

# Interpersonal Resources in Chimamanda Adichie's *Dear Ijeawale or A Feminist Manifesto in Fifteen Suggestions*: A Feminist Critical Discourse Approach

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## Abstract

This paper examines how arguments for feminism are laid out and presented in Chimamanda Adichie's *Dear Ijeawale*. Drawing on Feminist Critical Discourse Analysis (henceforth FCDA) for theoretical underpinnings and Systemic Functional Linguistics (henceforth SFL) the study examines Adichie's projection of feminism and argues for its validity. The study reveals that Adichie deployed declarative, interrogative and imperative clauses in the text to not only inform, but also instruct and engage her audience. The modality analysis of the text reveals Adichie's strategic use of language to balance certainty, possibility, and obligation. The deployment of both epistemic and deontic modalities makes the text authoritative and instructive. Three feminist viewpoints are identified and amplified by interpersonal resources in the text: female autonomy and empowerment, critique of patriarchal norms, and equality and non-conformity. The paper contributes to feminist discourse by demonstrating how linguistic structures are strategically deployed to challenge dominant ideologies and foster feminist consciousness.

**Keyword:** Discourse Analysis, Female Empowerment, Gender Inequality, Manifesto, Modality, Mood

## Introduction

Feminist literary texts often captivate readers with their profound and multi-layered ideologies, yet the grammatical and discursive elements that underpin these works are rarely scrutinized. In the realm of feminist literature, language transcends its role as a mere storytelling tool to become a potent instrument for challenging entrenched power dynamics, reshaping social relations, and redefining gender ideologies. Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie's *Dear Ijeawele, or A Feminist Manifesto in Fifteen Suggestions* stands out as an exemplary text that invites such an examination. The book is not only a call to action but a rich repository for understanding how interpersonal meaning is meticulously crafted and conveyed.

The gender discrimination faced by women in Africa, particularly in Nigeria, underscores the urgency of feminist discourse. Women confront barriers ranging from restricted access to education and employment to limited representation in political and leadership roles. These inequalities are sustained by deeply ingrained cultural and religious norms that perpetuate patriarchy and gender-based violence. Against this backdrop, African feminism has emerged as a powerful force for advocating gender equality and challenging oppressive systems (Nutsukpo, 2020). Despite resistance and dismissal of early feminist voices as "man-haters" or "unruly," feminism has gained momentum, driven by a growing recognition of the harms of patriarchy (Nutsukpo, 2020).

Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie, a prominent reformist feminist (Nwosu, 2017), has

become a leading advocate for dismantling gender stereotypes and promoting equality in Africa (Sebola, 2022; Anggeria, 2019). Known for her eloquence and simplicity, Adichie's work, including her celebrated TED talk "We Should All Be Feminists," profoundly impacts contemporary feminist discourse. Her writings not only challenge traditional gender roles but also offer a critical lens on societal structures that sustain gender inequality. *Dear Ijeawele* takes a unique approach by addressing a friend's query on raising a feminist daughter. Rather than merely critiquing societal norms or highlighting gender inequalities, Adichie focuses on the root causes of these issues and suggests practical solutions. This manifesto, structured as a personal yet political letter, draws on Adichie's experiences in Nigeria and her global feminist activism. Each of the fifteen suggestions provides a distinct perspective on feminist thought, from the importance of language to the rejection of restrictive gender roles, making it a significant text for analyzing contemporary feminist debates.

While previous studies have explored *Dear Ijeawele* from literary and stylistic angles (Akpan & Udoette, 2023; Sebola, 2022; Akeju-Ahmad & Shobowale, 2024), this paper delves deeper into its linguistic fabric. By applying feminist critical discourse analysis to the interpersonal resources within the text—such as mood, modality, and personal pronouns—this paper uncovers how Adichie articulates and defends feminist ideologies. This analysis not only illuminates the subtle ways Adichie engages with patriarchy but also reveals her strategic use of language to champion feminist ideals. The paper explores how Adichie utilises interpersonal resources in *Dear Ijeawele* to illustrate the insidious nature of patriarchy, starting from the early stages of a female child's life. The study identifies and describes interpersonal resources such as mood, and modality; this reveals how they are utilised in *Dear Ijeawele* to articulate feminist ideologies and identities. The paper discusses how the identified resources are deployed in constructing feminist ideologies and identities. The paper also explores how Adichie's deployment of interpersonal resources reveals her commitment to feminist orientation. Finally, the paper seeks to bridge the gap between feminist theory and linguistic analysis, offering fresh insights into how Adichie's *Dear Ijeawele* challenges and reshapes gender norms through the intricate use of interpersonal resources.

Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie has established herself as a significant figure in contemporary feminist literature, with works such as *We Should All Be Feminists*, *Purple Hibiscus*, and *Half of a Yellow Sun*. Her writings explore gender roles and challenge traditional norms, focusing on women's lived experiences in familial and communal settings. Adichie often depicts the systemic mistreatment of women and their occasional resistance to violence and subjugation by male figures (Ann, 2015). While Adichie is frequently linked to liberal feminism, as noted by Lascelles (2021), her feminist stance has faced criticism. Lascelles argues that Adichie's feminism lacks alignment with anti-capitalist and anti-racist principles and does not adequately support LGBTQIA+ communities. This criticism was amplified by Adichie's controversial 2017 comment distinguishing transwomen from ciswomen, which some interpreted as transphobic. Lascelles suggests that such views dilute Black Feminism, which should be a comprehensive political stance opposing all forms of oppression, including those affecting disabled, migrant, Muslim, queer, and trans-women.

Existing studies on Adichie's *Dear Ijeawele* have examined various aspects of her feminist discourse. Akpan and Udoette (2023) investigate the effectiveness of African feminist

manifestos in empowering women to challenge patriarchal norms. They argue that societal gender role prescriptions perpetuate inequality and hinder women's self-realization. While feminist manifestos alone may not completely eradicate female oppression, they can significantly shift women's consciousness, enabling them to assert their potential. The authors reference Judith Butler's concept of gender performativity, highlighting how societal norms shape gender identities and expectations. However, they do not examine the role of language in promoting feminism and challenging patriarchy. A critical discourse analysis of Adichie's manifesto, particularly concerning interpersonal resources, could clarify how she constructs and presents her feminist arguments, thereby assuming discursive roles in a predominantly patriarchal society.

In a similar vein, Reshmi (2022) applies an intersectional approach to *Dear Ijeawele*, a concept developed by Kimberlé Crenshaw. The analysis emphasises Adichie's complex perspective, recognising that not all women identify as feminists and not all men are misogynists. Reshmi concludes that Adichie's work connects her feminist ideals, potentially empowering women to challenge patriarchal structures. However, the study does not thoroughly investigate the linguistic strategies Adichie employs to assert the validity of her feminist claims. A focused examination of the interpersonal resources she uses could provide deeper insights into the effectiveness and persuasiveness of her feminist rhetoric.

Akeju-Ahmad and Shobowale (2024) conduct a stylistic analysis of *Dear Ijeawele* using Halliday's Systemic Functional Linguistics Framework. Their findings indicate that Adichie's language choices significantly contribute to expressing her intentions and the aesthetic quality of the text. While this stylistic exploration is detailed, it does not fully explore how Adichie constructs and supports her arguments to engage and persuade her audience.

This paper undertakes a Feminist Critical Discourse Analysis (FCDA) of the interpersonal resources in Adichie's *Dear Ijeawele*. By focusing on how Adichie uses language to assert her feminist views, the paper explores how she navigates and challenges patriarchal norms, constructs her arguments, and positions herself within the broader feminist discourse. This analysis provides a comprehensive understanding of the rhetorical strategies employed by Adichie, thereby contributing to the broader discourse on feminist literature and the role of language in advocating gender equality.

### **Feminist Critical Discourse Analysis (FCDA)**

This study applies Feminist Critical Discourse Analysis (FCDA) to investigate the linguistic and discursive deployment of interpersonal resources in Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie's *Dear Ijeawele*. Specifically, the study seeks to understand how Adichie uses language to develop and propagate feminist ideals. The choice of FCDA is grounded in the recognition that language is not a neutral medium of communication but a social practice imbued with power dynamics and ideological struggles. This study posits that Adichie's text does more than convey feminist ideas; it actively constructs and negotiates feminist identities and relations through its discursive strategies.

The methodological strength of FCDA lies in its interdisciplinary nature, combining feminist theory's critical insights with CDA's rigorous analytical tools. This approach allows scholars to interrogate the subtle and overt ways discourse perpetuates or challenges patriarchal

structures. As Dalton (2019) observes, CDA is particularly concerned with how language shapes our understanding of social phenomena, a concern that is amplified in FCDA through its explicit focus on gendered discourses.

Adichie's *Dear Ijeawale* is a rich site for such analysis. The text reflects not merely feminist ideals but a strategic intervention in ongoing debates about gender and power. By employing FCDA, this study seeks to uncover the discursive strategies that Adichie uses to challenge patriarchal norms and to propose alternative feminist discourses. This involves identifying the ideologies embedded in the text and understanding how linguistic elements, particularly interpersonal resources, are mobilised to transmit these ideologies.

Lazar's (2005, 2007, 2014) five key principles of FCDA—feminist analytical activism, gender as ideological structure and practice, complexity of gender and power relations, discourse in the (de)construction of gender, and critical reflexivity as praxis—provide a comprehensive framework for this analysis. These principles underscore the dual focus of FCDA: critique and transformation. FCDA is not content with merely analysing how gender is constructed in discourse; it also aims to challenge and transform the discourses that sustain patriarchal power relations.

In *Dear Ijeawale*, Adichie not only critiques the patriarchal social order but also offers a blueprint for feminist resistance. This aligns with FCDA's goal of empowering marginalised voices by highlighting alternative discourses that challenge dominant narratives. For instance, Adichie's suggestions for raising a feminist daughter can be seen as a discursive strategy to dismantle hegemonic gender norms and propose new, egalitarian ways of being. Through a critical analysis of these strategies, this study aims to contribute to the broader feminist project of deconstructing and reconstructing gendered identities and relations.

The application of FCDA to literary texts is well-established, with scholars such as Imran, Sahrish and Hussain (2024), Allagbe, Alou, and Chinade (2021), and Amoussou and Djimet (2020) demonstrating its efficacy in uncovering the discursive means through which gendered identities and relations are constructed and contested. These studies provide a precedence for the current analysis, validating FCDA as a suitable framework for examining how interpersonal resources in *Dear Ijeawale* are used to negotiate feminist ideals. This study aims to contribute to feminist scholarship by illuminating the complex discursive strategies through which Adichie engages with and challenges patriarchal structures, offering new possibilities for feminist discourse by applying FCDA.

### **Systemic Functional Linguistics**

Systemic Functional Linguistics (SFL) is a linguistic model that examines language as a social semiotic system, emphasizing the role of context in meaning-making. Unlike traditional grammar that often isolates linguistic elements from their communicative functions, SFL views grammar as a resource for constructing meaning in social interactions. Bloor and Bloor (2013) argue that grammar under SFL is concerned with how meanings are deployed through linguistic choices, which are inherently tied to the contexts in which they are used. This makes SFL particularly suited for the analysis of texts that engage in ideological work, such as Adichie's *Dear Ijeawale*.

SFL delineates three metafunctions of language: ideational, interpersonal, and textual.

The interpersonal metafunction, which is the focus of this study, concerns how language is used to enact social roles, establish relationships, and express attitudes, judgments, and evaluations. Halliday and Matthiessen (2013) describe the interpersonal metafunction as presenting clauses as interactive events, involving roles, responsibilities, and the negotiation of meaning between speakers and listeners. This framework is instrumental in analysing how Adichie engages her readers and conveys feminist ideals through interpersonal resources such as mood and modality.

The relevance of SFL to this study lies in its ability to unpack the linguistic choices that Adichie makes to achieve her feminist objectives. An interpersonal analysis of Adichie's *Dear Ijeawale* will show how Adichie strategically positions herself and her readers in the discourse, particularly in terms of mood and modality. Mood, as identified by Halliday and Matthiessen (2013), encompasses the grammatical structures that encode the speaker's intent—whether giving information (statements), demanding information (questions), or requesting action (commands). Halliday and Matthiessen (2013) categorises mood structures into two: indicative and imperative. They further subdivide indicative into declaratives and interrogatives. Declaratives refer to the clause structure whereby the Subject of the clause is followed by the finite element of the clause. The declarative clause is often used to give information. Interrogatives refer to the clause structure whereby the finite element of the clause often precede the subject of the clause. The interrogative structure is used to demand information. The imperatives refer to the clause structure whereby the Subject element is often elipted. The imperative structure is often used to request action or services, In *Dear Ijeawale*, these speech functions are critical for understanding how Adichie negotiates power relations and advocates for feminist principles.

Modality, another key component of the interpersonal metafunction, further deepens this analysis by highlighting how Adichie expresses attitudes, assessments, and commitments to the propositions she advances. Downing and Locke (2006) define modality as the semantic category through which speakers express their stance toward the likelihood, necessity, or desirability of a proposition. In the context of *Dear Ijeawale*, modality helps reveal the nuances of Adichie's feminist discourse—whether she presents certain feminist ideals as obligatory, possible, or desirable, and how she negotiates these stances with her readers.

Modality is not monolithic; it encompasses epistemic (extrinsic) and deontic (intrinsic) modalities, each reflecting different dimensions of speaker engagement. Epistemic modality concerns the likelihood or truth of a proposition, while deontic modality involves obligations, permissions, and duties (Downing & Locke, 2006). The deployment of mood and modality in Adichie's text thus serves as a powerful tool for feminist discourse. By positioning herself and her readers through these interpersonal resources, Adichie not only conveys her feminist ideals but also actively involves her audience in the negotiation of these ideals. In sum, through the examination of mood and modality, this paper reveals the discursive strategies that enable Adichie to construct, negotiate, and promote feminist identities and relations in *Dear Ijeawale*.

## **Methodology**

This study adopts a qualitative research design, which is appropriate for exploring the discursive strategies and linguistic patterns in Adichie's text. Qualitative research enables an

in-depth examination of language use and provides insights into how social and ideological meanings are constructed through discourse. Specifically, this paper employs Feminist Critical Discourse Analysis (FCDA) as its primary analytical approach. FCDA is an interdisciplinary method that merges critical discourse analysis with feminist theory, focusing on how language both reflects and perpetuates gendered power relations (Lazar, 2005). The study also integrates the interpersonal metafunction of Systemic Functional Linguistics (SFL) to analyse how Adichie’s language choices contribute to interpersonal meaning-making.

The data for the study consists of the complete text of Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie’s *Dear Ijeawale or A Feminist Manifesto in Fifteen Suggestions*. The text, which is a letter written to a friend on how to raise a feminist daughter, serves as a rich source of feminist discourse. Given that this study focuses on interpersonal resources, the data collection process involves a close reading of the text, with particular attention paid to clauses that exhibit mood and modality. The selection of this text is based on its explicit feminist agenda, making it a suitable case for examining how language functions to construct and negotiate feminist identities and relations.

The first stage of the analysis involves identifying key interpersonal resources in the text, particularly mood and modality. Drawing on Halliday and Matthiessen’s (2013) framework, the clauses are categorised into different moods (declarative, interrogative, imperative) and modal expressions (epistemic, deontic, and dynamic). This step is crucial for understanding how Adichie structures her discourse to position herself and her readers within the feminist dialogue. The second stage applies FCDA to analyse how these interpersonal resources are used to advance feminist ideologies. This stage draws on Lazar’s (2005) principles of FCDA, focusing on how gendered power relations are constructed, contested, and negotiated within the text. The analysis examines how Adichie uses language to challenge patriarchal norms and propose alternative feminist discourses. The focus is on how mood and modality convey attitudes, judgments, and obligations related to feminist ideals. The final stage entails a critical interpretation of the findings. This stage contextualizes the discursive strategies within broader feminist and socio-political frameworks. It also includes a reflection on how Adichie’s use of interpersonal resources contributes to the larger feminist project of deconstructing and reconstructing gendered identities.

### Data Analysis

The results of the present study show the interpersonal elements (mood and modality) involved in the analysis.

### Mood Structure in the Text

Mood structure analysis can be seen in Table 1.

**Table 1: Mood structure in the Data**

Mood Structure	Declaratives	Imperatives	Interrogatives
Total Clauses	361	136	37
Percentages	68	25	7

*Dear Ijeawale* consists of 534 sentences. Table 1 shows that three types of mood structures are deployed in the text. Declaratives are the most commonly used clause types by Adichie in the text. However, there is a significant use of imperatives and interrogatives in the text. Declaratives are obviously the best choice for writers since the mode of communication gives no room for feedback (Liping, 2017). Declarative clauses serve as the primary mode of communication in Adichie's text, aligning with her role as the information provider. Declaratives are typically used to present facts, opinions, or explanations, which supports the informative and instructive nature of the manifesto. The predominance of declaratives reflects Adichie's authority and expertise on the subject, allowing her to assert her views clearly and persuasively. Declaratives in the text function beyond mere information delivery; they also provide encouragement and advice, reinforcing Adichie's role as a mentor guiding the recipient, Ijeawale, through complex feminist issues.

Imperatives are often associated with commands or directives. In *Dear Ijeawale*, they allow Adichie to directly instruct or advise the reader (or the intended recipient of the letter) on what actions to take. This is crucial in a manifesto that aims to inspire change and proactive feminist stances. The significant presence of imperatives emphasises the urgency and actionable nature of Adichie's advice. It reflects the prescriptive nature of the text, where the author not only informs but also persuades the reader to adopt specific behaviours and attitudes. The imperatives create a sense of immediacy and direct engagement, making the text reflective and pragmatic.

Interrogatives in the text might initially seem surprising due to their lower frequency, but they serve a critical function. Adichie uses interrogatives to engage the reader more actively, encouraging them to reflect on their own experiences and assumptions. The interrogatives can be seen as rhetorical devices that challenge the reader, making them reconsider conventional views on gender and feminism. Though fewer in number, these questions enhance the dialogic nature of the text, inviting introspection and deeper engagement with the content.

### Modal Expressions in the Text

In modality analysis, the modal expressions in the texts are categorised into epistemic, deontic and epistemic as seen in Table 2.

Table 2: Modal Expressions in the Data

Modality Expressions	Epistemic	Deontic	Dynamic
Total	107	53	15
Percentages	61	30	9

In the data, there are about 174 occurrences of modal expressions ranging from modal verbs, modal adverbs, modal adjectives, modal nouns to parentheticals. Adichie uses more modal expressions that express epistemic meanings than deontic and dynamic.

The modality analysis of *Dear Ijeawale* highlights Adichie's strategic use of language to balance certainty, obligation, and possibility. The high occurrence of epistemic and deontic modalities constructs the text as both authoritative and instructive, while still allowing room

for individual agency through dynamic modality. Epistemic modality involves expressions of certainty, belief, or knowledge about the truth of a statement (Downing and Locke, 2006). In the text, this modality allows Adichie to articulate her confidence in the ideas and advice she provides. The high frequency of epistemic modality emphasises the authoritative tone of the manifesto. Deontic modality is concerned with necessity, obligation, or permission, often reflecting rules or norms (Downing and Locke, 2006). In *Dear Ijeawale*, deontic modality is crucial because the text is prescriptive, offering guidelines and suggestions on navigating feminist issues. Adichie uses deontic expressions to articulate what ought to be done or what is permissible within the framework of feminist action. Dynamic modality refers to expressions of ability, willingness, or possibility, often focusing on the subject's capability or potential to act (Downing and Locke, 2006). Although the least frequent in the data, dynamic modality is important for expressing personal agency and empowerment, which are central to feminist discourse. The lower frequency of dynamic modality suggests that Adichie's focus is more on what should be believed or done rather than on the potential or ability to act. However, its presence still signals that she recognises the importance of individual capacity and the possibility of change within her feminist framework.

Downing and Locke (2006) explain that epistemic modality expresses three levels of confidence or lack of it that the speaker feels towards the proposition expressed. Table 3 shows the categorisation of epistemic modality in the text into modal certainty, probability, and possibility. It also shows the frequency of their use in the text.

**Table 3: Epistemic Modality in the Text**

Epistemic Expression	Modal Certainty	Probability	Possibility
Total Occurrences	60	35	12
Percentages	56	33	11

The breakdown of epistemic modality in *Dear Ijeawale* according to Table 3 reveals how Adichie constructs her arguments with varying degrees of confidence. Modal certainty reflects the highest level of confidence Adichie expresses in her propositions. These expressions are used when she is fully assured of the truth or necessity of her statements. The dominance of modal certainty suggests that Adichie aims to present her views as authoritative and incontrovertible. This aligns with the manifesto's purpose—to provide clear, decisive guidance on feminist issues.

**Probability** indicates a moderate level of confidence, where the speaker considers a proposition likely but not absolutely certain. Adichie uses this modality to express ideas that are plausible or highly likely, but where some room for doubt remains. The use of probability allows Adichie to introduce balance into her arguments. Acknowledging that some outcomes or beliefs are probable rather than certain demonstrates intellectual flexibility and openness to different possibilities. This can make her advice appear more realistic and grounded, as it reflects an understanding that not all situations are clear-cut.

**Possibility** expresses the lowest level of confidence, where the speaker considers a



proposition possible but not guaranteed. In *Dear Ijeawale*, this modality is used sparingly, indicating that Adichie reserves such expressions for scenarios where outcomes are less predictable or where she acknowledges a wider range of potentialities. Adichie shows that while she offers strong guidance, she also understands that some aspects of feminist practice may vary depending on context. This acknowledgement of uncertainty adds depth to her arguments and helps readers see her advice as adaptable rather than rigid.

Modal meanings expressed with deontic modality include volition, obligation, necessity and permission. Table 4 shows the categorisation and frequency of deontic modal meanings in the text.

**Table 4: Deontic Modality in the Text**

<b>Deontic Expressions</b>	<b>Volition</b>	<b>Obligation</b>	<b>Necessity</b>	<b>Permission</b>
Total Occurences	5	23	18	7
Percentages	9	43	34	13`

Table 4 shows how deontic modality meanings are deployed in the text to amplify her feminism ideals. Modal expressions that signal meanings related to obligation are the most frequent in the data according to the findings. The distribution of deontic modality in *Dear Ijeawale* reveals Adichie’s strategic use of language to emphasize the moral and practical imperatives of feminism.

**Obligation** modality expresses a sense of duty or moral requirement. In *Dear Ijeawale*, this modality is most frequently used, reflecting Adichie’s strong conviction that certain actions or attitudes are necessary for embracing feminism. . Adichie uses obligation to articulate what she believes people must do to support feminist ideals, framing her advice as essential rather than optional. This emphasis on obligation helps to communicate the seriousness and urgency of feminist action, reinforcing the manifesto’s authoritative and instructive tone.

**Necessity** modality, closely related to obligation, conveys a sense of something being required or indispensable. While obligation focuses on duty, necessity emphasizes the importance or inevitability of certain actions or conditions. The significant use of necessity modality supports Adichie’s argument that certain changes are not only morally required but also practically essential for achieving feminist goals. By using necessity expressions, she stresses that embracing feminist values is crucial for addressing gender inequality, making her arguments more compelling and urgent.

**Permission** modality involves granting or denying the right to perform an action. In *Dear Ijeawale*, permission is less frequent but still important, as it reflects Adichie’s recognition of autonomy and choice within the feminist framework. The use of permission modality shows that while Adichie advocates strongly for certain actions, she also acknowledges the importance of personal agency. This adds a layer of flexibility to her advice, suggesting that while feminism requires commitment, individuals still have the right to make choices within that framework.

**Volition** modality expresses intention or willingness. Although the least frequent in the

text, it indicates a focus on the desire or will to take action. The lower frequency of volition suggests that Adichie places more emphasis on what should be done (obligation) rather than on what individuals want to do. However, its presence still highlights the importance of personal motivation in feminist action. Volition modality adds a more personal dimension to the manifesto, acknowledging that the desire to embrace feminism must come from within.

### **Feminist Critical Discourse Analysis**

FCDA is particularly concerned with uncovering how discourse perpetuates or challenges gender inequalities, and in this context, we can identify four key ideologies that Adichie articulates: Female Autonomy and Empowerment, Critique of Patriarchal Norms, and Equality and Non-conformity.

### **Female Autonomy and Empowerment**

Societies often prescribe specific rules, responsibilities, and rights to men and women based on perceived biological differences. However, these practices, upon closer examination, reveal inherent discrimination that systematically disadvantages women across various spheres, including social, cultural, religious, economic, and legal domains (Haque et al., 2011). In *Dear Ijeawale*, Adichie challenges these discriminatory norms by advocating for female autonomy and empowerment. Her discourse is centred on the belief that women should be free to determine their paths and reject societal constraints that limit their potential.

Extract 1: *"Be a full person. Motherhood is a glorious gift, but do not define yourself solely by motherhood. Be a full person."* (p.6)

In this extract, Adichie utilises imperatives to emphasise the need for women to embrace their full humanity beyond traditional roles. The choice of the phrase *"Be a full person"* instead of *"Be a full woman"* is particularly significant. By opting for *"person"*, Adichie consciously moves away from gendered language, signalling that women's identities should not be confined to their biological roles. This linguistic choice challenges patriarchal norms that reduce women to their reproductive functions, thereby expanding the definition of womanhood. The repetition of the imperative *"Be a full person"* serves to reinforce the importance of this message, asserting that women can, and should, aspire to a multifaceted life beyond motherhood, much like men do.

Adichie's use of imperatives without explicit subjects in this extract (e.g., *"Be a full person"*) creates a sense of universality, implying that this message is directed at all women. The absence of a subject could also be interpreted as a strategic move to create a direct, authoritative voice that encourages self-empowerment. This strategy positions Adichie as not merely offering advice but issuing a call to action—a rhetorical device that aligns with the broader feminist goal of challenging and dismantling patriarchal norms.

Extract 2: *"Tell her that a double-income family is actually the true Igbo tradition because not only did mothers farm and trade before British colonialism, trading was exclusively done by women in some parts of Igboland."* (p.6)

Here, Adichie challenges the notion that financial independence and professional engagement are Western impositions on African women. By invoking pre-colonial Igbo traditions where women were economically active, she deconstructs the myth that women's participation in the workforce contradicts African cultural values. This historical reframing serves as a counter-narrative to colonial and patriarchal ideologies that have marginalised women in the economic sphere. Through this discursive strategy, Adichie legitimises women's financial independence, not as a departure from tradition, but as a return to authentic African values. This is a deliberate effort to align feminist ideals with cultural heritage, thereby delegitimising arguments that feminism is incompatible with African traditions.

Extract 3: *"Tell her that it is important to be able to do for herself and fend for herself. Teach her to try to fix physical things when they break. We are quick to assume girls can't do many things."* (p.12)

In this extract, Adichie addresses the gendered assumptions that limit women's participation in traditionally male-dominated fields such as engineering and construction. The imperative verbs *"Tell"* and *"Teach"* highlight the need for proactive and deliberate instruction in breaking down these barriers. Adichie argues that the belief in women's inability to perform certain tasks is not rooted in a lack of capability but in social conditioning. By advocating for the active teaching of practical skills, she challenges the societal norms that restrict women's roles, suggesting that empowerment comes from equipping women with the tools to defy these limitations. This also reflects a broader feminist critique of how socialization processes contribute to the perpetuation of gender inequality.

Extract 4: *"Teach Chizalum to read. Teach her to love books."* (p.15)

The repetition of the imperative *"Teach"* in this extract further emphasises the active role that education plays in feminist empowerment. Adichie's focus on reading and intellectual development as tools for empowerment reflects the feminist ideology that education is a critical pathway to equality. By encouraging girls to engage with literature, Adichie promotes the idea that knowledge and critical thinking are essential for resisting patriarchal structures. This aligns with feminist pedagogical approaches that view education as a means of liberation, where women are empowered to question and challenge the status quo.

Extract 5: *"Property rights for rural Nigerian women, for example, is a major feminist issue, and the women do not need to be good and angelic to be allowed their property rights."* (p.33)

In this extract, Adichie addresses the systemic inequalities in property rights that disenfranchise women, particularly in rural areas. The use of deontic modality, particularly the phrase *"need to,"* underscores the non-negotiable nature of women's rights to property ownership. Adichie challenges the moral standards imposed on women as a precondition for accessing rights that

should be universally guaranteed by stating that women do not need to be "good and angelic" to deserve these rights. This reflects a critique of the patriarchal notion that women's worth is contingent upon their conformity to certain moral ideals.

Extract 6: *"Her job is not to make herself likeable, her job is to be her full self, a self that is honest and aware of the equal humanity of other people."* (p.21)

This extract challenges the societal expectation that women must prioritise being liked over being authentic. The repetition of the phrase "Her job is not," followed by "Her job is," establishes a contrast between societal expectations and Adichie's redefined role for women. The declarative statements assert that a woman's primary responsibility is to herself, not to others' perceptions of her. This challenges the patriarchal tendency to condition women to seek approval, which often leads to self-censorship and disempowerment. By encouraging women to embrace their "full self," Adichie advocates for a form of empowerment that is rooted in self-awareness and authenticity rather than external validation.

### **Critique of Patriarchal Norms**

Patriarchal ideology, grounded in the belief that women possess fewer rights and less autonomy in gender relations, is a pervasive force that subjugates women, often relegating them to subordinate roles in society. As Urujzian (2022) explains, patriarchy operates by treating women as unequal to men, enforcing their subservience across social, cultural, and even legal domains. In *Dear Ijeawale*, Adichie critiques these patriarchal norms, challenging deeply ingrained traditional gender roles and advocating for the rejection of practices that perpetuate gender inequality. Through the strategic use of declaratives, interrogatives, and imperatives, Adichie engages in a feminist discourse that seeks to question, deconstruct, and expose the ideological flaws embedded within patriarchal structures.

Extract 7: *"Teach her to ask questions like: what are the things that women cannot do because they are women? Do these things have cultural prestige? If so, why are only men allowed to do the things that have cultural prestige?"*

In Extract 7, Adichie deploys a series of WH questions to encourage critical reflection on the gendered distribution of societal roles. WH-questions are traditionally associated with inquiry and discovery. They invite the reader to engage in active reflection rather than a passive consumption of knowledge. This rhetorical strategy positions women not merely as recipients of feminist ideology but as agents capable of interrogating their own experiences. The WH question "What are the things that women cannot do because they are women?" functions as a direct challenge to the socially constructed limitations placed on women, while the follow-up question "Do these things have cultural prestige?" probes into the underlying power structures that sustain these restrictions.

Framing these questions in the imperative mood ("Teach her to ask questions like..."), further emphasises the importance of education and socialization in dismantling patriarchal ideologies. The extract suggests that women must be consciously taught to challenge these

norms, highlighting the pervasive nature of gender socialization. The concluding question, "Why are only men allowed to do the things that have cultural prestige?" exposes the hypocrisy of gendered hierarchies, making visible the cultural mechanisms that allocate prestige and power to men while excluding women. This interrogative structure operates as a tool of feminist critique, fostering an awareness of the cultural capital denied to women under patriarchal systems.

Extract 8: "*Shouldn't her children have Yoruba first names since they would have their father's Igbo surname? I asked, and she said, 'A child first belongs to the father. It has to be that way.'*"

Extract 8 employs a polar interrogative ("*Shouldn't her children have Yoruba first names...*") to question the norm that children belong exclusively to their father. Polar questions are particularly effective in challenging normative assumptions because they demand a direct affirmation or rejection, thereby forcing a reevaluation of established beliefs. In this case, the interrogative structure questions the automatic assignment of paternal surnames, a practice that reflects the broader patriarchal norm of male ownership over women and children. Adichie's strategic use of "*shouldn't*" further highlights the dissonance between cultural practices and the principles of equality, subtly suggesting that there is no inherent reason for a child to bear only the father's surname. The declarative response, "*A child first belongs to the father. It has to be that way,*" reinforces the rigidity of patriarchal norms, revealing how deeply ingrained these ideas are in both individual and collective consciousness. The phrase "*It has to be that way*" indicates a sense of inevitability and resignation, which Adichie critiques through her use of polar interrogatives.

Extract 9: "*More troubling is the idea, in Feminism Lite, that men are naturally superior but should be expected to 'treat women well.'*"

In Extract 9, Adichie introduces the concept of "*Feminism Lite*," a term she uses to critique superficial forms of feminism that accept male superiority while advocating for kinder treatment of women. The declarative structure ("*More troubling is the idea...*") serves as a direct critique of this diluted version of feminism, positioning Adichie as a strong opponent of any feminist stance that fails to fully challenge patriarchal structures. The use of the adjective "*troubling*" signals the interpersonal tenor of disapproval, marking *Feminism Lite* as a problematic stance that undermines the goals of genuine gender equality.

Extract 10: "*Tell Chizalum that women actually don't need to be championed and revered; they just need to be treated as equal human beings.*"

In Extract 10, the imperative "*Tell Chizalum...*" is another example of how Adichie uses the imperative mood to assert feminist principles. Here, the interpersonal meaning is one of instruction and authority, as Adichie directs readers to reject the notion that women should be revered simply because of their gender. The declarative clause "*women actually don't need to*

*be championed and revered*" directly counters the patronising form of respect that feminism lite endorses, advocating instead for feminism based on equality rather than chivalry. The use of *"actually"* serves as a modal adjunct that reinforces the truth value of the statement, adding emphasis to the assertion that what women require is not reverence, but equal treatment. The declarative statement *"they just need to be treated as equal human beings"* underscores Adichie's commitment to feminist principles that demand full equality, rejecting any form of gendered hierarchy, even one that appears benevolent.

Extract 11: *"A marriage can be happy or unhappy, but it is not an achievement."*(p.18)

In Extract 11, Adichie uses a contrastive declarative structure to dismantle the notion that marriage is an achievement, especially for women. The juxtaposition of *"happy or unhappy"* serves to relativise marriage, presenting it as a neutral state rather than an accomplishment. The clause *"it is not an achievement"* acts as a stark counterpoint to societal norms that elevate marriage as the ultimate goal for women. This extract highlights how interpersonal relationships are structured by societal expectations, and the way marriage confers social capital on women. Adichie's discourse challenges this, asserting that marriage should not be the basis for women's self-worth. The declarative structure reinforces the certainty of her argument, leaving little room for contestation.

Extract 12: *"We also use evolutionary biology to explain male promiscuity, but not to explain female promiscuity, even though it really makes evolutionary sense for women to have many sexual partners."*

In Extract 12, Adichie critiques the double standards applied to male and female sexuality through a series of declarative clauses. The intensifier *"really"* underscores the strength of her argument, emphasising that the biological rationale often used to justify male promiscuity is equally applicable to women. Adichie exposes the flawed logic underpinning gendered moral standards, showing that patriarchal interpretations of biology are selective and biased by highlighting this inconsistency. The series of declarative clauses in this extract create an authoritative tone, positioning Adichie as a knowledgeable figure who dismantles pseudo-scientific justifications for male dominance.

### **Equality and Non-conformity**

Adichie advocates for the equality of both genders in relationships and society at large, emphasising that men and women should not be confined to traditional roles. She argues for equal treatment of men and women and rejects rigid gender norms.

Extract 13: *A husband is not a headmaster. A wife is not a schoolgirl. Permission and being allowed, when used one-sidedly – and they are nearly only used that way – should never be the language of an equal marriage*

Extract 14: *Share child care equally.* (p.9)

Extract 15: *Teach her never ever to say such nonsense as 'my money is my money and his money is our money'.*

In Extract 13, Adichie's declarative structure is a direct confrontation of the patriarchal ideology that positions men as the dominant figures in the household. The use of the negative polarity marker "not" creates a clear opposition to the traditional narrative, destabilizing the societal expectation that husbands should act as authoritative figures, while wives should be submissive.

The noun phrases "headmaster" and "schoolgirl" are deliberately chosen to invoke hierarchical power relations typical of educational settings, where the headmaster holds authority, and the schoolgirl is expected to follow without objections. These metaphors critically underscore the infantilisation of women in marriage, a theme that resonates strongly within feminist discourse. Invoking such metaphors portrays marriage as practised in patriarchal societies with relationships of power imbalance rather than mutual respect. The declaratives are not just statements of fact but they also function as discursive tools to expose and deconstruct the authoritarian roles often assumed by husbands in marital dynamics.

Moreover, Adichie's critique of language—specifically the use of terms like "permission" and "allowed"—reflects her sensitivity to how linguistic practices reinforce patriarchal control. The statement *Permission and being allowed, when used one-sidedly... should never be the language of an equal marriage* draws attention to how even mundane linguistic exchanges between spouses can perpetuate inequality. Here, Adichie underscores the subtlety of oppression, revealing that it is not only the overt actions but also the everyday language that sustains the gender hierarchy.

In Extract 14, Adichie employs an imperative mood a direct and forceful call to action. The imperative mood here carries a strong deontic force, suggesting that the equality of domestic labour is not merely a suggestion but a moral imperative. The simple structure of the clause highlights the necessity and urgency of this demand. It also functions as a rebuttal to the cultural norm that confines women to caregiving roles, challenging the traditional division of labour in the household. The declarative is direct and universal, offering no qualifiers or room for negotiation, thereby establishing an expectation for an egalitarian approach to parenting.

In Extract 15, Adichie uses another declarative structure. The repetition of "money" and the contrasting possessive pronouns "my" and "his" highlight the unequal financial dynamics that often play out in marriages. Adichie's use of the word "nonsense" is particularly striking, as it conveys disdain for the prevalent belief that financial responsibility lies predominantly with the man. The declarative challenges the patriarchal economic arrangement in marriages, wherein men are positioned as providers, and women's financial contributions are seen as supplementary or irrelevant. Adichie is advocating for the complete dismantling of the gendered financial structure in marriage, where men are cast as providers and women as dependents. The declarative both challenges women to claim financial agency and disrupts the expectation that men must bear the financial burden of the household alone. This call for financial equality

extends beyond the household and can be interpreted as part of a broader argument for women's economic independence.

Extract 16: *More important, every woman should have the choice of keeping her name –but the reality is that there is an overwhelming societal pressure to conform. (p.19)*

In Extract 16, Adichie tackles the societal expectation that women should change their surnames upon marriage, a practice that reinforces the notion of a woman's dissolution into her husband's identity. She states, "More important, every woman should have the choice of keeping her name." The phrase *should have the choice* uses deontic modality, implying that this is a matter of obligation to ensure women's autonomy rather than a mere option to be considered. The noun phrase *every woman* serves to universalize the claim, underscoring that this is not an isolated issue but one that affects women globally.

The lexical choice of *choice* is critical, as it highlights the agency that Adichie believes women should exercise in a society that often denies them such agency. The focus on choice also aligns with broader feminist discourses that emphasize the importance of women's autonomy in all areas of life, from reproductive rights to professional opportunities. The societal pressure that Adichie mentions *an overwhelming societal pressure to conform* speaks to the hegemonic force of patriarchal expectations, wherein women are not only encouraged but often coerced into following societal norms. The term *overwhelming* amplifies the weight of this coercion, stressing how deeply ingrained these gender norms are in society and how difficult it can be for women to resist them. Hence, Adichie challenges the symbolic erasure of female identity that occurs through the name-changing practice. This symbolic erasure, rooted in patriarchal traditions, reflects the broader societal tendency to view women as extensions of their husbands rather than as independent individuals. Adichie's focus on choice in this context reclaims the woman's right to self-definition, a key tenet of feminist ideology that opposes the objectification and subordination of women.

## Conclusion

The paper used a Feminist Critical Discourse Analysis framework to analyse the interpersonal resources deployed in Adichie's *Dear Ijeawale*. It examined various interpersonal resources used in the text to critique patriarchy and gender inequality; and also to amplify the author's stance towards feminism. Mood and modality resources are first identified and analysed in the text. Findings reveal that Adichie deployed declarative, interrogative and imperative clauses in the text to not only inform but also to instruct and also to instruct and engage her audience. The modality analysis of the text reveals Adichie's strategic use of language to balance certainty, possibility, and obligation. The blend of epistemic and deontic modalities make the text both authoritative and instructive. Three feminist viewpoints are identified and amplified by interpersonal resources in the text: female autonomy and empowerment, critique of patriarchal norms, and equality and non-conformity.

Overall, Adichie's *Dear Ijeawale* emerges as a forceful feminist manifesto that transcends mere advocacy by effectively using linguistic strategies to both persuade and



mobilise her readers. The deployment of mood and modality resources not only reinforces her feminist position but also transforms the text into a dialogic space where patriarchy is critiqued, gender norms are interrogated, and the possibilities for a more egalitarian society are articulated. Through her skilled use of interpersonal resources, Adichie engages in a discursive intervention that not only advocates for change but demands it, positioning the reader as an active participant in the feminist struggle.

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