



**MITIGATE YOUR “VERBAL ABUSE” WITH LANGUAGE
SOFTENERS: A DISCURSIVE ASPECT IN CHIKA UNIGWE’S *ON
BLACK SISTERS STREET.***

Doh KONE
Doctoral student
Alassane OUATTARA University
Konedoh50@gmail.com

Abstract: Interactions in society requires the act of addressing a locutor either with signs or verbal expressions. This attitude inherent to human involves a bivalent and binary truism about language, where the speaker tends to resilience but can also inflects verbal abuse to the listener. The last aspect which has in store humiliation, intimidation and blames through expressions. In *On Black Sisters Street*¹ by Chika Unigwe, the verbal abuse flows from the story of the four characters: Efe, Ama, Sisi and Joyce in their inopportune journey for stability. Thus, what constitute the verbal abuse throughout *On Black Sisters Street* by Chika Unigwe? Through a discursive approach as a mitigation plan by A. Durnova and P. Zittoun (2013), key results of this investigation pinpoint the altruistic mitigation of verbal behavior. The result of the story of the four characters from home country and living abroad lead to an impulse of language resilience where a speaker tends to be politically correct.

key words: altruism, discourse, language, mitigation, verbal, abuse, interactions, softeners

Résumé: Les interactions dans la société exigent l'acte de s'adresser aux autres locuteurs avec des signes ou par expressions verbales. Cette attitude inhérente à l'homme implique un truisme bivalent et binaire sur le langage, où le locuteur a tendance à être résilient d'une part, mais peut aussi infliger la violence verbale à son l'auditeur d'autre part. Le dernier aspect nous réserve l'humiliation, les menaces, l'intimidation et les reproches à travers les expressions. Dans *On Black Sisters Street* de Chika Unigwe, la violence verbale découle de l'histoire des quatre personnages : Efe, Ama, Sisi et Joyce dans leur voyage inopportun vers la stabilité. Ainsi, qu'est-ce qui constitue la violence verbale dans *On Black Sisters Street* de Chika Unigwe ? À travers une approche d'analyse de discours en tant que plan d'atténuation d'Anna Durnova et Philippe Zittoun (2013), les principaux résultats de cette enquête mettent en évidence l'atténuation altruiste du comportement verbal. L'histoire du pays d'origine et de la vie à l'étranger conduit à une impulsion de résilience linguistique où un locuteur a tendance à être inclusif ou inclusive.

Mots clés: adoucisseur, altruisme, discours, atténuation, langage, violence, verbale, interactions.

¹ OBSS

Introduction

In the narrative of thoughts, discursive approach reveals the sequences of ideas of the speaker and that of the characters to the readers. It is a social constructionist approach to talk and social interaction that applies ideas from discursive and conversational analysis, critical discourse studies, and ethnomethodology to the analysis of talk and texts. Discursive approach then gives insights into the realms of linguistics different terminologies where prevailed the language of abuse refers to as the verbal abuse. Interactions and social exchanges of people are littered with verbal abuse as follows: condescension, criticism, degradation, manipulation, blame, accusation, isolation, gaslighting and threats. Thus, to counterattack these abuses, C. Caffi (2006) has refers to language softeners known as mitigators. They provide a mild action to the speech to appease not only the speaker but also the listeners. In the novel: *On Black Sisters' Street* by Chika Unigwe published in 2009, the language of abuse use by the character Olga Dele, has manipulated four girls from different angles. This article tends to pinpoint the verbal abuses and the mitigated action of language softeners through the stories of the main character Sisi, that of Efe, Ama and Joyce. The four have common denominator Olga Dele, the deceiver through language.

1. Literature Review

Verbal abuse has been defined as aggressive actions that also known as verbal aggression, verbal attack, verbal violence, verbal assault, psychic aggression, or psychic violence. It is a type of psychological or mental abuse that involves the use of oral, gestured, and written language directed to a victim. Verbal abuse can include the act of harassing, labeling, insulting, scolding, rebuking, or excessive yelling towards an individual. It can also include the use of derogatory terms, the delivery of statements intended to frighten, humiliate, denigrate, or belittle a person. These kinds of attacks may result in mental and/or emotional distress for the victims.

1.1. Language Softeners

Mitigation is from the Latin word “*Mitigatus*” the past part of “*Mitigare*” which is “*Mitis*” meaning ‘mild’ and “*agere*” meaning: to do, to drive and be akin to. Mitigation is then the abatement, the diminution and the attenuation of afflictive and calamitous effects. Applied and transferred in the use of language, mitigation is a discourse strategy for the persuasion of addressees. The speaker refers to it in order to convince the hearer. In fact, to

mitigate is to make less severe, less intense, and less painful. To mitigate means to soften, to appease and to moderate the speech. Therefore, mitigation excludes the substance of rudeness and the severity in speech. In effect, mitigation is a linguistic tool that “minimizes the display of a potential face-threat” according to S. Blum-Kulka (1990); and A. Brumark (2006).

The use of language is to act or to command the hearer. In the process of communicating, the speakers employ strategies to vehicle their message. These strategies are noticeable in the attitude, the tone, and the willingness of the addresser. The speaker has the right to cool his/her speaker and not. The main concern is the linguistic interest in the address. Thus, the range of mitigators conveys a large scope of linguistic units that need an analysis. This scope establishes a general overview of mitigation. The previous unit in which appear a device of mitigation is the “proposition”. The mitigation operators that involve the scope of “proposition” focuses on the propositional content. This content is J. L. Austin’s “Locutionary act” that is the “rhetic act”. The mitigation phenomenon reveals the reducing aspect of the utterer in the speech. Thus, the locutionary act in which mitigation parameters occur is devoted to “precision”. In fact, the rhetic act refers to as an utterance having the semantic properties of sense and reference rather than merely as one consisting in the production of sounds or of grammatically arranged words.

The stamina of mitigation has been noticed by C. Unigwe in *On Black Sisters Street* in the verbal acts of Sisi, Efe, Ama and Joyce. The mitigation acts are analyzed at the common push of each character. Their common denominator Olga Dele and their chief abroad they preciously named Madam.

1.2. Verbal Abuse in General

Physical abuse is the infliction of physical pain, injury, or physical coercion, and involves at least one act of violence. Verbal abuse is the infliction of mental anguish through yelling, screaming, threatening, humiliating, infantilizing, or provoking intentional fear. Much of the work on abusive language subtasks can be synthesized in a two-fold typology that considers whether (i) the abuse is directed at a specific target, and (ii) the degree to which it is explicit. Starting with the targets, abuse can either be directed towards a specific individual or entity, or it can be used towards a generalized Other, for example people with a certain ethnicity or sexual orientation. This is an important sociological distinction as the latter references a whole category of people rather than a specific individual, group, or organization



(Brubaker 2004, Wimmer 2013) and, entails a linguistic distinction that can be productively used by researchers.

Verbal Abuse-- (Verbally assaulting)- constant name calling, harsh threats, and sarcastic comments that continually “beat down” the addressee’s self-esteem with humiliation-includes openly telling him/her that he/she is worthless and calling child derogatory/demeaning names (S. Hamarman and W. Bernet, 2000).

Emotional Abuse-- According to R. K. Oates (1996), emotional abuse is the habitual, verbal harassment of a person by disparagement, criticism, threat, ridicule, and the inversion of love; by verbal and nonverbal means, rejection and withdrawal are substituted.

Psychological Abuse-- “Psychological maltreatment means a repeated pattern of caregiver behavior or extreme incident(s) that convey to children that they are worthless, flawed, unloved, unwanted, endangered, or of value only in meeting another’s needs” (American Professional Society on the Abuse of Children, 1995).

The abuse language in the novel is visible in the interactions of Olga Dele with the girls who uses the circumstances to catch with words. The language used by Olga Dele and Madam is to fulfill their goals. This use of language will be analyzed as context bound structures to show their verbal assault.

2. Theoretical Framework

2.1. Discursive Approach

In discursive approaches, social world is viewed as a construction of meanings which social actors produce, maintain, and transform through the use of language and communication. The approaches draw much on the social constructionist perspective (Berger and Luckmann, 1966) but also on a wide range of other traditions (N. Fairclough, 1992 and R. Wodak, 1997). In general, the traditions share two basic features: they are interested in the constructive effects of texts, and they are necessarily interpretative (Hardy and Phillips, 1999, p. 2). Ideas in this paper are based on a critical discursive approach that not only describes different discursive practices but also shows how discourse is shaped by ideologies and indicates the constructive effects that discourse has on social relations and practices and on social identities (N. Fairclough, 1992). In other words, our assumption is that discursive practices can have major ideologically-based effects, and they can help produce and reproduce unequal power relations, for example, between the genders through the way they

represent and position people. The ideological loading of certain ways of using language and the power relations which underlie them are often invisible, taken for granted, and seen “natural” to people. That is why they need to be made visible in research (N. Fairclough and R. Wodak, 1997). Hence, a critical discursive approach openly declares its emancipatory interests. It aims to open up the often invisible and taken-for-granted assumptions and, thus, has a moral loading. We consider it as a theoretical framework, although it can also be regarded as a method of research (J. Potter and M. Wetherell, 1998).

The distinction is, however, often blurred. In the following, we stress on the basic concepts of the framework: discourse and ideology, beginning by focusing on the concept of culture, since discourses constitute society and culture as well as are constituted by them. M. Foucault and N. Anthony (1972) argue that discourses make it possible for certain statements but not others to occur in particular times, places and institutional locations (N. Fairclough, 1992). Consequently, language and communication are not operating in a “vacuum”. They always maintain and transform the social and cultural practices from which they emerge, N. Fairclough and R. Wodak (1997), are best seen as indirect and mediated rather than as direct. The traditional definition of the concept of culture, based on the work of the anthropologist E. Tylor (1874), refers to a combination of conventional courses of action, values, norms, behaviour, and symbols, which develop in a particular place and time, and which influence the functioning of the people of the culture in question. Cultural dimensions manifest themselves in several overt features (people’s behaviour, symbolic artefacts such as logos and trademarks in business organizations, the physical environment, and so on), values (for example, how societal responsibilities and relationships are understood), and self-evident basic assumptions which deal with worldviews, humankind and individuality.

People are positioned in a particular way as subjects’ discourses, which may produce unequal power relations. The ideological way of representing and constructing social reality in a particular manner easily develops into a “taken-for-granted tradition” in a given culture. The aim of the critical discourse approach is to make visible aspects of this kind in discourse.

2.2. *Chika Unigwe’s On Black Sisters Street*

The fiction, *On Black Sisters’ Street* (shall going forward be represented with the acronym OBSS for the purpose of this work), was first published by Chika Unigwe, a Nigerian writer, in 2009. It tells the story of four different women: Sisi, Efe, Ama and Joyce, who found themselves within the same world in the distant land of Brussels, Belgium, all in



the quest to survive. For the most part of their early stay in Brussels, each of them holds her peculiar ugly past story close to her chest and confiding in no one until one of them is suddenly murdered in cold blood by unknown elements (unknown at least to them). The tragedy draws them close to each other leading them to opening up to themselves about their ugly pasts. It is the story of these pasts that form the corpus of the text as they are narrated in the form of flashbacks to their peculiar pasts and flash forwards to the present situation. The author adopts the style of dedicating each chapter of the work to each particular character or city in the text, thereby maintaining the reader's focus and attention on each particular character and city being exposed at each point in time. The details of these stories they share shall be explored using the same model as in the quest to identify the various push and pull factors contained in their peculiar individual narratives.

Sisi, whose real name was Chisom, was the most beautiful of all the four girls, at least according to Joyce's estimation (OBSS, p.13). She came from a modest Christian home of a father, who was a civil servant and a petty trading mother. Her life was always driven by the primary motive of becoming somebody bigger and better than her father, who incidentally "had not studied beyond secondary school and often blamed his stagnant career on that fact" (OBSS, p.19). Her father's eternal words would always be, "The only way to a better life is education. Face your books and the sky will be your limit. It's in your hands" (OBSS, p.18). No wonder, she was excited upon her graduation as she looked forward to a realization of everything she had always dreamed of. "She did not need a clairvoyant to predict her future, not when she had a degree from a good university. She would get a house for herself. Rent somewhere big for her parents.... a massive house where she had the space to throw Saturday-night parties" (OBSS, p.18). She and her family were so obsessed with their belief in the power of a university degree to turn their lives for the better that they always kept fantasizing about the many good things to follow upon Chisom's graduation. In fact, for her father, "there were only two certainties in their lives: death and Chisom's good job" (OBSS, p.21), as far as university education was concerned.

As far Ama was concerned, "She knew that she could not withstand another year in Lagos. Not like this. I must escape" (OBSS, p.30). And that was why despite the difficulty and the shame in her acceptance of what Dele had to offer, she chose to keep it to herself without informing her family and boyfriend about the details of the offer. She was rather filled with the thoughts of whom she would be after she must have made it big abroad. And so, "She

did not tell them that she had already decided to change her name, to adopt a new name that she would wear in her new life. Sisi.... She would rename herself Sisi: a stranger yet familiar. Chisom would be airbrushed out of existence at least for a while. And once she hit it big she would set up a business or two. She could go into the business of importing second-hand luxury cars into Nigeria” (OBSS, p.44). Even the normal nostalgia of leaving home which she found to be indeed brutal at her point of departure could not stay her mind from leaving Lagos. All that mattered to her was that she was plunging bravely into a future that held bright hopes for her. And for her, “it was all thanks to Dele”, to whom she felt she owed her life (OBSS, p.48).

Efe’s story was simply that of a teenage young girl, who lost the care and guidance of a mother as a teen and then fell into the hands of a callous and flirtatious forty-five years old man, who deflowered her at the age of sixteen. Efe became caught in the mix of a disinterested father, who became devastated on account of his wife’s death and a man with money “wey full everywhere like san’ san’ (OBSS, p.49). And this man, Titus, was also ready to spend the money on Efe just so he could have his way in between her thighs and continue doing so. The escapade continued with things going on smoothly for Efe and her siblings (who were also benefitting from the largesse of the amorous affair) until Efe took in. The news of her pregnancy broken to Titus marked the end of the relationship and climaxed in her being chased out of Titus’ house by the latter’s wife. This marked the huge turning point in Efe’s life that placed her face to face with the desperate urge to survive in order to fend for her son, Lucky Ikponwosa (L.I., as Efe’s father named him for short).

When Dele eventually asked her if she would want to travel abroad, she could not understand the rationale behind the question. For her, “Who did not want to go abroad? People were born with the ambition and people died trying to fulfil that ambition” (OBSS, p.81-82). So, why ask her if she wanted to travel abroad when it was everybody’s dream? That was why “She had agreed to his terms before she asked what she was expected to do abroad”. In fact, as far she was concerned, “People knew the risks and people took them because the destination was worth it. What was it the song said? Nigeria *jagajaga. Everything scatter scatter*. Nobody wanted to stay back unless they had pots of money to survive the country. People like Titus and Dele” (OBSS, p.82). This mindset perfectly encapsulates both the push and pull factors that drove Efe’s desire to emigrate from Nigeria.

Ama was a girl that found herself in the very unfortunate circumstance of a pretentious and hypocritical foster father (although she initially thought he was her father), who began to defile her sexually from the night of her eighth birthday. This was the fundamental push factor she began to experience – the fact that this foster father of hers, Brother Cyril, was a very highly respected puritanical man, who was known for his moral uprightness. In Chika Unigwe’s depiction, “Brother Cyril was an assistant pastor at the Church of the Twelve Apostles of the Almighty Yahweh, Jehovah El Shaddai, Jehovah Jireh, one of the biggest churches in the city. The Devil did not belong to anywhere near the house which he was the head” (OBSS, p.128). On account of this he repudiated anything ‘ungodly’ be it music, dressing, language and what have you. As Chika Unigwe put it, “The music of the world was to be kept in the world, away from the confines of the house. As were alcoholic drinks. And cigarettes. And magazines with lewd pictures. And bad language. Their house was a house of holiness. And if Brother Cyril had his way, he would have had the entire house painted white for its sanctity” (OBSS, p.129).

These depictions serve to perfectly capture the image of the disillusion that Ama felt when this same man, described in such heavenly words as the above and who would always say, “you have to be prepared to meet the Lord at any given moment” (OBSS, p.131), defiled her sexually at the very tender age of just eight. Ama became so disillusioned that the pink walls in the sitting room of her father’s house became the only ‘person’ she could talk to about the ongoing amorous and illicit affair. Her situation was worsened by the fact that her mother did not care enough as a mother would to inquire into her sudden dislike for pap, owing to its “warm and yucky” similarity with the sperm that her father usually ejaculated during the unholy affair.

Joyce, originally named Alek by her Sudanese parents was the only one among the four women that was not from Nigeria. Her own push factors appear to be the most pathetic of all. She was a very unfortunate victim of a clash between the Sudan People’s Liberation Army (SPLA), which had been guarding the predominantly Dinka town and the Janjaweed militia. The first thought about migration came from her father, Nyok, a police officer, when she was just fifteen. He was preparing to move his entire household to somewhere around Khartoum from where they hoped to eventually migrate to either the UK or America. This migration was not for sightseeing or a vacation trip. It was a fleeing from home, as Chika Unigwe described it, on account of the tension in the land (OBSS, p.187). Pitiably, it was never to be! For on the

day of the planned trip, Janjaweed militia invaded into their home, massacred her parents and only brother and left her for dead after subjecting her to multiple rapes (OBSS, p.188 – 191).

When she eventually woke up after hours of unconsciousness to join the group of women and children that survived the mayhem, the only thought in her mind was simply to survive. That was what she owed her deceased family. And so, the decimation of her family in one sweep of massacre and her desperate determination to survive for their sake became her own primary push factor. Finding herself setting up a personal tent as a refugee in a refugee camp at the tender age of fifteen was nothing near her initial dreams of becoming a medical doctor. Georg Steiner was therefore right when he postulated that “migration has also become increasingly complex, manifesting itself in mixed population movements including refugees, asylum seekers, economic and other migrants whose motivations for travel are often diverse and overlapping” (Obiezu and Odimegwu xxvi). The best Alek could do was simply to smile to the stars with which she always conversed to ventilate her burdens, until she stumbled unto Polycarp, a Nigerian soldier, who was among the soldiers guarding them in the camp. It was Polycarp that brought back joy into her life so much so that he even had to take her along with him back to Lagos when he was redeployed to Lagos, after about two months of their intimate love tangle.

Through Polycarp’s description of Lagos to Alek as they arrived, one gets into Chika Unigwe’s mind about the government of the day thus: “And this is Lagos in the twenty-first century. Lagos in 2004! All our government is good for is stuffing their pockets. They don’t care what happens to the people they are supposed to be ruling” (OBSS, p.214). After all, as Sisi had earlier observed, President Obasanjo’s own children were all placed at Ivy League universities in the US (OBSS, p.201-202). So, if that is the case, it, therefore, becomes necessary that every other person who can, should also find their own way outside the country for their own survival. It is such political maladministration as this that constitutes one of the perennial push factors that usually drive people into wanting to migrate from Nigeria.

3. Verbal Abuses in *On Black Sisters’ Street*

The abuse language to be investigated lies in the interactions of Olga Dele and Madam to each character Sisi, Efe, Ama and Joyce. In these interactions, superiority and manipulation are obvious in the sense that Dele and Madam are using the girls for their own purposes abroad. The language used by Dele to persuade them is oriented to either direct or indirect abuse towards the girls each in her own living condition.

3.1. *Condescension in the life of Ama*

Condescension is an attempt to belittle you. The abuser's comments are sarcastic, disdainful, and patronizing. It is all to make themselves feel superior. Condescension is associated with a patronizing attitude, and with other negative words such as divisive, heartless, arrogant, high-handed and dictatorial.

- (1) “Don’t even try to deny it. I know it. And you know it. Money does not have legs. We both know who has been doing the pilfering, and God help you the day I have my proof. That day you shall suffer more than Job. I ga atakalia Job n’afufu,” the woman said. (OBSS, p.93)

The story of Ama is weird. In linguistic lens, a careful heed on this first which refers to condescension, the hearer “Ama” was confined not to open her mouth for whatever reason. Through: “Don’t even try to....” the abuser of Ama has a total control on her. The negative phrase here is a barrier for the addresser to subdue his or her addressee. There is no other means for Ama, not bear that disdainful attitude. The dictatorship of the utterer kept her pined from a distance. In “...That day you shall suffer...” here the intimidating act gives Ama the fear of life and no one to whom she could talk in house.

- (2) “The walls could sketch her stories. They could tell how she wished she could melt into the bed. Become one with it. She would hold her body stiff, muscles tense, as if that would make her wish come true. When she did this, her father would demand, “**What’s the Fifth Commandment?**” “Honor thy father and thy mother,” she would reply, her voice muffled by the collar of her nightgown in her mouth. And then she would relax her muscles, let him in, and imagine that she was flying high above the room. (OBSS, p.98)

In the excerpt (2), the structure of sentence referring to the biblical education has nothing to do with intentions of the abuser. The biblical reference here is a means for the abuser to fulfill his Brother Cyril who could be called a father Ama. He just refers to the bible, so that Ama cannot complain about his bad attitude. In this extract, the abusive act is implicit. Only the context shapes the discursive meaning. One could imagine or find her father not guilty or not being the abuser, but he actually refers to biblical references to cover the way he abuses Ama. This linguistic attitude differs from political correctness. It is manipulation of language to accomplish once purpose.

- (3) **She wished her mother would ask her** so that she could tell her, but she never asked, choosing instead to complain about Ama’s hair being as tough as sisal. (OBSS, p.99)

Ama as a little girl at home was supposed to be opened up to her mother but no. She was scared in the house because her parents turned to be abusive. Her mother refused to listen to her. They patronized her to extend that she was traumatized. She was in despair. Here in the excerpt (3), the linguistic parameter puts forward here is "...wished her mother would ask..." the wish reveals the speaker's willingness to address herself to someone but unfortunately, she could not. No way for Ama to complain about anything at home.

3.2. Criticism

Criticism can come in many forms. Someone may be direct and blunt with their criticism, such as asking, "Why are you so lazy?"

Other times, criticism can come in the form of a joke. Typically, abusers will say something hurtful and try to disguise it as a joke so they can get away with making you feel vulnerable or bad about certain aspects of yourself.

- (4) When her father came home from work **to be confronted with the JAMB² result**, he had accused her of not studying hard enough. "If you had spent some time studying for your exams instead of floating around the house like a ghost, you'd have passed! **You are just lazy. Plain lazy. Period!**" (OBSS, p.106)

In this excerpt (4), the abusee is seen as a lazy person. The use of words like: "...accused..." which is transparent word show that for abuse, Ama is worth of nothing. She is just good for nothing. Not passing her exam qualifies her as a foolish by the abuser. In fact, Brother Cyril is at basis of the whole story. He uses language here to make guilty and blame her for the fault she never committed.

- (5) Ama watched him laugh and **heard Brother Cyril call her a lazy good-for-nothing** and she pooled saliva in her mouth and released it. (OBSS, p.119)

This is a call launched through language that language is nothing, but context bound. Ama has started to build hateful attitudes because of her abuser. Through the attitude of the speaker, Ama who is the abusee, sees herself a "... good-for-nothing..." she lost self-confidence.

3.3. Degradation

Abusers want you to feel bad about yourself. They employ humiliation and shame to degrade you and eat away at your confidence.

² JAMB: Joint Admissions and Matriculation Board, diploma in Nigeria.



- (6) “**Just shut up. Shut up**, Ama, before I am thrown out of my husband’s house because of you. (OBSS, p.109)
- (7) “Shut up! Shut up!” Wail. “Shut up, Tora Bora wife.” Wail. “Are we not people like you? Are we not?” Her grief raising her wails to a crescendo that made Alek’s lungs clog up as if she were inhaling dust. Alek wished she could block it out, this sound that was horrific in its peak. (OBSS, p.137)

In this excerpt, through the linguistic tone, it is obvious that the abuse language is forecasted through orders. Ama fears her mother who turned to be her abuser. In fact, whenever she tries to talk to mother openly about the tortures she goes through, she finds herself forbidden. With the use of the adverb “*just...*” which refers to “*only, simply, merely*” one thing or single thing is to keep quiet even if she is oppressed by her perpetrator.

3.4. *Manipulation*

Manipulation is an attempt to make you do something without making it a direct order. Make no mistake about it: It meant to control you and keep you off-balance.

- (8) “Oya! **Make am** beautiful. She dey go abroad. Today! Beautify am!” he shouted, almost pushing her toward one of the hairdressers. (OBSS, p.28-29)
- (9) **Chisom felt compelled to talk to the girl**. Her silence bothered her. “So you dey go abroad?” “Yes.” The girl nodded. Then added, almost as an afterthought, “Spain.” Her voice sounded garrotted, as if it hurt her to use it. “**Wetin you dey go abroad go do?**” “She dey go work. You wan’ go, too? You wan’ go abroad, too?” The man walked up to where Chisom and the girl sat, inserting himself, incredibly, into the space between their chairs. (OBSS, p.29)
- (10) “**If you wan’ comot from dis our nonsense country**, come see me, make we talk,” he continued loudly, not giving the girl a chance to say anything. (OBSS, p.30)
- (11) **Dele asked if she would like to go abroad**. “Belgium. A country wey dey Europe. **Next door to London.**” (OBSS, p.61)
- (12) “**If you wan’ make easy money, if you wan’ go abroad**, come my office for Randle make we talk. But only if you dey serious o. If you no dey serious make you no waste my time and yours. You hear me so?” (OBSS, p.117)

In excerpts (8, 9, 10, 11 and 12), appears the language of Olga Dele the provider of girls to go abroad. He is using manipulative words through “*if-clauses*” to catch the weakens. We have words like “*comot...*” for “come out or travel out”, *if you wan*” for “want”. These broken phrases used by Olga Dele show his local habits. He is referring to the fact of going abroad as an easy way to find money, to make one’s life better. The ironic fact is that Olga Dele himself has never been in Europe the place he claims to be the best. To him, “*If you wan*’



comot from dis our nonsense country, ...” their home countries are seen as nonsense. He is just using language to reach his goals.

3.5. *Isolation*

Isolation is a control tactic abusers use to separate you from your support systems. It often starts subtly by discouraging you from spending time with other people. They may ask you not to communicate with one individual, then another, and another until your inner circle is just the two of you. An abuser may try to prevent you from seeing friends, family members, or peers altogether. They may encourage you to quit your job or drop out of school as a way to remove outside influences. They may also isolate you financially and control all the money in the relationship. The abuser may make all financial decisions without discussion, refuse to provide money for necessities, and not allow you access to bank accounts. This is financial abuse. The abuser does this to ensure you do not have your own resources, are dependent upon them, and, therefore, are unable to leave.

(13) “That girl is very **foolish**. Atulu. She’s a **sheep**,”. (OBSS, p.92)

(14) There was nothing Ama feared more than **Discipline** cutting a rawness into her skin that hurt for many days after. (OBSS, p.95)

(15) Ama spoke to the pink walls...Ama told the walls how ... **She told the walls of the pain** of the squeezing and the coldness of her father’s hands. (OBSS, p.97)

“Foolish, sheep, discipline...” were the words Ama was confronted to. She could not escape at this her younger age. In fact, she was treated as worth of nothing. “discipline...” was the punishment she undergoes whenever she was accused of something even if she was not guilty. She finds herself talking to nobody but to the “*walls...*” she was isolated. In these excerpts, Ama is not guilty of anything but she finds herself pushed by her oppressor.

3.6. *Threats*

Any type of threat is verbal abuse. If someone threatens you, what they’re saying is that they want to control and manipulate you and that is how they are going to go about it. Threats are designed to invoke fear in the person being abused so that they will submit to their abuser’s demands.

(16) Ama tried to tell her mother about the year she was eight. On the tip of her tongue, **she tasted the fear of the nights** he came into her room and yearned to spit it out. She started, but her mother cut her short. (OBSS, p.109)

At the age of eight, Ama was in constant fear. Her fear was high. It is clear that even in the house there were no one to whom she could talk. The abuser here made her create and develop thoughts of trauma. The linguistic unit in store is the cognitive thoughts of her nights in constant fear.

- (17) **“Oga Dele, this is Alek. I told you already about her.”** His voice was almost servile. The fat man nodded at Alek and said, “The name has to go. Alek. Sound too much like Alex. Man’s name. We no wan’ men. Oti oo. That man’s name has to go, one time. Give am woman name. Fine fine name for fine gal like her.” He laughed and Polycarp laughed. Alek hated them both. “Make I see ... Cecilia? Nicole? Joyce? I like Nicole. Wetin you tink, Polycarp? Nicole no be nice name?” Polycarp nodded. Yes, it was a good name. Nicole was an excellent choice, he said. Dele shook his head. “No. Not Nicole. Dat Nicole Richie too skinny. No flesh. She be like stick insect. No be good name for fine gal like dis.” Another roar of head-bobbing laughter. Polycarp laughed along. “No, Senghor Dele. Na true. Nicole no be good name for fine gal. Nicole Richie too skinny.” **“Joyce. Yes. Joyce. Dat one sound like name wey dey always jolly. Joooooyce!”** He ripped out a loud laugh, a hee-hee haw-haw that wobbled his stomach. (OBSS, p.166)

(18)

It is worthy of note that Alek, unlike the other three ladies, appeared not to have been desperate about leaving for abroad. All she wanted was survival and happiness. It did not matter to her where she got it, so long as she got it. She would have been pleased to stay on with Polycarp in Nigeria or indeed anywhere of his choosing, if his family had not been such tribal bigots as Polycarp and his mother presented them to be. But that was never to be! As a result, part of her firm resolutions upon arriving Zwarte Zusterstraat was that never again would she allow her happiness in life to ever depend on another’s, for that was the fundamental push that landed her into the odd job and life she found herself in (OBSS, p.241). This perfectly captures one of such painful emotions of many migrants, who find themselves abroad, especially on involuntary cases. Joyce (Alek) did not have a choice to decide on her own.

Conclusion

Performing with language, Chika Unugwe has touched the substance the political correctness where lies perfect interactions between language users referring mitigation. Unfortunately, language is manipulative and versatile for its user. In *On Black Sister Street*, the narrative tone expressed the discursive aspect that allows the “*common denominator*” Algo Dele to abuse the life of four innocent girls who did not realize what life is about abroad. The language he uses reflexed mitigation, but in the analysis, one comes across abusive language, how language is used to reach and fulfill a social goal, make the addressee dreams and do the “*un-*



do". From data (1 to 20), the lives of Sisi, Efe, Ama Joyce were linked by the verbal abuse which could serve as a lesson for any reader to pay attention to the subtlety of language.

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