

A Lexical Study of the Representation of African Womanhood in Chinua Achebe's Novels

Toyese Najeem Dahunsi

General Studies Department, Federal Polytechnic, Ile-Oluji

Joel Iyiola Olaleye

Department of English, Waziri Umaru Federal Polytechnic
Birnin Kebbi

Abstract

The early African writers have been accused of using negative portraiture to project African women in ways that subordinate them to their men counterpart. This study closely investigated this perception using the language of narratives as the object of analysis. It is a lexical analysis that adopts comparative frequency analysis of male and female characters and their pronominal referents; analysis of character's identity projection patterns; and analysis of comparative masculine-feminine gender semantic prosodies. Five works of Chinua Achebe: *Things Fall Apart*, *A Man of the People*, *Arrow of God*, *No Longer at Ease*, and *The Anthills of the Savannah* were used for the study. The result shows that male characters are more frequently projected than female characters; the narrator consistently foregrounds the identities of male characters by presenting them mostly either by direct names or a combination of names with appositional information; whereas the identities of female characters are often suppressed by presenting them with descriptions and appositional information. The comparative character identity projection pattern connotes male characters' visibility and female characters' facelessness across texts. Both masculine and feminine genders were also presented in ways that make them to have different semantic prosodies. While the masculine gender was projected to have positive semantic prosody, the feminine gender was projected to have negative semantic prosody across texts. The paper concludes that Chinua Achebe's

narrative style that consistently projects the masculine gender as visible, domineering, strong and brave, but the feminine gender as faceless, subservient, weak and inconsequential.

Introduction

A great number of scholars of African literature and modern literary critics are concurrent in their averment that African literature (that is, plays, poems and narratives written by Africans) is awash with works that project the masculine gender as strong and domineering, and the feminine gender as weak and subservient (Fonchingong, 2006). Against this background, the early African writers, most of whom were male, were constantly accused of pro-masculine gender bias in reactionary critiques (e.g. Davies, 1994; Smit, 1996; Kolawole, 1997; Chukukere, 1995) and a body of emerging female-authored pro-female literary works where the feminine gender is being systematically and more positively re-textualised (e.g. Elechi Amadi's *The Concubine* (1966); Flora Nwapa's *Efuru* (1996)).

It can be argued that the perceived under-representation of the feminine gender in most African literary works has been largely subjective and impressionistic. Such arguments are rather premised on concrete and empirical facts, with some comparative phenomenal quantification. In other words, how do we, more scientifically, argue that women are under-represented in *Things Fall Apart* or *A Man of the People*? How do we argue that women are presented as weak in any African novel in concrete terms rather than impressionistic and subjective terms? It is the issue of empiricism and objectivity in literary analysis from the angle of the literary language that this study aims to address. The study is therefore a close examination of some African literary works with focus on lexical resources and authorial lexical selections, with a view to getting useful insights into the role and status of women, as well as the societal perceptions about women during the pre and post-colonial Africa. If literature is, truly, a mirror of the society (Hall, 1961), then such literary works should be reflective of societal norms,

beliefs and practices at any given time and should be veritable resources for synchronic and diachronic scholarly investigations. In other words, language is the vehicle through which literature does its work. A study like this is therefore interested more in how language has been used to achieve narrative objectives and authorial intentions.

The issue of gender, that is, the perception of the society about females, the role and status of women, etc. compared to their male counterpart has continued to attract increased scholarly attention in African literature. The focus on this critical issue is two-fold: the under-representation of African women in African literary works and the exclusion of the contributions of African women to the development of African literature (Stratton, 1994). African literature, like other types of literature, reflects the happenings in the society, in this case, the African society. The ethno-diversities and multi-cultural nature of Africa as a distinct continent inevitably lead to the heterogeneity of its literature, since there are many African experiences and many verbal expressions of them (Julien, 1995). According to Julien (1995), African literature can be categorised along the rubrics of region (such as West Africa, East Africa, South Africa, etc.), all of which have both historical and environmental distinctions; ethnicity (such as The Yoruba, Igbo, Mende, etc.); language of expression (Anglophone, Francophone, Hausa, Swahili, etc.), genre (poetry, drama, prose) and some other related criteria.

One of the major thematic pre-occupations of African writers in the 20th Century is the issue of colonialism and self-representation. A plethora of literary works are focused on this theme, with such works as Achebe's *Things Fall Apart* (1958) and *Arrow of God* (1964); Ngugi wa Thiong'o's *Weep Not, Child* (1964), *The River Between* (1965), *A Grain of Wheat* (1967); Soyinka's *Death and the King's Horsemen* (1975), etc. as few examples. Julien aptly captures the motivation for the emergence of African literature around this time with her averment that

African narrative and poetry, in the era immediately preceding and following formal declarations of independence, were born, for the most part, in protest against history and myths constructed in conjunction with the colonial enterprise. Writers struggled to correct false images, to rewrite fictionally and poetically the history of precolonial and colonial Africa, and to affirm African perspectives. (Julien, 1995, p.297)

In their various attempts to self-represent their continent and nationalities, African writers were sub-consciously projecting the various cultural peculiarities and aspects of social lives to the external world for various interests including scholarship. One of such cultural peculiarities is the patriarchal way of life that is prevalent in most African societies, a system that clearly indexes asymmetry of roles and status between the masculine and feminine gender. This cultural peculiarity has provoked quite a number of research questions around the identity and status of the African woman in real life and as projected in African literary texts. Oloruntoba-Oju and Oloruntoba-Oju (2013, p.5) note that the African representations in the early post-colonial African literature were unwitting continuations of European negative image of the African, in which the African woman was projected in various negative forms including 'jural minors' living under the tutelage first of fathers, then of husbands; great overgrown women, *mothers* of families, *naked* as when born, and quite unconscious of the disgust which their appearance excited.

Scholars have attempted to trace the origin of the asymmetry of roles and status between the masculine and feminine gender in African literature in a number of ways. Kolawole (1997) attributes this to the early African male writers who deliberately projected the African females in ways that subordinate them to their male counterparts. For Chukukere (1995), the female characters were projected on the basis of their traditional roles and status as wives and mothers in real life, and

the degree of recognition and respect largely depends on how such female characters are able to excel in the performances of these traditional roles.

Oloruntoba-Oju and Oloruntoba-Oju (2013) posit that the pictorial projection and social classification of the African female in the colonial and African narratives of “the Senghorian and négritude tradition entailed the sole identification of *women* with essentially biological, or sex-related roles” (p. 6); and submit that such colonial and early African narratives were mainly characterised by essentialism, biological dimorphism and gender binaries, all in favour of the African male characters. Ogundipe-Leslie (1994) ties the characteristic under-representation of African women in African literature to the prevalent culture and tradition in Africa, which institutionalises female subordination to their male counterpart in the society. Onwuka (2007), cited in Jegede (2009), was reported to have posited that in early African literary works, the male writers were “too preoccupied with themselves to remember women while the few writers like Cyprian Ekwensi who portrayed women did so in bad light” (Jegede, 2009, p. 251).

The under-representation or negative representation of the African woman in African literature has been proved in different ways by different scholars and critics. Fonchingong (2006) uses Achebe’s *Things Fall Apart* and *Arrow of God*, and Elechi Amadi’s *The Concubine* to prove the presentation of the early African women as “victims of a society regulated by cultural norms and traditional values” (p. 137), and to show women (citing Strong-Leek, 2001) as being “indoctrinated to envision the world from a patriarchal perspective” (p. 138). Adeyemi and Ajibade (2009) concentrated on three novels written by Yoruba (African) writers (that is, Bode Akinola’s *Fila L’obinrin*, Olu Owolabi’s *Igba Oro* and Talabi Olagbemi’s *Eru o B’odo*) in their investigation of how women were portrayed in Afro-Yoruba fictional works. They reported that the writers (all of whom are male) portrayed women in their themes, plot, characterisation and language in ways that make them

“enormously inclined to material wealth and lust for money”, a clear indication that “women’s decisions or choices are largely influenced by money” Adeyemi and Ajibade (2009, p.115). Makokha (2014) examines how the woman has been portrayed in Adichie’s *Half of a Yellow Sun*, and submits that the representation of the woman showed that

the Nigerian woman in this postcolonial patriarchal political setting experienced double colonisation, the first time by the British colonialists, and the second time by the Nigerian man in postcolonial Nigeria. The African woman has been presented as having been colonised in the mind, and therefore having embraced patriarchy, hence having placed the African man on a pedestal, a position socially higher than hers (Makokha, 2014, p.119).

Against the ever-rising debate on the perceived misrepresentation or under-representation of women in African literature, some scholars have argued that the situation is not as bad as largely perceived, noting, in the words of Karen (1984) that, “it is clear that the depiction of female images in African works by male writers is not as one-sided as critics contend; in fact, it essentially mirrors the reality of the African experience”.

Jegede (2009) explored the changing patterns of writing about African women, and reported how some women writers have attempted to “counter most of the destructive testimonies that some authors have expressed about women and strip away the layers of distortion and misrepresentation” (p. 251). Using Aminata Sow Fall’s *The Beggars’ Strike* (2002) and Osammor Stella Ify’s *The Triumph of the Water Lily* (1996) as case studies, she observes two contrastive positions taken by the two female African writers. She submits that while Fall’s stand does not “clearly and fully portray women in a positive light and her attempt to counter the previous misrepresentation of women, to a large extent, re-emphasises female stereotypical portraits” (p.

260). She further submits, using the approach of Osammor that “depicting women in traditional stereotypical ways and giving voice to the various opinions and oppressions men perpetuate in society in an attempt to debunk them, can be counter-productive” (p. 260).

In all of these previous studies on the textualisation or re-textualisation of the African woman, there is the need to further investigate whether African writers vary their woman textualisation patterns depending on work-type or whether such woman textualisation patterns permeate most or all works of a particular African writer. For example, Chinua Achebe is known to have originated from the Igbo (African) tribe, and he has contributed significantly to the body of African literature with quite a number of prose-works including *Things Fall Apart*, *Arrow of God*, *No Longer at Ease*, *A Man of the People*, *Anthills of the Savannah*, etc. It will be interesting to investigate the stand of Achebe on the status and perception about women across these pieces.

Methodology

This is an analytical study that examines five different prose-works of Chinua Achebe, with a view to identifying how women are represented in the works using lexical patterning as evidence. There were three major lexical analytical procedures adopted, which include a frequency analysis of the major nouns and human pronouns in each novel to determine the most frequently projected gender and characters (male and female), analysis of identity projection patterns in terms of foregrounding and suppression, and an analysis of semantic prosodies in relation to male and female identities per novel. Each of these is further discussed below.

Frequency Analysis of Major Nouns and Pronouns

The frequency analysis of nouns involved a software-enabled counting of all cases where a particular character’s name was mentioned, while the frequency analysis of pronouns involved a

software-enabled counting of all cases where specific masculine pronouns (*he*, *him* and *his*) compared to feminine pronouns (*she* and *her*) are used per novel. The software used for the analysis was *Wordsmith Tools*, a software that was developed for lexical analyses. The aim of this type of analysis is to identify the prominent characters and their gender as indicated by the number of times their names were mentioned across novels. This is exemplified in Tables 1(a) and 1(b), using *Arrow of God* for nominal and *Things Fall Apart* for pronouns.

Table 1(a): Frequencies of Nouns in *Arrow of God*

S/N	Masculine Nouns		Feminine Nouns	
	Character s	Frequencies	Characters	Frequencies
1.	<i>Ezeulu</i>	479	<i>Ugoye</i>	39
2.	<i>Obika</i>	171	<i>Matefi</i>	36
3.	<i>Akuebue</i>	126	<i>Obiageli</i>	30
4.	<i>Edogo</i>	105	-	-
5.	<i>Nwafo</i>	199	-	-
		1,080		105

Table 1(b): Frequencies of Human Pronouns in *Things Fall Apart*

S/N	Masculine Pronouns		Feminine Pronouns	
	Items	Frequencies	Items	Frequencies
1.	<i>he</i>	1,028	<i>she</i>	319
2.	<i>his</i>	843	<i>her</i>	434
3.	<i>him</i>	272	-	-
		2,143		753

Identity Projection Patterns

Identity projection has to do with how a character has been presented by the narrator and the kind of message the narrator wants the readers to discern about such character. This can be done in three different ways. First, the narrator might present a character by mentioning his or her name directly, without any

apposition in the introductory or any sentence. This is referred to as identity foregrounding in the study. Secondly, the narrator might present a character by first mentioning his or her name and following it with an apposition (vice versa). This is referred to as reinforced identity foregrounding in the study. Thirdly, the narrator might deliberately avoid mentioning a character's name but use an apposition only in place of such names. This is referred to as identity backgrounding or identity suppression. Each of these is exemplified in Table 2.

Table 2: Character Identity Projection Patterns

Name-Only	Name with Apposition	Apposition-Only
<i>Okonkwo</i> was well known throughout the nine villages and even beyond.	<i>Ogbuefi Ezeudu, who was the oldest man in the village</i> , was telling two other men.....	So when <i>the daughter of Umuofia</i> was killed in Mbaino
No one can deny that <i>Chief Honourable M. A. Nanga M. P.</i> was the most approachable politician in the country.	<i>Chief Koko, a fat jovial man wearing an enormous home-knitted red-and-yellow sweater</i> was about to have coffee.	"They are here", answered <i>his first wife, Nwoye's mother</i> .
<i>Ojiugo</i> was looking towards the other woman's hut which was separated from theirs by the whole length of the compound.	<i>His youngest son, Nwafo</i> , now came into the Obi..	Do what you are told, <i>woman</i> .

In Name-only projection pattern as shown in Table 2, *Okonkwo*, *Chief Honourable M. A. Nanga M. P.*, and *Ojiugo*

were directly mentioned. In Name-with-Apposition projection pattern, we can see that *Ogbuefi Ezeudu* was mentioned and qualified with some appositional information *who was the oldest man in the village*; *Chief Koko* was mentioned and qualified with some appositional information, just as *Nwafo* was mentioned and modified with pre-head information *His youngest son*. For Apposition-Only projection pattern, the name of the character was hidden completely, with only their descriptions projected (e.g. *the daughter of Umuofia*, *his first wife*, *Nwoye's mother*, and *woman* respectively).

Semantic Prosodies

The term “semantic prosodies” in lexical analysis is defined as “evaluative or attitudinal and are used to express the speaker’s approval (good prosody) or disapproval (bad prosody) of whatever topic is momentarily the object of discourse” (Sinclair, 1996, p.87). Both masculine and feminine genders have some semantic associations when mentioned in contexts. Such semantic associations are usually derived from various ways which include direct metaphors (such as *Ezeulu is lion*, *Amalinze the cat*, *Hold yourself together, you are not a woman*), similes (such as *Sit like a woman*) or sharp contrast (*yam is a man’s crop*; *maize, melons and beans are women’s crops*), etc. From these direct equations and contrast of attributes, some inferences could be made: the masculine gender is often associated with strength, valour, hard work and pride; whereas the feminine gender is often associated with laziness, subservience, indeterminacy and weakness. The summary of these is that the masculine gender often has positive semantic prosodies whereas the feminine gender often has negative semantic prosodies when used in contexts. This is exemplified in Table 3, using *Anthills of the Savannah*.

Table 3: Examples of Positive and Negative Semantic Prosodies

Positive Prosodies for Men (showing strengths)	Negative Prosodies for Women (showing women as the oppressed and weak)
• That every woman wants a man to complete her is a piece of male chauvinist bullshit. • We praise a man when he slaughters a fowl so that if his hand becomes stronger tomorrow he will slaughter a goat.	• The original oppression of Woman was based on crude denigration. She caused Man to fall. So she became a scapegoat. No, not a scapegoat which might be blameless but a culprit richly deserving of whatever suffering Man chose thereafter to heap on her. • 'The women are, of course, the biggest single group of oppressed people in the world and, if we are to believe the Book of Genesis, the very oldest.

Results and Discussion

Domineering Gender across Novels

The results of frequency analysis conducted for the prominent characters in each of the five novels analysed are presented in Tables 4 and 5. The results clearly indicate that in each of the five novels, the most frequently mentioned nouns were masculine, while the feminine nouns were less frequently mentioned. For example, in *Arrow of God*, five topmost masculine nouns (Ezeulu, Obika, Akuebue, Edogo and Nwafo) are directly mentioned 1,080 times with Ezeulu topping the list, whereas for the five topmost feminine nouns (Ugoye, Matefi, Obiageli, Akueke and Ojiugo), there are only 158 direct mentions with Ugoye topping the list. In *Anthills of the Savannah*, four topmost masculine nouns (Chris, Ikem,

Emmanuel, Professor Okong and Braimoh) were directly mentioned 501 times, with Chris topping the list, whereas the topmost feminine nouns (Beatrice, Elewa and Agatha) were directly mentioned 246 times, with Beatrice topping the list. The frequency pattern permeates all novels, thus leading to a grand total of 3,015 direct mentioning of masculine nouns as against a grand total of 1,094 direct mentioning of feminine nouns across novels.

Table 4: Frequency Analysis of Nouns across Novels

Novels	Masculine Gender	Feminine Gender		
	Characters	Frequencies	Characters	Frequencies
<i>Arrow of God</i>	Ezeulu	479	Ugoye	39
	Obika	171	Matefi	36
	Akuebue	126	Obiageli	30
	Edogo	105	Akueke	30
	Nwafo	199	Ojiugo	23
Sub-Total	1,080	158		
<i>Things Fall Apart</i>	Okonkwo	297	Ezinma	102
	Obierika	85	Ekwefi	100
	Nwoye	57	Obiageli	15
	Ikemefuna	47	Chielo	25
	Unoka	28	Goddess	16
Sub-Total	514	258		
<i>Anthills of the Savannah</i>	Chris	237	Beatrice	127
	Ikem	171	Elewa	81
	Emmanuel	42	Agatha	38
	Professor Okong	17	-	-
	Braimoh	34	-	-
Sub-Total	501	246		
	Obi	489	Clara	137

No Longer at Ease	Joseph	61	Girl	59
	Christopher	44	Women	37
	Okonkwo	53	Mary	29
Sub-Total	647	262		
A Man of the People	Chief Nanga	173	Edna	82
	Max	59	Mrs. Nanga	29
	Odili	41	Elsie	59
Sub-Total	273		170	
Grand Total	3,015	1,094		

In terms of the comparative frequencies of masculine and feminine pronouns across novels, the results of analysis show that in each of the novels, the most frequently mentioned pronouns are masculine (*he, him, his*), while the feminine pronouns are less frequently mentioned (Table 5). Pronouns are lexical items used for cataphoric and anaphoric references in texts. The preponderant frequencies of masculine pronouns as against feminine pronouns further reinforce the preponderance of masculine referents compared to feminine referents across novels. In *A Man of the People* for instance, the pronouns *he, him* and *his* were mentioned in 1,325 times as against the 561 times in which the feminine pronouns *she* and *her* were mentioned. In *Arrow of God*, the masculine pronouns are mentioned in 4,003 times as against 623 times in which the feminine pronouns are mentioned. The domineering pattern of masculine pronoun referents over feminine pronoun referents is observed in all the five works analysed, thus leading to a total of 8,141 masculine pronoun referents as against 3510 feminine pronoun referents.

Table 5: Comparative Frequencies of Pronouns across works

Novels	Masculine Gender		Feminine Gender	
	Pronouns	Frequencies	Pronouns	Frequencies
<i>Arrow of God</i>	He	1,793	she	366
	His	1,592	her	257
	Him	618	-	-
Sub-Total		4,003	623	
<i>Things Fall Apart</i>	He	1,028	she	319
	His	843	her	434
	Him	272	-	-
Sub-Total		2,143	753	
<i>Anthills of the Savannah</i>	He	989	she	509
	His	972	her	520
	Him	412	-	-
Sub-Total		2,373	1,029	
<i>No Longer at Ease</i>	He	1,261	she	372
	His	730	her	272
	Him	309	-	-
Sub-Total		2,300	544	
<i>A Man of the People</i>	He	659	she	295
	His	451	her	266
	Him	215	-	-
Sub-Total		1,325	-	561
Grand Total		8,141	3,510	

Character Identity Foregrounding Versus Identity Suppression

The results of character identity projection analysis show that in each of the works analysed, there were three character identity projection styles. This has to do with how the narrator presented each character and how the narrator wanted his readers to perceive each character. Thus, there were “name-only” projection style, “name-with-apposition” projection style,

and “apposition-only” projection style identified in each work. The “name-only” projection style and the “name-with-apposition” projection styles were categorised as Identity Foregrounding styles in the study. This is because in each of them, at least the names of the characters (e.g. *Professor Reginald Okon*), then followed by an optional reinforcement through appositional information (e.g. *Professor Reginald Okon, though a buffoon*) were mentioned. The second category includes character projection styles where the names of the characters were suppressed. In such a style, the characters were projected through appositional information or descriptive expressions only. Thus, the proper names of characters have been suppressed or cut out of projection using descriptive expressions only (for example, *Nwoye’s mother, a daughter of Umuaro*). This category was referred to as character identity suppression style in the study. The identified examples of these two types of character projection are shown in Table 6.

Table 6: Character Identity Projection Patterns (Foregrounding and Suppression)

Novels	Identity Foregrounding	Identity Suppression
<i>Things Fall Apart</i>	• <u>Okonkwo</u> was well known throughout the nine villages and even beyond. • One day a neighbor called <u>Okoye</u> came in to see him.	• <u>That woman</u>, said Ezeugo, was <u>the wife of Ogbuefi Udo</u>, and he pointed to a man who sat near him with a bowed head. • “Ask <u>Akueke’s mother</u> to send us some kola” said Obierika.
<i>Arrow of</i>	• <u>Obika</u> was one of the handsomest young men in Umuaro and all the	• But <u>Ojiugo’s mother</u> said it was a lie and that Akueke was

<i>God</i>	surrounding districts. • On the way he stopped to call <u>his friend, Ofoedu</u>, who was never absent from the scene of a fight.	headstrong and proud. • But it was very likely that they would press Ibe to carry palm wine to Ezeulu and ask for <u>his wife's</u> return...
<i>Anthills of the Savannah</i>	• <u>My friend, Ikem Osodi</u>, was always at me for running that column. He said Professor Okong deserved to be hanged and quartered for phrase- • mongering and other counterfeit offences. • <u>Professor Reginald Okong</u>, though a buffoon, is a fighter of sorts and totally self-made.	• He hung up and called in <u>his new secretary</u>. As she pulled up her chair and turned to a clean page of her dictation pad the telephone came alive and she made to answer it. • Make a thorough fool of him, <u>my dear girl</u>, he thought. Ikem's concessionary silence was long and heavy. Then without another word he clanged the phone down so heavily that <u>the girl</u> jumped.
<i>No Longer at Ease</i>	• Whenever <u>Mr. Justice William Galloway, Judge of the High Court of Lagos and the Southern Cameroons</u>, looked at	• Mercifully he had recently lost <u>his mother</u>, and Clara had gone out of his life. • <u>Two young women</u>

	a victim he fixed him with his gaze as a collector fixes his insect with formalin. • In fact, some weeks ago when the trial first began, <u>Mr. Green, his boss,</u> who was one of the Crown witnesses, had also said something about a young man of great promise.	then brought in a simmering pot of stew hot from the fire.
<i>A Man of God</i>	• No one can deny that Chief <u>Honourable M. A. Nanga M. P.</u> was the most approachable politician in the country. • It is an unprecedented crowd in the annals of Anata, said <u>Mr. Nweke.</u>	• At that point <u>the beautiful girl</u> in the Minister's party turned round on her chair to look at me. • Without Knowing anything whatever about <u>that girl</u>, I feel she deserves to be somebody's first wife...

The results further showed that in most cases, masculine gender identities are predominantly foregrounded across texts, in which cases, the characters' identities were projected either by mentioning their names directly (such as *Captain Winterbottom had a setback in his recovery; Ofoedu did not seem to have fared as badly as Obika*, etc.) or projected by mentioning their names and qualifying such names with appositional information or complements (such as *Obika and his good friend, Ofoedu; This man, Ezidemili, was Nwaka's great friend and mentor*). It was further shown, however, that feminine gender identities are

predominantly suppressed, and projected in far more appositive (or descriptive) ways than direct names. Examples of these include *Don't heed what my daughter says; Then turning to his daughter, he announced; Okonkwo and his wife followed at a respectful distance; That woman standing there is my wife, I married her with my money*. In each of these cases, like many others, the identities of the women projected here were suppressed unlike what happened in the projection of the masculine gender identities. The preponderance of character identity foregrounding in favour of the masculine gender characters over the feminine gender characters contributed to the narrator's achievement of a predominantly patriarchal literary setting. It also underscores the perception of the Igbo people and some other Africans about the facelessness of the African women.

Results of Semantic Prosody Analysis for the Feminine Gender

The narrator's style of presentation of the feminine gender most often comes with some negative semantic prosodies. Prominent among the kind of negative semantic association with feminine gender in the novels are the presentation of the gender as faceless in the Igbo and African societies, women as items of properties to be owned by the masculine gender, and women as representing feebleness and inferiority. Some examples of these negative semantic associations are shown Table 7. In the excerpt below for example, the narrator's deliberate presentation of the feminine gender as faceless is easy to see:

*"Those sons of wild animals have dared to murder **a daughter of Umuofia**." He threw his head down and gnashed his teeth, and allowed a murmur of suppressed anger to sweep the crowd. When he began again, the anger on his face was gone, and in its place a sort of smile hovered, more terrible and more sinister than the anger. And in a clear*

unemotional voice he told Umuofia how **their daughter** had gone to market at Mbaino and had been killed. **That woman**, said Ezeugo, was **the wife of Ogbuefi Udo**, and he pointed to a man who sat near him with a bowed head. (Boldening for emphasis). (*Things Fall Apart*: p.9)

In the excerpt above (from *Things Fall Apart*), the narrator projects a particular woman, who had been involved in a major crisis, killed by some men of a neighbouring village. He refers to the woman on four (4) different occasions, but all the four references are by appositional information and descriptions (*a daughter of Umuofia, their daughter, that woman, and the wife of Ogbuefi Udo*). Interestingly, however, there was reference to the woman's husband only once, and the full names and identity of the husband are disclosed as *Ogbuefi Udo*. Throughout the novel, the name of the woman is hidden. Also in the same work, the narrator informed the readers that *they treated Okonkwo like a king and brought him a virgin who was given to Udo as wife, and the lad Ikemefuna*. Although both the virgin and the lad were given for the narrated atonement, the narrator projected the lad as Ikemefuna, mentioned in the novel forty-seven (47) times, but never mentioned the name of the virgin throughout the narrative. This is clearly evident of the narrator's deliberate projection of the feminine gender as faceless. There are other instances of this character projection style to depict facelessness of the feminine gender in other novels too.

There is also ample evidence of the narrator's presentation of feminine gender as a societal item to be possessed by the masculine gender. For example, in *Things Fall Apart*, the cluster *his/their/Okonkwo's wives* are mentioned 43 times, as against *her/their husband(s)*, which are only mentioned 13 times. In *Arrow of God*, the cluster *his/their/our/my wives* is repeated 22 times, as against *their/our husbands*, which is

mentioned only 3 times. In *Anthills of the Savannah*, there are 31 entries of *his/my wife* compared to the 3 entries recorded for *her husband*. The implication of these is that there are very high frequencies of such clusters as *his wife*, *their wives*, *his most senior wife*, *his third wife*, *his brother's wife*, *he has many wives*, etc. In each of these instances, the feminine gender is presented as an item possessed by another person, the masculine gender; and what is clear from this possessor-possessioned relationship is the inherence of control on the part of the masculine gender, the possessor, and subservience on the part of the possessed, the feminine gender.

Each of the works analysed also has multiple instances of the metaphorical representation of the feminine gender as feeble, compared to the masculine gender that is constantly presented as strong and brave. Some examples of these are shown in Table 7.

Table 7: Examples of Three Negative Semantic Prosodies in Relation to the Feminine Gender across Novels

Feminine Gender as Faceless	Feminine Gender as an Item for Possession	Feminine Gender as Feeble and Inconsequential
i. "Those wild animals have dared to murder a daughter of Umuofia. "	i. Right now he had five wives - the youngest a mere girl whom he married last year.	i. If any one of you prefers to be a woman, let him follow Nwoye...
ii. "Don't cry, my daughter, " said the priestess.	ii. ... he had too many other wives and children to take any special notice of me.	ii. How could he have begotten a woman for a son?
iii. 'See that you come back quickly,' she said to her daughter and her son's wife..	iii. 'That's all they care for,' he said with a solemn	iii. And let our wives bear male children.
iv. But the last group of women		iv. ... in moments of great crises when lesser men and women would

who went in to see his wives... v. ... and the-two women went to prepare another meal. vi. I remember that at that point the beautiful girl in the Minister's party turned round.. vii. The only lady there was a very beautiful lawyer who, I learnt afterwards, was engaged to Max whom she had first met at the London School of Economics.	face. 'Women, cars, landed property. iv. Her husband's wife ... v. Amikwu took the young bride and she became his wife... vi. we did not take his land or his wife... vii. We must not drink because we see our neighbours drink or run after women because our thing stands up.	make loud, empty noises. v. ... and begin to weep like a woman... vi. Are you asking me since when have I become a woman? vii. ... who had so unaccountably become soft like women. viii. The faint and distant wailing of women settled like a sediment of sorrow on the earth ix. The women were screaming outside, afraid to go in..
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Discussion

The various results of lexical analyses above show that the narrator in the five works investigated clearly shows preference for the masculine gender over the feminine gender. The results specifically show that in terms of heroism and the character at the centre of the fictional plot, none of the novels studied has any feminine gender as the leading character. The feminine characters are merely used to complement the masculine characters in the works. This clearly manifests in the varying but lop-sided frequencies of both masculine and feminine gender characters and their pronominal referents consistently in favour of the masculine characters across novels.

The results also show that the narrator adopts three character projection styles, which were “name-only”, “name-

with-apposition”, and “apposition-only”. In most cases across novels, the narrator adopts both “name-only” and “name-with-apposition” character projection styles for the masculine characters, whereas he uses the apposition-only projection style predominantly for the projection of the feminine characters. Both “name-only” and “name-with-apposition” character projection styles are termed as identity foregrounding styles, in which case the names and identities of the masculine characters are fully disclosed for the information and understanding of the readers. On the other hand, the “apposition-only” character projection style is termed identity suppression style, where the names of the characters are not disclosed but projected using mere appositional information or descriptive expressions.

The use of identity foregrounding for the masculine gender characters but identity suppression style for the projection of feminine gender characters clearly implies the narrator’s conscious action to be silent on the identities of the female characters, thus portraying them as being faceless, compared to their male counterparts, who are projected as being visible. This lop-sided character projection style is evident in all works studied, though the degree of use varies, with *Things Fall Apart* having the highest.

In terms of the kinds of meanings associated with the feminine gender as shown in lexical selections compared to the masculine gender, it is easy to infer that the feminine gender was used to have negative connotations. The three conspicuous negative semantic prosodies identified across works were the representation of the feminine gender as faceless in the society; as a social item to be possessed by the masculine gender; and, as feeble, inferior and subservient. This largely corroborates the averment of Udenweze (2009, p.2), that in Igbo land, “males are valued as the stronger and great achievers in contrast to the females, who are regarded as weak and non-achievers, and, are therefore, assigned minor roles”. The deliberate and consistent under-projection of the feminine gender characters in all works studied can be said to be a peculiar style of the narrator, and can

be claimed to be a mirror of the patriarchal Igbo society, a sociocultural practice that is prevalent in most parts of Africa.

Conclusion

The role and status of the feminine gender in a typical African society as represented in African literary works were investigated in this study, using five works of Chinua Achebe as case studies. Chinua Achebe originated from the Eastern part of Nigeria, specifically from the Igbo tribe. The Igbo sociocultural setting and practices are predominantly projected in each of the works, thus enabling the use of such works as a mirror to view the cultural practices, beliefs and perceptions of the Igbo people. Using lexical analysis that involves the comparative analysis of the masculine and feminine gender nouns and pronouns, analysis of character identity projection patterns, and analysis of comparative masculine and feminine gender semantic prosodies in terms of positive and negative semantic prosodies. It was found that the masculine characters are the predominantly projected gender across works, a clear indication that the protagonists and most frequently talked about characters in all works are the male characters. It was also found that the identities of the male characters are constantly foregrounded across novels, whereas the identities of female characters are largely suppressed.

Lastly, it was found that whereas the masculine characters have positive semantic prosodies that portray them as strong, brave, visible and domineering, the feminine characters have negative semantic prosodies that consistently portray them as faceless, social items for possession, pleasure and support; and as weak and inferior. As shown in these works of Chinua Achebe, it can be said that the Igbo tribe is essentially patriarchal, a system that indexes asymmetry of role and status in favour of the masculine gender, and a system that regimentally perceives the feminine gender as subservient, faceless, inconsequential, weak and inferior to their masculine counterpart.

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