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Verbal choice in the ideological construction of romance and migration in Chimamanda Adichie’s Americanah

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Abstract: A novel is a composite of ideologies about individuals, groups, events or communities. Central to the construction of ideology is a clause, which survives on the existence of a verb, which could reveal an attitude to a particular ideology. This paper focuses on Chimamanda Adichie’s choice of verbs in constructing the two ideologies of romance and migration in Americanah. While data is randomly drawn from the novel, insights from Systemic Functional Grammar are useful in revealing the functions of the verbal items in the construction of romance and migration. The focus on the verb is justified since the choice of verb will take a central place in ideological construction. Findings show that some of the verbs used in depicting the two ideologies have a direct value of the ideology depicted while others rely on their contextual significance in “conjuring up” the intended ideologies. Specifically, the verbs of romance, which are either finite or non-finite (but usually lexically extensive), reveal the phenomenon at physical and psychological levels, but there are also some verbs that have emotive value, depicting a character’s assessment of other character’s perception or judgment of a phenomenon. The verbs of migration, which are either copula or extensive, are inclined towards depicting direction, linguistic competence of immigrants, their hope, disposition and challenges in America. The study concludes that a close examination of the verbs used in constructing romance and migration in the novel is a gateway to a further understanding of the text.

Subjects: Language & Linguistics; Sociolinguistics; Literature

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1. Introduction

Every novel is a network of ideologies being a reflection of a habitable society. Those ideologies are not necessarily the inventions or creations of the writer him/herself since they are representations of societal features (Lemke 1995). However, writers often have different dispositions to them the way individuals within a real society have conflicting reactions. Novels generally comprise ideologies, presented in chapters, each of which takes care of parts or bits of different ideologies. Each of these, in turn, relies upon coherent and cohesive paragraphs. The sentence or the clause appears to be the starting point for any ideological make-up. This is so because it is at the level of the clause that we can begin to address ideational constructions.1 Granted that clauses are central to any ideological formulation in text, verbs become a prominent tool in expressing an idea. The choice of verbs could reveal an author’s attitude to a particular ideology, and it is against this background that this paper focuses on Chimamanda Adichie’s employment of verbs in Americanah.

The novel, Americanah, is built upon a number of ideologies, two of which clearly dominate the narrative: romance and migration. The plot of the novel largely deals with the love relationship between Obinze and Ifemelu in Nigeria before emigration parted the two love-birds. While Obinze emigrated to the United Kingdom, Ifemelu moved to the United States although both of them migrated at different times. This separation of residence gradually puts an end to their relationship even though its reminiscences still echoes throughout the narrative. Even though there are important activities situated in Nigeria, the major and central activities of the narrative take place in America, as the story intends to compare the behaviour of Africans in Africa and in America and Europe. In America, Ifemelu’s experience establishes human hair as an element of racial discrimination, which explains why Africans or blacks generally often try to imitate the white by applying relaxers on their hair. This phenomenon of hair racism reverberates throughout the novel. When Ifemelu prepares to look for job, she is advised to give her hair a quintessential treatment because it is an important factor to consider during employment. This paper is not interested in the entire narrative of the novel; it is rather interested in the expressions employed by Adichie in constructing some of the ideas in the novel. In what follows, we shall examine the verbal choice of the author in addressing the two ideologies of romance and migration.

Adichie’s Americanah receives the warmest reception compared to her other novels, and this realization motivated our choice of this text in our study. Studies on Adichie’s Americanah abound although majority of them are placed within a literary tradition.2 There are a few of them that have adopted a stylistic approach to examining the text.3 One thing that is common to these style-based studies is that they have, in varying degrees, concentrated on the construction of migration and identity. Specifically, Idowu-Faith (2014) focuses on hair politics and skin color discourse; Back (2016) investigates the social construction of race in the novel while Kabore’s (2016) interest is in the stylistic/aesthetic handling of migration. Indeed, Idowu-Faith and Kabore do not clearly present the role of linguistic choices in the construction of migration and identity. For instance, Kabore dwells on the choicelessness of the Africans in America as depicted in the novel, but he does not show us how this choicelessness manifests in the characters’ language use. Similarly, Idowu-Faith provides a valuable explanation of the discourse migration in the text, but fails to give an in-depth account of how language works in the novel. This gap partly provides a motivation for this study.

Back’s study is a strong move with respect to accounting for how language works in Americanah. However, his study concentrates on how nominals, such as colour, race, black and hair, contribute to the construction of migration and identity in the text. The role of verbs in this construction, therefore, is not catered for in Back’s study. This present study, in part, complements Back’s research in that it accounts for the functional role of verbs in the construction of migration and romance in the novel.

The study draws insights from systemic functional linguistics, which sees every lexical choice as contextually functional. Our argument is that the construction of the ideologies of romance and
migration in Americanah is partly dependent upon the function of the careful selection of the verbs. The basic assumption, therefore, is that it is impossible to ignore the peculiarities of verbs of romance and migration in the text in explaining or accounting for the two phenomena. We would, as much as possible, restrict our exploration of the language resources of the text to the verb, except where non-verb resources become very instrumental to our illustration, or they are prompted by verbs of related value.

2. Verbs in systemic functional grammar
The verb is central to the construction of clauses and sentences such that it assigns roles to the subject and the object of a clause as well as semantically restricting them. Identifying vagueness, redundancy and ambiguity in clauses is partly a function of the nature of verbs in them. In Chomsky’s module of grammar (otherwise referred to as Government and Binding), the verb is given a prominent role, particularly in the discussion of government, binding and bounding theories.

In Systemic Functional Grammar (SFG), language is a meaning-creating tool through the resource of wordings so that the particular choice of expression or its arrangement communicates a specific meaning. Verbs occupy an important position in SFG not only because of its indispensability in sentence constructions, but also because of its semantic influence on the choice of subject and object. They are the most varying item of word classes in that they can respond to change to signal time (past and present), number (singular and plural), person (first, second and third) and voice (active and passive). Verbs that possess these changing features are referred to as finite. There is a subset of finite verbs which may only respond to change in time but not in terms of number. This class of verbs is known as modals (Bache, 2008). This is so because the same form is used for singular and plural forms (unlike lexical verbs that have distinct forms for third person singular and plural in the present tense). The be-verb undoubtedly is the richest variety of all the verb forms in English in that it has eight forms (be, am, is, are, was, were, being, and been) and has varying forms for (first, second and third) persons. Language is a meaning-making resource and it is, therefore, difficult (if not impossible) to make reference to processes without making recourse to the use of verb. In fact, “processes are verbs”. Verbs in SFL are given discourse treatment so that their forms in language use are not as important as their functions. In discourse, verbs, particularly participial types, can perform a wide range of functions such as epithet (as in a caring mother) and classifier (as in amazing grace). Lexical items, particularly verbs and nouns, often hold “implicit assumptions and values underlying” the message of a writer. Such linguistic choices serve to operationalize ideology through legitimation, dissimulation, unification, fragmentation and reification.

An important aspect of SFG is transitivity, a phenomenon which captures the representation of “actions, events, processes of consciousness and relations”. Transitivity entirely thrives on the existence of verbs. For instance, Halliday conceives of the term, “process”, a form of transitivity, “… as anything that can be described by a verb: event, whether physical or not, state, or relation.” Thus, any ideological representation would consist of three parts: the process (expressed by the verb or verb phrase), the participants (to whom the verb or verb phrase assign roles) and the circumstance (which are typically expressed by adverbial and prepositional phrases). Thus, the kind of verb in a construction determines the semantic implication of the process type such that an extensive verb like play (as in James plays football) would signify an action while an intensive verb like seem (as in James seems injured) would only ascribe an attribute to a participant. Beyond signifying an action, an extensive also holds features of “effectiveness”, “descriptiveness”, “operativeness”, “middleness” and “receptiveness”. By effectiveness, Halliday means that the action in an extensive verb is usually directed at a goal. However, if a descriptive extensive is chosen, then the process will be a non-directed action (as in James slept in the morning), which suggests that the goal is not required. It is also possible for a verb to carry both the effective and operative feature, in which case the subject of the clause doubles as the actor (as in James plays football—where James is subject and actor at the same time). But if [descriptive] + [operative] extensive verb is chosen, then the subject would be the
Initiator of a non-directed action performed by a different participant (as in James marched the prisoners—where James is the subject/initiator and the prisoners the goal). Similarly, if [effective] + [receptive] extensive verb is chosen, then the subject dovetails to the goal (as in the plates were washed—were the plates functions as the subject and goal at the same time; Bache, 2008). But if [descriptive] + [receptive] extensive is selected, then the subject would double as the Actor of a non-directional action (as in the prisoners were marched—where the prisoners is the subject and actor at the same time). When a verb has [+effective] and [+middle] features, then the actor and the goal are the same participant (as in James injured himself—where James is the actor, and himself the goal). But when [+descriptive] and [+middle] meet in an extensive verb, then the Actor and the Initiator represent the same participant (as in the prisoners marched—where the prisoners is both the actor and the goal).

SFG, unlike many other grammatical theories, often draws on real life language use since language is a socio-human property. This fact is also buttressed by this study since the data for analysis is drawn from a life text. In other words, it is an application the language-function assumptions of the theory to a real text. Halliday is of the opinion that “the class assignment of any verb is in effect a specification of those clause features which determine its potentiality of occurrence”. This means that verbs become grouped in “into semantically related sets.”

3. The concept of ideology

Ideology, in a technical sense, is a reference to a network of ideas that define a phenomenon. Thus, ideology consists of several sub-ideas that interrelate within a holistic frame. For instance, religion is an embodiment of ideology upon which the ideas of rules, norms and taboos stand. Ethnicity, culture, and marriage are all ideologies. However, there is the possibility that an ideology can be made up of ideas from different ideologies. A cultural ideology, for instance, would embrace ideas probably from marriage, ethnicity and religion. This shows that ideology has to do with beliefs, consciousness or ideas.

According to Jon Elster, “An ideology is a set of beliefs or values that can be explained through the (non-cognitive) interest or position of some social group”. It can be consciously or unconsciously cultivated. For instance, cultural beliefs and perceptions of the world are unconsciously assimilated from the childhood until a point in adulthood when some individuals may be critical of certain beliefs and perceptions already cultivated over a period of time. In the view of Norman Fairclough, it is the constructions of reality which manifest in different dimensions and degrees of human affairs. Conceptually, ideologies are products of “relevant sociocultural values … (which are) organized by an ideological schema that represents the definition of a group”. Sometimes, they “shape the attitudes and worldviews of people, causing them to feel different from others, sometimes superior to them, and sharpen their collective sense of identity and purpose.” As such, they are subject of “social dimensions by being embedded in institutions and recognized in political discourse.”

In van Dijk’s submission, ideology is the link between “social cognition, discourse and society”. In other words, a breakthrough into the ideological formation of a text, which he calls discourse access, provides an understanding of society and its practices. In agreement with van Dijk, Fairclough is of the opinion that the grammar and structure of word in a text constitutes a discourse, and therefore part of its ideology so that any “grammatical changes and rewording” lead to the manipulation of form, meaning and style, and therefore ideological manipulation. This suggests that language choice translates to social discourse ideology. There are numerous voices in support of this notion. Ideology in text needs not be an intentional representation of existing sentiment. But, obviously, an expression of an ideology is an acknowledgement of the perceived dominant idea in society, which now makes it an ideal.

Scholars have identified different modes of operation of ideology—legitimation, dissimulation, unification, fragmentation, and reification—and identify a number of micro-linguistic (involving
single words and phrases) and macro linguistic strategies (involving a clause or more) which can be used to realise them. Such strategies include passivisation, nominalisation, and premodified participial attribute constructions. Knowles and Malmkjær appear to be comfortable of locating ideology in clausal constructions as most of the strategies indicate. Our argument is that, since the verb is central to clausal constructions, the verb becomes the bedrock of the ideology located or identified in the clause. This is why this paper concentrates on the examination of the choice of verbs in the various constructed ideologies in Americanah. By focusing on verbs, we would be able to establish how ideologies become circulated, reproduced and normalized using single or combination of the framework.

In addition, ideology can manifest in speech and writing. In other words, language is a strong tool for the manifestation or exhibition of ideology. Thus, through speech, it is possible to measure an individual’s mannerism, worldview and prejudices. In the same vein, in writing, choice of expression could be a gateway to understanding a writer’s ideology so that the manner of idea building exposes the writer’s idiosyncrasy, bias, as well as his/her position about an idea. Kathryn Wooland suggests that ideology should be systematically examined in language study. This suggestion implies that subjecting language to a critical examination is a promising method of accounting for ideology in speech or writing. In line with this suggestion, the choice of verbs in the ideological constructions of romance and migration in Adichie’s Americanah is examined. The two ideologies are central to the entire narrative such that they have an overlapping definition in the text.

4. The concept of choice in language in use
Choice is, perhaps, the most mentioned concept in stylistics; and in fact, it sums up the basic focus of any stylistic discussion. The concept of choice presupposes that there are existing alternatives in language use, and that whichever (from the alternatives) is used communicates certain significance which the unselected alternatives may not have. Style is, according to Leech and Short, a selection from “a total linguistic repertoire”. This selection or choice is believed to have been consciously or unconsciously made by the text-producer from the alternative linguistic resources available to him/her.

Insights from Transformational Generative Grammar have helped to stimulate some theoretical concerns, particularly that of choice, in stylistics. For instance, the polar between the deep and surface structures of transformational models has supported the claim that an instance of language use is a function of motivated choice from a number of alternatives—active/passive, thematized/non-thematized, statement/interrogative. Although TGG does not explain the existence of these alternatives as having functional values in a language, the insight has been very useful to stylistic theorization. As for SFG, language is not particularly examined or treated in isolation. It is discussed as social product or property as well as social practice or behaviour. In fact, it is almost impossible not to consider language as social. This is the bedrock of SFG theorization, and this claim has been very useful to stylistics. In SFG, meaning in language use is a result of appropriate choice of expression. According to Halliday,

Choosing to act, whether materially or semiotically, is typically a subconscious process. But it can always be brought into conscious attention, and reflected on. Verbs such as select, opt for may suggest deliberate choosing. Choosing to mean is as natural as choosing to be or to do; but for writers, orators and teachers – and especially for actors and for translators – it is often guided, or at least modified, by design.

This suggests that as writers choose what to write so also they choose what they mean. This choice of meaning is not only in the choice of expression, but also in the choice of organizing it. Of important relevance in the choice of expression is the choice of verbs.

Three types of choice may be identified in language use. First, a chosen language resource may be made to have part of its features lost, so that the chosen type can be described based on
this situation. In a simple language, the selected item exhibits some “formal constraints”. The second type is that a chosen item can permit the inclusion of the features of the unselected items so that it can be described as having a special freedom or exhibiting deviant features. The third type is the selection that allows a combination of certain forms, exhibiting some statistical preference. Thus, “[w]henever something is chosen, something else is not chosen; that is the meaning of choice. What is not chosen, but could have been, is the meaning of that particular instance of choice. When we ask the question ‘why did the speaker say that?’, what we want to know is why that, why not this, or the other. What difference would it have made if the speaker had chosen something else? We can consider each choice independently, pinpointing it in terms of one system at a time”.

5. Methodology

This research is a stylistic study of Adichie’s Americanah. It is, therefore, a content analytical research, drawing its data from the novel. It draws insights from Systemic Functional Grammar so that the verbal items in the construction of romance and migration and their grammo-contextual features are particularly of utmost interest to the research. The focus on the verb is justified since the study is interested in examining how romance and migration are constructed in the novel, in which case the verb is expected take a central place. The verbs for those two ideologies are identified and examined in terms of their typological features as well as their idiosyncratic functions within their context of use. The choice of Americanah, as opposed to the other novels of the author, is motivated by the global appeal of the narrative therein, which correlates the challenges of managing romantic relationship with separation (as a result of migration) of two lovers.

SFG is applied in our analysis of the verbs identified by first accounting for their grammatical features, and then later establishing their functional relevance in their context of use. This functional importance of the verbs is done within the macro-structure of the narrative of the novel. With the realization that lexical items radiate meaning with one another, the implication of the verbs analysed is done in consideration of their co-text.

6. Verbal choice and the ideological construction of Romance in Americanah

Adichie employs a network of varieties of verbs in the construction of romance ideology in Americanah. The verbs range from finite and non-finite types to physical and emotive/perceptual forms. Romance is the tool Adichie uses in wielding up several other ideologies in her novel. It, therefore, constitutes an important ideology in the text. There exists a romantic relationship between the major characters of the narrative, Ifemelu and Obinze, from the beginning through the middle of the story. Throughout the romance escapades, Adichie’s choice of verbs reflects expressions of love, hatred, jealousy and sexual affairs.

Verbs of physical actions constitute a plethora of the verbs that depict romance ideology in the text. A reference can be made to the verbs Adichie used in capturing a romantic scene that reveals Ifemelu and Obinze after their (inaugural) long chat: “They kissed, pressed their foreheads together, held hands (62)”. This sentence consists of three clauses, each of which is goal-oriented. However, while the goal is inexplicit in the first clause, They kissed . . ., it is explicit in the other two (i.e. . . . pressed their foreheads together, held hands; their foreheads and hands being the goals in the respective clauses).

They [agent] kissed [each other]goal
[theyagent] pressed their foreheads [patient] together [attribute]
[theyagent] held hands[patient]

The three finite lexical verbs in the sentence depict physical actions, each of which has an amorous implication. If the verbs are taken together with the participants in the clause/sentence, there will
not be any controversy regarding the mutuality between the initiators of the processes of kissing, pressing of the foreheads and holding of hands. In other words, the physical verbs are mutually carried out by the two characters, Ifemelu and Obinze. The employment of such physical verbs is a testimony to the theme of romance around which the narrative is woven (Fairclough 1995). Even though it was the first time the two characters are having a conversation, application of such verbs presents each of them as nursing some affection towards the other before the encounter. Otherwise, it is not likely that such physical romance activities would take place on their first meeting. Other verbs of physical actions of romance in the novel include:

(i) She began to call what they did together ceiling their warm entanglements on his bed when his mother was out, wearing only underwear, touching and kissing and sucking, hips moving in simulation. (20)

\[
\text{touching} \ [+\text{action}] \ [+\text{concrete}] \ [-\text{romance}]
\]

\[
\text{kissing} \ [+\text{action}] \ [+\text{mouth}] \ [+\text{romance}]
\]

\[
\text{sucking} \ [+\text{action}] \ [+\text{mouth}] \ [+\text{liquid}] \ [+\text{romance}]
\]

(ii) She rested her head against his … (61).

\[
\text{rested} \ [+\text{action}] \ [+\text{placement}] \ [-\text{romance}]
\]

(iii) He put an arm around her shoulder and pulled her to him gently; it was the first time their bodies had met and she felt herself stiffen (61).

\[
\text{put} \ [+\text{action}] \ [+\text{placement}] \ [-\text{romance}]
\]

\[
\text{pulled} \ [+\text{action}] \ [+\text{direction}] \ [+\text{backward}] \ [-\text{romance}]
\]

(iv) Other girls would have pretended that they had never let another boy touch them (20).

\[
\text{Touch} \ [+\text{action}] \ [+\text{concrete}] \ [-\text{romance}]
\]

The three non-finite verbs in (i) summarize three related actions that are carried out simultaneously by Ifemelu and Obinze as their way of expressing love. The “-ing” non-finiteness of the verbs reveals the simultaneity of the actions. Although the verbs demonstrate physical actions, the actions take place in a private environment, Ifemelu’s mother’s apartment. Thus, the actions are only witnessed by the participants. In (ii), the verb, rested, though a verb of physical action, does not singularly depict romance. However, the action, when considered alongside Ifemelu’s illocution and Obinze’s cooperation, is that of romance. Ifemelu places her head against Obinze’s in the spirit of love. This is why she “… felt, for the first time, what she would often feel with him: a self-affection” (61). Ifemelu’s intention to carry out the action is, therefore, borne of out of the fact she wants to put herself in the world of romance and intimacy. Immediately the romance posture is made, she begins to tell all sorts of odd things in order to prolong this ephemeral romance stance.

In (iii), the two finite lexical verbs, put and pulled, are innocent of romance; they can be used without any romantic suggestion. Nevertheless, they depict physical actions. The two verbs are examples of verb transitive locative, a kind that must take a direct object (noun phrase) and an adverbial (in the form of prepositional phrase). This allows the two actions to be placed in a parallel platform. In other words, the two actions are not just conjoin in a compound sentence. Rather, they are parallel to each other. Importantly, it is the nature of the grammatical accompaniments of the verbs (together with the verbs themselves) that captures the essence of romance here—a sort of collocational effect. By this, we mean that the character, Ifemelu, that Obinze pulls to
himself and upon whose shoulder he places his arm, and the intimacy that surrounds their relationship confer the sense of romance upon the verbs.

The finite lexical verb, touch, in (iv) also does not primarily belong to verbs of romance, a verb of physical action though. However, it lacks its primary sense in the context of use; nevertheless, a physical action. The choice of this verb chronicles women’s presentation of sexual affairs, particularly in an atmosphere of denial. The use of such verbs is simply to extend the preamble of sexual affair, foreplay (symbolically tagged “touching”), to the climax of the activity of romance. It is in this sense that the verb, as used in (iv) above, captures romance. Adichie simply echoes the verbal choice common to women when they discuss sexual affair (especially in denial) (van Dijk 1995).

There are several other verbs that also depict physical actions related to romance. Most of them have to do with sex scene: “The first time she let him take off her bra … (20)”, “She lay on her back moaning softly (20)” and “… her fingers splayed on his head (20)”. One thing that is common to the above verbs is that their agents are subtly excused from the act. For instance, the expression, “… she let him take off her bra …” can suggest Ifemelu’s bow to pressure. The phrase, “The first time”, also supports this. A similar interpretation is applicable to the second expression, “She lay on her back moaning softly”. While the actual verb that captures a sex situation is moaning, Adichie backgrounds this by presenting in a non-finite subordinate clause, making the verb in the independent clause semantically neutral of romance situation. As for the last expression, “… her fingers splayed on his head”, the real agent is [+human], Ifemelu. However, the action has been tactically passed unto one of her parts of the body, fingers, through the technique of synecdoche.

Apart from verbs of physical action, there are some verbs that have emotive value, depicting a character’s assessment of other character’s perception or judgment of a phenomenon. Sometimes, they actually depict the author’s assessment of her (fictional) character’s standpoint. In Adichie’s depiction of Obinze’s reaction towards a black American with whom Ifemelu cohabits, she presents his jealousy as hatred: “He had hated it. He had hated it so much that he Googled the black American … (19)”. Obinze is not comfortable with the companionship between them. While the verb, “hate”, captures Obinze’s emotional feeling towards the black American, Adichie’s choice of it tactically superficially makes it take a [-human] object (it). In other words, it appears as if the hatred only applies to the cohabitation between Ifemelu and Obinze. Rather, beyond that, it also affects the black American; hating his character is simply a tactical way of hating him.

Quite a number of the scenes of romance are depicted through Ifemelu’s imaginations, making the reader feel that much of the romance happens at a psychological rather than physical plane. This is made possible through the choice of the verb, imagine, which has a psychological implication as in the following:

(v) Ifemelu imagined kissing him (Odein), in a way that she imagined doing something she knew she never would. (91)
(vi) She still imagined kissing him (Odein) (92)
(vii) She imagined his mother watching them … (94).

imagine [+unreal] [+assumption] [-romance]

Each of these instances captures romance situation that never takes place. All of them represent situations that run contrary to what Ifemelu wishes to come to life. Items (v) and (vi) are Ifemelu’s imaginations of an intimacy with Odein despite her certainty that such a situation would never arise. In (vii), there is an undertone of fear; an indication that the intimate relationship between her and Obinze is shrouded in secrecy, especially from her mother.
7. Verbal choice and the ideological construction of migration in Americanah

Migration often reveals a direction. This explains the existence of immigration and emigration in the English lexis to describe “coming into” and “moving out from” a place respectively. In constructing the overriding perception of the majority of Nigerian youth about America as a dream country, Adichie employs many verbs to depict different itineraries associated with migration. One of such kinds of verbs is a copular verb. Copular verbs are chiefly employed to represent a state of things, and Adichie has employed them in that perspective in her bid to capture the psychological and physical state of beings of migrant characters in Americanah. The following expressions are instances of such:

(viii) He was newly back from England, had been in Lagos for only a week (23).
(ix) He was fluent in the knowledge of foreign things especially of American things. Everybody watched American films and exchanged faded American magazines, but he knew details about American magazines, but he knew details about American presidents from a hundred years ago. Everybody watched American shows, but he knew about Lisa Bonet leaving. (67).
(x) SHE HUNGERED to understand everything about America, to wear a new knowing skin right away: to support a team at the Super Bowl … (135).

As can be seen in (viii), the verbs, was and been, are copular verbs depicting the static feature of a character, a Chief, Nneoma’s wooer. In narrating the Chief’s societal influence, Adichie employs these verbs to showcase his ability to globe-trot as a justification of his wealth and importance. This has to be done because Nneoma seeks to encourage Obinze, who has been unemployed in Lagos for some time despite his efforts, to approach the Chief for job assistance. That the Chief was newly back from England places him in the upper class of the Nigerian society, and that should make whatever job request he makes to whatever establishment weighty. That he has been in Lagos for only a week makes him an essential commodity: he could travel anytime soon. The available window, therefore, needs to be explored.

Similarly, in the description of Obinze’s knowledge competence of America in Item (ix), the copular verb, was, is used with the adjective, fluent, to establish a high competence. This combination (was + fluent) does not give much detail about the level of competence. This is why the lexical verbs, watched and knew, are subsequently used to give support to the copular verb earlier used. Watched, in the above item, is used to denote that the knowledge most people who are yet to travel to America is a result of watching American movies or shows, or reading magazines about America. Although Obinze’s knowledge is also a result of this, he pays adequate attention to details of important American phenomena. Thus, while others watch American movies or shows for the sake of their thrilling moments, he seeks to know about the society itself as a gateway of gathering a momentum for his American dream. This is similar to what obtains in the case of Ifemelu when she gets to America as Item (x) shows except that an intransitive (rather than a copular) verb comes to play. The use of the lexical item, “hunger”, as a verb is distinctive. The verb suggests a strong will to cultivate American behaviour in terms of appearance and other peculiarities. When she mentions this to Obinze in one the mails she sends to him, he has suggested a strong reading exploration of “American books, novels, histories and biographies” (135).

There are also some lexical (extensive) verbs that point to the challenges that often bedevil new Nigerian (African) immigrants into America. Amongst them are want, find and hope. Most of such immigrants have been driven away from home by poverty (want), seek to look for a greener pasture (find) and believe this dream can be realized in America (hope). The verbs in items (xi) and (xii) chronicles this interpretation. In Items (xi)-(xii), Ifemelu wants to enroll in school in order to get accustom to the American culture, a condition she thinks will give her a passport to realising her dream of finding a job in America.

(xi) She wanted to start school to find the real America (119).
(xii) “I really hope I find a job soon (125)."
In an attempt to realise this dream, she often finds herself in masking up a fake identity as common with many (illegal) immigrants into America who have to rely on some other people's valid documents in securing employment. At a point, “Ifemelu forgot that she was someone else (130)” and she almost gives herself up in one of the interviews she intended. She repeatedly fails to get a job—as a waitress, hostess, bartender, cashier, and even nanny.

It is also common with African/Nigerian immigrants to America to find it a little bit difficult to interact with American native speakers owing to difference of lexicon, grammar, and, particularly, intonation. In accounting for this migration challenge, Adichie reveals how Cristina Tomas uses a staccato speech while interacting with Ifemelu when she reports for enrollment in an American school. Embarrassed, she complains: “I speak English” (133). This is a protest response to Tomas’ manner of addressing her. She speaks very slowly, almost stressing every syllable, afraid that Ifemelu, being a foreign student (of African origin), might find it difficult to understand a rapid speech (van Dijk 1995; Bello and Adegoke 2017). Now, Adichie, in consonance with the context of discussion, did not use “understand” (I understand English”), but rather use “speak” in order to emphasise that she has a high competence in the English. She is not only capable of understanding instructions made in English and but also making herself understood in the English.

In another instance of depicting the challenge of dialectal variation often encountered by Nigerian immigrants to America, Adichie reveals the wrong choice of word by Ifemelu while interacting with some Americans (van Dijk 1995; Bello and Adegoke 2017). The verb, bone, in Nigerian colloquial English, suggests frown, and it is in the sense that Ifemelu has used it in America:

(xi) “If you see how they laughed at me in high school when I said that somebody was boning for me. Because boning here means to have sex!” (123).

She becomes embarrassed by her use of this lexical verb of Nigerian colloquialism. The same thing happens to her when she first arrives America: “During her first year in America when she took New Jersey Transit to Penn Station, she was struck by how mostly slim white people got off at the stops in Manhattan and, as the train went further she had not thought of them as “fat” though. She had thought of them as “big” because one of the first things her friend Ginika told her was that “fat” in America was a bad word … (5)”. This suggests that before she gets acculturated in American language peculiarity, she has thought of the word, “fat”, as innocuous, and never thought of the word, “big”, as a positive synonym to it. The depiction of these situations by Adichie is simply an attempt to introduce dialectal difference—same lexical item with different semantics—as one of the challenges of Nigerian immigrants to America. This is simply to create the awareness of would-be immigrants to America that English consists of different dialects, whose variation may range from high to low.

8. Conclusion
The foregoing shows the primacy of the choice of verbs in Adichie’s Americanah, particularly in the construction of romance and migration in the narrative. We find verbs of various types constructing the romantic experiences between Ifemelu and Obinze, and highlighting the challenges of the immigrants into America. For both ideologies, some of the verbs have a direct value of the ideology depicted while numerous others rely on their contextual significance in “conjuring up” the intended ideologies. The verbs of romance, which are either finite or non-finite (but usually extensive), reveal the phenomenon at physical and psychological levels, but there are also some verbs that have emotive value, depicting a character’s assessment of or feeling towards other character’s perception or judgment of a phenomenon. There is also the use of the verb, imagine, which makes the reader feel that parts of the romance in the novel happen at a psychological rather than physical plane. The verbs of migration, which are either copula or extensive, are inclined towards depicting direction, linguistic competence of immigrants, their hope, disposition
and challenges in America. It goes without saying that Adichie’s choice of verbs is instrumental to the success of events put up together in the narrative.

We have established that the construction of the ideologies of romance and migration in Adichie’s *Americanah* are highly dependent on the choice of verbs. The verbs indicate the orientation of the (romance/migration) of participants as well as their mannerisms and idiosyncrasies. Application of numerous physical verbs contributes to the normalization of romance ideology. Also, use of “-ing” non-finite verbs in a compound clause implicates simultaneity (rather than conjunction) of actions. In the case of migration ideology, copular verbs are chiefly employed to not just movement, but to really capture the psychological and physical state of (migrant) characters in *Americanah*. The extensive verbs function in the co-creation of spelling the migration challenge of immigrants of want, and therefore, in search of hope. However, nominal constructions also appear to have mutual role in constructing those ideologies, but the delimitation of this paper has caused this to be downplayed. In the realization that lexical items contextually radiate meanings amongst themselves, future researchers might consider the role of nominals, adjectival as well as adverbial in the construction of those ideologies. Such research could provide more insights about the lexical, phrasal or clausal patterning and functions in *Americanah* in particular, with regard to the construction of those ideologies, and literary texts in general.

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Notes
1. Halliday (2014), p. 10.
2. Akingbe and Adeniyi (2017); Scarsini (2017).
3. Idowu-Faith (2014); Back (2016); Kabore (2016).
4. Alagbe and Bello (2017), p. 67.
5. Bloor and Bloor (2013), p. 26.
6. Halliday (1985), p.78.
7. Armstrong (2009), p.147.
8. Puurtinen (1998), p. 7.
9. Thompson (1990), pp. 59–67; Knowles and Malmkjær (1996), pp. 41–80.
10. Halliday (1985), p. 53.
11. Halliday (1985), p. 59.
12. Halliday (1967; 1985).
13. Halliday (1967), p. 43.
14. Halliday (1967), p. 52.
15. Elster (1982), p.123.
16. Gouldner (1976), p.23 Thompson (1990), p. 85; Friedrich (1989), pp. 306–307.
17. Aworo-Okoji and Jibrin (2017), p. 50.
18. van Dijk, 1995, p.248.
19. Rabie (2022).
20. Abuin-Vences et al. (2022).
21. van Dijk, 1995, p.244.
22. Fairclough 1995, p. 27.
23. Lemke, 1995; Stubbs 1983.
24. Hall (1999), p.397.
25. Stubbs, 1983:194.
26. Knowles and Malmkjær (1996), p. 41–80; Thompson (1990), pp. 59–67.
27. Bello and Adegoke (2019).
28. Wooland p. 236.
29. Leech and Short (1981), p. 11.
30. Bello (2020).
31. Halliday (2013), p. 17.
32. Freeman (1970), p. 1; Zwicky and Zwicky (1982), p.214.
33. Halliday (2013), pp. 25–26.

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