyes)) (p.324).

Unigwe has deployed numerous graphological devices in the stories in *The Middle Daughter*, including punctuation marks of all types, italicisation, boldening and capitalisation. These graphological devices have enabled her to accentuate certain aspects of the stories which would have otherwise been difficult to accentuate. This has helped draw attention to specific issues raised in the stories. It has also helped improve the aesthetic quality of the stories.

Grammatical analysis

The analysis at this level focuses on the peculiarity in the choices of the author in line with the tenets of Halliday's SFG. This is sub-divided into morphological and syntactic features.

Morphological features

The morphological features examined, as are evident in the selected text, are compounding, word class conversion and neologisms (which emanate from nonce formations). (These show a morphological process, the end product of which is the formulation of new lexical structures or words.)

Compounding

Compounding considers the combination of two or more words to derive a single word or semantic item. The combined words no longer function as individual lexical items, but become inter-dependent in order to achieve the new meaning. In most cases, compounding is achieved through hyphenation (-). It is also achieved through spacing, where the compounded items are spaced, but are still considered as a single unit. The use of conjunction can also facilitate compounding.

In the target text, *The Middle Daughter*, compounding has been used mostly in the descriptive category, where the compounded items (especially the first of the pair) are used as the modifier for the second item or the nominal. ‘Life-changing (p.191),’ ‘made-up (p.190)’ are examples of compounding in the text. Since adjectives give details about a noun or pronoun, the constant recurrence of adjectives therefore reveals the need for further details, in order to better clarify a matter. Symbolically, the implication of the profusion of adjectives in *The Middle Daughter* is that there is so much more to marriage and love than meets the eye.

Conversion of word class

This considers the borrowing of a word from a word class and using it in another. Most of the lexemes converted are utilised as adjectives. Below are illustrations from the text:

In the conversion of verbs to adjectives, some examples are: “car-free streets (p.294),” “long-winded (p.79),” “my everexpanding stomach (p.151),” and “unsmiling faces (p.296).”

The foregoing are examples of verbs functioning adjectivally. In other words, the verbs “free” and “unsmiling” no longer perform the function of indicating actions, that is tense; rather, they now add descriptions to nouns and

pronouns. According to Udoka, Umoh and Etuk (2020, p.58), “Tense is a category that locates the action of a verb on a timeline in relation to the time of speech relating to the action in question”. The shift from the original function of showing action to describing nouns and pronouns is indicative of radical change. These converted items exhibit the author’s license and her choice to approach style in the manner she chooses. Through these conversions, Unigwe exercises poetic license, even though she is not writing a poem.

Neologism

Neologism, the creation of new lexical items in a language, could arise from clipping and blending or creating portmanteau words. It could also arise from borrowing and transfer of items from one language to another. Coinage is the most common way of achieving neologism. It depicts writers’ experiments with linguistic possibilities. Calling writers “linguistic innovators”, Ayo (2005, p.84) comments that they “create some lexical items to suit the emotion they wish to express or arouse when they think the existing lexis cannot do their biddings to their satisfaction”.

Unigwe creates neologism by borrowing from indigenous Nigerian languages and transferring such items into the English language. Two reasons which inform this are: the attempt at strengthening the immediate setting, where the author utilises the words pertaining to the immediate locale in the text and secondly, the need to delineate characters in a way that reflects the personalities in the real world, their social relationships, as well as their language competence. This buttresses the fact that “Language is a reflection of one’s emotions, beliefs and ideological positions” (Etuk and Okon, 2024, p.88). Furthermore, on the stylistic level, it could be a trope to marry the cultural background of the writer with the text. Whichever the case may be here, Unigwe has successfully employed neologisms, paying attention to their semantic relevance, as well as their situational essence. Below are examples of neological expressions, their origins and their forms.

Expression	Origin	Form
Byzantine luxury (p.50)	Byzantium	Borrowing/transfer
a sellam-buyam trader (p.50)	Online marketing	Borrowing/ transfer
Crinkum-crankum (p.50)	English	Borrowing/transfer

Indigenous Expressions

Expression	Meaning	Origin
Biko (p.103)	Please (Not translated into English).	Igbo
Anyinweluakonauche (p.162)	We have wisdom and common sense (Not translated into English)	Igbo

Unigwe incorporates indigenous words into the stories to reflect Nigeria’s multilingual, multi-ethnic status. As a nation, Nigeria is linguistically held together by English, the language of her former colonial master. However, besides English, the languages of the three major ethnic groups (Hausa, Igbo and Yoruba) are most predominantly spoken alongside those of hundreds of minority ethnic groups. This is in addition to Pidgin, which Adaba (2007, p.237) considers to be a different language since it has a different phonetic, graphological, syntactic and semantic system from that of Standard English. Thus, the average Nigerian is a bilingual: he/she speaks at least English and his mother tongue.

It is important to observe that Igbo expressions are translated, such that their English equivalents in some cases are provided just next to them. For example, the narrator in *The Middle Daughter* narrates thus: “In my native Igbo, it is ‘afu m gin’anya’ (I see you with (my eyes)) (p.324). Therefore, the essence of these expressions is to infuse the writing with elements of originality as can be seen in real life conversations. This is realism in conversation – the writer’s “ability to render in writing the characteristics of spoken conversational language” (Leech and Short, 1981, p.160). Onumajuru (2015, p.61) describes this communicative mannerism when he posits that:

An Igbo native speaker is so used to code-mixing that he does not always know when he mixes both English and Igbo...in the same utterance. This mixture has become so natural to Igbo speakers that they can hardly make a sentence in Igbo without one or two words of the English language.

There is also the illustration of what Adeniran (2015) calls the “other-endowed” characteristic of the English language, which makes it accommodate words and expressions from the indigenous language.

Syntactic features

Syntax considers the rules of the arrangement and ordering of grammatical structures from the word level up to the sentence level. However, syntactic norms can be defied in a stylistic manner as a way of enhancing some effects desirous of the language user. Such defiant or deviant motives in many cases mark out a writer's language. In this research, the analysis on the syntactic level considers non-standard expressions and sentence type examination, both by structure and by function.

Non-standard expressions

For a structure to be said to be grammatical, it has to follow the paradigmatic and syntagmatic rules of the language. From the paradigmatic instance, choice of lexical items is paramount in this case. On the syntagmatic level of relations, the patterning or chain structure is considered. Unigwe experiments with ungrammatical structures with the purpose of revealing a character's level of literacy or social status as is evident in *The Middle Daughter* where the two characters that are interacting with each other are from different social and educational backgrounds. Nani is a girl from a wealthy home who is caught in the web of deceit when she meets an uneducated man who, claiming to be a man of God, rapes her. While Nani speaks standard grammatical English, the man as well as his mother, from a low class, speaks non-standard English - a clear reflection of their under-education. The ungrammaticality in the man's diction includes L1 interference, use of ambiguous words and omission of certain lexical items. Below are examples:

- a. L1 interference: Compretery (as in completely, p.42), rove (as in love, p.144), Hory (as in holy, p.160), srup (as in slap, p.181).
- b. Use of ambiguous words: "The medulla oblongata of my God is bigger than any man's comprehension" (p.109).
- c. Omission of lexical items: Me, Mrs Ebosse. You, Mrs Ebosse (p.166) (as in, I am Mrs Ebosse. You are Mrs Ebosse)

All of the above point to one thing: the man and his mother in question lack the kind of education that Nani has. This draws attention to the fact that they are of a lower social status than Nani. In ascribing different language varieties to them, Unigwe uses non-standard expressions to draw attention to the relationship between language variety and class structures within the text and the Nigerian nation by extension.

Sentence type

Sentence type by function

On the average, the author uses declarative sentences the most because of the genre of literature explored here. A declarative sentence is a factual statement of certainty. The role is simply to relay information. Eka (1994) simply refers to a declarative sentence as a statement. Unigwe's declaratives have a regular structure in the active voice as the subject is presented first, before the verb and object. The author rarely uses passive declaratives as they could be clumsy, in many cases derailing the message and its purpose. Even in cases where direct speech is used, the declarative still conveys the message.

Sentence type by structure

The five types of sentences—the simple, compound, complex, compound-complex and multiple sentences – are found in the novel. The sentences below show a confluence of various sentence types, rendered as shown below:

//Today I saw Aziz, //a man I had long thought was dead]] //—Simple sentence with rankshifted clause functioning as apposition to "Aziz".

//I should have bent down, //grabbed a handful of sand, //and//thrown at him, [[in a way my people do to make sure a person is not a ghost]]//—Multiple sentence with rankshifted clause.

//I did not throw sand at him.//—Simple sentence.

//I could not have done so//even if I had wished to, anyway, //since we met at the concrete grounds of the church.//—Complex sentence.

Indeed, there is an unwitting mixture of emotions pleasant, unpleasant and indifferent emotions – throughout the story, and the near-equal deployment of all sentence structures beautifully demonstrates this situation of mixed feelings.

Lexico-semantic analysis

The analysis under the lexico-semantic category, "...a specialized area within the field of linguistics that is focused on exploring the meaning of words and phrases, along with their connections and compositions" (Etuk & Okon, 2025 p.141), considers diction at word level as well as its implication with regard to meaning. Therefore, emphasis is placed on how the author stylistically influences the meanings of certain words and expressions with the

intention of achieving some literary effects. Focus is placed on elements such as metaphor, paradox, hyperbole and onomatopoeia.

Semantic level

Metaphors

The metaphors in the text are presented below, bearing in mind the context of their usage, in order to display their significance clearly. For example, “the word is the world and her tongue Atlas’s shoulders carrying it (p.92)” and “it felt like I had evacuated a huge watermelon (p.107)”. The metaphorical expressions outlined above are used by the author to create descriptive effects. With them, the reader can easily imagine the person, object or situation being described. In the foregoing examples, Unigwe likens her sister’s words with the weight of the world on Atlas’ shoulders in order to relay the difficulty of Ugo speaking to her sister, Nani, (especially as Nani’s life takes a sad and helpless turn) to readers.

Hyperbole

Also referred to as overshooting, the hyperbole is a figurative device that is used to overstate something and it is not meant to be interpreted literally. Chika Unigwe uses this device to create some semantic effects in the text. This is analysed further using the following example: “eating beans and fried plantain or ukwa with fish at a dining table too big to fit into this house (p.98).” The use of a hyperbole by the author basically serves a descriptive purpose. The device is employed to create an effect on the reader about the person, object or situation being referred to. It lays emphasis on the referent in a deviational and stylistic manner.

Paradoxes

A paradox is an “apparently self-contradictory” statement and requires the reader to “probe beyond the literal meaning to find a deeper, usually more philosophical meaning which will reconcile the apparent absurdity” (Spencer, p.300). Paradox plays on the meaning of an expression as it takes the reader beyond the literal meaning of the words. Unigwe employs this device in her text to underscore her stylistic leanings. For example, in the expression, “I did not want to live. I did not want to die (p.105),” the paradox is that the same Nani who does not want to live, does not also want to die. In other words, her wants are self-contradictory, owing largely to her plight of being raped and forced to marry and bear children for her violator.

Phonological features

Here, the concern is on how certain sound elements are manipulated by the author to create particular effects of foregrounding. However, phonological features are not too apparent in prose as they thrive mostly in poetry. That notwithstanding, the few featured in the text are examined.

Onomatopoeia

Onomatopoeia simply refers to words or expressions which suggest meaning from the sound or manner in which they are produced. Unigwe features a number of onomatopoeic words in *The Middle Daughter*. Some of these include: click-clack-click (p.188) and OOHDOUGH (p.12). The first example connotes the sound of the little heels of the girls’ (Udo’s and Nani’s) shoes while the second example suggests the correct pronunciation of Udo’s name. The stylistic use of onomatopoeia in the text generally helps in giving more depth to the author’s descriptions as the onomatopoeic expressions draw the reader into having an almost real-life experience of the texts.

Repetition

Repetition is used to lay emphasis on certain structures of words, phrases, clauses and sentences by increasing their frequency of occurrence. It can also be used to highlight the degree of emotion or to draw extra attention to the structure(s) it affects because of the importance of the structure(s) to the context of discourse. Below are some expressions that are repeated by the author. It can be summed up that the author stylistically uses repetition for linguistic highlighting or to give prominence to the structures that are so affected. According to the systemic functional grammar of Halliday, repetition or what he refers to as “the relative frequency of different grammatical or lexical patterns” is an aspect of “meaning potential” (p. 343). Through it, authors call attention to particular intended meanings or effects which are achieved through emphasis. This is what motivates Unigwe’s use of the device. For example, Unigwe repeats words thus:

- a. Pound. Pound. Pound. (p.182).
- b. He took and he took and he took. (p.170).
- c. My beautiful, beautiful sister. (p.158).
- d. Took and took and took (p.158).
- e. What was its name? What was its name? (p.153).

Findings

Chika Unigwe's *The Middle Daughter*, sometimes, employs Popular Nigerian English, "...a variety of English that has been 'acculturated' to carry the Nigerian experience" (Etuk, 2024, p.289) and showcases aspects of Nigerianism, reflecting key facets of Nigerian culture, societal norms, and the struggles of women within this context. The novel blends Nigerian traditions with mythological influences, particularly drawing on the Greek myth of Hades and Persephone, but adapts it into a uniquely Nigerian setting. The adaption is replete with Nigerian phonological and lexico-semantic features. The protagonist experiences isolation and alienation. Her experiences in turn mirrors common struggles faced by Nigerian women who are caught between tradition and modernity and this is reflected in the way she speaks and the meanings embedded in her linguistic nuances. Her interactions with Ephraim, a controlling figure who represents both the mythical Hades and the manipulative preachers found in some Nigerian communities, for instance, highlights the intersection of religion and power in Nigerian society.

This study found that Unigwe also explores familial expectations, gender roles, and the societal pressure on women, especially within the context of grief and loss. Nani's mother, a wealthy and powerful woman, represents a new Nigerian woman successful and driven yet, she too adheres to traditional roles in how she manages her family and personal relationships. This reflects a broader theme in the novel: the push and pull between modernity and deeply ingrained Nigerian customs.

Furthermore, the novel subtly comments on the socioeconomic divides in Nigeria, represented by characters like Ephraim, who use religion as a tool to gain control and status despite their impoverished backgrounds. Unigwe incorporates different voices and non-linear timelines, thereby adding to the rich depiction of Nigerian life, from both the ordinary and the mythic perspectives. Through this fusion of myth, religion, and the stark realities of Nigerian culture, *The Middle Daughter* offers a profound exploration of identity, womanhood, and the complexities of Nigerian society.

Conclusion

The study has critically examined the way in which Chika Unigwe explores style in her writings, with particular emphasis on her novel, *The Middle Daughter*. It has also taken a close look at the various ways in which stylistic elements can be employed by writers in a general sense to enhance the communication of meaning to their readers.

The author conforms to grammatical norms where she is restricted by common core and other elements of usage. However, by deviating in a number of situations, as the study illustrates, she goes in search of the best encoding medium of her message. Unigwe places optimum importance on her audience, thus wanting to write in a language and style that can be understood without stress.

The analysis has revealed the stylistic strategies employed by a writer, who appreciates and continually asserts her Africanness in her writings. She feels the urge to always have a reflection of the linguistic, cultural and behavioural complexities of Africa and its people. Resulting from this, she makes language choices that reflect these in her writings. One way of achieving this is by borrowing a lot of expressions from the indigenous Igbo language and allowing them to feature in their original forms in her writings. The need to first communicate to an African audience before the global informs this style to a great extent. It can be summed up here that all the stylistic strategies employed by the author, as identified here, are a seal of her literary excellence, singling her out as a master of words—one who tells stories, bearing in mind the need to communicate in the most effective way to her audience.

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