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THE USE OF KINESICS AS A NON-VERBAL MODE IN CHIMAMANDA ADICHIE'S *PURPLE HIBISCUS*

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Introduction

Communication deals with the exchange of information through a medium. There are different types of communication, which include verbal, written and nonverbal communication. Communication in literary works does not rest alone on the verbal mode. This paper examines the use of non-verbal communication in Adichie's *Purple Hibiscus*. A number of studies have been carried out on Chimamanda Adichie's first novel, *Purple Hibiscus*, which won the 2003 Commonwealth Prize and many of them are literary (see McElhatton (2003), Obaze (2003), Oha (2007), Kehinde (2008), Chielozona (2008) and Okuyade (2009)). The linguistic studies that exist on the novel include those that examine the stylistic and pragmatic analysis of the text (see Unuabonah, 2008 and Osunbade, 2009). The aim of this paper is to explore how Adichie has effectively used kinesics to project the characters and situations in the novel.

Kinesics is one of the non-verbal means through which interactants communicate. It involves the use of body movements such as facial expressions and gestures that convey meaning. It comprises gestures, which is further comprised of illustrators, regulators, emblems, adaptors, affect displays; haptics and postures. **Illustrators** are used to accompany what is said. This may include pointing to a building when showing an addressee that particular building. **Regulators** are used to regulate what is being said in order to indicate feelings of boredom, consent, surprise. For example, frowning may indicate disgust or anger on the part of a hearer. **Emblems** are body movements, which have specific verbal equivalents in certain cultures and societies. For instance, stretching out one's hands with fingers scattered while gesticulating at an individual in Yoruba culture in Nigeria may mean cursing the person's mother, while such an act in some other culture may illustrate the act of greeting. **Adaptors** are unconscious behaviors borne out of sharp emotional arousal. This may include scratching one's body to show unease and discomfort. **Affect displays** are also unintentional facial movements. For example, a smiling face shows a happy person. **Postures** show the way one sits, stands and walks send strong meanings about a speaker's attitudes to others. **Haptics** refer to the use of touch to communicate. Touch



communicates different messages, which can be positive, playful, control or alert (Adedimeji, 2006).

Some scholars have looked at the use of non-verbal communication in literary texts. One of such scholars is Grice (1999) who studied the indices of space, time, tactility and taciturnity in Joy Kogawa's *Obasan*. Although, silence has a significant role to play in the novel, she opines that touch, space and time constitute a useful lexicon of analysis when applied to the text. She adds that non-verbal elements resonate when speech appears intrusive, redundant, inaccurate or insufficient. Korte (1997) asserts that references to body language are important in narrative literature as the interpretation of a text's body language gives the reader a useful tool to read, or misread the individual characters and the interactions between characters. She opines that nonverbal cues create a body semiotics, which is an "important signifying system in the literary text" that "contributes to the text's potential significance and effect" (Korte, 1997: 4 in Anderson, 1999).

Poyatos (2002) studied face and body of characters, the explicit and implicit paralanguage, kinesics and quasi-paralinguistic, extrasomatic and environmental sounds in the novel and asserts that in understanding a play, people depend on the sensory and intellectual relationships between performers, audience and the environment of both, in a temporal dimension. She also looked at the functions of personal and environmental silences. She opines that the stylistic, communicative and technical functions of nonverbal repertoires in the literary text enrich critical analysis and offer new perspectives in translation. Although, these studies have looked at different aspects of nonverbal communication in literary texts, the paper studies kinesics in Chimamanda Adichie's *Purple Hibiscus*.

Non-verbal Communication in *Purple Hibiscus*

Purple Hibiscus centers on fifteen year-old Kambili and her elder brother, Jaja who live under an abusive situation, both at home and in the country. Although, their father is a wealthy man who owns several factories and presents a public façade of being a moralist and humanitarian, he maltreats members of his family, even to the extent of causing his wife to have miscarriages. He alienates his father who does not embrace the Christian faith. The children obtain relief when their father allows them to spend a week at his sister's house, where there is freedom of speech. The story is set in the context of the Nigerian state where there have been military coups and lack of freedom of speech. The story also discusses religious tolerance, where Auntie Ifeoma, Kambili's aunt, accepts her father even though he is a traditionalist and where Father Amadi goes beyond his priestly duties to care for those around him.

Obaze (2003) opines that *Purple Hibiscus* mirrors the enchanting beauty and richness of Nigeria and captures 'its trauma, tragedy, desperation, resignation, and

political tribulations. He describes the book as one which 'reduces and personifies the fate of a disenfranchised nation to the *microcosm* of a dysfunctional family of the Achike's. Obaze (2003) posits that *Purple Hibiscus* elicits anger, sympathy, and curiosity at the same time, particularly in the character of Kambili's father, Eugene who fends for the public and, at the same time, maltreats members of his family. *Purple Hibiscus* also delves into the topical but controversial debate about celibacy within the Catholic Church.

Okuyade (2009) asserts that silence is used to show how the dominant group regulates the existence of the subservient group around the margins and how the subservient group attains power and agency in the subversion of the weapon of domination to negotiate their existence around the margins. Unuabonah (2008) investigates how lexical cohesive devices have been used in Chimamanda Adichie's *Purple Hibiscus*. She posits that lexical cohesive devices such as repetition, synonymy, antonymy, hyponymy, meronymy and collocation have been exploited to bring out the themes of familial and political tyranny, freedom, religious tolerance/intolerance and dysfunctional academia in the novel.

Osunbade (2009) looks at meaning generation at the explicit level in Chimamanda Adichie's *Purple Hibiscus*, using relevance theory. He reveals that the recovery of explicatures involves reference assignment, bridging, gap-filling, disambiguation, and embedding propositional contents of expressions into higher level explicatures. He demonstrates that these processes facilitate access to the author's thematic foci, character exposition, location of settings, and cohesive unity.

Discussion

A study of kinesics in Adichie's *Purple Hibiscus* reveals that kinesics has been used to supplement, reinforce and regulate verbal exchanges, indicate like/dislike for individuals, situations and ideas as well as to reveal the emotional state/personality traits of the characters. The kinetic variables in the text include gestures, haptics and postures. The discussion is presented in the following section.

(1) Gestures

Gestures are used to reveal the personality traits/emotional state of the characters. Different types of gestures have been used in the novel and these include illustrators, adaptors, regulators, affect displays and emblems. These are further explained below in relation to *Purple Hibiscus*.

(i) Illustrators

Illustrators are used in the text to reinforce verbal exchanges. They emphasise what the characters are saying and this adds meaning to their words. In the novel, Eugene is depicted as one who is expressive while talking. This can be seen in the illustrators he uses while speaking



Example: Papa stood by the hibiscuses, giving directions, one hand sunk in the pocket of his tunic while *the other pointed from item to car.* (p. 53)

Here, Eugene gives directions on where the different food items will go to. This occurs when the whole family is to travel to the village for the Christmas celebration, where he provides food for the whole village. This excerpt depicts him as one who has absolute control over members of his family.

(ii) Regulators

Regulators are used by the characters to regulate verbal exchanges. This has been used by Eugene to denote his attitude towards what he is saying. The excerpt below depicts Eugene's ruthlessness and intolerance towards members of his family.

Example 1: Papa *stared at her...* "Are you sure you wanted to stay in the car?" (p. 29)

Papa stares at his wife to show that he is dissatisfied with the latter's suggestion of not wanting to visit Father Benedict. She says this because she feels like vomiting and would not want to embarrass the whole family at the Father's house. It is sad that Eugene has no feelings for his wife's condition and takes that as a sign of disrespect for the Father.

Example 2: "They put out cigarettes on his back," Papa said, *shaking his head.* "They put out so many cigarettes on his back." (p. 42)

In this excerpt, Papa shakes his head while talking about the treatment that Ade Coker received while in prison. This shows that he is distressed over the incidence. It also shows the political tyranny that is going on in the country where there is lack of freedom of speech and political prisoners are tortured. It also shows Eugene's inconsistent nature. He is sad over the treatment of his newspaper editor, yet, he does not see anything wrong in pouring hot water over the feet of his children as a punitive mode.

Example 3: Mama's hands *flew to her chest ...* Mama *wrapped her hands around herself.* "Ewu, so he has gone to rest, ewu." (p. 190)

In this excerpt, Beatrice expresses grief over Papa-Nnukwu's death by putting her hands on her chest and wrapping her hands around herself. This reveals her pain as a

result of the tragic occurrence. However, her husband who is the son of Papa-Nnukwu shows no grief over his death simply because Papa-Nnukwu is a traditionalist.

(iii) Adaptors

Adaptors have been used by the characters to reflect their emotional state. The fear Beatrice exhibits can be seen in the use of adaptors.

Example 1: Mama was *looking down*; her hands were placed on her belly, to hold the wrapper from untying itself or to keep her bread and tea breakfast down. (p. 29)

In this excerpt, Beatrice expresses her fear at her husband's words by looking down. This reflects the distress she has towards her husband's words. It is unfortunate that the husband does not recognize this, as his word is law. This is no different from what happens in the larger society where there is lack of freedom of speech.

Example 2: She *slowly ran the cloth over a figurine*, one of its matchstick-size legs raised high in the air, before she spoke ... (p. 35)

In this excerpt, Beatrice is cleaning a figurine when she just got back from the hospital over the miscarriage caused by her husband. This has become a kind of soothing effect on her whenever there has been a crisis between her and her husband. It is not until the kids are back from Auntie Ifeoma's place that she realises that cleaning the figurine will not have a positive effect on her and her children. When she realises this, she decides to poison her husband. Another example is given below:

Example 3: Mama *fiddled with her fingers* and said nothing for a while. (p. 74)

In this example, Mama unconsciously fiddles her fingers when Auntie Ifeoma tells her that she wants Beatrice and the children to go with her to see the village masquerades. The fiddling of her fingers shows that she is fearful about Eugene's reaction towards this suggestion. It also shows that she has no authority in her family.

Papa-Nnukwu is Kambili's grandfather and Eugene's father. He is a traditionalist, and this earns him disrespect and neglect from his own son. He is, however, accepted by his daughter, Auntie Ifeoma, and loved by his grandchildren. He dies in Ifeoma's house. He is one who has accepted his fate in life and this is depicted in his non-verbal acts. An example of an adaptor used by Papa-Nnukwu is given below:

Example 4: Papa-Nnukwu *shrugged* as if to say there was a lot that was wrong but he had no choice. (p. 65)



The action documented above occurs in Papa-Nnukwu's conversation with Jaja and Kambili when Jaja asks him about his welfare. He shrugs to show that he has resigned himself to fate. He is an old man and there are certain things that are bound to happen to him because of his age. He has also resigned himself to fate because of the kind of treatment he gets from his own son, who is wealthy but does not care for him because he is a pagan. He lives in an old dilapidated house and has little to eat. The little he gets is from his daughter, Ifeoma who is not rich.

(iv) Affect Displays

Affect displays have been used by the characters to show their state of mind. Eugene is a very emotional man and he shows this by his expressions when sad events occur around him.

Example 1: He *looked sad*; his rectangular lips seemed to sag. "Coups begat coups", he said. (p. 24)

This excerpt shows Eugene's sadness over the coup that just occurred in the country. He is sad that a coup will lead to another coup, showing the insatiable nature of the military. It is ironical that Eugene feels sad over the tyrannical nature of the military government, yet he is brutal to his own family.

Example 2: Papa-Nnukwu *smiled...* "You have spoken well my son. You are my father, Ogbuefi Olioike, come back. He spoke with wisdom." (p. 66)

In this excerpt, Papa-Nnukwu smiles over Jaja's answer that he and Kambili would have drunk water if they were thirsty. Papa-Nnukwu knows that Jaja is just trying to make him feel good because the real reason for not taking water is that their father has asked them not to take anything in his house because he is a heathen.

Example 3: I reach out and place my arm around mama's shoulder and she leans towards me and *smiles*. (p. 307)

In this excerpt, we see the intimate relationship between Kambili and her mum. The smile signifies the hope and freedom that this family sees now that Jaja will be free from prison and their father is no more alive to imprison them in their own home.

(v) Emblems

Emblems have been used by the characters to replace verbal exchanges. Kambili makes use of emblems when she finds it difficult to speak. This is illustrated in the example below:

Example 1: "Where is your class?" he asked. I *pointed to the building* by the group of mango trees. (p. 45)

In this example, Kambili points to her classroom when her father asks for the location of her class. This points to the fact that Kambili was afraid to talk because she did not know her father's intention for coming to her school, considering the fact that she took the second position in her class, which he sees as a failure.

Example 2: ... Papa-Nnukwu had laughed and *pointed at the out-house...* (Pg 63)

In this excerpt, Papa-Nnukwu points to the out-house, which stands for telling her where the local bathroom is, so that Kambili can go to the toilet. This also points to the fact that Kambili and her brother scarcely visits their grandfather's house and their grandfather is not being taken care of by his son.

(2) Haptics

Touch is used to reinforce verbal exchanges. It also reveals the emotional state/personality traits of the characters. Eugene expresses his love for people by hugging and patting them. This indeed reveals him as an emotional person. An example is given below:

Example 1: "Good morning, praise God," he said, before *shaking hands with the men, hugging the women, patting the toddlers, and tugging at the babies' cheeks*. (p. 29)

In this excerpt, Eugene is seen as someone who cares for people. He is a humanitarian and he shakes men's hands, hugs women and tugs at babies' cheeks to show his care and affection for them. This depicts his social relationship with the people of his church.

Example 2: He greeted Papa-Nnukwu first, before *hugging* Aunt Ifeoma and *shaking hands* with the boys. I extended my hands so that we could shake ... "Kambili," he said *holding my hand* a little longer than the boys'. (p. 171)



This excerpt portrays Father Amadi as one who cares for his parishioners. He goes ahead to hug Auntie Ifeoma which shows that he goes beyond the conventional roles of a priest to be involved in his parishioners' lives. This action also indicates his social relationship with Auntie Ifeoma's family.

Example 3: "We'll plant new orange trees in Abba when we come back, and Jaja will plant purple hibiscuses..." I reach out and *place my arm around mama's shoulder* and she leans towards me and smiles. (pp. 306-307)

Here, Kambili's touch signifies hope, and as expressed earlier, joy at the new-found freedom occasioned by Jaja's release from prison and their father's death, which translate to the fact that they will no longer be prisoners in their own home. This touch is a reflection of what Kambili is saying to her mother.

(3) Postures

Different postures have been put up by characters to show their emotional traits and to show their like or dislike for individuals or situations around them. Kambili exhibits this in the example given below:

Example 1: *Slowly*, I turned and headed upstairs to change out of my red Sunday dress. (p.8)

In this excerpt, Kambili walks slowly to her room because she is surprised and shocked about her family's reaction over the étagère that is broken into pieces when her father throws a missal at Jaja. Mama and Jaja talk as if nothing has happened but she knows that the seeming silence will soon erupt when her father knows what to do about Jaja's defiance. This posture is a reflection on her attitude towards her family's behaviour.

Example 2: I went upstairs *slowly*. Papa was in the bathroom... (p. 193)

In this excerpt, Kambili walks slowly to her father's room because she knows that he would punish her. This non-verbal act reflects Kambili's mind towards her father's punishment. He punishes Kambili because she stayed in the same house with her grandfather who he believes is a pagan. The evidence is there for him to see when Jaja says that Papa-Nnukwu may not have wanted to be converted before his death. Eugene sees this statement as an influence from staying in the same house with a pagan.

The posture that Beatrice shows portrays her as a woman who is full of fear.

Example 3: Mama was looking down; her *hands were placed on her belly*, to hold the wrapper from untying itself or to keep her bread and tea breakfast down. (p.29)

In this excerpt, Mama puts her hands on her belly to show that she was ill at the time her husband orders her to visit Father Benedict because she might vomit anytime. She does this when her husband asks if she is sure that she would want to stay in the car. She knows that the question actually implies an order that she should not stay back in the car because it is a sign of disrespect if she does not visit the Father.

Example 4: She *walked fast*, like one who knew where she was going and what she was going to do there. (p. 71)

This excerpt describes how Auntie Ifeoma walks. She walks fast, showing that she has self-confidence in herself. This is in contrast to Beatrice whose gait is slow and shows the grief and sadness in her life.

Conclusion

Purple Hibiscus is a novel that depicts familial/political tyranny in an African state as well as religious intolerance and dysfunctional academia (Unuabonah, 2008). These themes can only be seen in the words/actions of the characters which can, consciously or unconsciously be said or carried out. Thus, when one understands the characters, one is able to see these themes and appreciate the message of the author. In this study, several aspects of kinesics have been considered in *Purple Hibiscus* and these include gestures, haptics, and postures. The analysis reveals that the functions of non-verbal communication include supplementing, reinforcing and regulating verbal exchanges, revealing emotional states/personality traits, and indicating likes/dislikes of individuals/situations/ideas. Adichie has effectively used all these non-verbal elements to project characters as well as the themes in the novel. Further studies can be carried out on other aspects of nonverbal communication in order to see how the author has used them to project her themes and characters.

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