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Appreciating transgenderism in Nigeria beyond the netizens' critiques

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Abstract

*The lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, queer, intersex, asexual, and other similar terms altogether known as LGBTQIA+ Community is being marginalised by the Nigeria law thereby almost limiting critical inquiry of this group to online critiques. This study moves beyond such discourse to explore transgenderism in Nigeria using an integrated theoretical approach. Drawing from Cameron and Kulick's (2003) *Language and Desire* and Jefferies' (2010) *Critical Stylistics*, the researchers examine the linguistic behaviours and lived experiences of transgender individuals within their socio-cultural contexts. Employing a qualitative research design, the investigators of this study conduct a textual analysis of netizens' critiques and two African novels: *The Death of Vivek Orji* (Emezi, 2020) and *When We Speak of Nothing* (Popoola, 2017). Findings reveal prevalent internalised struggles such as repression, fear, depression, and dissociative stupor, reflect in the discourses of transgender characters. Investigating the linguistic expressions and personal histories of members of this community enhances understanding and fosters emotional intelligence, a crucial 21st-century competency. This study encourages further research into the linguistic justification of related unconscious aspects of identity either of this group or other set/populace.*

Keywords: Heteronormativity, Transgenderism, Cisgender, Language and Desire, Critical Stylistics

Introduction

In recent times, human sexuality, particularly the LGBTQIA+ community, has gained significant attention. The terminology surrounding transgender identities is rapidly evolving across academia, popular culture, and literature as awareness grows. Transgenderism is an inclusive term encompassing transgender males and females, transsexualism, transvestism, and diverse gender identities beyond the binary framework. In simple terms, transgender indi-

viduals identify with a gender that is different from their assigned sex at birth. Ohiho (2023) notes that in most parts of Africa, gender roles are traditionally based on a biogenetic model that recognizes only male and female sexes.

Netizens (active online participants) ordinarily play a crucial role in shaping public discourse in Nigeria. Their critiques and discussions significantly influence societal attitudes, fostering dynamic conversations on various issues, including transgenderism. As Ohihon (2023) observes, debates on transsexuality in Nigeria have largely occurred on social media. However, scholarly intervention is necessary to deepen understanding beyond online discourse. Literary texts provide a vital space for exploring transgender narratives in Africa, particularly in Nigeria. Emezi's *The Death of Vivek Oji* and Popoola's *When We Speak of Nothing* serve as key texts in this research, offering nuanced perspectives on transgender identities and experiences beyond social media debates.

This study examines transgenders' language with the aim to reveal inmates' bottom-line linguistic expressive bearings and real-life encounters within their socio-cultural contexts thus, enabling the larger speech community to unravel the hidden customary preconceptions and unwritten canons of this in-group. Clearly, the researchers, in this study, intend to proffer answers to the following questions:

- i. In what ways do linguistic resources reveal the implicit meaning of transgenders' experiences in the examined texts?
- ii. How do the discovered meanings in the texts align with or differ from netizens' critiques?

Tracing the Scholarly Journey of Transgender Understanding

This section appraises some related works with the aim of justifying the present study in the light of existing results. The appraisal is carried out from three varied points of view: the data-based (Wacker, 2019; Nurayn, 2010), the theme-based (Dhiman, 2023), and the field-based (Bello, 2018; Bamgbose and Ladele, 2023).

Wacker (2019) focuses on *When We Speak of Nothing* as a black British bildungsroman; as such, prominent attention is given to the moral and psychological growth of the main character. Wacker's study is similar to the present investigation because it analyses the same queer Nigerian text. While the present study is aimed at revealing underlying meanings of transgender characters' behaviours and experiences within their socio-cultural contexts in the text, Wacker presents the text as a transformation novel. Connectedly, Nurayn's (2019) study of *When We Speak of Nothing* posits the concepts of sexuality and gender as determinants of identity for a transgender African in

diaspora. In fact, the novel is presented as a postcolonial diaspora text where identity emerges through a psychosocial process for the diasporic African person. Nurayn's study has a similar source of analytical tool (psychoanalysis) to the present study. Nurayn's work uses place of negotiation and self-discovery as analytical variables adopted from the psychoanalysts', Thomas Ogden's, the postcolonial theorists' and Homi Bhabha's works, while the present study uses Cameron and Kulick's psychoanalytic inclined theory, and the Language and Desire Model. Notably, Nurayn's focus is on the diasporic African character's identity negotiation and it does not include the linguistic representation of the underlying meaning of transgender personalities' behaviours and experiences in Nigeria.

Dhiman (2023) is presented as a theme-based review. The study acknowledges that the media significantly shapes public perceptions, attitudes, and understanding of various social issues. It indicates the significant change in the narrative of transgender community, from being misrepresented and marginalised to being given more visibility and positive representations. The change is posited to have yielded a more inclusive society and promoted the rights and dignity of transgender individuals. Regardless of such positive outcomes, the study admits that media coverage of transgender individuals is a dynamic and evolving landscape influenced by societal attitudes, cultural contexts, and media practices. Thus, striving for ethical and inclusive media representation is presented as an ongoing process that requires continuous improvement and accountability from media outlets. Such a position amongst others necessitates the present study.

Bello (2018) and Bamgbose and Ladele (2023) are relatable academic works in the field of Language and Gender Studies which mostly focus on limitations based on a person's sex, the female sex in particular. The studies, while concerned with the multifaceted portrayal of females equally, examine how societal norms and cultural expectations shape such identities. In addition, the studies mostly identify and attempt to deconstruct gender stereotypes, by navigating cultural and societal expectations to the quest for female empowerment, through questioning conventional gender norms like the Yoruba children's address terms of parents exposed in Bello (2018). Challenging patriarchal structures like male attitudinal excesses is examined by Bamgbose and Ladele (2023). The literatures that are reviewed in the surveyed works are similar to the present investigation in that they depict marginalisation. Markedly, the reviewed works are depicted from a feminist perspective thereby, reinforcing the present study's need to explore queer inclined marginalisation.

Theoretical Framework

This study goes for an integrated theoretical framework, using Cameron and Kulick's Language and Desire, and Jefferies' Critical Stylistics. Cameron and Kulick's (2003) Language and Desire Performance Theory of Queer Linguistics elaborates on Butler's Performativity. Language and Desire is a response to Butler's call. In terms of studies on language, gender and sexuality, Butler's call is to move away from the fixed linguistic practices, particularly identity categories, to exploring the ways linguistic codes are flexible to everyone for various purposes and to create different effects. Cameron and Kulick (2003, p. 55) clarify the misleading belief that Queer Theory is for the deviant queer. They explain that Queer Theory does not refer to homosexuality but is related to heterosexuality and heteronormativity (systems and practices that present heterosexuality as natural, obvious, desirable, privileged, and essential). To them, "The Queer Theory interrogates heterosexuality by dismissing its claims to naturalness, and examining, instead, how it is vigorously demanded and actively produced in specific sociocultural contexts and situated interactions."

Furthermore, Cameron and Kulick (2003) hypothesize that pieces of research on gay and lesbian language have basically investigated the relationship between language and sexuality in terms of sexual identity (which does not include the range of feelings, sensations, knowledge and relations that compose sexuality). They argue that concentrating solely on identity limits the range of questions one can explore in gender and sexuality studies. Such focus also leads to repetitive debates about whether an LGBTQIA+ community truly exists; who should be considered part of this community; and what counts as genuine expressions of it. Cameron and Kulick believe that identity clearly has a linguistic dimension. However, identity-based analyses in gender and sexuality studies often overlook important elements of intimacy such as fantasy, repression, fear, and the unconscious. Altogether, such elements are herein considered under the broader concept of desire which is deeply rooted in psychoanalysis.

Jefferies' (2010) Critical Stylistics is partly in response to what Jefferies sees as the limitations and imprecision inherent in literary analysis. In his conscious attempt to provide a more linguistically oriented framework, Jefferies (2010:3) argues thus: "The term "stylistics" is particularly fitting because it emphasises the framework's focus on linguistic detail, distinguishing it from other CDA approaches. This theoretical framework aims to equip readers with a clear set of analytical tools to conduct critical text analysis. Pointedly, Critical Stylistics is dedicated to teaching methods for analysing texts in a way

that explains their potential impact on readers or listeners, beyond merely acknowledging their existence.

Neither of the theories is independently sufficient to provide answers to the research questions. Clearly, some claims of the two theories have been adapted for the analysis of the present study's data. Remarkably, Cameron and Kulick's (2003) Language and Desire Model answers the question of how internal phenomena are linguistically located in texts and conversations. Connectedly, Cameron and Kulick's (2003) Language and Desire questions conventional points of view which is characterised with fixed means of doing things and of identification, contrary to one that recognises the issues within the processes of meaning-making. In terms of studies on language, gender and sexuality, Cameron and Kulick's (2003) prescribe the exploration of ways in which linguistic codes are flexible to everyone for various purposes and to create different effects. What is more, Jeffries' (2010) Critical Stylistics is needed to further interpret such identified phenomena beyond just the texts. Correspondingly, Jeffries (2010) challenges conventional constructed equivalence and contrast by suggesting that **good** is not simply the opposite of **bad** and that **adequate** is not merely equivalent to **enough**, proposing instead that these concepts can be contextually complex. Aside, Cameron and Kulick's movement from identity to culturally grounded semiotic practices that continually get re-circulated in social life and their emphasis on the argument that all linguistic codes like lexical items are resources available for anyone heterosexual or members of the LGBTQIA+ Community is similar to how Jeffries finds it crucial to remember that texts play a significant role in organising our understanding of the world, and not just of politics. Thus, **repression, neurotic symptom, dissociative stupor and the unconscious** are analytical tools that are utilised to linguistically locate underlying phenomena that indicate **desire** in texts or conversations. In addition, **Equating and Contrasting** analytical tool of Critical Stylistics is adapted to compare and contrast netizens' critiques to what is observed in the sampled texts.

Methodology

This study uses a qualitative research design to examine socio-cultural and linguistic aspects of transgenderism. Methodologies such as textual analysis, participant observation and library exploration are employed to achieve the stated research design. The researchers' deliberate attempts to observe Nigerian transgenders from each of the basic religions and ethnic groups led to a virtual observation of Bob Risky (a Muslim Yoruba trans woman) and James Brown (a Christian Igbo trans woman). Consequently, in this study, analysis is based on data gathered from major social media

platforms, specifically netizens' critiques of the Nigerian transgender celebrities, as well as data extracted from two Nigerian authored novels- Emezi's (2020) *The Death of Vivek Orji (TDOVO)* and Popoola's (2017) *When We Speak of Nothing (WWSN)*.

Data Analysis

This section depicts researchers' use of theoretical toolkits to proffer answers to the laid-down research questions.

Repression

Repression is depicted as a psychological term that refers to the unconscious process of pushing distressing thoughts or memories out of people's conscious awareness. This mechanism helps individuals avoid emotional discomfort by keeping such troubling elements hidden from their conscious mind. Remarkably, language abilities of language users actually facilitate repression. To become proficient speakers, it is essential to exercise repression, as everyday conversation not only teaches speakers the skills necessary for repression but also requires them to practice these skills. Clearly stated, both the unconscious and conscious minds are shaped through interactions. Accordingly, everyday interactions not only reinforce moral norms but also generate immoral desires that are frequently resisted and repressed. Such align with Freud's belief that "people repress, or drive from their conscious minds, shameful thoughts that then become unconscious" Billig, (2004, p. 10). Engagingly, Cameron and Kulick (2003) posit that **repudiation and disavowals** are indications of repression in language. To explore such dynamics, it is essential to focus on the absences in dialogues rather than consider just the presences. Language, therefore, serves a dual role, being inherently both expressive and repressive. The following illustrations demonstrate this duality:

Excerpt 1

- 2.3.1. Are you mad? You think I'm like your friends? Or like you? Is that why you decided to start looking like a woman, eh? Because you have been knocking men? Biko, I'm not like you. (*TDOVO*, p. 72)
- 2.3.2. I deliberately kept my mind empty, except for him, because ..., I might go mad from what I had just done. (*TDOVO*, p. 136)
- 2.3.3. I'd been trying so hard to not think about why I was trying to see Vivek. I know the reason- of course I knew- but to admit it was more than I could handle. (*TDOVO*, p. 128)

- 2.3.4. I could understand his anger- for me to come and admit that in the end I was exactly what I'd denied, it must have felt like a betrayer.... (TDOVO, p. 134)
- 2.3.5. He might have had to repress his natural sensitivity, so it's breaking out now. (TDOVO, p. 104)

Clearly, repudiation and disavowal involve a conscious and explicit denial of something, often to distance oneself from it. A person might use disavowal and repudiation as an attempt to neutralise the effects of repressed feelings, by overtly rejecting or distancing themselves from what they repress. Excerpt 1a is an outburst by Osita, the cousin of the major character, Vivek (a trans woman) in *The Death of Vivek Orji* (TDOVO). When Vivek accuses Osita of having a boyfriend instead of a girlfriend, Osita does not only deny such contradictory opinion but also flares up in anger. The contradiction is against the societal definition of an ideal and healthy relationship which expects a young man like Osita to be in a relationship with the opposite sex and not with the same sex. Similarly, 1c indicates Osita's denial of being non-conformist to societal expectations of a sexual partner. These explicit denials are indicators of Osita's repressed desire to be a transgender. Straightforwardly, 1a and 1c are expressions that help the researchers uncover the implicit meaning of what is being expressed by Osita. 1d justifies the implicit meaning in 1a and 1c by making it obvious that repudiation and denial is used by Osita to conceal the fact that he had a forbidden desire to be with Vivek sexually. Relatedly, 1b also indicates repudiation and denial; however, unlike the excerpts which are indicators of the use of repudiation and denial to hide forbidden desires, 1b is an explicit indication of Osita's attempt to repress an acceptable desire. "Mad", a word that literarily means mental disorder, is used to express how Osita will behave if he is unable to repress thoughts which try to make him feel guilty as he satisfies the forbidden desire to be with Vivek who is naturally assigned the same gender as him. 1e also exemplifies Vivek's attempt to deny his desire to be a woman.

Silence is posited as a strong tool that also indicates repression, a form of desire in language. Cameron and Kulick (2003) draw on the work of several key scholars to argue that silence is a crucial analytical tool. For instance, Billig's interpretation of Freudian repression is seen as closely related to Foucault's idea that silences are central to the strategies that shape and pervade discourses (Foucault, 1981, p. 27, cited in Kulick, 2000, p. 13). Relatedly, Butler's argument indexes how people become who they are by repeatedly rejecting and excluding certain things through language; such a process which does not just involve what people say but also signals what is left unsaid highlights the significance of silence in understanding the

indication of repression in language. **Silence** is illustrated in:

Excerpt 2

- i. Me watching him close and intervening when I could and Vivek never really telling me what was going on. (*TDOVO*, p. 25)
- ii. None of our parents noticed, maybe because he was always so controlled around them,...to them it just looked like he had quite spells. (*TDOVO*, p. 26)
- iii. The silence. Uncle T leaned into it. You couldn't always pick up words to flourish the unsayable. (*WWSO*N, p. 36)
- iv. Karl all speechless whole self sunk into the gut. (*WWSO*N, p. 10)
- v. ...When we asked him to start making sense, that's when he stopped talking. (*TDOVO*, p. 57)

Except 2a reveals how Vivek employs silence as a tool to repress disagreeable thoughts. How does he explain and make Osita understand the dissociative stupor he has just experienced? It exemplifies how transgender personalities like Vivek repress disturbing thoughts by being silent about such thoughts. 2e further clarifies the explanation. During a conversation between Mary (Osita's mother) and De Chika (Vivek's father), De Chika informs Mary that Vivek doesn't sleep anymore, that he wanders around the house, lies down on the veranda with dogs and he sometimes climbs the trees in the backyard and just stays there. 2e is Vivek's reaction when he is confronted about his strange actions. Vivek's silence in 2e illustrates his resolution to hide his disagreeable and incomprehensible thoughts from the further condemnation of the people around him. What is more, Karl, the major character in the second examined text, is not left out of this illustration (the use of silence). 2d depicts how Karl utilizes silence to repress the physical and emotional pain he feels as a result of the Wanega boys' racist attack on him and his friend, Abu. Similarly, in 2c, when Karl discovers the secret behind his separation from his biological Nigeria father, he communicates such painful discovery with silence which enables him to repress such an inexpressible feeling. Vivek's "quite spells" in 2b, depicts silence as a form of politeness which enables him to avoid expressing his hidden and socially undesirable thoughts.

Neurotic symptoms

Neurotic symptoms indicate repression of desire; however, they do so in quite a distinct way from the ones explored above. Billig (2004, p.17) says: "The thoughts or desire of having been denied access to consciousness are sometimes converted to neurotic symptoms." Neurotic Symptoms are mental

and emotional disorders that affect only part of the personality, without resulting in disturbance of the use of language. These symptoms often come by from internal conflicts, stress, or anxiety, and can manifest in various ways. Common neurotic symptoms include fear, obsessive thoughts, depression, irritability, and excessive worry. Individuals with neurotic symptoms are usually aware of their issues but may struggle to manage their emotions or behaviours effectively and this may interfere with their daily life. Thus, the observable neurotic symptoms that explicitly depict absences are presented below.

Fear

Excerpt 3

- The wall is falling down. (*TDOVO*, p. 23)
- You don't hear the rain? he said. It's so loud (*TDOVO*, p. 23)
- She laughed. It's not raining. It's raining inside me, he said
- I'm not what anyone thinks I am. I never was. I didn't have the mouth to put it into words, to say what was wrong, to change the things that I felt needed to be changed (*TDOVO*, p. 40)
- I had looked for ways to break out of it-sleeping outside, trying to tap life from other things, from the bright rambunctiousness of the dogs from the air at the top of the Plumera tree-but none of these had really made any difference. (*TDOVO*, p.119)
- I was drowning. Not quickly, not enough for panic but a slow and inexorable sinking... (*TDOVO* p.119)
- I'd heard it since secondary school; I knew what that night was supposed to make me. Less than a man-something disgusting, something weak and shameful. But if that pleasure was supposed to stop me from being a man, then fine. They could have it. I'd take the blinding light of his touch, the blessed peace of having him so close and I would stop being a man. I was never one to start with, anyway. (*TDOVO*, p.141)

Fear often reveals an individual's deepest values and aversions, exposing hidden aspects of their desires. In *The Death of Vivek Oji*, Vivek expresses fear of losing control over suppressed thoughts, specifically, his hidden inclination to dress and act like a woman. His fear stems from these desires escaping the unconscious realm into the conscious, open world. Similarly, Cameron and Kulick (2003) argue that analyzing language tied to fear unveils how societal norms and personal insecurities shape expressions of intimacy and longing.

The excerpt, “I didn’t have the mouth to put it into words,” illustrates this, emphasising that Vivek’s desire is forbidden.

Symbolism further conveys fear and internal turmoil. The term “rain” in excerpts 3b and 3c represents emotional unrest, with Vivek and Osita feeling sadness, confusion, and an overwhelming inner storm. The word “drowning” in 3f strengthens this imagery, linking to “rain” and reinforcing the overpowering nature of their sorrow. Additionally, Cameron and Kulick (2003:120) describe agoraphobia as a condition where individuals feel paralyzed by anxiety, lacking control over their emotions and actions. While Vivek does not suffer from panic attacks, he experiences a deep-seated helplessness, trapped in fear due to his nonconforming desires.

In 3e, Vivek seeks connection outside human society, attempting to find solace in nature and animals, such as dogs and Plumera trees. This illustrates his struggle for acceptance in a world that rejects his identity. Queer theorists, such as Berlant and Warner (1998, cited in Cameron and Kulick, 2003), argue that intimacy, though seemingly private, is shaped by public norms and interactions. They suggest that transgressing societal taboos is often integral to achieving intimacy. Vivek’s actions in 3g highlight this dynamic. Despite being aware of prohibitions against non-heteronormative desires, he ultimately defies these societal norms to embrace his true self.

By examining fear-driven language and symbolism in Vivek’s narrative, this study provides deeper insight into the complex interplay between desire, societal expectations, and personal identity.

Depression

Excerpt 4

- i. I felt heavy my whole life... I wanted to stay empty, like the eagle in the proverb, left to perch, my bones filled with air pockets, but heaviness found me and I couldn’t do anything about it I couldn’t shake it off. (*TDOVO*, pp. 96,97)
- ii. And dashed. Split. Nothing could hold him and he ran and ran until the cold air almost cut into his face...with all that other stuff that was tight inside his stomach. (*WWSON*, p. 23)
- iii. We just thought that maybe, if you felt like talking, it would be nice to have someone who was ready to listen. Actually listen, not like they like to say they’re listening....and they were being nicer than anyone had bothered to be in a while, so I tried to relax. (*TDOVO*, p. 121)

- iv. Everything had stopped making sense a long time ago. (*TDOVO*, p. 125)
- v. I just need to do it my way. Something for me. Just me. (*WWSN*, p. 42)

Depression is posited as a persistent feeling of sadness, hopelessness and a lack of interest or pleasure in activities that were once enjoyed. The sentential composition by Vivek in 4a is one of the expressions that enables the researchers to unveil the repressed absence, which aids the understanding of the experiences of transgender characters in the examined texts. Such reveals the internal conflict of Vivek which arises because he thrusts aside hidden thoughts which are too disagreeable to tell. The repressed subconscious thoughts indicate their presence in form of the sadness and hopelessness expressed in 4a. Karl's attempt to shut out the noise that was being produced by the internal conflict in his mind is presented in 4b. "We" in 4c refers to two sisters, Somto and Olunne, who are of the same age group as Vivek and whose mother is a friend of Vivek's mother. Vivek's mother had requested that the girls come over with the hope that their presence will improve Vivek's deteriorating physical and emotional condition; and it did. 4c justifies Billig's (2004, p.17) view that, "If a doctor were to restore a patient to health, drugs would be inefficacious. Instead, the doctor needed to discover the hidden repressed thoughts, and bring them to conscious awareness of the patient. Only then, would the symptoms desist. Talk is therefore the medium for the cure." This further justifies neurotic symptoms as being within the scope of linguistic investigations that are being done in this present study and aimed at promoting the understanding of linguistic behaviours of transgender individuals. 4d is Vivek's expression after he made out with Tobechukwu, his naturally assigned male estranged neighbour. 4d foregrounds Cameron and Kulick's (2003, pp. 113,114) argument that, sexual desire is not based on the intention and identity a person claims, but generally centred on "social semiotic of desire: a set of meaningful resources that both constrain and enable the choices that individuals make when they communicate desire." Although Tobechukwu desires a homosexual relationship, Vivek, Tobechukwu understands that his desire should not be random; his hidden desire is therefore constrained by the social semiotic of desire. "My way" and "just me" in 4e, equally reinforce the societal role in relationships, as well as indicate Karl's desire to get satisfaction regardless of being against the prohibitions and taboos.

The Unconscious

Cameron and Kulick explain Freud's opinion that human behaviours

which include verbal behaviours are determined by forces that humans have no conscious knowledge of; as such, **Dissociative Stupor** is an expression of the unconscious. During dissociative stupor, the mind goes further by shutting down or dissociating entirely from reality when faced with extreme distress. Dissociative stupor acts as a defence mechanism, helping the individual escape from unbearable emotional experiences or trauma. This is demonstrated in the following excerpts:

Excerpt 5

- 2.5.1. It's nothing. Just small-small blackouts... There were moments when he would become very, very still, just stop moving while the world continued around him. (TDOVO, pp. 24, 25)
- 2.5.2. I pushed him harder, then again, out of the room, and he just kept taking it, his mouth slightly open looking like a fucking mumu. (TDOVO, p. 37)
- 2.5.3. When he came out of the bathroom, his face was washed and he was no longer camping on Moon Fourteen, successfully avoiding the here and now. (WWSON, p. 12)
- 2.5.4. He could see it in Karl's eyes. The way they were further away than ever. The way his ears were no longer listening, as if tuned to a different station. (WWSON, p. 42)
- 2.5.5. The fugues were short absences that I became grateful for, small mercies. Like finally getting to rest after having your eyelids forced open for days. (TDOVO, p. 97)

5a and 5b indicate how Vivek dissociates entirely from the painful occurrence surrounding him. Godfrey, Karl's legal guardian, equally understands the notion being communicated by Karl's dissociative stupor in 5d; accordingly, he interprets it that "Karl would just vanish, not only pounding pavements but straddling continents without any contact, without any sort of bond left" (WWSON, p. 42). Remarkably, 5c and 5e underscore the essence of dissociative stupor as depicted by Billig's (2004, p. 26) view that "these beliefs are so shocking or painful that something stops them from making the journey, which the preconscious beliefs find quite simple. Instead of slipping into the field of awareness, they are turned aside; they are repressed." Such view aids the researcher to interpret the dissociative stupor herein as what stops the painful experiences and desires of the transgender characters from coming into their conscious awareness.

Equating and contrasting characters' insights with netizens' critiques

This subsection examines how netizens' critiques align with or depart from the reality of transgender characters in the chosen texts. According to Jefferies (2010, p. 51), equating and contrasting is concerned with how texts structure the world in terms of equivalence and opposition. Such concern may be aimed at enhancing the knowledge of existing ideologies or contradicting existing ideologies. The researchers, in this study, however, utilise the analytical tool, to enhance the understanding of the key concept of the research, transgenderism.

Jefferies (2010, p. 53) depicts appositional equivalence, relational intensive transitivity and metaphorical equivalence as triggers of equivalence. This is exemplified with X is Y; X seems Y; X became Y; X appears Y; Z made X Y; Z thinks X Y; Z cause X to be Y (Intensive relational equivalence), X,Y,(Z) (Appositional equivalence), and X is Y; the X of Y; X is like Y (Metaphorical equivalence). Relatedly, the items below serve as triggers of contrasts:

Negated opposition X not Y Home not dry
 Transitional opposition Turn X into Y Turn water into wine
 Comparative opposition More X than Y More stupid than evil
 Replacive opposition X instead of Y Gold instead of yellow
 Concessive opposition Despite X, Y Despite her anger, she danced
 Explicit oppositions X by contrast with Y Steel by contrast with water
 Parallelism He liked X. She liked Y He liked beer. She liked wine
 Contrastives X, but Y She was young, but ugly. (Jefferies, 2010, p. 55)

For clarity, this subsection is further presented in three sub categories, based on the observable themes in the data.

Equating and Contrasting Based on Religion

These excerpts concern the issue of religion with regard to transgenderism in Nigeria.

Excerpt 6

- a. Lots of people are really in satanic bondage, God is the only way out. Please pray for them instead of condemning them. They are ignorant of what they do. (You Tube. @darrennhamilton9236)
- b. "We will pray for him," my mother countered. "The forces of darkness will not triumph! No, he is not lost. He cannot be lost". (TDOVO, p. 57)

6a is a netizen's response to an online interview of Bobrisky by Biddy Mande, a renowned presenter, while 6b is Mary's response when she is informed of Vivek's unacceptable feminine looks. This excerpt uses intensive relational equivalence trigger of "x appears y" to illustrate an equivalence between "satan and darkness"; "bondage and lost"; and "pray and pray". These straight-forward triggers indicate that netizens' critiques correspond with the examined texts to insinuate that transgender individuals are ordinarily in dire need of prayers to free them from the suggested spiritual attack.

Excerpt 7

- ai. ai. Repent Repent Repent, Jesus Christ is coming now (Instagram. @romanusanunobi3147)
- a.ii. Uncle Idris [Bobrisky] repent, accept Jesus Christ in your life for the LGBT shall not enter the kingdom of God. Repent when the saints are still here. (Instagram @alphaomega2210)
- bi. Mary took Vivek to her church (*TDOVO*, p. 80)
- b.ii. She took him to the cathedral to see Father Obinna. When Vivek came out from their conversation, his forehead was wet with holy water. (*TDOVO*, p. 75)

Excerpt (b) presents the attempts of Vivek's relatives (his mum, Kavita and aunt, Mary) to seek spiritual help for him. The spiritual aid was sought with a different intention; his relatives intended to have Vivek behave in the desirable manly way, while Vivek intention was to better understand and be at peace with himself. The equivalence structure "X seems Y" equates ai and aii; thereafter, negated opposition "X not Y" is used to contrast a and b. This analysis means that the netizens' critiques of transgender do not align with the gathered pieces of information from characters in the texts. Thus, contrary to netizens' belief that transgender individuals lack faith, the examined texts reveal them as believers.

Equating and Contrasting Based on Society

Consider the following examples:

Excerpt 8

- a. Otiku ready wonti sin e ni wonmapa e gbe yin ni Abuja Mama ti lo. This interprets as, you are dead already but just haven't been buried. They will eventually kill you. Abuja Mama is dead. (Tik Tok Lite @ user-us7dw1hd1i)

- b. You don't know Nigeria. People have killed their neighbours and burned down their houses. (*TDOVO*, p.76)
- c. What could happen if someone looked closely at her [Vivek], someone holding a machete and buffeted by a mob? How quickly they could hurt her, kill her. I quickly grabbed her arm and started to drag her away. She pulled herself away with such force that she stumbled and... fell. I saw her body slump, eyes closed, blood pooling into the sand within seconds. (*TDOVO* p, 253)

Excerpt (8a) is a netizen's reaction to Bobrisky's 30th birthday celebration, while (8b) is Mary's admonition which foreshadows the harm that Vivek's feminine-inclined appearance and behaviour brings him. Altogether, Excerpt 8 uses Z made X Y intensive relational equivalence trigger. The netizen's critique in (a) connects to Mary's warning in (b) which foreshadows the tragedy in (c). In (c), the unfortunate occurrence that Osita tries to prevent, by forcefully dragging Vivek away before his female attire is noticed, eventually occurs when Vivek falls to his death. Correspondingly, the venerability of transgender individuals in Nigeria is evident.

Excerpt 9

- ai. What is the point in changing what god has created eh (crying emojis). (Tik Tok Lite @Egbalawa).
- a.ii. When will people learn to be contended with God's creation? (You Tube @molyntadavidsorucha6178)
- b. ...the title was spelled Beautiful. I liked it because it kept the beauty intact. It wasn't swallowed or killed off with an i. I wanted to be as whole as that word. (*TDOVO*, p.52)

Excerpt (9ai) and (9aai) equate on the **relational equivalence trigger** X appear Y. Thereafter, "Intact" of (9b) contrasts "changing" with the negated opposition trigger "X not Y". Such implies that, contrary to netizens' critiques that transgenderism is an attempt to change and abuse Gods' creation, Vivek considers his female-inclined personalities to be "intact" and "whole" a case of being natural. He does not welcome the idea to change due to the requirements of the society; he regards such with derogatory words like "swallowed" and "killed".

Excerpt 10

- i. Omg... So **Nigeria** has been reduced to thisit simply pathetic. Am out (walking emojis) (You Tube. @schmetterlingspuppchen6549).

- ii. He told me to go back to **London**. That there isn't any place **here** for someone like me.' (WWSON, p. 142)
- iii.it was difficult walking around and knowing that people saw me one way, knowing that they were wrong, so completely wrong, that the real me was invisible to them. It didn't even exist to them. (TDOVO p. 40).
- iv. Ahn! Kavita. You know how things are **here**. It's not safe for him to be walking around Ngwa looking that . . . feminine. (TDOVO, p. 76)

The **Replacive opposition X instead of Y** is used to create a contrast first between "London" and "Nigeria" then, between "there" and "here". Altogether, Excerpt 10 shows that despite the obvious presence of transgender personalities, the Nigerian socio-semiotic code expectedly constrains their existence.

Excerpt 11

- a.i. Stop and end this madness. He is a bad influencer to common sense and should have been in jail for constituting societal nuisance (Instagram. @richardadetule6787)
- a.ii. Bobrisky is a national disgrace. (Instagram @okoriehilary9233)
- b.i. I'd heard it since secondary school, I knew what that night was supposed to make me. Less than a man-something disgusting, something weak and shameful. (TDOVO, p. 141)
- b.ii. 'Who told you to dress as a boy? What is this?' His father was walking him to the front door, metaphorically. ..and ready for Karl to be swept out. (WWSON, p. 135)

The **Appositional equivalence structure "X,Y,(Z)"** is used to equate "he is a bad influencer", "he is a societal nuisance", and "Bobrisky is a national disgrace" of ai and aii. Thereafter, the intensive relational equivalence of "X is Y" equates a and b. Altogether, this excerpt foregrounds Nigerians' stance about homosexuality in relation to transgender individuals. Also, this equivalence underscores the value and belief of the Nigerian Society with regard to transgenderism.

Equating and Contrasting Based on Family

Excerpt 12

- a. I can't believe his parents have not yet disowned him. (You Tube @

toniawes944)

bi. I cannot accept your behaviour. (WWSO, p.135)

bii. He just doesn't want me. He is disgusted (WWSO, p. 143)

Excerpt 12 utilises the **intensive relational equivalence trigger of “x appears y”** to illustrate a comparison between “disowned” and “cannot accept” then, “doesn't want”. All these triggers illustrate an agreement between netizens' critiques and the examined texts, which is the rejection of transgender individuals by their family members.

Excerpt 13

a. I can't believe his parents have not yet disowned him. (You Tube @ toniawes944)

bi. She finally explained what she wanted: their last gesture for their dead child, their belated apology. (TDOVO, p. 244).

bii. The first time in my life I'm able to walk around and just be. No hassle, no questions. No pity or sympathy or harassment or being beaten up. Just me. You get me? Bloody fucking me. The first time. (WWSO, p. 142)

Regardless of the discovered rejection in the equivalence of Excerpt (12), the contrast herein in Excerpt (13) reveals some kind of support from certain members of the family. Excerpt (13bi) is Kavita's reaction after Vivek's friends and cousin, Osita, finally reveal Vivek's transition to a female, while (13bii) is Karl's expression of relief due to the support and acceptance he gets from most of his relatives and friends in Nigeria. The excerpt (13b) contrasts with 13a by **Negated opposition “X not Y”** “gesture” not “disowned”. Remarkably, contrary to netizens' suggestion that Nigerian family members ought to discourage transgenderism by disowning their transgender relatives, the analysis herein depicts that some Nigerian family members do care and support their relatives regardless of their transgender identity.

Conclusion

This study has evaluated the underlying nuances of the behaviours and experiences of transgender personalities within the Nigerian socio-cultural contexts, by employing Cameron and Kulick' (2003) Language and Desire to analyse the language of transgender characters in the examined texts, as well as utilising Jefferies' (2010) Critical Stylistics to compare and contrast the meanings that are discovered in the texts vis-a-vis netizens' critiques.

Amongst other findings, this work reveals that psychoanalytical

phenomena like repression, silence, fear, depression and dissociative stupor, etc. are located in and are able to be linguistically explored in real texts and conversations. In addition, this study indicates that gender transitioning is not always intentional; it, as a matter of fact, generally happens beyond the control of concerned transgender individuals. Connectedly, transgender personalities get more emotionally stable through the fulfilment of their desire for recognition and intimacy. Thus, acceptance and conversations are discovered to be effective means of ensuring that transgender individuals are emotionally stable. Importantly, this study discovers that netizens' critiques mostly conflict with the actual experiences of transgender personalities.

It is noted that the debate about the formal acceptance or outright rejection of transgenderism in Nigeria is outside the scope of this scholarly piece. Distinctly, this study examines the language of transgender personalities in a bid to reveal the underlying meaning of members' behaviours and experiences within the Nigerian society. Pointedly, this research is instrumental in offering relevant clarifications that could foster empathy in place of homophobic attacks on transgender individuals. What is more, this study is significant in utilising a distinct and productive academic approach, one which is psychoanalytically inclined to the sociolinguistic study of the relationships between language, gender and sexuality. Aside, being an ethnographic study, this work helps to proffer solutions to sociological-anticipated communal problems, in creating awareness about this in-group's norms, values, institutions, and practices.

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