

Language and Identity in Adichie's *The Arrangers of Marriage*: A Sociolinguistic Approach

Lect. Afaf Sami Salih Al- Mihimdi (Ph. D)

University of Anbar, College of Education for Women, Department of English

Email: edw.sami.afaf@uoanbar.edu.iq

Asst. Lect. Hala Hamid Hasan Alqaisi

University of Anbar, College of Education for Women, Department of English

Email: hala.hamed@uoanbar.edu.iq

اللغة والهوية في قصة أديتشي "مدبرو الزواج": مقارنة لغوية اجتماعية

م. د. عفاف سامي صالح المحمدي

م. م. هالة حامد حسن القيسي

جامعة الانبار، كلية التربية للبنات، قسم اللغة الإنكليزية

Abstract

The study aims to explore the intricate relationship between language and identity in Adichie's *The Arrangers of Marriage*. Based on some major sociolinguistic theories, such as linguistic identity, code-switching, and Bourdieu's theory of linguistic capital, the study conducts a qualitative textual analysis to investigate the way in which language is used to reconstruct identity in the immigration setting and reproduce power relations between the main characters of the story. It examines the dominance of English over Igbo in the story and underlines the impact of such dominance in shaping social inequality and sense of belonging. Further, the study tackles the impact of the internal language conflict in maintaining the indigenous language and switching to a more dominant one. The study findings reveal that language is not only a medium of communication but also a symbolic power through which the imposition of a dominant language highlights loss of identity and suppression of culture. **Keywords:** Language and Identity, Sociolinguistics, Code-Switching, Linguistic Capital, Immigration

المستخلص

تهدف هذه الدراسة الى استكشاف العلاقة بين اللغة والهوية في قصة اديتشي "مدبرو الزواج". وقد اتبعت الدراسة منهجا نوعيا لتحليل النص بالاستناد الى عدد من النظريات اللغوية الاجتماعية مثل: الهوية اللغوية، التحويل اللغوي، ونظرية راس المال اللغوي، لاستكشاف الطريقة التي تستخدم بها اللغة لإعادة تشكيل الهوية في سياق الاغتراب وإعادة تكوين علاقة السطوة بين شخصيات القصة الرئيسية. يهتم البحث بدراسة هيمنة اللغة الإنجليزية على لغة الإيجبو في القصة، ويُسلط الضوء على تأثير هذه الهيمنة في تشكيل عدم المساواة الاجتماعية والإحساس بالانتماء. علاوة على ذلك، تتناول الدراسة تأثير الصراع اللغوي الداخلي في الحفاظ على اللغة الأصلية والتحول إلى لغة أكثر هيمنة. وقد أظهرت النتائج بان اللغة ليست وسيلة للتواصل فحسب، بل تمثل ايضا قوة رمزية التي من خلالها يمكن لفرض لغة مهيمنة تأكيد فقدان الهوية وقمع الثقافة. **كلمات دالة:** اللغة والهوية، علم اللغة الاجتماعي، التحويل اللغوي، راس المال اللغوي، الهجرة

1. Introduction

Language is not only a critical component in the formation of human experience or as an effective communication system, but also as a powerful identity marker of social belonging, cultural affiliation, and ideological positioning. In sociolinguistic studies, language is regarded as a dynamic process that constitutes and negotiates identity at different levels, including ethnicity, class, and gender. Such linguistic practices as the use of pronouns, the selection of words, and patterns of discourse encode minor differences between inclusion and exclusion.

This is more likely to affirm the lines between the self and the other in social interaction (Sholihah et al., 2026; Chen, 2025). Meanwhile, heritage languages provide the communities with such symbols of cultural survival that they can resist the influence of assimilation and the communities can hold on to a sense of shared identity despite the external forces (Dunmore, Rosiak, and Taylor, 2024). These dynamics are particularly evident in an even more globalized world that is characterized by mass-scale migration, where more than 280

million people are expected to migrate through multifaceted linguistic environments that would require them to adapt and maintain connections to home (United Nations, 2024). In such settings, language turns into a very fragile and powerful tool, simultaneously endangered with extinction and the cornerstone to the maintenance of cross-border identity.

Language is a conflicted site in both the context of migration and diaspora, with forces of assimilation and preservation colliding in one place. Linguistic assimilation, which is possible due to the need to use a dominant language, might result in the marginalization of the native language and disruption of cultural continuity (Amirouche, 2025). This conflict causes identity negotiation where individuals aim to balance the inherited linguistic identities and the needs of the newly formed sociocultural environment. Cultural displacement is a common feature of such a type of negotiation in which the loss or change of language can be observed as well (Bekkai, 2025). Such struggles can be vividly described using literary accounts of migration, which can be used to describe how the linguistic changes alter identity and social relations. Indicatively, the effects of imposing languages as an instrument of power have been demonstrated in colonial experiences over the years, such as in Algeria, where the French language replaced the Arabic language, resulting in deep cultural alienation (Sebbar and Dana, 2003). Similarly, diasporic narratives reveal that linguistic hybridity and silence could be adopted to manage identity dilemmas as well as resist socially dominant culture (Mostefaoui, 2025). These views show that language in migration is not neutral but is a part of power relations that are at work in the agency of the individual and experience of the collective identity.

Such convergence of language, identity and power is eloquently voiced in the literary works of Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie, whose literary works critically explore the postcolonial and immigrant reality. Through her short story *The Arrangers of Marriage*, Adichie demonstrates the lived experience of the Nigerian immigrants in the United States. She points out cultural and linguistic conflicts which accompany the process of migration (Asmarani, 2025). The novel revolves around the life of the new bride, Chinaza, who has gotten married and moved to America, but soon has to face an extremely strict demand of assimilation of the husband, Ofodile, who has recast himself as Daves. In this metamorphosis, the culture of conflict, the imbalance of power within marriage, and the imposition of language are all anticipated in this transformation. Chinaza has no choice but to drop her Igbo language and to use English as a symbol of modernity and acceptance (Mohrem, 2020). That is how language becomes a sort of control and identity oppression (Adichie, 2010). The imposition is a symptom of broader processes of postcolonialism, where the Western linguistic norms are internalized as a sign of superiority, and can be used to reinforce hierarchies within diasporic groups (Mohrem, 2020). It also shows the interaction between gendered power relations and the dominant role of language as Chinaza's voice as a wife and her social and cultural space becomes marginalized (Egbung and Akpagu, 2019). These factors render the story particularly well-suited to sociolinguistic analysis in that it summarizes the complex interaction of language, identity, and power in transnational settings.

Following the foregoing, this study addresses language and identity in *The Arrangers of Marriage* as a sociolinguistic issue. This study investigates how linguistic practices are involved in the construction of identity and the reconstruction of power relations in the immigration context. It particularly addresses how dominant languages dominate society and erase culture. The study is multi-theoretical in its approach, which combines the concept of linguistic identity, code-switching, and linguistic capital proposed by Pierre Bourdieu. It further integrates sociolinguistic views of Fishman, Ferguson, and Gumperz. Accordingly, this study explores the internal conflict in the linguistic life of the immigrants in order to demonstrate the hybridity of the immigrant experience of going back and forth between their native language and the dominant one. It demonstrates the significant role of language as an instrument of resistance and a place of struggle in the diasporic life.

1.1 Problem Statement

Although there is a growing literature on both postcolonial and immigrant discourses, there is a dearth of sociolinguistic studies that focus on language use in the short stories of Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie. Though many works have been written on the themes of culture, gender, and identity, there are few works which discussed the theme of language as a means of power and identity in her stories. In particular, there has been a lack of emphasis on the analysis of language as a vehicle of domination, in which the dominance of a certain language is used to undermine indigenous identities and maintain social inequality.

This issue has an academic and social importance. Academically, it constrains the application of sociolinguistic theories, such as linguistic capital and code-switching, to the analysis of literature. Thus, it constrains a more informed understanding of the connection between the world and discourse. It has further

social significance in reflecting the reality of immigrants and their challenges with language use that affects their identities. This omission not only facilitates a deeper understanding of immigrant struggles but also underscores the significance of language in maintaining or erasing cultural identity.

1.2 Research Objectives

This study attempts to articulate the correlation between language and identity in *The Arrangers of Marriage* from a sociolinguistic perspective. It explores how language can be used as a key instrument in the construction and reformation of the identities of characters in a diasporic setting.

Moreover, the study will examine the incorporation of power relations in linguistic decision-making, especially with the prevalence of English over native speakers' languages like Igbo. It also examines the role of these linguistic dynamics in the suppression of identity and social control in interpersonal relations. Also, the study examines how code switching contributes to identity negotiation as a strategy of identity negotiation that indicates the internal struggle of the individual who switches between his/her native and dominant languages.

1.3 Research Questions

The present research is guided by a series of targeted research questions that examine the interplay among language, identity, and power.

1. How does language construct and reflect identity in *The Arrangers of Marriage*?
2. What is the impact of using major languages on the relationships of power among characters?
3. What is the contribution of code-switching to identity negotiation and resistance/adaptation in the story?

The above questions are designed to facilitate the analysis of the sociolinguistic aspects of the story systematically.

1.4 Significance of the Study

This study is important in the sense that it contributes to various dimensions. Theoretically, it enriches the sociolinguistic studies, as it uses major concepts by scholars like Fishman and Bourdieu in the literary discourse, especially in the interpretation of language as a symbolic power. Literarily, it is more detailed and closer to Adichie as it provides a foregrounding of linguistic practices as the main meaning in the narrative, rather than secondary aspects.

Socially, the study illuminates the lived experiences of immigrants and the significance of language in empowering and marginalizing individuals. It emphasizes that there are issues connected with identity negotiation, cultural displacement, and linguistic assimilation, which is advantageous in the framework of multiculturalism and social integration.

1.5 Scope and Delimitations

The given work is confined to the analysis of a short story, *The Arrangers of Marriage*. This short story was selected as it is a representative narrative to investigate the language and identity in the context of a diaspora. The discussion is specifically linguistic (discourse patterns, language choice, and code-switching) as opposed to a comprehensive literary or thematic analysis of the narrative. Moreover, the analysis is limited to the chosen sociolinguistic frameworks, especially the sociolinguistic aspects associated with linguistic identity, code-switching, and linguistic capital in Pierre Bourdieu.

Although these frameworks offer an overall perspective on analysis, there are other perspectives that might not be within the scope of this study. Such limitations facilitate a concise and thorough investigation of the research problem within well-articulated limits.

2. Theoretical Framework

2.1 Linguistic Identity

The linguistic identity of arranged marriages is not a matter of cultural demarcation. However, it is rather a controversial matter of erasure and opposition. In the *Arrangers of Marriage*, language is used as a sort of colonial assimilation, and to elaborate how Western norms were imposed on African identity in the past (Okafor, 2021). The name of the novel is not symbolic but rather reflects the experience of diasporic life that immigrant women face, which forces them to abandon native language identities (Johnson & Cole, 2022; Onyekachi, 2020; Nnaji, 2023). This underlines the mental agony of displacement in arranged marriages (Johnson & Cole, 2022). In this respect, the linguistic identity functions as a form of survival and a locus of oppression. It reveals the power of colonial legacies in the marriage institutions.

Linguistic identity is considered a mode of resistance, which helps culture to continue even when it is under pressure. The fact that Chinaza secretly speaks Igbo and refuses to learn the linguistic standards of the

Americans proves that language is the way of keeping the past and remembering it, even when it is being erased (Nnaji, 2023). This aligns with the concepts of Homi Bhabha on the third space, where hybrid identities are constituted not as assimilation but as a compromise between cultures (Mbemba, 2022). In the diasporic settings, Nigerian immigrants are more likely to retain Igbo or Yoruba in their home environments as they refuse to be erased when navigating the hybrid identities (Nnaji, 2023). Here, this type of negotiation portrays how linguistic identity is oppressive and resilient in arranged marriages and locates language as a dynamic aspect that not only rejects cultural imperialism but also maintains diasporic voices.

2.2 Code-Switching

In *The Arrangers of Marriage*, code-switching is not a stylistic device, but an essential commentary on the historical and cultural contradictions inherent in multilingual cultures. The concept of code-switching historically has been used to refer to the use of two or more languages in the same discourse, which serves several functions, namely, communicative, identity, and cultural (Grosjean, 2012). In the story, the protagonists are schematically shifting between English and indigenous languages (Rahmadani, 2023). They use code-switching to negotiate meaning, to assert identity, and to negotiate power relations (Ferguson, 2018). Accordingly, the use of code-switching by the characters reflects the greater sociolinguistic literature that bilingual speakers use code-switching to bridge communicative gaps and to sustain relational connections (Genesee et al., 1996). It is worth mentioning that the practice of code-switching in the story is not neutral; it rather represents the colonial tradition of English as the marker of modernity and social mobility, whereas representing native languages as the bearer of cultural closeness and unity (Rahmadani, 2023). As such, the use of code-switching in the narratives exemplifies how the concept of code-switching is historically based on linguistic hierarchies and is still present in terms of identity and belonging negotiation.

However, the ambivalent consequences of code-switching can also be noticed in the story. To elaborate, the use of code-switching in the narrative enhances communication and sense of cultural identity; however, it exposes characters to linguistic insecurity and confusion, especially when switching is stigmatized or when a certain language dominates (Ferguson, 2018). For instance, the shift between English and the native language used by the protagonists reflects the challenges experienced by the bilingual children of mixed-marriage families, who often struggle with preserving proficiency across languages (Paradis et al., 2011).

Code-switching reflects the power of language and cultural heritage. According to Rahmadani (2023), code-switching demonstrates how language can inhibit or enhance language clarity. In this context, code switching is an identity-making and language-growing practice (Astuti, 2020).

2.3 Linguistic Capital in Pierre Bourdieu's (1991)

In Bourdieu's framework, linguistic capital is a key process of reproduction of inequality since it justifies dominant practices in language, while marginalizing other practices. As Agirdag (2025) shows, schools and universities glorify standardized forms of language, introducing symbolic hierarchies in those systems that are supposed to foster equity and exclusion. It can be inferred from this critical perspective that linguistic capital is not a neutral communication skill but a socially constructed resource that acts as a gatekeeping instrument to strengthen structural inequalities by privileging those who are already oriented to the prevailing norms (Grosjean, 2012). This type of reproduction of inequality highlights the importance of linguistic capital as a form of symbolic violence, which serves to influence access to opportunities and recognition in a manner that reproduces domination.

More importantly, the literature of communicative competence in bilingual children demonstrates the underestimation of the different forms of linguistic repertoires, revealing the conflict between practical and institutional acknowledgement of the linguistic practice (Genesee et al., 1996). As such, this underestimation confirms Bourdieu's statement that linguistic capital cannot be addressed beyond the social capital as a whole. This is justified by the fact that legitimacy does not depend on communicative proficiency but on conformity to the mainstream institutions (Agirdag, 2025). By giving precedence to some competencies, the institutions invalidate the other repertoires, thus supporting the practices of exclusion and perpetuation of inequality (Yokossi et al., 2022). It can be elicited from these observations that language capital is a disputed resource, one that perpetuates symbolic domination by affirming legitimacy in line with dominant standards and marginalizing diverse voices systematically.

2.4 Literature Review

The Arrangers of Marriage by Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie has been approached through a pragmatic, postcolonial, and feminist lens to a greater degree than the text seems to have been inadequately approached. The synthesis of these studies has identified their contribution as well as their

limitations in general. This is especially vivid in the context of the unexplored role of language as a sociolinguistic force in the shaping of identity and power.

Yokossi et al. (2022) adopted the theory of conversational implicature by H. P. Grice to approach the story. The study focused on the aspect of how the meaning is indirectly delivered. Their qualitative analysis shows how pragmatic ambiguity, in terms of silence, metaphor and indirectness) is effective in encoding deeper tensions in terms of cultural alienation, forced marriage and materialism. Although this methodology has effectively revealed the implicit meanings that are involved in dialogue, it is still mostly limited to micro-level linguistic interpretation. This analysis favors conversational processes over the larger processes of sociocultural interaction. Therefore, it limits its ability to illustrate how language itself can be a source of power. This is exemplified in resistance, which, although observed in the rejection of imposed linguistic changes in the protagonist, is interpreted in a pragmatic, but not sociolinguistic, manner. The study overlooked the structural implications that language dominance and hierarchy have.

In like manner, Sanesh (2024) broadens the scope of analysis by placing *The Arrangers of Marriage* and *Americanah* within the framework of the theory of diasporic identity. To this end, the study adopted the theories of Franz Fanon and Stuart Hall. The study eloquently highlights how migration pinpoints cultural dislocation. Thus, the characters abandon key markers of identity such as language, food, and names to seek assimilation. Nevertheless, the analysis considers language as one of such markers; it is viewed as a symbolic part of it rather than a dynamic system of social practice. Language is not a process that actively creates an identity crisis, but it seems to be an effect that it has. As a result, the study fails to recognize subtle forms of identity negotiation through linguistic choices, including code-switching or lexical preference. The study further did not reinforce power imbalances in the diasporic space.

Ur Rehman and Ullah (2024) adopt a postcolonial approach. The study adopted the ideas of hybridity and mimicry, suggested by Homi K. Bhabha. The data were analyzed using a close reading approach proposed by I. A. Richards. Their analysis provides a more theoretically stratified account of the experience of Chinaza, in terms of the psychological and cultural trauma of displacement and negotiation of identity in the so-called third space. The research contributes to the discussion by connecting the issue of personal identity struggles with the broader framework of cultural imperialism. However, it is still rather thematic and ideological. Although implicitly, hybridity is, in fact, a linguistic negotiation, the study does not directly address the language practices themselves. The study did not thoroughly analyze the language, leading to an abstract treatment of identity formation, since language is influenced but not critically put into question as a form of domination or resistance.

Rather, Asmarani (2025) attracts attention to the problems of intra-racial microaggression with a feminist critical perspective in *The Arrangers of Marriage*. The study identified microassaults, microinsults, and microinvalidations in the marital relationship. This identification successfully reveals the overlap between patriarchy and internalized racism. The linguistic behavior of the husband, especially his insistence on the names and speech patterns, Americanized and is the conveyor of these microaggressions. Nevertheless, the work interprets such acts mainly as gender and racial hierarchy, which is not completely involved in the sociolinguistic aspects of the study. The language is approached as a means of expression of aggression, instead of being a structured system that inherits symbolic power. Consequently, the underlying consequences of linguistic dominance, including the devaluation of indigenous languages and the accrual of linguistic capital, are under-researched.

All these studies are of great importance to understand *the Arrangers of Marriage* in terms of identity, migration, intercultural conflict, and gender. However, a close reading shows that there is a common weakness regarding the marginalization of language as an object of analytical interest. The reviewed studies recognize language as a pragmatic means, a cultural marker, or a medium of microaggression. However, none of them systematically explores the role of language as a constitutive force in the development of identity and power relations. The study mainly focused on pragmatics, feminism, and postcolonialism theories. This limits their interaction with sociolinguistic approaches.

It can be inferred from the above that the reviewed studies considered identity as a stable construct influenced by external factors, such as patriarchy and migration. The reviewed studies are considered an ongoing process that is actively negotiated by applying linguistic practices. This view ignores the fluidity of identity and the pivotal role played by discourse in constructing identity. The symbolic meaning of the resistance of the protagonist to renaming and linguistic assimilation is often identified

symbolically. However, it reflects the strategy of negotiating linguistic capital, social positioning, an aspect that has generally been overlooked in previous analyses.

Overall, even though the current literature offers many useful insights into the narrative of Adichie, it is still limited by its lack of involvement with the concept of language as one of the systems of symbolic power. This gap highlights the need to adopt a sociolinguistic approach that would incorporate the theories of linguistic identity, code-switching, and linguistic capital to provide a more holistic approach to articulate the role of language in shaping and reflecting the lived experience of diasporic subjects.

3. Methodology

The study conducts a qualitative textual analysis in order to investigate basic linguistic practices of the story's main characters, examine patterns of code switching, and explain the sociolinguistic meanings of the characters linguistic choices. Some representative extracts are chosen and analyzed in relation with the concepts of identity and linguistic dominance.

4. Analysis and Discussion

Language performs social and cultural functions that go beyond the mere daily communication. Hence, the characters' switching from the Nigerian to the American English reflects their attempts to reconstruct identity according to the Western cultural model. Furthermore, continuous linguistic correction represents practicing dominance within the marital relationship. Additionally, the story reveals immigrants as living in a state of oscillation between the desire to integrate and the fear of losing his original identity. As a result, the linguistic behavior becomes a precise indicator of the psychological and social conflict experienced by the main characters of the story. In the sections below, each of these functions will be thoroughly explained.

4.1 Imposing Identity through Language

The story demonstrates language is an essential element in the process of identity construction suggesting that the way people use a language is largely connected to their sense of self and social belonging. Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie in her story *The Arrangers of Marriage*, emphasizes the idea that abandoning the one's indigenous language is not only some thing superficial but an attempt to reconstruct his cultural identity.

Ofodile's idea which necessitates speaking properly in a specific community is not unbiased because it reflects his linguistic ideology which places American English at the top of the pyramid since judging people, in his case, is based on their linguistic patterns, and intersects with concept of linguistic discrimination which leads to the production of class hierarchies even in certain contexts that are assumed to be culturally homogeneous. The husband, literally forced his wife to use the American dialect asking her to speak English. Thus, he believes that the use of language is a crucial criterion for social discrimination in the expatriates' community itself. This indicates the husband's awareness of the impact of language accommodation in establishing social status. This is reflected in his statements in extracts (1) and (2) below:

Extract (1): **"We have to sound American."**

Extract (2): **"I'm not called Ofodile here, by the way. I go by Dave,"**

Labov (1972) proposes that people, in order to attain a higher social status, tend to adopt their linguistic patterns according to the context. However, the story shows that linguistic adaptation would be coercive or forced by others where it turns to be a demand for social acceptance instead of being a strategic choice. This is exactly expressed in the following extracts where Ofodile orders Chinaza to use the English name.

Extract (3): **"You don't understand how it works in this country. If you want to get anywhere you have to be as mainstream as possible. If not, you will be left by the roadside. You have to use your English name here."**

It is also possible that the husband pushes his wife to change her name from Chinaza into Agatha, as an act of symbolic domination when language is employed for identity reconstruction in line with the criteria of the American middle class.

Extract (4): **"When he filled out a Social Security number application for me the next day, the name he entered in bold letters was AGATHA BELL."**

As the following extract shows, Ofodile persuades his wife to use the English name despite her refusal:

Extract (5): **"You'll get used to it, baby," he said, reaching out to caress my cheek. "You'll see."**

Changing the wife's name not only carry a linguistic significance but also represents an attempt to erase cultural remarks related to the African origins. Actually, the one's name, in the sociolinguistic studies, is regarded as an indication his identity which reflects the educational and ethnic belonging. Therefore, changing the name indicates the husband's intention to reproduce himself and his wife identity according to the American cultural model, as explained in extract (6) below:

Extract (6): **“This is not like Nigeria, where you shout out to the conductor,” he said, sneering, as though he was the one who had invented the superior American system.**

He is talking about some Nigerian customs and traditions with disguise and considers success in America needs getting rid of the Nigerian language and behaviors as well.

This explores the impact of the postcolonial discourse on Ofodile's personality which makes the western culture a standard for prosperity and progress. Thus, language has become a means for imposing cultural dominance where the immigrant is forced to abandon his native language for achieving the social acceptance.

Notwithstanding, in the extracts below, Chinaza continues to use the same word 'biscuits' as an attempt to assert her native culture.

(7): **I reached out for the biscuits (cookies).**

(8) **“Okay,” I said. I no longer wanted the biscuits**

Extract (9): **“Can we buy those biscuits?” I asked. The blue packets of Burton’s Rich Tea were familiar; I did not want to eat biscuits but I wanted something familiar in the cart.**

In fact, this does not merely refer to a shape of social accommodation, but also indicates the forced assimilation when people from a specific cultural or ethnic identity are obliged to abandon their culture and language and adopt the language and social practices of the dominant individuals or groups. This will result in changing the native culture and identity as the following extracts explain:

Extract (10): **“Busy. Americans say busy, not engaged,” he said.**

Extract (11): **“Pitcher. Americans say pitcher, not jug.”**

Extract (12): **“Cookies. Americans call them cookies,” he said.**

One important point should be stressed in relation to the preference to use some words or expression rather than others. This shows that immigrants must negotiate identity through the use of language. In his speech with Chinaza, Ofodile emphasizes the importance of using the word "Attending" instead of "Consultant" impacted by the postcolonial linguistic history. This is clearly demonstrated in the extract below:

Extract (13): **“When I become an Attending, we will stop buying store brands, but for now we have to; these things may seem cheap but they add up,” he said. “When you become a Consultant?” “Yes, but it’s called an Attending here, an Attending Physician.”**

The husband's refusal of using "Consultant" stems from the idea that it refers to one of the British institutional terms inherited in Nigerian English, while "Attending" is part of the American English dominates in the United States context. This terminological shift represents a symbolic movement from the Britain linguistic center of power to the American one. Talking about 'store brands', he associates it with poverty announcing that he will stop buying store brands when becoming an 'Attending physician'. In extract (14) below taking 'the shopping carts out' and 'in the neighborhoods,' are also associated with wealth and being respectable and, therefore, belonging to another higher social identity. Therefore, in Ofodile's opinion, the customers' behavior and objects reflect their social identity:

Extract (14): **“See how they have bars so you can’t take the shopping carts out? In the good neighborhoods, they don’t have them.”**

4.2 Language as a Means of Class Distinction

In the story, mastering the American English is revealed as an indication of the characters social primacy, in contrast with the Nigerian dialects which are associated with inferiority. Ofodile seeks to get rid of any type of local language influence, striving to gain the linguistic capital that ensures him a higher position in the social hierarchy.

This, no doubts, coincides with Bourdieu statements about the linguistic marketing where a socially accepted language determines the individuals' opportunities of social promotion. This aspect is clearly demonstrated in the following exchange between Ofodile and Chinaza:

Extract (15): **“Dave?” I knew he didn’t have an English name. The invitation cards to our wedding had read Ofodile Emeka Udenwa and Chinaza Agatha Okafor.**

“The last name I use here is different, too. Americans have a hard time with Udenwa, so I changed it.

This further proposes that a speaker does not have an underlying fundamental language that is causally used in communication, rather all languages are equally fundamental based on context. Therefore, the main characters of the story experience a state of bilingualism due to their transmission from the Nigerian to the American society where language turns to be a conflict arena between two different cultures. As an example, Ofodile is used to correct Chinaza's way of pronouncing words and asking her use the American way pronouncing words and rejects her use of local African expressions as in extract () below: as in the exchange

below when he corrects his wife's speech tasking her to use ' elevator ' instead of 'lift' because the American fundamentally use the former:

Extract (16): **“It’s an elevator, not a lift. Americans say elevator.”**

Evidently, class disparity becomes distinct when considering Ofodil's evaluative attitudes towards the use of language as appeared in the following statement:

Extract (17): **“They are not like us... they don’t speak properly.”**

Ofodile constructs his speech specifically to associate himself with the American community. This behavior reveals one type of language dominance where the American dialect is given a higher social prestige over the Nigerian language. Further, it reflects the husband's internal feeling that using his original language will hinder his social integration. Thus, he tries to get rid of any linguistic evidence indicating his African origins.

4.3 Code Switching as an Act of Resistance

Notwithstanding all the pressure, Chinaza keeps using her native language in her communication with the officer and other people surrounding her. This practice of code- switching comes as an act of symbolic resistance reflecting her adherence to indigenous identity as in the following extracts where several words from her native language are frequently appeared in her speech:

Extract (18):

The officer had examined my foodstuffs as if they were spiders, her gloved fingers poking at the waterproof bags of ground egusi and dried onugbu leaves and uziza seeds, until she seized my uziza seeds.

Extract (19):

“‘The agwum,” I said, placing my handbag down on the bedroom floor.”

Even when talking with her husband, she insists on using utterances from her native language as in:

Extract (20): **Ezi okwu? All that?”**

Extract (21): **“We raise you as our own and then we find you an ezigbo di!”**

Code- switching is not only used as a means of asserting cultural identity; it is also used as tool for enhancing communication among individuals having the same cultural identity but altering between two or more different languages. The speech between Chinaza and her new neighbor provides an example of code-switching enhancing communication between immigrants:

Extract (22): **“Supri-supri, Auntie Ify called it, fast-fast. “When you come back to visit, you will be speaking supri-supri like Americans,” she had said.”**

Evidently, Chinaza's internal resistance reflects the gap between her native identity and the dominant one when she refused to use the dominant language in her everyday conversations retaining to use her native language from time to time in different situations even when talking to her husband despite his constant emphasis to use the American English. The following extracts from the story could be used as examples:

Extract (23): **“Ezi okwu?” I said, then hastily added, “Really?”**

Extract (24): **“O di mma. Okay.”**

Extract (24): **“Ezi okwu? Don’t you drink yours with milk and sugar?”**

4.4. Gender Dimension of the Linguistic Dominance

Language is used as a means of practicing dominance within the marital relationship as the husband frequently insists on correcting his wife's speech to determine the socially and linguistically appropriate format for her. When Chinaza speaks with him, Ofodile is used to interrupt her speech asking her to speak like the Americans do considering significant to attain the respect of the American people. One important point to be mentioned here is that the husband's frequent correction is not intended to improve her communication with the Americans but to impose his symbolic dominance over his wife. At this point, the husband creates a connection between the language and the social status, and use it as a means of reconstructing his wife's personality in accordance with his own point of view.

Very often, the husband employs language to assert dominance over his wife through dominating her linguistic practices. Therefore, he insists on calling her ' Agatha' instead of Chinaza as an attempt to make the woman lose her native cultural identity and replace it with another one which is, in his opinion, more acceptable in America. Also, he positions himself as having supremacy and authority that allow him to impose specific types of behavior over the heroin of the story particularly those related to her use of language. Hence, he asserts his claimed superiority through overcorrection and continuous criticism of her accent, grammar and word selection as in:

Extract (25): **“Don’t say it like that. Say it the American way.”**

Ofodile's inner rejection of Chinaza's language and culture is revealed when he orders her not to use native language or preparing Nigerian traditional meals. Here, language is used as a tool for cultural suppression. His language reflects assimilation as power—he dominates by deciding what is “right” or “acceptable.” As in: Extract (26): **“Americans don’t drink their tea with milk and sugar.”**

Extract (27) **“You should say ‘Hi’ to people here, not ‘You’re welcome ----- Everybody says hi.”**

The intersection between the gender dimension and the linguistic dominance is emphasized in Adichie's *The Arrangers of Marriage* where the husband's utilization of language indicates another type of authority related to gender dominance, specifically when correcting his wife's way of pronouncing some words. This goes beyond the mere didactic spectrum to the strong intent of practicing an act of domination seeking to control the wife's behavior and reconstruct her character according to a specific social and linguistic pattern. The patriarchal authority is clearly revealed in the husband's attempts to dominate his wife linguistic practices as in:

Extract (28): **“Boil some water for tea,” he said**

Frequently used in the husband's speech with his wife, these corrections and orders communicate disapproval, superiority, or lack of respect. This speech style is used as an attempt to control the other and often point to a relationship dynamic based on control, hierarchy, or dominance rather than mutual partnership. All these linguistic practices reflect examples of double superiority, namely- linguistic superiority and gender superiority as demonstrated in the extracts below:

Extract (29): **“We have to call your uncle and aunt to tell them we arrived safely. Just for a few minutes; it costs almost a dollar a minute to Nigeria. Dial 011 and then 234 before the number.”**

Extract (30): **when he leaned on it and said, “You should say ‘Hi’ to people here, not ‘You’re welcome.”**

From a sociolinguistic perspective, this type of behavior represents a kind of symbolic which is mentioned by Pierre Bourdieu where specific linguistic standards are imposed as the most socially accepted model to be used in specific settings.

The story reflects the woman state within the patriarchal social structure where her linguistic expressions are totally restricted and her identity is being reconstructed under the control of men. For example, Chinaza often keeps silent when engaged in a conversation with her husband to express rejection of some of his conducts. This silence reflects imbalance of power within the marital relationship when language turns to be an indication of social dominance. The wife's state of silence and confusion emphasizes her feelings of marginalization within the family and social atmosphere. Chinaza's silence highlights disagreement or differences between her internal thoughts and spoken responses. From a sociolinguistic perspective, this silence does not reflect lack of communication but it can stand as sign of symbolic suppression and losing the ability of freely expressing the one's identity.

4.5 Linguistic and Psychological Alienation

The story demonstrates that immigration leads to a state of linguistic alienation where the individual feels that his indigenous language has become a burden hindering his integration with the new community. For example, Chinaza looks confused and shy when speaking to the Americans because she afraid that her language will be seen as a sign of difference or lack of civility.

The story demonstrates that the linguistic merges does not necessarily result in complete acceptance of the dominant language since, over time, Chinaza starts to question her situation and assert her independence It might yield a hybrid unstable identity dominated and controlled by unequal power relations. Despite all his attempts to mimic the American model, Ofodile's social position appears tenuous indicating that language itself is not enough to overcome social class restrictions. This is revealed in extract (31) below:

Extract (31):

It seems that the heroin of the story suffers from alienation as a result of losing the harmony between her new language and her cultural identity. In fact, this alienation represents a direct consequence of imposing another dominant linguistic model, and also stresses that language is an essential factor in the ones' psychological balance. This clarifies why Chinaza refuses to use her new name and insists to be called Chinaza instead of Agatha as expressed in the extract below:

Extract (32): **“I never have, my English name is just something on my birth certificate. I’ve been Chinaza Oka for my whole life.”**

The reason behind this insistence to use her original name seems to be her feeling of psychological alienation when unconsciously using the name Chinaza first when talking to Nia in the following extract:

Extract (33): "Hi," she said when I went down to get the mail. "You're Dave's new wife. I've been meaning to come over and meet you. I'm Nia."

"Thanks. I'm Chinaza... Agatha."

She also secretly continues to use her native language when her husband is absent as a strategy of overcoming the state of alienation felt when communicating him, as shown in the following extract

Extract (34): "We spoke only English now; he did not know that I spoke Igbo to myself while I cooked, that I had taught Nia how to say "I'm hungry" and "See you tomorrow" in Igbo."

4. The study Findings

Adichie uses language to uncover the cultural identity crisis among the immigrants where changing the wife's name is used as an attempt to reconstruct the cultural belonging, code switching reflects a psychological conflict between two different cultures, linguistic correction is seen as a kind of the symbolic dominance, and immigration leads to the linguistic and psychological alienation. Therefore, the study finds that:

1. Language is used as a means of identity reconstruction in the context of migration.
2. The American English dialect is used as an example of dominant linguistic capital which reflects social stratification.
3. Code switching is used by the heroine as an act of asserting identity and resistance.
4. Linguistic domination intersects with gender domination.
5. Linguistic alienation leads to the psychological and cultural alienation.

7. Conclusion

Drawing on Bourdieu (1991) and Labov (1972), the study represents a sociolinguistic approach to Adichie's *The Arrangers of Marriage* through which language appears as having a significant role in constructing the human total experience specifically when talking about alienation and migration circumstances.

It is concluded that language in Adichie's *The Arrangers of Marriage* not only functions as a means of human communication but also as a symbolic power which has an essential role in reconstructing the individuals' identity and reflects social distinctions within the diasporic setting. language is related to the one's self awareness and cultural affiliation. The analysis demonstrates that the linguistic practices like renaming, linguistic corrections represent strategies in constructing social relations and re-distributing power positions among the story characters. In addition, code-switching is used as an indicator of psychological and social transformations resulting from migration. It is used as a complex strategy compiling both resistance and cultural identity, and it highlights the conflict between two different types of feelings: the affiliation to the native cultural identity and the intrusion in the dominant cultural construction. Meanwhile, code-switching can be turned into a strategy forced by a dominant power leading to maintain the character's feelings of linguistic and psychological alienation

Clearly, American English is presented in the story as the basic criterion of social acceptance and class integration while native languages and dialects are being marginalized. Hence, social stratification is reconstructed within the migration setting. Further, the analysis demonstrates that linguistic dominance is inseparable from the gender domination. This intersection plays an important role in reconstructing the heroin identity and her social and linguistic behavior. Here, language is used as a mediator for reconstructing a variety of domination strategies utilized at the same time.

To sum up, Adichie's *The Arrangers of Marriage* represents a critical literary model which reveals that language is not that neutral tool but a social practice enriched with different types of power and dominance used for reconstructing the individuals' identity and social relations. Thus, the study proves that interpreting literary texts within their sociolinguistic contexts helps the readers to reach intensive understanding of the relationship between identity construction, social class and dominance.

References

- Adichie, C. N. (2010). *The thing around your neck*. Vintage.
- Agirdag, O. (2025). Beyond prompt engineering: Prompting (l) iteracy, linguistic capital, and educational inequality. *Educational Theory*, 76(2), 206-223.

- Amirouche, N. (2025). *Between Roots and Routes: Narratives of Diaspora, Identity, and Belonging*. University of Mohamed Boudiaf – M'Sila. p. 9.
- Asmarani, R. (2025). Intra-Racial Microaggressions Experienced by the Wife in "The Arrangers of Marriage" by Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie. *Rainbow: Journal of Literature, Linguistics and Cultural Studies*, 14(1), 108–117. <https://doi.org/10.15294/rainbow.v14i1.19216>
- Asmarani, R. (2025). Intra-Racial Microaggressions Experienced by the Wife in "The Arrangers of Marriage" by Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie. *Rainbow: Journal of Literature, Linguistics and Cultural Studies*, 14(1), 108–117. <https://doi.org/10.15294/rainbow.v14i1.19216>
- Astuti, C. W. (2020). Language awareness: language use and reasons for code-switching. *LLT Journal: A Journal on Language and Language Teaching*, 23(1), 116–130.
- Bekkai, S. (2025). Fragments Against the Grain: Hybridity, Disrupted Memory, and the Postcolonial Diasporic Archive. In N. Amirouche (Ed.), *Between Roots and Routes*. p. 52.
- Bourdieu, P. (1991). *Language and symbolic power*. Harvard University Press.
- Chen, J. (2025). The expression of polyphonic city image: A perspective from the linguistic landscape of Beijing's Hutongs. *Language & Communication*, 104, 9–28. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.langcom.2025.06.001>
- Dizayi, S. (2019). Locating identity crisis in postcolonial theory: Fanon and Said. *Journal of Advanced Research in Social Sciences*, 2(1), 78–86.
- Dunmore, S., Rosiak, K., & Taylor, C. (Eds.). (2024). *New approaches to language and identity in contexts of migration and diaspora*. Routledge.
- Egbung, I. E., & Akpagu, W. Z. (2025). Cultural alienation and exploitation: The immigrant experience in Chimamanda Adichie's "Arrangers of marriage". *International Journal of Arts, Languages, Linguistics and Literary Studies*, 9(1), 1–6. <https://doi.org/10.4314/jolls.v9i1>
- Ferguson, J. K. (2018). Code-switching and multilingualism. *Oxford Bibliographies Online Datasets*.
- Genesee, F., Boivin, I., & Nicoladis, E. (1996). Talking with strangers: A study of bilingual children's communicative competence. *Applied psycholinguistics*, 17(4), 427–442. <https://10.1017/S0142716400008183>
- Genesee, F., Boivin, I., & Nicoladis, E. (1996). Talking with strangers: A study of bilingual children's communicative competence. *Applied Psycholinguistics*, 17(4), 1–23. <https://doi.org/10.1017/s0142716400008183>
- Grosjean, F. (2012). *Studying bilinguals*. Oxford University Press.
- Johnson, R., & Cole, M. (2022). Race, class, and gender in Adichie's narratives. *Journal of African Diaspora Studies*, 15(4), 311–329.
- Mbembe, A. (2022). Postcolonial identities and the politics of cultural hybridity. *Journal of Postcolonial Studies*, 14(2), 134–145.
- Labov, W. (1972). *Sociolinguistic patterns*. (Conduct and Communication, 4.) Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press.
- Mohrem, B. (2020). Examining the concept of the 'other' according to Edward W. Said. *International Journal Online of Humanities*, 6(2), 1–14. <https://doi.org/10.24113/ijohmn.v6i2.144>
- Moore, T. O. (2005). A Fanonian perspective on double consciousness. *Journal of Black Studies*, 35(6), 751–762. <https://doi.org/10.1177/0021934704264089>
- Mostefaoui, Y. Z. (2025). Memory, Voice, and Diasporic Identity in Edwidge Danticat's *The Dew Breaker* and Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie's *Americanah*. In N. Amirouche (Ed.), *Between Roots and Routes*. p. 99.
- Nnaji, E. (2023). The immigrant experience in Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie's *The Arrangers of Marriage*. *African Literary Perspectives*, 22(3), 45–63.
- Okafor, J. (2021). Linguistic imperialism and the erasure of identity in Adichie's works. *Studies in African Literature*, 19(4), 89–102.
- Onyekachi, C. (2020). Postcolonial narratives and the displacement of identity: A study of Adichie's short fiction. *Postcolonial Literature Quarterly*, 11(1), 78–92.
- Paradis, J., Genesee, F., & Crago, M. B. (2011). *Dual language development and disorders: A handbook on bilingualism and second language learning*. Paul H. Brookes Pub. Co.
- Polychroniadou, V., & Panicci, A. (2025). When cultural antagonism does not align with language bias: German immigrants in post-crisis Greece. *Ampersand*, 14, 1–12. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.amper.2024.100206>
- Rahmadani, A. (2023). Navigating multiple languages: The use and effect of code-switching in children from mixed marriage families. *Indonesian Journal of Applied Linguistics*, 13(1), 13–25. <https://doi.org/10.17509/ijal.v13i1.58252>

- Rehman, Z., Bibi, A., & Ullah, F. (2024). Cultural hybridity and the role of mimicry in *The Arrangers of Marriage* by Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie. *Al-Mahdi Research Journal (MRJ)*, 5(5), 736–746.
- Sanesh, A. (2024). Nigerian diaspora and cultural identity in Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie's *Americanah* and *The Arrangers of Marriage*. *IIS University Journal of Arts*, 13(4), 433–440.
- Sebbar, L., & Dana, C. (2003). Je ne parle pas la langue de mon père. *Confluences Méditerranée*, 45(2), 171-184.
- Sholihah, R., Bagea, A., & Agustina, E. (2026). Language, identity and ideology: A sociolinguistic analysis of discourse in multicultural societies. *International Journal of Multicultural Studies*, 12(1), 45–63.
- Sue, D. W., Capodilupo, C. M., Torino, G. C., Bucceri, J. M., Holder, A. M. B., Nadal, K. L., & Esquilin, M. (2007). Racial microaggressions in everyday life: Implications for clinical practice. *American Psychologist*, 62(4), 271–286. <https://doi.org/10.1037/0003-066X.62.4.271>
- Torino, G. C., Rivera, D. P., Capodilupo, C. M., Nadal, K. L., & Sue, D. W. (2019). *Microaggression theory: Influence and implications*. John Wiley & Sons.
- United Nations. (2024). *International Migration Report 2024*. United Nations Department of Economic and Social Affairs.
- ur Rehman, Z., & Ullah, F. (2024). Cultural Hybridity and the Role of Mimicry in *The Arrangers of Marriage* by Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie'. *Al-Mahdi Research Journal (MRJ)*, 5(5), 736-747.
- Yokossi, D. T., Datondji, A. C., & Koutchadé, I. S. (2022). *A pragmatic study of generalized and particularized implicatures in "The Arrangers of Marriage" from Adichie's The Thing Around Your Neck*. *International Journal of English Language and Linguistics Research*, 10(4), 1–18.