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(Dis)Empowering Gendered Characters In Disourse: A Sociolinguistic Study of Daniel Mengara's *Mema (2003)*

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Abstract

This paper seeks to gain a full insight into how the phenomenon of power game- empowering and disempowering gendered characters- is discursively enacted in Daniel Mengara's *Mema* (2003) from a sociolinguistic perspective. It takes the view that language and context co-constitute each other; i.e. language contextualizes and is in turn contextualized. This implies that an individual's language would naturally vary along with the context of use. It follows from this de facto to argue that there is no such thing called an absolute powerful/powerless person, sex/gender or social group in social life, given that it is the role that a person, a sex/gender or a social group takes on or is assigned in a given context that exudes if s/he/it truly holds or exercises social power or not. The study draws on Norman Fairclough's and van Dijk's notions of power and Michael A. K. Halliday's concept of register combined with qualitative approach to explore in four selected discourses from the novel how gendered characters and their relations of power are discursively represented. The findings reveal that Mema is surprisingly empowered at the expense of her male counterparts (Pepa and the male speaker) D1, Akoma is positioned as powerful also at the expense of her husband, Nkulanveng, in D2, but Nkulanveng, the male elder from Biloghe's village and Old Meleng are all discursively empowered respectively in D3 and D4.

Keywords: Context; Discourse; Gendered character; Language; Power game.

1. Introduction and Literature Review

Recent empirical research works (Allagbé and Allagbé, 2015; Allagbé and Amoussou, 2018; Capo-Chichi *et al.*, 2016; Gbaguidi and Allagbé, 2018) have directly or indirectly underpinned how power swings pendulously along gender lines in Daniel Mengara's *Mema* (2003). Allagbé and Allagbé (2015), for instance, has revealed how the female gender power is enforced in *Mema* by means of linguistic subversion, on the one hand, and the subversion of role assignment; i.e. the deconstruction of traditional gender roles, in the social world of the novel, on the other. In a much similar way, Capo-Chichi *et al.* (2016) have attempted to gain an insight into the strategies and stratagems (*witchcraft, mutual aid and self-help, motherhood and wifehood, sisterhood and dialogue)* women in the fiction draw on to undermine the workings of/in this supposed patriarchal culture. The study actually displays how the social world of the novel provides women with the enabling power to disarticulate male dominance and power buttressed by patriarchy or systemic institutionalized sexism (Koussouhon *et al.*, 2015b) or/and androcentrism (Coates 1986:15 cited in (Simpson, 1993).

Again, Gbaguidi and Allagbé (2018) has provided some hints on the ideologies (*liberal and radial feminisms*) that pervade, embody and characterize most of (not to say all) the female characters in the fictional world of the novel. They submit somewhere in the paper that the women in this literary piece shift from a liberal feminism to a radical one to advocate their rights. However, it should be noted that these women move from a liberal feminism to a radical one as a result of male oppression encoded in linguistic forms which are socially and contextually embedded and naturalized. Ascertaining that the reproduction of gender is always a negotiation of power (Butler, 2009) inherent in discourse that conditions agency into what is livable or what is un-livable, (Allagbé and Amoussou, 2018) have analyzed how the language of *Mema* enacts the two facets of gender- *masculinity* and *femininity*. They have empirically proven that the ideology of gender positioning or representation and gender performances typical of this text is overtly not phallocentric at all "in that it [the novel] narrates a story of/about a woman and her experience. By so doing, it celebrates woman and even shows a certain inclination for a social world governed by the ideals of matriarchy" (Ibid: 250). Stated clearly, if *Mema* shows a certain inclination for a social world governed by the ideals of matriarchy, this implies *de facto* that it is mainly concerned with the deconstruction or disarticulation of the ideals of patriarchy. It may be presumed from this then that *Mema* embeds a handful of linguistic and extralinguistic or contextual clues that clearly figure out (or can clearly figure out) the dual role of empowering the female gender and disempowering the male one.

In fact, two recent groundbreaking studies in Systemic Functional Linguistics Koussouhon *et al.* (2015) and Koussouhon *et al.* (2015a)) have explored how relations of gender (which are also those of power) are encoded in a

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contemporary Ghanaian prose work entitled by Darko (1998) and have established that these relations are symmetrically downplayed and dialectically influenced by authorial ideology. A very salient observation in one of these papers is that contemporary African literature influenced by the rise of feminism in the seventies (Lakoff, 1975) is now increasingly characterized by a shift from the depiction of relations of gender from the phallocentric perspective to the woman-centered one or to a blend of both, otherwise called the human-centered perspective. It follows from this to note that contemporary African writers (male and female alike) have doubtlessly been more politically/ideologically versatile and engaged than their predecessors in this post-independence, post-colonial and post-modernist era. And their political/ideological versatility and engagement are diligently dissimulated in their fictional texts, especially in the ways they encode or represent relations of power and gender between/amongst their gendered characters. In this perspective, as Per Wastberg (1986) notes, "They [contemporary African writers now] take the side of the powerless and important, they write of victims of the arbitrariness of others, they sing no songs in praise of the victor." It is crystal clear in the foregoing that contemporary African writers have deliberately decided to subvert or deconstruct the victor/victim role relationships and power relations by simply acting on (some) register or social scales/dimensions or utterly *re-scaling or restructuring* (to borrow (Fairclough's, 2001) terms) these relationships and relations with the aim to demystifying them or producing some de-familiarizing, aesthetic or stylistic and ideological effects in the prose works in which they are enacted. Two other very insightful papers Koussouhon *et al.* (2015b) and Allagbé (2016) drawing on feminist linguistics and literary onomastics, gender studies and linguistics (Critical Linguistics, precisely) respectively have explored and established Amma Darko's adoption and execution of the feminist ideology/project *à la lèttre* in her aforementioned novel and three other ones: Darko (1995), Darko (2003) and Darko (2007). The major finding here is that she copiously represents male activity and male character names negatively.

The reviewed works, which have studied Daniel Mengara's literary work, have done so from different theoretical angles too: gender, feminist and queer theoretical perspectives (Allagbé and Allagbé, 2015), multidimensional approach to women's empowerment and Womanist theoretical viewpoints (Capo-Chichi *et al.*, 2016), women's liberal and radical feminist perspectives (Gbaguidi and Allagbé, 2018) and Systemic Functional Linguistic and Butlerian perspectives (Allagbé and Amoussou, 2018). As the review above clearly exudes, these works have fairly unveiled how linguistic and social structures ontologically or dialectically interact to entrench such dimensions as gender, power and ideology in the novel. However, none of them has highlighted *in situ* the phenomenon of power game- empowering and disempowering of gendered characters- that discursively pervades its social world- in sociolinguistic terms. The phenomenon of power game noted in this novel is actually perceived here as a set of recondite aesthetic or stylistic features which can be duly unraveled from a sociolinguistic perspective.

2. Theoretical Framework

As implied above, this study draws on sociolinguistics. It particularly draws on Norman Fairclough's (1989) and Van Dijk (2003) notion of power and Michael A. K. Halliday's concept of register (cf. Halliday (1971), Halliday and Hasan (1985/1989), Eggins (1994), Bloor and Bloor (2004), Fontaine (2013), etc.); They serve as the corner-stone for the sociolinguistic analysis of the phenomenon of power game enacted by Daniel Mengara's literary language in Daniel Mengara's *Mema* (2003). These scholars functionally perceive and treat language as a social semiotic system. They focus on it, so to speak, the way it is used or structured for use in social life; they consider the participants involved in it, the roles they take on, their speech acts and the sociocultural or institutional contexts within which language is used. In other words, they investigate the linguistic determination of society as well as the social determination of language use. In this perspective, language is often studied with the aim to unraveling a given social concern, say, relations of power.

According to Norman Fairclough's (1989), relations of power are ideologically encoded in discourse. He also argues that discourse is a place where relations of power are actually exercised and enacted. He then analyses a sample discourse and notes that "power in discourse is to do with powerful participants *controlling and constraining the contributions of non-powerful participants*" (ibid: 46). Following this, he distinguishes between three broad types of constraints: constraints on *contents* (on what is said or done in discourse), constraints on *relations* (the social relations people enter into in discourse) and constraints on *subjects*, or the '*subject positions*' people can occupy in discourse. However, Fairclough is far from holding such a view in that he cogently claims that "power, whether it be 'in' or 'behind' discourse, is never definitively held by any one person, or social grouping, because power can be won and exercised only in and through social struggles in which it may also be lost" (ibid: 43).. It is obvious in the foregoing that *power is not a God-given or an essential right of a person, a sex/gender or a social group over others*; it is rather something that is discursively enacted or negotiated in social practice. Subscribing to the same view, Van Dijk (2003) contends that ''power is seldom absolute''. To sustain his contention, he argues that a group may more or less control other groups, or only control them in specific situations of social domains. On the other hand, dominated groups may more or less resist, accept, condone, comply with, or legitimate such power, and even find it 'natural'. It follows from the foregoing that, depending on the degree of their conscious awareness, dominated groups may consider their powerless condition as taken-for-granted (thus as ideological), or stand up against it through 'resistance'. In the latter case, the discursive nature of power (or more precisely social power) could simply change hand, moving from the most powerful to the powerless. Therefore, the issue of power or the phenomenon of social struggles for the conquest of power (which we refer to here as ***power game***) in *Mema* is a matter of changing social roles in changing social contexts. This actually points to the *dialectic of register and language use or/and style*.

The term 'register' was first used by the linguist Thomas Bertram Reid in 1956 and adopted by a group of linguists who was interested then in the study of language variations. The systemic linguist Michael Alexander Kirkwood Halliday (in Halliday and Hasan (1985/1989)), for instance, uses the term to denote "specific lexical and grammatical choices as made by speakers depending on the situation of context, the participants of a conversation and the function of the language in discourse." Suzanne Eggins in turn uses it to refer to the impact of dimensions of the immediate context of situation of a language event on the way language is used (Eggins, 1994). It is obvious in the foregoing that there is a close relationship between language and context of situation. Both are mutually reflexive. A speaker's language in this sense can be said to predict the context of situation or the context of situation can be said to predict his/her language. According to Eggins, there are three register variables- field, tenor and mode- which functionally serve to enact the context of situation.

Field is concerned with the nature of the social activity, involves both the acts being carried out and their goal(s) (Hasan in Halliday and Hasan (1985/1989)). (Eggins, 1994) claims that field denotes the topic or the focus of the activity interactants are engaged in. Tenor is concerned with how the social activity is institutionalized, elicits how the nature of the activity predicates the set of roles relevant to its unfolding Hasan in Halliday and Hasan (1985/1989). In other words, it indicates the social role relationships played by interactants Eggins (1994) in the social activity. According to Cate Poynton 1985 cited in (Eggins, 1994), tenor can be broken into three continua, viz. power (it denotes whether the roles the interactants are playing are those in which they have equal or unequal power), contact (it whether the roles the interactants are playing are those that bring them into frequent or infrequent contact) and affective involvement (it denotes whether the roles the interactants are playing are those in which the affective involvement between them is high or low). In fact, these three continua of role occupation in a given situation impart how language is used. Following this, one can distinguish between two types of situation, viz. the informal and the formal (see (Eggins, 1994) for more detail). Mode is concerned with the role the language is playing in the social activity. James R. Martin (1984 cited in (Eggins, 1994)) suggests that the role language is playing in an interaction can be seen as involving two simultaneous continua which describe the two different types of distance viz. spatial/interpersonal distance (it ranges situations according to possibilities of having an immediate feedback between interactants) and experiential distance (it ranges situations according to the distance between language and the social process occurring).

The point made here is that language as well as society is amenable to both quantitative and qualitative analysis methods. The field of study that offers a very useful and workable framework for such a task is sociolinguistics. By definition, sociolinguistics is the science that studies language in relation to society (Holmes, 2013). This means that it is concerned with language as used for communication amongst different social groups of people in different social situations. One of the major tenets of this field of study is that language and context co-constitute each other; i.e. *language contextualizes and is in turn contextualized*. Sociolinguistics has actually integrated over time Fairclough's and van Dijk's views of power as not being absolute in social life, controlling and constraining discourse as well as the social orders of social institutions or societies within which discourse is produced or enacted, and Halliday's tripartite view of register or context of situation as the deterministic impact of such register or contextual variables as field, tenor and mode on the use of language. This integration has yielded a whole range of more elaborated social scales and dimensions which can be used to measure empirically relations of power in discourse or the phenomenon of power game in a literary artwork: i. ***a social distance scale*** (concerned with participant relationships), ii. ***a status scale*** (concerned with participant relationship in terms of social status and position in society), iii. ***a formality scale*** (relating to the setting or type of interaction) and iv. ***two referential and affective function scales*** (relating to the purposes or topic of interaction) (for more details, see (Holmes, 2013)).

3. Methodology and Analysis of the Phenomenon of Power Game in the Selected Discourses

This study draws on qualitative method. With this method, the phenomenon of power game- empowering and disempowering gendered characters- is duly analyzed in four (04) selected discourses from Daniel Mengara's literary work entitled Daniel Mengara's *Mema* (2003) . The aim here is to gain a full insight into how this phenomenon of power game encodes a stylistic dimension in the discourses. The discourses are first labeled according to their content or the meaning they convey. Next, they are split into numerically numbered sentences. Finally, the striking stylistic/linguistic features which encode the phenomenon of power game in the discourses are duly highlighted or identified: **bolded** (clauses/sentences), *italicized* (phrases) and underlined (tokens/words). After this, the foregrounded features are presented and accounted for.

(D1) *Discourse of an Unconventional Female Demeanor and Subverted Gender Roles and Traits* (p. 4-6)

1. It is the nature of things that the years should take their toll. 2. But the years *did not vanquish* Mema, because Mema was *strong, a strong woman indeed*. 3. **Mema had a big mouth too**. 4. I mean she really had *a big mouth*. 5. **Not in the physical sense**. 6. **But in the sense of the things she said, and how she said them**. 7. Somewhere in heart, **Mema always believed she was the most intelligent person in the universe**. 8. **It was not easy to win a debate against her**. 9. **She would always try to convince others that she was right**. 10. **But she was never easily convinced**. 11. **I vaguely remember those times when she would have a dispute with either her husband, my father, or other people in the village**. 12. The days following the dispute would always be *days filled with tension*. 13. They would always be days of apparent hatred during which **Mema would adopt a stubborn demeanour**, working her way silently throughout the hut and the village. 14. **She would not speak to anyone and nobody would dare to speak to her**. 15. **When she was in such a mood, even my father could not dare to approach her**. 16. I have never been able to tell **whether this was part of my mother's theatrical way of doing things, or**

whether she was serious. 17. **All I can tell is that this could go on for days**. 18. Of course, as was required our village customs, **when a member of the community was at odds with another, someone from among the most influential speakers in the village had to attempt a reconciliation**. 19. It did not matter whether the dispute was a private matter between husband and wife, or a public matter between two villages. 20. Something had to be done. 21. **But the task of reconciling estranged parties was particularly daunting when Mema was involved**. 22. **The person secretly appointed by the village to act as mediator would have to approach her with extreme caution and expert tact, for fear of *my mother's mouth***. 23. **Everybody knew *her mouth***. 24. **Everybody knew that *her mouth* could become a terrible weapon if caused to start spitting out words like bullets**. 25. **So my mother would sit there, patiently listening to the mediator**. 26. **Reassured, the mediator would continue his speech of appeasement, encouraged by my mother's apparent willingness to listen**. 27. **But, as could be expected, my mother would eventually interrupt**: 'Have you finished?' 28. Startled, the speaker would say: 'Errrr . . . yes. I mean . . . Not really . . . You know . . . I . . .' 29. 'Because if you have finished,' my mother's mouth would strike, 'let me tell you one thing . . .' 30. **And my mother's mouth would start to talk. 31. It would talk longer and longer, bigger and bigger, and louder and louder, with that high-pitched something that always caused the insides of people to shrink**, you know, *the kind of thing* that happens to your insides when you are afraid. 32. *The kind of thing* that made you want to rush out to pee in the bushes behind the hut, only to find out that you did not have anything to pee out at all. 33. Yes, that's it. 34. Fear. 35. Fright. 36. That is what people experienced when *my mother's mouth* started to talk. 37. **She had the kind of strong voice that could be heard from one village corner to the other**. 38. When *that voice* started to talk, **it sounded very frightful to both males and females**. 39. Was my mother angry about something? 40. Perhaps. 41. About what? 42. I cannot tell. 43. **All I remember is that when *that voice* came out of a mouth that was going to spit out feelings of anger, spite, sorrow and sadness, it was unstoppable**. 44. It really caused *heavy shrinking* in your bowels. 45. **And when *that voice* was heard thundering into the air like thousands of guns, the village would stop breathing for a while**. 46. They just knew. 47. It was her again. 48. **Gathering his courage with both of his hands, the mediator would try to continue**: 'Woman . . . Please listen to me a bit. I am just trying to . . .' 49. 'Woman what?' my mother would interrupt. 50. 'Did you hear me talking when you were telling me your nonsense? 51. No! 52. Now I say: listen to my side of the story, and after that, go and tell *that animal* what I have told you here today, do you hear me well?'

In D1, Daniel Mengara's mouthpiece, Elang Sima, a vibrant advocate of female gender politics *per excellence*, depicts his mother, Mema, in terms that strikingly position her as *vanquishing, strong/unbeatable, terrifying/fear-instilling, intelligent* and *powerful*. Consider how he positions her as vanquishing and strong before the years in (1 and 2). The transitive verb '*did not vanquish*' and the epithet '*strong*' doubly employed and reinforced by '*indeed*' meant for emphatic purposes confirm this apprehension. Again, in (3 and 4), he portrays her as a person who has '*a big mouth*'; a metonymic term meant to encode her outspokenness and cognitive resourcefulness, both of which embody her unfailing intelligence (6 and 7), whose grasp and meaning utterly fall outside the scope of the physical sense (5), indeed. Subsequent sentences (8, 9 and 10) give more details on the effects of such intelligence (repeatedly symbolized with the metonymic expression '*a big mouth*') on Mema and her relations with others (male and female alike). As this female depiction shows, Mema is actually aware of this enabling factor and uses it to the fullness of her benefit. From (11-25), the homodiegetic narrator also represents Mema as a *fear or fright-instiller* in days following a dispute that she has had with someone or her husband. As the depiction clearly exudes, neither the person nor her husband with whom she has disputed can approach her in that she '*would adopt a stubborn demeanour ...*" (12), but she has the right to speak to anybody anyhow. This depiction plainly points to a marked masculine character trait put on by a woman and a marked feminine character trait ascribed to a man. This is to say, while Mema is diligently de-feminized here, her husband is de-masculinized.

The metonymic term '*mouth*' is repeatedly employed by the narrator-character in (22, 23 and 24) to further enforce Mema's masculine attribute which instills a pervasive fear and fright in everyone, including the mediator appointed and sent forth by the village to settle the dispute between her and her husband. In (24), the narrator in his attempt to showcase the devastating force of Mema's mouth likens it with the figurative expression '*a terrible weapon .... spitting out words like bullets*'. All this actually freezes her relations with others. For instance, while trying to settle the dispute between Mema and her husband, the appointed male mediator "*would have to approach her with extreme caution and expert tact*" (22). While this mixed-sex portrayal exudes a fear-instilling woman in the person of Mema, it really indicates an unusual politeness and deference towards her from a man. In his role of mediator, the male character is normatively expected to be vested with a certain authority in that he represents the entire village or community in Mema's home, and this should naturally command respect. In (26), the speaking character depicts Mema as complying with this norm by patiently listening to the male speaker's speech of appeasement. But this does not last at all because Mema expectantly interrupts him (27) with a breath-taking question: 'Have you finished?', making him utterly startled and causing him to stammer: 'Errrr . . . yes. I mean . . . Not really . . . You know . . . I . . .'. Here the terms 'Errrr, yes, I mean, Not really, You Know and I' are all followed by spaced dots. This denotes a transient indecision or speech hesitation or/and a transient loss of control of the talk from/by the speaker. Meanwhile, Mema's mouth gains an increasing momentum (30). To highlight this aspect, the narrator-character adds this:

> 31. **It would talk longer and longer, bigger and bigger, and louder and louder, with that high-pitched something that always caused the insides of people to shrink**, you know, *the kind of thing* that happens to your insides when you are afraid. 32. *The kind of thing* that made you want to rush out to pee in the bushes behind the hut, only to find out that you did not have anything to pee out at all. 33. Yes, that's it. 34. Fear. 35. Fright. 36. That is what people experienced when *my mother's mouth* started to talk.

In the above quote, the narrator repeatedly uses terms like 'longer, bigger and louder' in a rhythmical or musical cadence or gradational way to strongly foreground the weight of *every single word* (not to say *every single sword*) dropping out of Mema's mouth. He further establishes a cause and effect relationship between her mouth and what happens in the insides of people when they are afraid. Consider also his use of the token 'you' and its variant 'your' in (31, 32 and 41) which integrates temporarily the reader in the social world of the narration and leaves him/her with the impression of co-performing the action enacted therein. In (37 and 38), the narrator depicts Mema as having *the kind of strong voice* that could be heard from one village corner to the other, and 'When *that voice* started to talk, it sounded very frightful to both males and females'. In the foregoing, the term '*that voice*' is a metonymic phrase meant to further entrench the masculine trait of Mema. Likewise, the two sentences (37 and 38) are nothing else but hyperbolic expressions employed by the male speaking voice to enhance or exaggerate meaning about Mema's masculinity at the expense of her male counterpart (the male mediator). The same thing is observed in (45) too.

From (39-43), while the narrator wonders if his mother is angry about something, he clearly restates the unstoppable nature of the voice that comes out of a mouth going to spit out feelings of anger, spite, sorrow and sadness, the consequence of which is causing *heavy shrinking* in people's bowels (44). This depiction truly problematizes the un-settled open gender war between men and women. It must be noted that this war is concomitantly a war over (the control of) language/discourse/talk. In (48), the mediator attempts once more to re-conquer his lost control over the ongoing discourse/talk: 'Woman . . . Please listen to me a bit. I am just trying to . . Consider the spaced dots after 'Woman . . ., I am just trying to . . .', they denote indecision and speech hesitation from the male speaker. They also suggest an unequal power relationship which projects the male speaker into a state of inferior status from which he implores his interlocutor. These observations are understandable here in the sense that Mema on her notice that the man is about to take the floor again immediately interrupts him with a face-threathening question: 49. **'Woman what**?' Without giving him a breathing space, she lands another embarrassing question on him: 50. **'Did you hear me talking when you were telling me your nonsense?**, to which the man bashfully and helplessly replies: 51. No! After this, she puts forth three orders confined in an imperative sentence which ends with a tag meant to elicit an expected acquiescence from him: 52. Now I say: listen to my side of the story, and after that, go and tell that animal what I have told you here today, do you hear me well?'

The use of the lexical term '*that animal*' by Mema to refer to her husband teleologically and ideologically encodes her feeling and attitude towards her husband. This indicates first of all that she is deeply annoyed here. It also indicates that she does not consider her husband as socially superior to her. Her use of this term before the male mediator is startlingly supercilious and deflationary for the male image. It follows from this to note that this depicted female behavior seeks to produce a de-familiarizing effect on a reader who is utterly conversant with African patriarchal culture, its workings and underlying sexist or/and androcentric ideologies, and even challenge his/her taken-for-granted conception/perception of gender and power politics. Now, let's move on to D2.

(D2) *Discourse of Female Insubordination, Reminiscence of Love Declaration, Sisterhood or Political Solidarity and Threat* (p. 16-18)

1. 'Ah Akoma, *my beloved wife*, since when do you serve me food without water?' 2. 'Ah! 3. **You think I am your slave?** 4. I do not remember my father telling you, when you paid the marriage *n'sua* to my people fifteen *mimbuh* ago, that he had sold me to you as a slave. 5. **If you want water to drink, go and get your water yourself**. 6. **Don't you have two legs like me?** 7. **Besides, you are sitting closer to the water pot than I am**." 8. Faced with this womanly assault, the man would simply shut up and look, speechless and overwhelmed, at this woman of his who had obviously elected to turn his life into a living hell. 9. Night would come again, and from hut to hut, the same questions would be asked over and over again. 10. 'Ah Nkulanveng, *my husband*, I have a question for you, and I need an answer now. 11. **Do you really love me?**' 12. **'*Of course, my wife,* I love you**. 13. **Isn't that what I told you the day when I saw you for the first time?**' 14. 'Yes, I remember that you were a constant visitor to my village because you had friends there with whom you used to go monkey-hunting.' 15. '*Owé*. 16. But monkey-hunting was just a pretext that allowed me to see you often as I could. 17. But I had to be careful not to approach you openly, because at that time a young man and a young woman were not allowed to see each other secretly or even to talk openly to each other without the presence of elders. 18. All I could do was to watch you from afar and let my heart throb frantically in my chest because of the love it felt for you.' 19. 'So you took advantage of the fact that you and I had the chance to meet during the wrestling contest that was held in your village. 20. You lured me away from my parents who were too busy watching the sweating wrestlers to pay attention to what I was doing. 21. You lured me into following you behind a hut.' 22. '*Owé*. 23. I remember the joy I felt and the throbs my heart gave me when you told me this. 24. I told you that I loved you too.' 25. 'And I said: "If it is true that your heart is throbbing for me, then I will come to visit you in your village. 26. Do you agree?"' 27. '"I agree," was my answer. 28. After our secret encounter, I heard the cock crow three times one morning after the other, and there you were with your people. 29. You had come to ask me to leave my parents and become one of yours. 30. Two full moons later, I moved into your village to become your wife.' 31. 'Those were good times'. 32. '*Owé*. 33. Good times, indeed. 34. But what I am asking you now is this: **Do you still love me the way you said you loved me during that day when we met behind the hut and exchanged words of love for the first time?**' 35. **'*My ancestors* are my witnesses that I still love you so.'** 36. **'If you love me like you say, why have you not told all the husbands of this village to go and fetch Ntutume's wife?** 37. It has now been moons almost as many as the fingers on both of my hands, and no one has budged a finger to go and get her back. 38. **Is that the way you show love for me?' 39. 'But, woman . . .** 40. **Biloghe is not my wife.** 41. **If it were you who had gone, you know I would have got you back very quickly.**' 42. 'Nonsense! 43. **When did family problems become one man's problems in this village?** 44. **You know perfectly well that it is everybody's duty in this village to go and and try to get Ntutume's wife back from her people.'** 45. '**You're right, woman, but . . .''** 46. **'There is no "but".** 47. **Why do you insist on insulting me?** 48.

You just said you loved me, did you not? 49. The question is: **would you have waited this long before coming to my village to beg me back?** 50. **'No . . . but . . .**' 51. 'What I see is that *all the males in this village* have been *very silent and inactive* since Biloghe left. 52. *No one*, so far, has tried to get the village to go and beg her back. 53. So don't lie to me. 54. This is exactly what you would have done if it were me who had left. 55. You would have made no attempt to go and beg me back. 56. **Is this how you do things in this village?** 57. **Is this the way you show love for your women in this place?'** 58. 'Woman, mine, it is not I who will say that what you have said is not true. 59. I understand what you are saying. 60. Let me think about it.'

D2 is a very serious talk that follows the departure of a woman, Biloghe, Ntutume's wife, from the village ten moons after a squabble between them. The talk is held between a husband, Nkulanveng and Akoma, his wife, in their home. The woman here proves insubordinate to her husband, because for her and other women/wives in the village, this is the only means (a sort of political solidarity or sisterhood) (Hooks, 2000) they can use to compel men/husbands of/in the village to go and beg her back from her parents. In (1), Nkulanveng notices that his food is served without water, which seems strange and unusual to him. He then raises this question to find out what is wrong. Consider his use of 'Ah', it exudes an utter surprise. His use of the proper name '*Akoma*' followed by an affectionate endearing phrase '*my beloved wife*' while addressing his wife shows high affective involvement and frequent contact. The woman's reaction in the first place proves the contrary. Her use of 'Ah!' (2) announces her unconventional demeanor. Her use of a declarative structure (3) high-pitched into a question is not actually meant to elicit an answer from her interlocutor. It is a rhetorical question meant to prepare the ground for an upcoming query that will leave the man in total dismay, perplex and speechless at the end. Akoma's subsequent sentences (4-7) are also meant to defy and disarm the man and surrender him to her will. The narrator-character (Elang Sima) uses the epistemic modal operator 'would' in (8) to encode his judgment/opinion/perception, etc., about a man's powerlessness before a womanly assault in the text. In (9), he also recalls the recursive nature of this female open confrontation in the village.

In (10), Akoma steps in. She obviously seems to dilute her speech a bit. Consider her use of the proper name '*Nkulanveng'* followed by the affectionate endearment term '*my husband'* indicates her affection for her husband and her recognition of his leadership position in the family setting. In (11), Akoma also poses a question: 'Do you really love me?', which obviously appears unexpected and audacious at the same time. She is not expected to raise such a question after vexing her husband verbally. Again, this kind of question and the act of questioning itself are presumably not expected from a woman to a man in a patriarchal culture or setting. That's why, the act of posing it is utterly deemed daring here. In (12), the man replies with the apparent modal adjunct '*Of course*' implying '*Yes*' (a polarity adjunct) followed by the affection-packed and contact-reinforcing phrase '*my wife*' and the clause 'I love you' to assure her. Then he asks her his second question (13) which opens the boulevard for the reminiscence of their love declaration and to which the woman positively responds with the polarity adjunct '*Yes*' in (14).

Indeed, the episode of the reminiscence of their love declaration runs from (13-33) with the woman doing much of the talking with thirteen sentences (14, 19, 20, 21, 22, 23, 24, 25, 26, 28, 29, 30 and 31) against eight employed by the man (13, 15, 16, 17, 18, 27, 32 and 33). This clearly indicates that the woman keeps the floor longer than her husband. In (34), she comes back to the initial issue, her querying her husband about his loving her or not with a question. With this question, she wants to find out if the love he has for her is still the same as when they have first met. In response to this recursive question, the man has to take his ancestors as witnesses in (35) just to convince his unimpressed wife. Still unimpressed, this woman asks her husband another question (36) in which she problematizes his love for her by relating it to the kind of love she wants all the men/husbands in the land of Otongwanku to have for her folk; she wants the whole village to go and get Biloghe back. This is further reinforced with another question (38) which structurally requires yes/no as answer from the man. Instead of this direct answer, the man deliberately chooses to answer his wife's question indirectly in these terms, uttering five sentences (four statements and one question): "39. 'But, woman . . . 40. Biloghe is not my wife. 41. If it were you who had gone, you know I would have got you back very quickly.' 42. 'Nonsense! 43. When did family problems become one man's problems in this village?"

Consider the textual adjunct 'But' in (39), it is used by the man to state his not being concerned with Biloghe's problems. This is overtly put in (40). Consider also the spaced dots in (39) placed after '*woman*', they simply indicate a short pause or speech hesitation from the man. Perhaps, this is due to the fact that he is not very sure if what he wants to say is morally valid or not. However, he is more or less sure of himself; he is more or less sure of what he will have done if it is his wife who has left the village. His use of the epistemic modal verb '*would*' in (41) utterly denotes this. His one-word sentence *'Nonsense!'* (42) denotes his surprise at his wife's unusual request as well as his de-solidarizing attitudes towards his community, in general, and Biloghe, in particular. These are further taken up in (43), the man's third question. In (44), the woman unfailingly recalls what the man should know; his duty towards his community. Disarmed, the man is constrained to say 'You're right, woman …' (45) but he astutely wants to argue this away with his introduction of the token 'but . . .' when the woman quickly interrupts him: 46. 'There is no "but". Following this, she raises a question (47) meant to entrench the man's duty. She brings in the same question (49) to see if the man has gotten her point, which he obviously does as indicated by his negative polarized sentence (50). Consider the spaced dots following the negation 'No', they indicate the man's indecision. There are also some spaced dots after the contrast-expressing conjunction "but" which indicate a sudden interruption. The woman suddenly interrupts her indecisive husband and goes on to keep the floor for a long time (51-57), uttering all in all a total number of seven sentences (five statements (51, 52, 53, 54 and 55) and two questions (56 and 57), all meant to make the man admit his male responsibility towards his community and react accordingly. And the man finally does so bashfully. He utters three consecutive statements (58, 59 and 60) to prove this. The same man is depicted in D3, let's see if he still maintains the same traits therein.

(D3) *Discourse of Oral Dexterity and Male Power* (p. 20-22)

1. 'We know we have offended you,' *the head speaker from Ntutume's village* would say to their in-laws. 2. 'That is why we have asked for this meeting between our two villages. 3. **Our forefathers used to say that he is a fool who does not know how to beg**. 4. We have come to beg for the return of our wife. 5. We therefore thank you for agreeing to this *medzo* because it will allow all of us to know what caused two of our children to part, and how to prevent this from happening again. 6. It is clear that we cannot let this situation persist. 7. By giving us your daughter, you agreed that our two villages should become united not only through the bloods of our married children, but also through the bloods of the children to whom they have given birth. 8. **Nothing can break the blood ties that now unite our villages.** 9. **Yet, how can we live in peace knowing that our daughter and wife has left us, and that the children she accepted to bear for us are claiming her back?'** 10. An elder from Biloghe's village stood up to speak. 11. 'We have heard *your words*, man. 12. And *your words* are wise. 13. But as wise as they may be, how can they erase the sorrow that has befallen us since our daughter came back to us crying almost *ten moons ago*? 14. *Ten moons*! 15. I do not remember ever seeing a daughter staying this long away from her loving family without such a family coming to make sure that their daughter has been healthy all this time. 16. **Doesn't a hand that loses one of its fingers become awkward?** 17. **Did your hand not feel awkward after it lost one of its fingers ten moons ago?** 18. Such is the question that I am asking you.' 19. '**We have heard *your angry words, father of our wife*.** 20. **We have heard and we are therefore crying before you like a child who has been beaten by his father.** 21. **Like such a child, we are crying and begging for forgiveness.** 22. **But is it because our father has beaten us that we must turn around and run away?'** 23. The speaker from Ntutume's village paused. 24. He looked around him, contemplating and trying to read the faces that were staring at him from the audience. 25. He was expecting an answer from them. 26. 'No!' came the answer in unison. 27. **'No,' continued the speaker, reassured.** 28. **'It is not because a father beats his son that the son must turn around and run away from his father.** 29. **A father never beats his children unless they have done something terribly wrong.** 30. A child raised to be a responsible person knows this very well. 31. So he must accept his punishment because he knows his father loves him. 32. He must therefore come back home after hiding in the forest to cry off his sorrow.' 33. '*Owé*. 34. That is the way it should be! 35. The audience responded. 36. 'Ya! 37. So if that is the way it should be, **why should our father deny us the right to come back to him to beg for forgiveness?'** 38. 'He should not!' the crowd roared. 39. 'Good. 40. So the question we are asking our father is the following: **do you want us back into your hut?** 41. I have spoken.' 42. A murmur of appreciation ran through the crowd. 43. **Nkulanveng had always been *a good speaker*.** 44. **He was feared in this area for the way in which he was able to use his tongue and knowledge of customs and words to win a debate for his people.** 45. **During the *medzo* he had been appointed to handle as *the lead speaker*, he was always able to twist words inside his mouth like lianas.** 46. **With these, he would tie hard knots around the tongues of his opponents, who would suddenly appear clumsy in their speech.** 47. **Nkulanveng was *a speech master* who knew how to make every word beautiful and convincing, and the crowds always drank his wisdom like water on a hot day.** 48. **In such *medzo* assemblies as this one, Nkulanveng's art of speech was especially appreciated because he was able to save his village from the most entangled situations.** 49. **When village honour was at stake, Nkulanveng was the person who could obtain appropriate compensation from the offending village.** 50. **So, whenever he started to speak, everyone would listen very intently, drinking his wise words like fresh water just fetched from a spring in the forest mountains nearby.**

D3 is a speech delivered by Nkulanveng during a public meeting held between his village and Biloghe's. The meeting is meant to beg Biloghe back from her parents' village. Biloghe is Ntutume's wife who has left her husband's village ten full moons earlier as a result of a conflict between them. Nkulanveng is Akoma's husband (see D2). His wife has seriously compelled him by means of political solidarity or sisterhood to get the village to go and get Biloghe back. It should be recalled that Nkulanveng has remained utterly perplex and speechless before his wife's verbal assaults. But here he is amazingly depicted as a public head speaker, representing his village in the meeting. From (1-42), the homodiegetic character narrates by means of direct quotes what goes on in such a gathering without disclosing the identity of the head speaker in question. Though the group of words '*the head speaker from Ntutume's village'* is given early in (1), the real identity of the person or referent to whom it refers is delayed and only revealed for the first time in (43). This backgrounding denotes a narrative suspense meant to keep and sustain the reader's attention. In the quotes from (1-42), it is noticed that a great number of linguistic clues and discursive strategies is employed by the head speaker from Ntutume's village. These linguistic clues and discursive strategies actually point to his mastery of words, customs, discourse patterning and orders of discourse. Consider how he expertly patterns his speech by means of language from (1-9). He sets out with guilt acceptance and states the reason for their asking for the meeting in (1 and 2). He then uses a very relevant proverb to introduce the subject-matter of the day/the meeting in (3). After this, he restates the reason of their coming to Biloghe's village in (4). Next, he thanks his in-laws for agreeing to the meeting in (5). In (6), he states their position, which is not letting the situation to persist any longer. In (7), he recalls the agreement binding the marriage of their two children, their grandchildren and, by extension, their two villages and draws a logical inference in (8): "Nothing can break the blood ties that now unite our villages." Following this, he formulates a question directed to his audience, including his people and their in-laws.

Consider again how he perfectly manipulates language from (1-9). He builds plain reference ties all through. While addressing his in-laws, he uses the token 'we' and its variants 'us' and 'our' to designate himself and his people but he employs 'you' and its variant 'your' to refer to his in-laws. Again, he uses the pronoun 'she' to point to 'Biloghe', their daughter-in-law. He also manipulates context very well here. In (3), for instance, he draws on a proverbial expression whose meaning is generally shared by the people of both villages. He also draws on such

commonly shared symbols as '*blood*', meaning, 'union', 'unity', 'lineage', etc., and context-specific lexical terms as '*our forefathers*', meaning 'our ancestors', 'our predecessors', 'our two villages', 'our wife', *medzo*, meaning meeting, gathering, etc. Again, his formulated question in (9) strongly relies on context for response. In (10), an elder (presumably a man) from Biloghe's village stands up to answer his question. He too shows a certain mastery of discourse and language here. Consider how he takes the floor (11-17), structuring his talk discursively. In (11), he first states that they have heard *the head speaker from Ntutume's village* (a sort of acceptance). In (12), he acknowledges his wise words. But in (13), he questions his wise words and exudes their limit in reality; the limit is that the head speaker's wise words cannot erase the sorrow Biloghe has experienced in/within ten months. Also, in (14 and 15) he exclaims the duration and relates the whole situation to his personal life/history, drawing solely on his past experience or cognitive knowledge. He then dishes out a suitable proverb in (16), which he later paraphrases to formulate a question in (17): "Did your hand not feel awkward after it lost one of its fingers ten moons ago?" And then he overtly asks the head speaker from Ntutume's village to answer it (18). The man's use of a proverb and its paraphrasing, context-specific terms like '*Ten moons*' meaning '*Ten months*', address term '*man*', etc., denotes once again his mastery of both discourse/language and context.

The head speaker from Ntutume's village steps in to take the floor once again. He sets out with a similar sentence pattern like his predecessor (19). He acknowledges therein *the angry words of the father of their wife*. He then asks for forgiveness. He also likens their situation to that of a child who has offended his father and has been beaten by him, and who is now crying and begging for forgiveness. He then as usual puts out a question to the audience: "But is it because our father has beaten us that we must turn around and run away?'" (22), and pauses a while to contemplate and read the faces staring at him from the audience (23-24). He is expecting an answer (25) from them, which he finally gets (26). And he continues to talk and talk, interacting with his audience in a series of turns (the speaker: 23 28 29, 30 31, 32, 37 (a question), 39 and 40 (a question) and the audience (33, 34 36 and 38). He marks the end of his speech with a thought-provoking question in (40): 'So the question we are asking our father is the following: do you want us back into your hut?' This question is a knot that needs to be untied or dismantled by the people from Biloghe's village. But who among them will do this? In the remaining part of the discourse (from 42-50), the narrator repeatedly characterizes the head speaker from Ntutume's village. He discloses his identity precisely in (43), Nkulanveng, a man represented as an epitome of exceptional rhetorical/oratorical qualities. Here are (some of) the attributes and values ascribed to him by the narrator: 'a good speaker' (43), 'feared in this area …' (44), 'appointed as the lead speaker' (45), 'able to twist words in his mouth like lianas' (46), 'a speech master' (47), 'appreciated' (48), 'the person who could obtain compensation from the offending village' (49). Now, let's see how Nkulanveng's knotty question will be addressed in D4.

(D4) Discourse of Oral Dexterity, Retaliation, Deflation of Male Image, Dominance and Power and Superiority of Motherhood (p. 22-25)

1. Today's *medzo* were no different. 2. **Nkulanveng had spoken.** 3. **It was now up to someone from the in-law village to break Nkulanveng's spell by picking up the challenge that had been laid down before them.** 4. **The crowd waited in silence.** 5. **Tension was building up in the air as faces stared straight into the eyes of other faces and heads turned left and right waiting for someone to undo the web that Nkulanveng had just woven.** 6. **Suddenly, a throat cleared from behind the crowd.** 7. **Someone wished to speak.** 8. People stepped aside to clear the view towards this person. 9. ***An old woman from Biloghe's village*** **painstakingly stood up on two bony legs that seemed to bend under the weight of her frail body.** 10. The whole structure of the body was supported by a walking cane that seemed to be the only thing that was preventing those legs from breaking. 11. **It was Meleng, Biloghe's grandmother from her mother's side.** 12. **Meleng happened to be in the village on a family visit.** 13. She had come from her own village one moon before, and was preparing to leave when the *medzo* were announced. 14. She decided to stay a few more days to see how the *medzo* were going to go. 15. **Meleng was a frequent visitor to Biloghe's village because her daughter, who was Biloghe's mother, was a wife of this village.** 16. These visits were important to her because she liked to make sure her daughter and grandchildren were all right. 17. Because of her illnesses that were becoming more and more insistent due to her age, she had not recently been able to come and visit them as frequently as she used to. 18. She had therefore not seen them for a while. 19. This visit, she sensed, could be the last before she joined her ancestors. 20. So, she wanted to see her grandchildren one last time before being called off to the world of the dead, **'Hééééééééé!' she started in a thin, shaky voice, slowly clapping her hands five times to mark her amazement.** 21. The clapping almost caused her to tumble to the floor because she had taken the cane off the ground in order to clap with both of her hands. 22. She quickly returned the cane to the ground to keep the balance. 23. *'Today's children*,' she continued, *'today's children* are funny. 24. **Nowadays children think that they are cleverer than their elders.** 25. **So they boast publicly about their intelligence and their sharp tongues.** 26. ***Of course, my son*** **who has just spoken has shown that he comes from a good family, and a good village.** 27. His people should be proud of him **because he is of the race of people who are born to lead others.** 28. **Yet, he is only *a child* in the eyes of someone like me who has wiped the buttocks of many children and grandchildren**. 29. **So I will not blame him for being clever.'** 30. **Old Meleng paused a moment, clearing her throat while assessing the reaction of the crowd that was now hanging on lips and wondering what kind of counter-attack she was going to come with.** 31. **'I have said that *the child* who has just spoken is clever, but can his cleverness, his understanding of matters such as these *medzo*, be superior to the knowledge of those who wiped his buttocks?** 32. ***The child*** **asked an interesting question.** 33. **He asked whether or not his father wished him back into his hut.** 34. **I do not blame him for that because that is the sort of question that *a child* who has offended his father should always ask.** 35. **But he forgot to mention one thing.** 36. **When *a child* runs away from his father after offending him, he must return home immediately after crying off his pain.** 37. **By coming home shortly after his punishment, he is showing his father that he has**

understood, and his father is thus prepared to give him his blessing. 38. **But if *the child* runs and stays away one moon after another, showing no sign of regret, the father may consider this a serious more offence because *the child* is clearly saying to him that he is coming back to get the blessings of his father.** 39. **The father may thus forget him and never forgive.'** 40. **Meleng was interrupted by *a fit of dry coughing that caused her to struggle with her throat for a while*.** 41. She managed to clear her voice and resume her speech. 42. **'So, what I am saying is that *a child* who stays away is in fact telling his father that he does not want to come back, and that he does not want to beg for forgiveness.** 43. **Such a child can only be a lost child to the offended father.** 44. **But because *a child* is only a child, he often discovers that no place is like home.** 45. ***Our forefathers and their forefathers before them* used to say this: you can say that the person over there was my wife, but you can never say the person standing over there was my brother, my mother or my father.** 46. No. 47. You cannot say so because someone who is linked to you by blood cannot get rid of that blood. 48. Two brothers born from the same mother cannot suddenly declare: "We were never born from the same *ébon*." 49. That is impossible. 50. Have I said well, my people?' 51. '*Ekéééé!* 52. *Owé!* 53. **You have said well mother,'** the crowd shouted. 54. 'Ya! 55. **So what I am saying to *the boy* who has just spoken and to our visitors is that it is they who have offended their father.** 56. **I do not like the question that was asked.** 57. **They asked their father whether he still wants them back in his hut.** 58. **That question turns things around.** 59. **It puts the blame on the father instead of putting it on the son.** 60. **It makes the father feel guilty for an offence that the son committed against him.** 61. **When have you ever seen someone coming to beg for forgiveness and the same time putting the blame on that person he offended?** 62. 'Never!' the audience reacted in agreement.

D4 is a retaliation speech from a member from Biloghe's village. The speaker here is a woman, Old Meleng, Biloghe's grandmother. She is actually not from the village. She has come to visit her daughter who is a wife of the village. By this alliance and the convention of marriage linking her granddaughter to Ntutume's village, she is considered a member *per excellence* of the village. She starts her speech with a public cry followed by the clapping of her two hands in (20) to denote an utter disapproval of Nkulanveng's naughty knotty question. She then makes a general observation (23-25) in which she polarizes children and elders, emphasizing on the former's publicly boasting about their intelligence and sharp tongues. Next, she turns to the head speaker from Ntutume's village (26) whom she addresses in these terms '*my son*'. This denotes an age difference between the female speaker and her male addressee. Old Meleng actually acknowledges the oratorical skills of her male opponent and summarily establishes that 'he comes from a good family, and a good village.' And for this reason, 'His people should be proud of him because he is of the race of people who are born to lead others.' (27). In the foregoing, one notes that the female speaker seems to admit that her male opponent is born to lead others (this indicates that *she seems to believe in and perpetuate the myth of those born to rule*). In fact, the woman seems here to ground her utterance in biological or genetic determinism (the belief that a person's behavior is directly controlled by his/her genes or some components of his/her physiology, generally at the expense of the role of the environment.). What this suggests here is the woman's implicit alignment to the laid-down male knowledge system or what Oyeronke Oyewumi (in (Oyewumi, 2005)) simply terms 'body-reasoning' (the assumption that biology determines social position), which actually provides the rationale for the organization and interpretation of the social world. As Oyewumi (ibid) observes, "Biological determinism is a filter through which all knowledge about society is run." Here Old Meleng obviously seems to interpret the social identity of her male opponent through the "prism of heritability", to borrow Duster's phrase (cited in (Oyewumi, 2005)).

While Old Meleng duly acknowledges Nkulanveng's intrinsic or heritable value of leadership, she does not perceive and treat him as an equal or as socially superior to her (as a result of his maleness) at all in that she considers him as only a child (28). Here something greater than maleness is at stake, seniority (a relational and dynamic sociological variable present in traditional African cultures and typical of their social intercourse). Represented here as a mere child, Nkulanveng's cleverness cannot in this sense supersede Old Meleng's adult or mother wit, given that she 'has wiped the buttocks of many children and grandchildren.' The point made here is that Old Meleng tends to entrench her superiority over her male speaker by simply drawing on motherhood (as Old Meleng ontologically implies, motherhood is an embodiment of repeatedly performed actions and experiences in social life). Motherhood, as observed here, is a real source of female power which seems to be superior to childhood, and even fatherhood (this observation has its root in the worldview of traditional African cultures. In traditional African societies, given the fact that woman was perceived as the bearer/giver of life, she was seriously revered in/with religious and figurative terms. For example, the Igbo use lexemes like "Nneka" (Mother is supreme), the Yoruba employ such figurative or proverbial expressions as "Iya ni wura" (Mother is gold), the Asante "Obaa na owoo ohene" (It is the woman who gave birth to the King.), etc., to celebrate the preeminence of motherhood. To prove the preeminence of motherhood or mother wit over Nkulanveng's intelligence or male wit, Old Meleng asks her audience the following question: '… can his (Nkulanveng's) cleverness, his understanding of matters such as these *medzo*, be superior to the knowledge of those who wiped his buttocks?' (31). In the same way, while Old Meleng notes that her male speaker has posed an interesting question (31-35), she goes on to pinpoint the awkward nature of the question or/and its irrelevance (35- 60), using a multitude of linguistic clues and discursive strategies like textual and contextual resources (her use of reference ties via the repetition of lexical and grammatical terms as well as culture-specific tokens. For instance, her repeated use of the lexical terms 'child' and 'son' is highly illustrative. Again, her use of tokens like *'Our forefathers and their fathers before them', 'ébon'*, etc., for example, a proverb (*Our forefathers and their forefathers before them* used to say this: you can say that the person over there was my wife, but you can never say the person standing over there was my brother, my mother or my father in (45)) and symbols (*blood, ébon meaning 'womb*', etc.) is indexical of a given culture, and is therefore culture-specific. In addition, her use of logical reasoning or argumentation (see 23-39, for instance) and her interacting with her

audience via a series of two question and answer chains (50-51-53 and 61-62) confirm her perfect command of discourse. Note that she successfully employs the afore-mentioned linguistic clues and discursive strategies to untie or dismantle the head speaker's naughty knotty question and goes on to restate the issue in the following terms and to which the entire audience startlingly acquiesces:

> 56. **I do not like the question that was asked.** 57. **They asked their father whether he still wants them back in his hut.** 58. **That question turns things around.** 59. **It puts the blame on the father instead of putting it on the son.** 60. **It makes the father feel guilty for an offence that the son committed against him.** 61. **When have you ever seen someone coming to beg for forgiveness and the same time putting the blame on that person he offended?** 62. 'Never!' the audience reacted in agreement.

4. Summary of the Findings and Conclusion

This paper has set out to gain a full insight into how the phenomenon of power game- empowering and disempowering gendered characters- is discursively enacted in Daniel Mengara's *Mema* (2003) from a sociolinguistic perspective. The study has drawn on Norman Fairclough's and van Dijk's notions of power and Michael A. K. Halliday's concept of register combined with qualitative approach to explore in four selected discourses from the novel how gendered characters and their relations of power are discursively represented. The analysis has yielded very insightful findings which can be classified according to the framework of four social scales and dimensions put forth by sociolinguists: i. *a social distance scale* (concerned with participant relationships), ii. *a status scale* (concerned with participant relationship in terms of social status and position in society), iii. *a formality scale* (relating to the setting or type of interaction) and iv. *two referential and affective function scales* (relating to the purposes or topic of interaction) (Holmes, 2013). With regard to this framework, one can make the following pronouncements about the four discourses.

Discourse1 revolves around a dispute between Mema (Ntsame Minlame) and Pepa (Sima Okang), her husband and her unconventional stubborn demeanor (12) during the days following the dispute, how she treats people around her, her husband included. The analysis of the narrator's language exudes that power is unequal between the two spouses in this context. Mema is actually depicted here as the person who holds power with such conspicuous masculine traits as *vanquishing*, *strong/unbeatable*, *terrifying/fear-instilling*, *intelligent* and *powerful*. In this conflictual context, Mema is likely to be addressed in formal terms by the people around her, including her husband, implying therefore that affective involvement is low and contact is infrequent between her and them. This is also noticed in the attitude of the male speaker appointed by the village to settle the dispute between the couple. Indeed, he addresses Mema with "*extreme caution and expert tact*" (22) to avoid having problems with her. While this mixed-sex portrayal exudes a fear-instilling woman in the person of Mema, it actually indicates an unusual politeness and deference towards her from a man. In this role of dispute-settler/mediator ascribed to this persona, he seemingly appears empowered in that Mema patiently listens to him (26) in the first place. However, this does not last because she interrupts him twice consecutively, making him stammer, hesitate and be indecisive all through. She also keeps the floor longer than the man, talking longer and louder to, questioning and ordering him. It follows from this to note that Mema is empowered here while the man is disempowered. She is even more empowered at the expense of her male counterpart when she makes use of the condescending metaphoric phrase '*that animal*' (52) to refer to her husband before him.

Discourse 2 is about female insubordination, reminiscence of love declaration, sisterhood or political solidarity and threat. The participants here are Akoma and her husband, Nkulanveng. The analysis of this discourse shows that both speakers have used proper names (*Akoma* and *Nkulanveng*) followed by affectionate endearment phrases (*my beloved wife* and *my husband*) while addressing each other. From this, one can simply infer that power is equal between the spouses, affective involvement is high and contact is frequent between them. However, this inference is superficial since the linguistic feature of naming does not exist in isolation; it works in symbiosis with other linguistic features. Hence, it is the configuration of all the linguistic features in the talk that can invariably provide a full picture of the relations of power therein. Given the purpose of the talk, notice that it is the wife, who has sought to compel her husband to get the whole village to go and get back one of her sisters, Biloghe, who has left her husband, Ntutume, ten months earlier, who has talked more, keeping the floor for a very long time, subsequently exuding some eccentric demeanors and openly defying male authority. Also, she has obviously controlled the talk by means of repeated questions and interruptions. All this denotes her being positioned as more *powerful* than her husband.

Discourse 3 is about oral dexterity and male power. Two male characters, Nkulanveng and an elder from Biloghe's village, are identified as speakers in public meeting meant to settle the dispute between Biloghe and Ntutume. Both men, as the study reveals, are empowered here in that they have shown they have an uncontestable mastery of words, customs, discourse patterning and orders of discourse. They have also proven to manipulate language and context very well. For instance, while taking the floor, they have plainly drawn on a great number of linguistic clues and discursive strategies to shape their talks. Nkulanveng has markedly stood out here in that he is represented as the head speaker of his village. His oratorical skills are then repeatedly highlighted by the narrator. In fact, he has posed a knotty question towards the end of his talk, which is expected to be untied or dismantled by someone from Biloghe's village. Discourse 4 is a retaliation speech from a member from Biloghe's village. The speaker here is a woman, Old Meleng, Biloghe's grandmother. As the analysis exudes, this woman is empowered in that she has proven to have an uncontestable command of words, customs, discourse patterning and orders of discourse. She has also proven to manipulate language and context very well. For example, in her attempt to

dismantle the knotty question put forth by the male speech master, Nkulanveng, she has employed a multitude of linguistic clues and discursive strategies like textual and contextual resources, a proverb, symbols, logical reasoning or argumentation and interaction with her audience. It should be noted that she has successfully employed these linguistic and discursive strategies to untie or dismantle the head speaker's naughty knotty question. It follows from the findings from D3 and D4 to note that the gendered personae therein have been discursively empowered. The question that follows suit is: 'Who is more powerful between Nkulanveng (who has posed a knotty question) and Old Meleng (who has dismantled the knotty question)?'

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