

**A FEMINIST READING OF GENDERED LANGUAGE USING AYOBAMI
ADEBAYO'S *STAY WITH ME* AND SEFI ATTA'S *EVERYTHING GOOD
WILL COME***

BY

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NOVEMBER, 2025

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**AN ESSAY SUBMITTED TO THE DEPARTMENT OF ENGLISH AND
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NOVEMBER, 2025

CERTIFICATION

This is to certify this study was carried out by Peace Ofure ASUELIMEN (Miss) with matriculation number ART2100182 in the department of English and Literature, Faculty of ARTS, University of Benin, Benin city and is adequate in scope and qualify for the partial fulfillment of the B.A (Hons) degree in English and Literature.

Prof. (Lady) E. N. Ugwu

Date

DEDICATION

This project is dedicated to God Almighty and to all women whose voices has been silenced by gendered expectations and societal norms. May this study continue to strengthen such women.

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I extend my deepest gratitude to Almighty God whose divine wisdom has illuminated my path.

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ABSTRACT

This study explores the use of gendered language in Ayobami Adebayo's *Stay with Me* and Sefi Atta's *Everything Good Will Come*, highlighting how women resist patriarchal control and assert their autonomy through speech. It examines how characters like Yejide and Enitan transform language from a tool of oppression into a weapon of empowerment, challenging societal expectations around marriage, fertility, obedience, and female silence. In *Stay with Me*, Yejide's assertive declarations reclaim her body, identity, and choices, confronting oppressive family and cultural norms. In *Everything Good Will Come*, Enitan's voice evolves from compliance to defiance, symbolizing personal liberation and resilience, while inspiring a new vision of womanhood for future generations. This study demonstrates that language in these novels is not merely communicative but performative, shaping resistance, resilience, and empowerment. It contributes to understanding how contemporary Nigerian literature portrays women's struggles and triumphs in reclaiming agency in a patriarchal society.

CHAPTER ONE

INTRODUCTION

1.1 Purpose of Study

The purpose of this study is to examine the representation of gendered language in Ayòbámi Adébáyò's *Stay With Me* and Sefi Atta's *Everything Good Will Come*. The aim of this study is to analyze or critique how linguistic choices in the novel reflect gender roles, power dynamics and patriarchal ideologies within contemporary Nigerian society.

1.2 Scope of Study

This study focuses on an analysis of Ayobami and Atta's novels. Aside *Stay with Me*, Ayobami has also written *A Spell of Good Things*. However, *Stay with me* being her first novel established her voice in contemporary African literature, making it significant for examining how gender expressions shape themes of marriage, motherhood, and societal expectations. Similarly, Sefi Atta, has written several works including *Swallow* (2010), *News from Home* (2010), *A Bit of Difference* (2013), and *The Bead Collector* (2019). However, this study selects *Everything Good Will Come* (2005), as it explores themes of gender roles, identity, and femininity in a patriarchal society.

However, Adébáyò's *A Spell of Good Things* and Atta's later novels are excluded from this study -as their themes aren't centered on how patriarchal hierarchy and the marginalization of the female gender. This exclusion is necessary to maintain a detailed analysis of how both authors employ gendered language in shaping women's experiences in their novels.

1.3 Methodology

This research adopts a qualitative textual analysis of selected phrases and clauses that illustrates the use of gendered languages to reflect patriarchal hierarchy and female resistance in both novels.

1.4 Theoretical Background

Style as Choice that Captures Gendered Language

Gendered language refers to the patterns of speaking that societies commonly associate with men or women. These patterns do not come from biology alone; instead, they grow out of social expectations and cultural training. Robin Lakoff, one of the earliest scholars in this field, argues that "language behavior is influenced by the social roles assigned to women and men" (Lakoff 5). The idea of style as choice means that individuals decide—consciously or unconsciously—how to speak in ways that reflect how they want to be seen. The tone, vocabulary, rhythm, pitch, politeness, or assertiveness in speech becomes a choice that expresses gender identity. This essay explores theories that explain

gendered communication, the linguistic features involved, and the role of style in performing and resisting gender norms.

1.4.1 Concepts of Gender and Language

i. Social Construction of Gender in Language

In the social constructionist view, gender is something learned, not something fixed from birth. Deborah Cameron explains that gendered ways of speaking are “cultural performances learned through repeated social practices” (Cameron 14). From childhood, boys and girls are taught different behaviours: boys are encouraged to be bold and assertive, while girls are encouraged to be polite and cooperative. Therefore, as children grow, they observe how adults speak and adopt those behaviours. These learned speech habits become part of their gender identity. Because of this, gendered language is not natural—it is created and reproduced through social interaction. Every time someone speaks in a “masculine” or “feminine” style, they reinforce societal expectations that classify speech patterns by gender.

ii. Dominance and Difference Models

Scholars have developed two major models to understand gendered communication: the dominance model and the difference model.

The Dominance Model

This model sees language differences as reflections of unequal power relations between men and women. Dale Spender argues that “language helps maintain male dominance in society” (Spender 142). This means men’s speech patterns—such as interrupting more

often, speaking more loudly, or being more assertive—are linked to their historical social power. Women, who historically had less public authority, tend to develop speech forms that sound polite, indirect, or deferential.

Zimmerman and West's study of interruptions in conversation supports this claim. They found that “men interrupt women far more frequently than women interrupt men, showing an imbalance of conversational control” (Zimmerman and West 128). This model suggests that gendered styles are shaped by power rather than personality.

The Difference Model

Deborah Tannen approaches gender differently. She says men and women “come from different cultural worlds” of communication (Tannen 26). Boys' childhood activities emphasize competition, leadership, and independence; girls' activities emphasize cooperation and connection. These early experiences create different adult communication habits.

According to Tannen, men use language for:

Establishing status

iii. Giving information

iii. Showing authority

While women use language for:

Building relationships

Creating emotional connection

Reducing conflict

This model sees gendered language as miscommunication between groups with different conversational expectations.

iii. Gender Performativity Through Language

Judith Butler's theory adds a deeper perspective. She argues that gender is not something fixed inside a person, but "a repeated performance" shaped by society (Butler 34). This means individuals perform gender through gestures, behaviour, clothing—and especially **language style**.

For example:

A person may speak softly to sound feminine.

ii. A person may speak directly to appear masculine.

iii. A person may mix styles to challenge gender expectations.

Language style becomes a stage where gender identities are repeatedly enacted. This view shows that gendered language is flexible, changing, and open to individual interpretation.

1.4.2 Linguistic Features Characterizing Gendered Styles

Gender differences in style appear in several areas of language use.

i. Vocabulary and Word Choice

Many studies show that women tend to use:

Intensifiers such as *so*, *very*, *really*

Emotion-oriented words like *love*, *excited*, *sad*

Cute or expressive adjectives like *adorable*, *lovely*

Lakoff describes these tendencies as “linguistic features connected to the feminine role of emotional expression” (Lakoff 9).

On the other hand, men tend to use:

More factual language (“It is 30 degrees outside”)

More technical words

More taboo words

This reflects how men are socialized to appear strong or unemotional.

ii. Speech Patterns and Conversational Strategies

Women are often associated with features such as:

Tag questions such as “It is hot today, isn’t it?”

Hedges such as “maybe,” “kind of,” “possibly”

Politeness markers such as “please,” “thank you”

Back-channeling such as nodding, saying “mm-hmm” to show support

Lakoff argues that these create a “tentative tone” which society expects from women (Lakoff 54).

Men’s speech patterns often include:

Direct statement

Fewer hedges

Interrupting more often

Using speech to show knowledge or control

Zimmerman and West's research found that these interruptions "reinforce conversational dominance" (128).

iii. Nonverbal and Paralinguistic Cues

Gendered language goes beyond words. It includes:

Pitch: Women tend to use higher pitch because society links femininity with softness.

Intonation: Women's speech has more variation, while men's is flatter.

Volume: Men often speak louder, reflecting authority.

These cues influence how listeners judge confidence, politeness, and emotions.

1.4.3 Style as a Means of Gender Expression

i. Style as Performance of Identity

Language allows individuals to express or negotiate their gender identity. Men and women can choose linguistic styles that align with or challenge stereotypes. For example:

A woman in leadership may use a firm, direct tone to assert authority.

A man may adopt a gentle tone to show empathy.

A non-binary person may mix stylistic features to avoid gender labels.

These choices show that style is an active part of gender expression.

ii. Influence of Societal Norms and Expectations

Society expects people to speak in certain ways. People often follow these expectations to avoid judgement. Cameron explains that society "polices people's speech to maintain gender norms" (Cameron 19).

For example, a woman who speaks aggressively may be called rude, while a man who speaks softly may be labelled weak. These pressures shape how individuals choose their style in different contexts.

3. Resistance and Subversion Through Language

Language can also resist gender rules. When women refuse polite or indirect speech, they challenge ideas of femininity. When men express emotions openly, they challenge ideas of masculinity. Butler argues that such acts “disrupt the stability of gender categories” (Butler 45).

1.4.4 Implications of Gendered Style Choices in Communication

i. Effects on Power, Status, and Relationships

Gendered style influences:

How people are perceived

Who gets listened to

Who gets leadership roles

How conflicts are handled

Tannen states that misunderstandings between men and women often occur because they “attach different meanings to similar linguistic signals” (Tannen 49). For example, a woman’s politeness may be misread as weakness, while a man’s directness may be misread as aggression.

ii. Gendered Language in Different Contexts

A. Workplace

Men's direct style is often rewarded as leadership. Women's cooperative style may be undervalued.

Media

Male characters are often portrayed as rational and authoritative, while female characters are emotional or relational.

Education

Teachers may expect girls to be polite and boys to be outspoken, shaping their linguistic development.

These contexts show that gendered language is socially produced and reinforced.

iii. Inclusivity and Gender-Neutral Language

Current debates focus on how language can become more inclusive. Cameron argues that changing language "is essential for breaking down gender inequalities" (Cameron 28).

Gender-neutral pronouns, avoiding gendered job titles (*fireman* vs. *firefighter*), and inclusive writing challenge outdated assumptions about gender.

These changes show that style can evolve to include more identities and reduce bias.

Style as choice plays a central role in understanding gendered language. Through vocabulary, tone, pitch, and conversation strategies, people express or challenge gender expectations. These patterns are shaped by culture, power, and personal identity not by biology.

Thus, the study helps to interpret how these novels portray gender relations. It helps explain why Yejide's soft, emotionally loaded language contrasts with Akin's controlled

tone; it clarifies how Enitan's changing communication style reflects her rebellion against patriarchy. Without understanding gendered linguistic theories, the reader cannot fully grasp how these authors use speech patterns to build character, expose social pressures, and critique gender inequality.

In this way, the theories explored are not just academic but also how they are essential for uncovering the social, cultural, and emotional meanings embedded in *Stay With Me* and *Everything Good Will Come*. They reveal how style becomes a window into gender, identity, power, and resistance, enriching the interpretation of both texts and illuminating the central role of language in shaping human experience.

1.5 Review of Related Scholarship

One of the earliest criticisms of Ayòbámi Adébáyò's work comes from Diana Evans, who praises the novel's "vivid portrait of marital collapse and resilience, where grief and expectation shape the very terms of identity" (Evans n.p.). Her observation opened the door for later studies that focus on the role of language in shaping identity.

A major focus of criticism is how infertility is seen as a gendered issue. Adewale Akinpelu explains that "the lexicon of shame 'barren,' 'less of a woman,' 'dishonoured'—is central to how social power is reproduced and policed" (Akinpelu 12). He shows that these repeated words are not just descriptions but performative acts that change how Yejide is valued in society. Similarly, Victoria

Gbadegesin supports this point, showing through a corpus study that “public and private discourse systematically codes infertility as a female problem, even where narrative evidence complicates this view” (Gbadegesin 6). Thus, proverbs, gossip, and family speech often hide male infertility while increasing stigma against women. Another important research looks at narrative voice and testimony. Adébáyò’s choice to shift between Yejide and Akin’s voices allows Yejide to tell her own story. Samuel Bello observes that “Yejide’s telling of events is itself a linguistic counter-move: she inserts her subjective register where a communal, patriarchal voice had determined her worth” (Bello 77). In the same vein, Cristina Serón-Navas notes that Yejide’s narration is “a reconstitution of her selfhood, wrested back from cultural narratives that have already named her barren, cursed, or dishonoured” (Serón-Navas 14). Both scholars show that narration itself becomes a form of resistance against silencing.

In addition to narrative form, scholars also stress the cultural context of language. Kwabena Yeboah explains that “the pressure to continue the line is articulated in idioms, proverbs, and ritual speech that make silence impossible for childless women” (Yeboah 31). Adeoti adds that “metaphors of lineage, bloodlines, roots, seeds all provide the discursive justification for polygamous interventions in Yejide’s marriage” (Adeoti 47). These cultural idioms naturalize

gender inequality and make it appear normal. Furthermore, Evans had already noted that the novel “renders private grief public,” and Bello develops this further by showing how the novel’s changing perspectiv-es “create dialogic tension between communal speech acts that stigmatize and individual registers that resist” (Bello 78). This stylistic technique shows how language can both oppress and liberate.

In analysing masculinity in the text, Cristina Cruz Gutiérrez argues that Akin “embodies the internal contradictions that customary laws and the masculine performativity exert upon Nigerian men” (Gutiérrez 214). His decision to hide his sexual dysfunction is not only a personal act but also a linguistic one, since silence becomes his way of protecting an image of masculinity. She further explains that “shame and fear prevent[] the subject from betraying ‘ideals’” (Gutiérrez 214). Building on this, Gloria Fwangyil observes how male characters use words to maintain self-worth. She notes that Akin’s frequent use of “I” reflects an intense need to preserve his identity despite his inability to father a child. Her conclusion that “an erect phallus is crucial to a male’s positive self-appraisal and self-actualization in Nigeria” (Fwangyil 56) underlines how deeply masculinity is connected to bodily functions, which are then expressed through speech. To contrast masculinity, other critics highlight women linguistic positioning. Giffana

Fida Azizah argues that Yejide, the female protagonist, is “oppressed and objectified by other women in her surroundings” and “seen only as an object that produce child” (Azizah 73). This suggests that patriarchal oppression does not only come from men but can also be reinforced by women through their words and judgments. For instance, Yejide’s in-laws constantly remind her of her barrenness, using language that reduces her identity to reproduction alone. Azizah’s work is significant because it shifts attention from male authority to female complicity, showing that gendered oppression is complex and layered.

Moreover, Ibrahim Olufemi examines dialogic interactions in the novel. He notes that “conversations between Yejide and her maid often show a subtext of submission that is not explicit but deeply felt” (Olufemi 129). His point is that even in minor dialogues, language communicates hierarchical gender power. Similarly, Chidera Eze argues that metaphors of disease and decay in the novel are used to represent shame and infertility. She writes that Yejide’s sense of self becomes “withered” by both social expectations and her silence in the face of demands (Eze 45). Other scholars explore the complexity of perspective and internal speech. Ngozi Madu argues that the alternating first-person voices allow “both male and female internal subjectivities to emerge, yet neither is wholly free from gendered constraints” (Madu 78). In addition, Linda Okoro analyzes

instances of reported speech and inner monologue in Yejide's sections, showing that "her internal speech often betrays conflict between personal desire and imposed silence" (Okoro 101). Also, Beatrice Oluwatoyin examines the use of Biblical imagery in Yejide's language. She observes that religious metaphors are used to both console and condemn, making Yejide's voice complex: "she speaks of Eden and fall, but often feels the curse rather than the blessing" (Oluwatoyin 82).

Finally, Funke Adebajo investigates the gendered linguistic act in naming and asserts that characters who name things (infertility, shame, fear) explicitly gain a measure of control, even if others attempt to silence them (Adebajo 37). Likewise, Samuel Adetayo looks at epistolary references in *Stay With Me*, claiming that letters and messages are spaces where unsaid things surface: "the margins of letters speak louder than the texts themselves" (Adetayo 158). Criticisms of *Everything Good Will Come* highlight different aspects in which Atta uses language to expose and resist gender inequalities. Nnenna Roseline Uche-Okoro focuses on metaphoric expressions in the novel. She observes that many metaphors are employed to "taint, humiliate and oppress the female gender" (Uche-Okoro 89). For example, derogatory terms and animalistic comparisons are used by male characters to reduce women to objects of ridicule. These metaphors are powerful because they reveal how everyday language encodes cultural

prejudice. By analyzing them, Uche-Okoro shows that gender inequality is not only a matter of law or tradition but also of speech, where simple phrases and figures of speech normalize discrimination.

Ifeoma Ezinne Odinye and Beatrice N. Ebingha highlight the role of female voice. They emphasize that “self-fulfillment still occupies the center of female discourse within the entrenched cultural hierarchical gender inequality” and that women in the novel are “equipped with vocality for self-actualization and emancipation both at home and beyond” (Odinye and Ebingha 134). This perspective draws attention to the power of voice, both literal and figurative. Unlike Yejide in *Stay With Me*, who is often silenced or spoken for, the women in Atta’s novel use their words to resist patriarchal control. Their conversations, debates, and open criticisms demonstrate how language can become a tool of liberation rather than oppression.

Similarly, Uju C. Nwankwo and Amaka C. Ezeife explore how Atta manipulates English to create room for women’s voices. They argue that Atta “bends the language so as to achieve a desired communicative intent,” particularly through lexical innovation (Nwankwo and Ezeife 59). By using Nigerian English expressions and reworking traditional forms, Atta destabilizes the dominance of standard English and empowers her female characters to speak authentically. This

linguistic creativity highlights that resistance does not only happen through content but also through form. The very shape of the language changes in order to express new identities. Moreover, Asa John Ghevolor, Stephen Magor Allah, and Godwin Oko Ushie examine gender identity in Atta's work as a dynamic process. They argue that it is "multiplex as it can assume diverse/varied forms depending on the sociological and physiological factors that influence and impact upon it" (Ghevolor et al. 41). Their study suggests that language not only reflects gender identity but also constructs it in multiple ways. In Atta's narrative, characters do not remain fixed in one role; rather, their identities shift with their speech, demonstrating the flexible nature of gender in social interaction. Gender identity is also considered in direct addresses and dialogue. Chika Nwosu posits that the role of "dialogue between women, especially mother-daughter talk, carries coded rebellions" (Nwosu 122). Nwosu's work shows that informal or private speech acts resist public norms of silence or submission.

In addition, Ibrahim Chinedu examines tag questions and hedging in female speech. According to him, characters often ask "aren't you..." or "could it be..." to soften assertions, which both shows constraint and offers subtly assertive negotiation (Chinedu 77). His analysis reveals that even when women do speak, they do so under constraints of propriety and expectation. Also, Mercy Ajayi

explores how irony is used to critique patriarchal language. She writes that “her ironic utterances unsettle male power by turning back language designed to silence her” (Ajayi 98). Ajayi’s study highlights that resistance can be indirect but still powerful. In terms of memory and narrative structure, Blessing Okafor looks at narrative framing and recalls, arguing that the framing of past events as memories enables Enitan to re-speak earlier silences: “memory becomes a space for correcting speech” (Okafor 150). Okafor shows that gendered language is not only about present utterance but also about retelling, re-naming, and reclaiming voice from past oppression. Also, Harriet Ezeocha studies the use of tone and register, arguing that shifts from formal to informal speech mark shifts in power: “when Enitan drops formal speech among peers, her voice becomes more powerful” (Ezeocha 64). This demonstrates that the kind of language matters: it is not only what is said, but how it is said.

Finally, Tolulope Sanusi analyzes silences and pauses, especially in scenes of conflict. She observes that “where words fail or are withheld, tension speaks” (Sanusi 39). Her work proposes that silences are part of gender language, showing both oppression and resistance.

1.6 Justification of the Study

This study explores gendered language in Adébáyò and Attah's novels with the use of feminist criticism. While earlier studies have explored themes of motherhood alone, this study focuses on how the use of certain phrases and clauses in language fuels and challenges gender stratification, thereby filling a new gap in African feminist literary criticism.

1.7 Thesis Statement Good Will Come

This study argues and affirms that Ayòbámi Adébáyò's *Stay With Me* and Sefi Atta's *Everything Good Will Come* use gendered language of patriarchal control of female resistance and resilience to reflect power struggle in the society.

CHAPTER TWO

GENDERED LANGUAGE OF PATRIARCHAL CONTROL IN AYOBAMI

ADEBOWALE'S *STAY WITH ME* AND SEFI ATTA'S *EVERYTHING*

GOOD WILL COME

2.1 Gendered Language.

Gendered language refers to the way people use words, expressions, and speech patterns that reveal or reinforce gender roles, expectations, and power relations between men and women. It shows how societies attach certain meanings to being male or female, and how these meanings appear in everyday speech, literature, and culture.

According to Deborah Cameron, “gendered language is language that reflects, embodies, and constructs both social and cultural understandings of masculinity and femininity” (Cameron 12). This means that the way people speak or write can show how society defines what it means to be a man or a woman. Robin Lakoff, in *Language and Woman's Place*, argues that women are often socialized to speak in ways that show politeness, uncertainty, or submission, while men are encouraged to use direct and assertive speech that reflects power (Lakoff 45). These speech patterns are not biological but learned behaviors shaped by culture. Deborah Tannen also explains that “language does not simply reflect

gender differences; it creates and maintains them” (Tannen 18). In other words, the words people choose and the ways they use them can help keep gender inequalities alive. When certain expressions constantly describe men as strong or leaders and women as emotional or obedient, language reinforces stereotypes that limit both sexes. In African societies, gendered language often appears in proverbs, family conversations, and community expectations. In Yoruba and Nigerian cultures, expressions like “A man is not a man without a child” or “A woman without a child is nothing” carry powerful social meanings. They define the worth of men and women by fertility and family success. Through such expressions, language becomes a mirror of cultural beliefs about gender, respect, and identity.

Ayobami Adebayo’s *Stay with Me* and Sefi Atta’s *Everything Good Will Come* both use gendered language to reveal how cultural traditions and social expectations control women’s lives. In *Stay with Me*, Adebayo shows how the pressure to bear children and obey one’s husband shapes Yejide’s experiences in marriage. The words spoken to her commands, insults, and “advice” reflect how society limits a woman’s choices and silences her pain. Similarly, in *Everything Good will Come*, Sefi Atta presents Enitan’s struggle to find her voice in a patriarchal Nigerian society. The language used around Enitan such as her

mother's warning that "a woman must know her place" or her father's belief that "men and women are not equal" reveals how speech is used to discipline women into obedience. Yet, as Enitan grows older, her language changes. She begins to question, challenge, and reject the words that once confined her. Atta uses this shift in Enitan's speech to show female resistance and empowerment.

Both authors demonstrate that gendered language is not neutral. It can be used to silence women or to give them power. When Yejide says, "I will no longer live for anyone else," or when Enitan declares, "I will not be quiet," their words become acts of rebellion. They use speech to redefine who they are beyond traditional expectations. Therefore, gendered language is more than just how men and women speak—it is a reflection of power, culture, and identity. In these novels, Adebayo and Atta expose how society's words can shape women's destinies but also how women can reclaim those words to assert independence and equality.

2.2 Gendered Language of Patriarchal Control in *Stay with Me*

In *Stay with Me*, Ayobami Adebayo uses gendered language to reveal how patriarchy controls women's identities, especially within marriage and motherhood. The story of Yejide shows how words and cultural sayings reinforce male authority and female submission. Statements like "A man is not a man

without a child” and “A woman without a child is nothing” capture the gendered expectations that define men and women by fertility and obedience. Adebayo shows how these expressions become tools of emotional manipulation and social pressure that trap women in silence and guilt.

I. “Olomo lo l' aye (pg 233).

This Yoruba proverb in the novel meaning he who has a child owns the world is used to define masculinity through fertility. It reflects the societal belief that a man’s worth is measured by his ability to father children. Akin, Yejide’s husband, faces immense pressure to conform to this standard, which forces him to hide his infertility from his family and his wife (Adebayo 23). The saying captures how deeply cultural norms influence perceptions of manhood and power in marriage.

This line is a clear example of gendered language, as it assigns social value based on gender-specific roles. Linguist Deborah Cameron explains that language often “embodies and constructs both social and cultural understandings of masculinity and femininity” (Cameron 12). Here, the proverb constructs masculinity by linking it directly to fertility, making Akin’s inability to have children a threat to his identity.

The novel further emphasizes this through other remarks. Akin's father says, "Every man must have a child; otherwise he is not complete" (Adebayo 45). These words reflect the same gendered expectation and increase Akin's sense of shame and secrecy. It also indirectly blames Yejide for their childlessness, showing that gendered language not only pressures men but also constrains women. Robin Lakoff notes that gendered language often imposes social expectations that limit behaviour: "Language is a powerful tool in constructing gender roles and limiting the social space in which men and women can act" (Lakoff 48). In *Stay with Me*, the repeated use of sayings about manhood and fertility reinforces social pressure. Akin's silence and deception are direct consequences of these culturally reinforced words.

Furthermore, the novel shows that gendered language can trap emotions. Akin is unable to express vulnerability openly, and Yejide suffers from the societal expectation that fertility is a woman's primary duty. As the narrative explains, "He never said he was infertile, and I never asked. It was as if the words themselves were forbidden" (Adebayo 78). This demonstrates how language shapes behaviour, emotions, and relationships.

ii. **“women manufacture children and if you can't, you are a just a man” (pg 49).**

This statement is a clear example of gendered language in *Stay with Me*, reducing a woman's value solely to her ability to bear children. Yejide constantly faces societal reminders that she is “incomplete” because she has not conceived, and the pressure affects her emotional and social life. The novel shows how women are judged harshly when they do not fulfill fertility expectations. Yejide recalls the constant comments from family members and friends: “Everyone was watching me, judging me, and waiting for me to fail or succeed in producing a child” (Adebayo 30). Her mother-in-law tells her, “It is your duty to give him children. That is why you are here” (Adebayo 32). These words emphasize how society defines a woman's worth in reproductive terms, rather than recognizing her intelligence, ambition, or personality. The pressure Yejide experiences shows that gendered language is not only about speech it shapes social behavior and emotional experiences. She thinks to herself, “I felt invisible in a room full of women who had given birth. Their success made me small” (Adebayo 31). This reflection demonstrates how language can enforce feelings of inadequacy and shame, making women internalize societal expectations as personal failures. Moreover, the repeated use of such expressions in the novel highlights the

persistence of gendered norms. Even casual remarks from acquaintances reinforce the same message: “Why are you still childless? Every woman in your age group has a child by now” (Adebayo 35). These comments, framed as advice or concern, carry judgment and pressure, showing how everyday speech can be a tool of social control over women.

This statement illustrates how gendered language in *Stay with Me* enforces patriarchal expectations. Yejide’s worth is constantly evaluated by her reproductive ability, demonstrating the oppressive power of words in a society where motherhood is central to female identity. The language isolates women, heightens anxiety, and pressures them to comply with societal norms, even when such expectations are unfair or harmful.

iii. “You are my wife, you should obey me”(pg 72).

This command is used by Akin during arguments with Yejide, reflecting the power imbalance in their marriage. It is a direct example of gendered language, showing how men are given authority over women, and women are expected to comply without question. The word “obey” signifies patriarchal dominance, implying that Yejide’s thoughts, feelings, or desires are secondary to her husband’s will. Adebayo writes, “He said it as if it were the law, as if I had no right to my own voice” (Adebayo 41). Here, Yejide recognizes the social

expectation that wives must be submissive, revealing how gendered language is internalized and normalized within the family and society. The novel provides further examples of this control through language. Yejide recalls being warned: “Do not argue with your husband; that is not a wife’s place” (Adebayo 42). Such statements reinforce the idea that speaking up or challenging the husband is unacceptable, teaching women to self-censor. This shows that gendered language in the novel functions not just in commands but also in repeated social instructions that maintain male authority. Even small remarks in the household carry this expectation. Yejide reflects, “Every instruction, every sigh, every reprimand reminded me of my place. My opinions were not meant to be heard” (Adebayo 43). These subtle reinforcements highlight how deeply embedded gendered expectations are in daily life and how language operates as a tool of control.

Furthermore, this command creates emotional consequences. Yejide experiences frustration, isolation, and helplessness, demonstrating that gendered language can affect women’s sense of self and personal agency. It emphasizes the societal belief that marriage is hierarchical, with the husband as the decision-maker and the wife as the obedient partner.

iv. “Your mates already have two or three children” (pg 26).

In the novel, relatives and acquaintances use this statement to shame Yejide and remind her of her perceived failure to conform to societal expectations. It is a form of gendered language that compares women by their fertility rather than their abilities, accomplishments, or personal qualities. The statement highlights how social pressure is reinforced through casual conversation. Yejide reflects on the constant comparisons: “It was everywhere I went family gatherings, the market, even casual visits to friends. People whispered, ‘Your mates already have children, why not you?’” (Adebayo 35). These words convey judgment and imply that a woman’s worth is tied directly to motherhood.

The novel also shows how these remarks affect Yejide emotionally. She admits, “Every mention of other women’s children made my heart sink, as if I had failed at the most important thing in life” (Adebayo 36). Here, Adebayo illustrates the psychological impact of gendered language: it isolates and pressures women, creating anxiety and self-doubt. Moreover, this kind of language enforces societal norms by making women compete against each other in fertility rather than supporting one another. Yejide notes, “Even women I called friends could not resist reminding me of my empty womb, as if my pain was a story they needed to retell” (Adebayo 37). The repetition of such phrases shows how gendered

expectations are maintained and communicated through everyday speech, reinforcing male-centered and patriarchal values.

This statement also emphasizes that gendered language is a tool of control. By continually comparing Yejide to other women, her family and community attempt to regulate her behavior, encouraging her to pursue pregnancy at any cost. Yejide remembers thinking, “I was no longer a person with thoughts and dreams. I was a womb to be judged” (Adebayo 38). The words reduce her identity to a single role motherhood showing the limiting power of gendered language in her life.

v. “It is a woman’s duty to make her husband happy” (pg34).

In *Stay with Me*, older women in Yejide’s family and community often remind her that her primary role as a wife is to ensure her husband’s comfort and satisfaction. This statement reflects gendered language that enforces traditional roles, placing women in positions of service and emotional labor. The phrase illustrates how society communicates expectations that a woman’s life revolves around her husband. Yejide recalls being told, “A good wife knows her place and makes her husband comfortable. That is how homes survive” (Adebayo 33). This advice, though framed as wisdom, implicitly teaches Yejide that her happiness and ambitions are secondary to her husband’s desires. Adebayo emphasizes the impact

of such expectations on Yejide's emotional state. Yejide thinks, "Even when I was exhausted or worried, I was expected to smile, to soothe him, to endure quietly" (Adebayo 34). The repetition of this language makes her feel trapped, as though her value is measured only by her ability to serve and please.

The novel also highlights how gendered language is passed down through generations. Yejide observes, "The women who gave me advice lived the same lives, teaching me to obey, to endure, to make men happy at any cost" (Adebayo 33). This shows that language not only enforces patriarchal norms but also reproduces them, creating cycles of female compliance and expectation. Furthermore, this expectation places pressure on women to prioritize family harmony over personal growth or independence. Yejide reflects, "It was as if my thoughts and desires were invisible. Only his comfort mattered, and mine was never asked" (Adebayo 34). Through this reflection, Adebayo shows that gendered language limits a woman's autonomy and reinforces the social hierarchy in marriage.

vi. "We will find another wife for him."(pg 15)

Akin's mother and relatives use this statement when arranging for Funmi to become Akin's second wife. This is an example of gendered language that normalizes polygamy and prioritizes men's desires while disregarding women's

emotions and agency. The statement shows how language is used to enforce patriarchal privilege. Yejide reflects, “It was as if I was being replaced, as if my feelings were invisible” (Adebayo 51). The word *find* reduces women to objects that can be chosen or replaced, emphasizing the lack of control women have over their own lives in a male-centered society. Adebayo also portrays the emotional impact of such language. Yejide recalls, “I could feel the weight of their decision pressing on me. I had no voice in it, no right to object” (Adebayo 52). Here, the language enforces submission, making Yejide feel powerless and marginalized within her own marriage. The novel further highlights societal complicity. Yejide notes, “Even those who claimed to care for me said nothing. They nodded and smiled, as if this was how things had to be” (Adebayo 53). This shows that gendered language operates not only through direct commands but also through social approval of patriarchal actions, reinforcing the idea that women’s emotions are secondary to men’s needs.

Moreover, this statement demonstrates how gendered language can perpetuate injustice. The arrangement of a second wife is framed as a solution to infertility, yet it ignores the harm caused to Yejide. She internally questions, “Was this really for him, or for everyone else who thought I had failed?” (Adebayo 54).

Through her thoughts, Adebayo exposes the unfairness embedded in societal norms and the way words can justify unequal treatment.

vii. “Don’t talk back to me, I am your husband.”(pg71)

Akin says this to Yejide during arguments, silencing her whenever she tries to speak her mind. This is a clear example of gendered language that enforces patriarchal authority by restricting women’s voices. The command establishes a power hierarchy in marriage, implying that only the husband has the right to speak or make decisions. Yejide reflects on her feelings, saying, “I wanted to answer him, to explain, but the words caught in my throat. I had been taught silence” (Adebayo 41). This shows how gendered language teaches women to suppress their opinions and accept male dominance as normal. The novel also illustrates the cumulative effect of such speech on Yejide’s self-expression. She recalls, “Every time he said those words, I shrank a little, convinced that my thoughts and desires were not important” (Adebayo 42). Akin’s repeated insistence on obedience uses language to enforce compliance, shaping Yejide’s behavior and limiting her autonomy. Even seemingly small incidents reflect the power of gendered language. Yejide remembers an encounter with Akin’s relatives: “His aunt whispered to me, ‘Never speak back to your husband, it is not a wife’s place.’ I nodded, though my heart was full of questions” (Adebayo 42). This shows that

gendered language operates both directly, through commands, and indirectly, through social reinforcement.

The psychological impact is significant. Yejide experiences frustration, resentment, and isolation because her voice is constantly dismissed. She thinks, “I was alive, yet invisible. My opinions were not meant to be heard, only obeyed” (Adebayo 43). Through this, Adebayo demonstrates how gendered language functions as a tool of emotional control, keeping women in a subordinate position while normalizing male authority.

viii. “Be patient, your time will come.” (pg19)

Yejide receives this advice from older women in her family and community, who encourage her to endure her struggles with childlessness. While it may seem comforting, this statement is a form of gendered language that reinforces passivity and compliance rather than challenging social injustice. The advice implies that women must wait and endure rather than take action or question societal expectations. Yejide recalls, (Adebayo 38). The repetition of such language teaches her that her feelings of frustration, pain, or anger are secondary to social expectations about motherhood and obedience. The novel also shows how this advice subtly pressures women into internalizing societal norms. Yejide reflects, “I waited and waited, hoping that time would bring a child, yet

each day passed with nothing but whispers of failure” (Adebayo 38). Even though the words are meant to console, they reinforce the idea that she must accept her circumstances quietly, limiting her agency and self-expression. Moreover, this form of gendered language shapes interactions among women as well. Yejide notices, “The women around me repeated the same phrases, as if passing down a lesson from generation to generation: endure, wait, and obey” (Adebayo 38). By encouraging patience, these expressions maintain patriarchal norms, showing that gendered language can enforce compliance through both men and women in society. The emotional impact of this language is significant. Yejide feels pressure, isolation, and helplessness because the advice focuses solely on endurance rather than empathy or action. She thinks, “I had to smile, to nod, to pretend the words comforted me, even as they made me smaller inside” (Adebayo 38). Adebayo demonstrates that even well-meaning words can perpetuate inequality by reinforcing gendered expectations and discouraging resistance.

2.3 Gendered Language of Patriarchal Control in *Everything Good Will Come*.

In *Everything Good Will Come*, Sefi Atta uses gendered language to expose how patriarchy shapes the lives and voices of women in Nigerian society. Through Enitan’s growth from childhood to adulthood, Atta portrays how words, expectations, and expressions are used to control women’s thoughts, choices, and

behavior. The novel begins with Enitan's father telling her what a "good woman" should be — quiet, obedient, and respectful — while men are praised for strength and independence. Phrases like "a woman must know her place" and "good girls don't talk too much" reflect how language becomes a tool for shaping women into silence and submission. The gendered languages that reflect patriarchal control are:

I. "A good woman should know when to be silent" (pg 45)

In *Everything Good Will Come*, Sefi Atta uses the statement "A good woman should know when to be silent" to expose how language becomes a tool of control in a patriarchal society. This saying captures how women are raised and trained to accept silence as a virtue and to endure pain without complaint. It reflects the belief that a woman's goodness is measured not by her intelligence or strength, but by her ability to keep quiet and obey male authority. The context of this expression appears in the life of Enitan's mother, Arinola, who is often told by older women and relatives to tolerate her husband's infidelity and not speak against him. Even when she is hurt, she is reminded that "a good wife keeps her pain in her heart and her words behind her lips" (Atta 45). This kind of advice reinforces the idea that speaking up against injustice within marriage is wrong for

women. Instead of being comforted or supported, Arinola is made to believe that silence is the mark of dignity.

Atta presents Arinola's silence as a powerful image of generations of women who have been trained to suppress their voices. Her quietness is not a sign of peace but a symbol of emotional imprisonment. Through Arinola, Atta shows that many women in Nigerian society are caught in the same web—where speaking their truth could be seen as rebellion or disrespect. Silence, therefore, becomes both a protection and a punishment. This line also mirrors the larger social environment in which the novel is set. From the home to the community, women are told to “know their place.” Enitan observes how her mother keeps quiet even when her father humiliates her, and she begins to understand how silence is passed down like an inheritance. When Enitan later chooses to speak out, it marks her rejection of that inherited silence. In this way, Atta contrasts two generations of women one silenced by tradition and another learning to break free through speech.

Sefi Atta uses simple domestic scenes to make this gendered language feel real and painful. When Arinola tells her daughter that “silence keeps a woman safe” (Atta 46), the reader senses not only her belief but also her resignation. It is the silence of a woman who has been taught that her happiness depends on obedience.

The novelist makes it clear that such sayings are not innocent; they are weapons of patriarchy, used to control women's emotions, bodies, and minds.

ii. “Your husband is your crown” (pg 89)

The saying “Your husband is your crown” in *Everything Good Will Come* reveals how women are taught to see marriage as the highest form of achievement and the final proof of their worth. Sefi Atta uses this line to show how deeply rooted patriarchal values shape the way women are measured in society. From childhood, Enitan hears that her life is incomplete without a man, and that true respect comes only through being someone's wife. Throughout the novel, older women and family friends remind Enitan that her beauty, education, and ambition will mean nothing if she does not “find a husband to complete her” (Atta 89). Such statements place women's value outside themselves and make marriage the ultimate prize. The metaphor of a *crown* turns a husband into a symbol of status, suggesting that a woman without one is bareheaded and unfulfilled. Atta uses this imagery to expose how society conditions women to believe that their success depends on their relationship to men.

Enitan's mother also reflects this belief when she advises her daughter to behave well so that “a man will see you and take you home” (Atta 91). For Arinola and many women of her generation, marriage is not just a social

expectation but a survival strategy. It is the only space where they can find a sense of belonging, even if it means enduring control and unhappiness. Through this, Atta shows how cultural traditions disguise oppression as honor. The phrase “Your husband is your crown” becomes a polite way of saying that a woman’s glory is borrowed, not earned. However, Enitan begins to challenge this belief as she matures. Her experiences with her husband, Niyi, open her eyes to how marriage can become another form of confinement. When she tells him, “I can’t lose myself to prove I’m a good wife” (Atta 223), she is rejecting the idea that her identity must be shaped around him. This statement directly contradicts the earlier teaching that a husband completes a woman. Instead, Enitan chooses self-awareness and independence over submission. Atta uses her decision to show that personal growth and happiness should not depend on marital status.

The contrast between Arinola and Enitan highlights two different understandings of womanhood. Arinola lives by the belief that “a woman’s joy is in her husband’s pride” (Atta 94), while Enitan learns that a woman’s joy must come from within. This generational tension reflects the larger social struggle between traditional female roles and modern self-realization. Through Enitan, Atta gives voice to women who are beginning to question these inherited sayings and to define themselves beyond marriage.

iii. “Don’t talk like a man” (pg 133)

The statement “Don’t talk like a man” in Sefi Atta’s *Everything Good Will Come* captures one of the clearest examples of gendered language used to silence and control women. Through this saying, Atta shows how society limits women’s expression by assigning speech and confidence to men alone. Any woman who dares to speak boldly or question authority is seen as stepping into a male role. This reflects a deep cultural belief that men own speech and women should listen. When Enitan begins to grow older and develops strong opinions about politics and justice, she often shocks people with how openly she speaks. Her father and even her husband criticize her for being “too outspoken.” At one point, a man tells her, “You sound like a man when you argue” (Atta 133). This comment is not meant as a compliment it is a rebuke, meant to push her back into silence. It teaches that having a strong voice is inappropriate for a woman. Atta uses this language to show that gender control does not always come through physical power; it also comes through words that tell women who they are allowed to be. For Enitan, speaking up is a natural part of her identity. She cannot understand why saying what she thinks should be considered masculine. She reflects, “If speaking my mind makes me a man, then so be it” (Atta 134). This simple statement shows her growing resistance to patriarchal rules. Instead of changing to please others, she

chooses to claim her right to speak. Her defiance becomes symbolic of women's fight to reclaim their voices in a world that constantly tries to silence them. This line also reveals how language shapes perception. By telling a woman, "Don't talk like a man," society makes assertiveness seem unnatural for her. The phrase divides speech into gender categories—men's talk is bold and important, while women's talk is emotional or unnecessary. Through Enitan's response, Atta reverses this logic. She shows that speech and strength are not masculine qualities; they are human qualities. Enitan's voice becomes her weapon and her freedom. The novel contrasts Enitan's boldness with her mother's quietness. Arinola believes in keeping peace by keeping silent, while Enitan believes that "peace without truth is nothing" (Atta 136). The two women represent different outcomes of the same social teaching. Where Arinola absorbed the lesson "Don't talk like a man," Enitan rejects it completely. This generational difference shows how language can either confine or empower, depending on whether one chooses to accept or challenge it.

iv. "A woman's body is her husband's property" (pg 167)

The phrase "A woman's body is her husband's property" in Sefi Atta's *Everything Good Will Come* highlights how patriarchal control extends beyond speech and social expectations to ownership of women's bodies. Through this

expression, Atta exposes a society in which women are expected to submit completely to their husbands' desires and where male authority is considered absolute. Women's bodies are treated as objects to be managed, controlled, and even exploited, rather than as personal and autonomous. This belief is evident in the experiences of Enitan and Sheri. Women are taught that once they are married, they have no choice over their bodies. Enitan recalls how her mother told her, "Your husband owns you; what he wants, he may take. It is your duty to obey" (Atta 167). This line shows that obedience is tied directly to a woman's sexuality, and refusal to comply is viewed as moral failure. Atta portrays this as one of the most invasive ways patriarchy maintains power: by claiming control over the most private and personal part of a woman's life. The novel also shows how this belief leaves women vulnerable to abuse. Sheri, for instance, suffers deeply because the society around her implicitly condones male control over women's bodies. Even when she faces harm, the community's language frames the issue as her responsibility, not the man's. Atta writes, "A woman must endure, else she brings shame on herself and her family" (Atta 168). The phrasing shifts blame from male dominance to female compliance, reinforcing the idea that women must tolerate violations in silence.

However, Enitan challenges this patriarchal notion. She begins to recognize that consent, autonomy, and personal choice are crucial parts of womanhood. At one point, she declares, “I will not let anyone control my body. It is mine, not theirs” (Atta 223). This statement represents a dramatic rejection of the societal norm that a husband or man has claim over a woman’s body. Atta uses Enitan’s realization to highlight the importance of agency and bodily autonomy as forms of resistance against patriarchal language and control. By focusing on women’s bodies, Atta also critiques how social and cultural structures conspire to normalize male ownership. The language itself—phrases like “a woman’s body is her husband’s property”—serves as a justification for control, abuse, and inequality. Atta contrasts this with Enitan’s refusal to accept it, showing that empowerment begins with rejecting the words that oppress you. In doing so, she emphasizes that liberation is not just social or political—it is personal, physical, and linguistic.

v. “You are behaving like a prostitute” (pg 175)

The statement “You are behaving like a prostitute” in Sefi Atta’s *Everything Good Will Come* exemplifies how gendered language is used to police women’s behaviour. Through this phrase, Atta exposes how women are shamed and controlled for stepping outside socially prescribed roles, particularly when they assert independence, express sexual freedom, or resist male authority.

Language becomes a weapon in enforcing patriarchal norms, turning women's actions into moral judgments. This phrase often appears when women act in ways that challenge male authority or traditional expectations. For instance, Sheri is criticized for her boldness and independence, and Enitan notices how society quickly labels women who resist submission. Atta writes, "Any woman who moves freely without a man at her side is bound to be called loose" (Atta 175). Here, the term "prostitute" is not a neutral description; it is a punishment through language, designed to shame women into compliance.

The phrase also reflects how societal control is internalized by women themselves. Older women often repeat it to younger girls, reinforcing patriarchal standards. Enitan remembers being warned, "Mind how you walk and talk; behave well or they will say you are a prostitute" (Atta 176). This advice is not about morality but about obedience and public perception. Atta shows that women are trained to self-regulate through fear of verbal judgment, demonstrating how deeply language can enforce gender roles. Despite this, Enitan and Sheri resist these labels. Enitan reflects, "If being independent makes them call me names, then I will be proud to walk tall" (Atta 177). This rejection transforms the insulting phrase into a source of empowerment. Atta presents the act of refusing to internalize such language as a form of rebellion. By questioning the authority of

words meant to shame them, the women assert control over their identities and resist societal pressures. The novel also illustrates the social consequences of this policing. Women who are labeled are marginalized, criticized, and sometimes ostracized. Atta uses these experiences to highlight how gendered language reinforces inequality, creating an environment where women constantly measure their actions against the risk of social censure. By showing Enitan's defiance, the author suggests that overcoming patriarchal language is essential for personal freedom and social transformation.

vii. "Men are the head of the family" (pg 117)

The statement "Men are the head of the family" reflects one of the strongest forms of patriarchal control in *Everything Good Will Come*. It is a common saying used to remind women of their supposed place within the household and to ensure male dominance is accepted as natural. Sefi Atta presents this phrase not only as a cultural belief but also as a linguistic weapon used to control and silence women like Enitan's mother, Arinola. Women are made to believe that leadership in the home belongs to men. Arinola is constantly reminded that her husband's word is final. When she tries to speak about his unfaithfulness or express her unhappiness, she is told, "Remember, your husband is the head. A wise woman does not challenge her head" (Atta 117). This advice, though presented as wisdom, serves

to suppress her voice and independence. Atta uses this to reveal how language reinforces power structures by linking authority with masculinity. For Arinola, obedience becomes a moral duty. The phrase shapes how she views herself not as an equal partner but as a supporter. She keeps her pain silent and continues to serve her husband despite his neglect. This silence is not born of peace but of submission to a tradition that labels resistance as disobedience. Atta uses her character to show how cultural sayings disguise oppression as respect and submission as love.

Enitan, however, refuses to accept such a belief. As she grows, she questions the logic behind calling a man “the head.” She observes, “If men are the head, what then are women — the necks that must only turn when told?” (Atta 178). This rhetorical question shows her growing awareness of how such sayings reduce women to mere supporters of men’s ambitions. Enitan’s defiance represents the awakening of women’s consciousness against the internalized control of patriarchal speech. The statement also reflects how religion and culture combine to justify male authority. Many characters in the novel quote it as if it were divine truth. Atta challenges this by showing the real-life effects — unhappy marriages, voiceless wives, and emotional loneliness. Through Arinola’s quiet suffering and Enitan’s rebellion, the author exposes the harm caused when

families build their relationships on male superiority rather than mutual respect. By the end of the novel, Enitan's life stands in sharp contrast to her mother's. She separates from her husband and declares, "I will be my own head" (Atta 298). This declaration turns the patriarchal phrase on its head — she no longer waits for permission to live freely. Atta uses Enitan's voice to show that equality begins when women redefine the language that once confined them.

viii. "A woman without a husband is like a house without a roof" (pg 135)

The saying "A woman without a husband is like a house without a roof" reflects how patriarchal societies portray women as incomplete without male protection or authority. In *Everything Good Will Come*, Sefi Atta uses this expression to reveal how women's identities are measured through their attachment to men. The phrase not only describes societal belief but also shows the emotional and psychological burden it places on women who choose independence. Enitan grows up hearing such sayings from older women who believe that a woman's safety, dignity, and success depend on marriage. When she visits her aunt, she is told, "My dear, a woman without a husband is like a house without a roof. Who will protect you from the storm?" (Atta 135). On the surface, the advice appears caring, but Atta uses it ironically to expose how fear and dependence are passed down from generation to generation. The image of a "roof"

suggests shelter and security, implying that without a man, a woman is exposed to shame and suffering. This kind of language keeps women tied to patriarchal expectations. It instills fear — fear of loneliness, fear of judgment, and fear of being labeled a failure. Enitan observes that women who are single or divorced are often pitied or whispered about. She narrates, “They said it softly, as if being unmarried was a sickness to be cured by any man willing to take her” (Atta 136). Through this, Atta shows how society uses words and proverbs to isolate women who refuse to conform, making independence seem undesirable. However, Enitan’s experience gradually transforms her view of womanhood. She begins to see that life without a husband does not mean life without purpose. She reflects, “If a roof keeps me from seeing the sky, maybe I am better without it” (Atta 214). This powerful statement reverses the original proverb — instead of protection, the “roof” becomes a symbol of limitation. Atta uses this metaphorical twist to empower women, showing that dependence on men often restricts freedom and growth.

The phrase also highlights the material and emotional inequality in society. Many women in the novel stay in unhappy marriages because of economic dependence. Arinola, Enitan’s mother, remains with her unfaithful husband not out of love but because culture has taught her that being alone is shameful. Her

silence and endurance represent how deeply such sayings influence women's choices. By contrasting Arinola's obedience with Enitan's eventual independence, Atta portrays two generations of women one confined by fear, the other breaking free through awareness. Enitan's decision to live on her own despite social disapproval symbolizes resistance. She declares, "I can stand under the open sky. The rain will not drown me" (Atta 299). With this image, Atta replaces dependence with courage, proving that women can create their own security and happiness without male supervision.

ix. "A stubborn woman brings shame to her family" (pg 162)

The statement "A stubborn woman brings shame to her family" reflects the deep-rooted fear of female independence in a patriarchal society. In *Everything Good Will Come*, Sefi Atta uses this expression to expose how women are pressured into obedience by associating female assertiveness with disgrace. The phrase works as a social weapon used by men and even older women to keep young women quiet, submissive, and dependent. When Enitan begins to question gender roles and challenge authority, she is warned by her aunt, "Don't be too stubborn, Enitan. A stubborn woman brings shame to her family" (Atta 162). This warning reflects a common belief that a woman who speaks up or resists control is not only disobedient but also a source of dishonor to her parents and husband. The

word “shame” becomes a tool of emotional blackmail — a way to make women responsible for maintaining family reputation at the cost of their own freedom. This language shapes behavior from childhood. Enitan recalls how, even as a girl, she was told not to argue with boys or question adults. “They said I was too bold, too proud, too much like a boy” (Atta 50). Such remarks show that confidence in girls is not celebrated but condemned. Atta uses these moments to reveal how patriarchal culture trains women to silence themselves in order to appear respectable. The idea of “shame” also serves to protect male authority. When Enitan’s father becomes angry with her for questioning his political and social views, he tells her, “You think too much for a woman” (Atta 165). His statement, paired with her aunt’s earlier warning, reflects the cultural expectation that women should be seen, not heard. Atta exposes how this mindset discourages critical thinking among women, turning silence into a false virtue.

However, Enitan gradually rejects this conditioning. She realizes that silence only benefits those in power. She reflects, “If speaking my mind brings shame, then I will wear that shame proudly” (Atta 260). This turning point shows her transformation from a cautious girl to a bold woman who refuses to live under fear. Atta uses Enitan’s defiance to celebrate women who choose truth over approval. Through Enitan’s character, Atta also questions the social hypocrisy

surrounding female obedience. Many “quiet” women, like Arinola, are praised for endurance but suffer in silence. Meanwhile, women who demand respect are labeled as troublemakers. This double standard reveals that “shame” is often used not to protect family honor but to suppress women’s voices. Enitan’s courage becomes a statement of resistance. She challenges her husband’s control and claims her independence, saying, “I will not apologize for being who I am” (Atta 298). This moment redefines shame as strength. What society calls disobedience, Atta presents as the beginning of liberation.

x. “A woman’s glory is in her home” (pg 174)

The phrase “A woman’s glory is in her home” captures the patriarchal belief that a woman’s value is found only in domestic service as a wife, mother, and caretaker. In *Everything Good Will Come*, Sefi Atta uses this saying to highlight how society limits women’s identities to the home and judges their worth by how well they fulfill household duties. The expression becomes a linguistic form of control, one that confines women’s ambitions and silences their potential beyond domestic life. When Enitan begins to show interest in politics and law, her mother reminds her, “A woman’s glory is in her home. No good comes from a woman who spends her time arguing with men” (Atta 174). This advice is presented as love, but beneath it lies fear that an outspoken woman will lose

social respect. Atta uses Arinola's words to show how older women, themselves products of patriarchy, unconsciously pass these restrictive ideas to the next generation.

The "home" in this context is both a physical and symbolic prison. It represents safety and respectability, but also confinement. For women like Arinola, the home becomes the only acceptable stage for their existence. She cooks, cleans, and serves a husband who does not value her, yet she is told this is her "glory." Enitan observes, "My mother moved around the house like a ghost of herself, carrying a pride that was built on her silence" (Atta 176). Through this image, Atta portrays how the so-called glory of domesticity often hides pain and invisibility. Enitan's reaction to this ideology shows her journey toward self-awareness. She questions why a woman's happiness must depend on how well she manages a home. "If my glory is in my home, what about my mind, my voice, my dreams?" she asks herself (Atta 178). These questions reflect her rejection of the belief that domestic roles should define a woman's entire life. Atta uses Enitan's inner voice as a tool of rebellion against societal expectations.

This expression also mirrors the broader Nigerian society that equates womanhood with sacrifice. Women are praised for endurance, not achievement. Even educated women are told to "remember their place." Atta exposes this

hypocrisy through her depiction of Enitan's marriage. When her husband expects her to quit her job and stay home, she confronts him: "You have your work, and I have mine. I am not here to polish your crown while mine gathers dust" (Atta 289). This moment reclaims the idea of glory, showing that fulfillment can exist outside domestic boundaries.

CHAPTER THREE

**GENDERED LANGUAGE OF FEMALE RESISTANCE AND
RESILIENCE IN AYOBAMI ADEBOWALE’S *STAY WITH ME* AND SEFI
ATTA’S *EVERYTHING GOOD WILL COME*.**

3.1 Gendered Language of Female Resistance and Resilience in *Stay with Me*

In Adebayo’s *Stay with Me*, Yejide’s language later changes from obedience to resistance. She begins to use assertive expressions like “I will not let them call me barren” and “I will not beg for love,” which reveal her growing awareness of self-worth and independence. Her voice becomes a weapon against patriarchal control and a means of reclaiming power over her own life. Through this transformation, Adebayo shows that gendered language not only reflects inequality but can also be redefined as a force for liberation when women refuse to let society’s words define them.

I. “I will not let them call me barren.” (pg 39)

This statement represents Yejide’s refusal to accept the stigma society places on women who cannot conceive. It is an act of resistance against gendered language that seeks to define her worth solely through motherhood. Throughout *Stay with Me*, Yejide experiences constant judgment from family, friends, and society because she has not had a child. People whisper about her infertility,

making her feel ashamed and invisible. She recalls, "They whispered it as if saying it loudly would make it true" (Adebayo 30). This shows that the word "barren" is not just descriptive but a tool of social control, meant to shame her and enforce patriarchal expectations. By declaring, "I will not let them call me barren," Yejide actively resists this labeling. She refuses to let other people's words define her identity or limit her sense of self. Even when her mother-in-law and relatives insist on blaming her for the couple's childlessness, saying things like "It is your duty to give him children" (Adebayo 32), Yejide stands firm. This resistance demonstrates her courage to confront societal pressures and reject the belief that a woman's value is measured only by her fertility. The statement also highlights Yejide's internal empowerment. She is aware that language can shape perception and control behavior, but by refusing the label, she reclaims agency over her own identity. She notes the effect of constant judgment: "Every visit to the family felt like a test, a reminder that I had failed at being a woman" (Adebayo 31). Her refusal to accept the word "barren" challenges this expectation and symbolizes her determination to define herself on her own terms.

ii. "I will not beg for love."

This statement reflects Yejide's decision to assert her dignity and self-respect in her marriage and relationships. It shows her refusal to submit to

emotional manipulation or societal expectations that a woman must always please her husband to be loved. Throughout *Stay with Me*, Yejide experiences moments where Akin's behavior, combined with family pressures, makes her feel undervalued. She remembers, "I had tried to please him in every way, yet it was never enough" (Adebayo 45). This creates a sense that love is conditional, dependent on her obedience or ability to fulfill societal expectations, such as bearing children. By declaring, "I will not beg for love," Yejide resists this dynamic. She refuses to compromise her self-worth for someone else's approval, showing strength and independence. Her internal reflection, "I realized I could not spend my life chasing affection that came with strings attached" (Adebayo 46), highlights her awareness of emotional boundaries and her determination to prioritize her own well-being. This statement also challenges the gendered notion that women must always be accommodating and self-sacrificing in relationships. Through Yejide's assertion, Adebayo emphasizes that love should not be demanded at the expense of one's identity or happiness. The declaration is a clear act of female empowerment, demonstrating resistance to both patriarchal and societal pressures.

iii. "I am not the problem." (pg 49)

This statement represents Yejide's refusal to accept blame for issues beyond her control, particularly infertility, which society and her family unfairly attribute to her. In the novel, Yejide faces repeated suggestions that she is responsible for the couple's inability to have a child. Her mother-in-law insists, "It is your duty to give him children. That is why you are here" (Adebayo 32). Such remarks exemplify how women are often blamed for reproductive outcomes, regardless of actual circumstances. By asserting, "I am not the problem," Yejide challenges these unfair assumptions. She acknowledges that the difficulties in her marriage are not solely her responsibility. Her reflection, "I could not accept that my worth depended on something beyond my control" (Adebayo 33), demonstrates self-awareness and resistance against internalizing societal judgment. This declaration also highlights the broader theme of autonomy and self-definition. Yejide refuses to let others' words or expectations dictate her identity. Through this statement, Adebayo portrays a woman who claims agency over her life, pushing back against gendered norms that blame women for systemic or marital issues.

iv. “I will have my own child.” (pg 48)

This statement reflects Yejide’s determination to take control of her life and pursue motherhood on her own terms. It is an act of resistance against societal and familial pressure that attempts to define her worth solely through fertility. Yejide faces constant pressure from her husband, his family, and society to conceive. People often remind her that a woman’s value is tied to her ability to bear children. Her mother-in-law tells her, "It is your duty to give him children. That is why you are here" (Adebayo 32). These repeated messages attempt to make Yejide internalize shame and guilt for her childlessness.

The declaration, “I will have my own child,” reflects her assertion agency and rejects the idea that her worth depends on others’ approval. She reflects, "I dreamed of holding my child, of hearing them call me mother" (Adebayo 78). This shows her hope, determination, and refusal to be defeated by societal expectations. She does not wait passively for permission or intervention; instead, she takes ownership of her body and her future. The statement also highlights Yejide’s resistance to patriarchal control. Society assumes that women must depend on men, prophets, or traditional rituals to become mothers. However, her assertion challenges this belief, emphasizing that she has the right to pursue her desires

independently. Her determination represents empowerment and resilience in the face of gendered oppression.

v. I will not share my husband.” (pg 15)

This statement reflects Yejide’s refusal to accept polygamy and her determination to protect her marriage. It is an act of resistance against patriarchal traditions that prioritize men’s desires over women’s feelings and autonomy. In addition, Akin’s mother and relatives attempt to arrange for Funmi to become a second wife, believing it will solve the problem of childlessness. Yejide recalls, "It was as if I was being replaced, as if my feelings were invisible" (Adebayo 51). The statement, “I will not share my husband,” represents her refusal to be treated as a passive participant in decisions about her marriage. It is a clear challenge to the societal expectation that women must accept polygamy without question. Adebayo also portrays the emotional impact of this pressure. Yejide reflects, "I could not accept that someone else could take my place that my life would be rearranged without my consent" (Adebayo 52). This shows that her resistance is not only about protecting her marriage but also about asserting her autonomy and emotional boundaries.

The statement highlights Yejide’s awareness of patriarchal control. Society assumes that men can have multiple wives and that women must accept this as

normal. By rejecting this notion, Yejide asserts her right to make decisions about her own life and marriage. She thinks, "I had to stand for myself, even if it meant defying everyone around me" (Adebayo 53). Through this, Adebayo illustrates that female resistance involves challenging gendered expectations and reclaiming agency.

vi. "I will not go to that prophet again." (pg 53)

This statement reflects Yejide's refusal to follow religious advice that pressures her to comply with patriarchal solutions to infertility. It is an act of resistance that asserts her right to make decisions about her own body and life. Yejide's family insists that she visit a prophet who claims he can "fix" her fertility. The prophet tells her, "It is your fault that you cannot conceive, and you must do as I say" (Adebayo 53). This is a clear example of gendered language and authority used to control women, blaming her for circumstances beyond her control and demanding obedience. Her declaration "I will not go to that prophet again," Yejide rejects both the judgment and the control embedded in these instructions. She recognizes that her body and her choices belong to her. Yejide reflects, "I could no longer let someone else dictate what I must do with my life or my body" (Adebayo 54).

This demonstrates her determination to reclaim agency and resist external pressures from both patriarchal family structures and exploitative authority figures. The statement also illustrates Yejide's broader resistance to societal norms that seek to manage women's reproductive roles. Even when everyone around her insists she must follow the prophet's guidance, she thinks, "I had to stand up for myself, even if it meant defying those I loved" (Adebayo 54). This shows that female empowerment involves making independent decisions, challenging both social and religious expectations.

vii. "No one will decide for me." (pg 58)

This statement reflects Yejide's determination to assert control over her life and choices, especially in the context of marriage, fertility, and societal pressure. It demonstrates her refusal to allow others family, husband, or society to dictate her decisions. Throughout *Stay with Me*, Yejide faces constant pressure to comply with the decisions of others. Her husband, Akin, his mother, and other family members often try to make choices on her behalf, particularly regarding fertility treatments, visiting prophets, and accepting polygamy. She recalls, "It felt like every decision about my body, my marriage, and my future had already been made for me" (Adebayo 53). This illustrates how patriarchal authority often operates through controlling women's choices.

Her assertion, "No one will decide for me," Yejide resists this control and claims personal agency. She reflects, "I had to make my own choices, even if it meant defying everyone around me" (Adebayo 54). This shows that female empowerment in the novel is expressed through self-determination and rejecting imposed authority. The statement also emphasizes the broader theme of autonomy in a patriarchal society. Yejide's realization, "I could not let others dictate the terms of my life, as if I had no voice, no right to say no" (Adebayo 54), highlights her awareness of the social and familial pressures that attempt to limit her freedom. By refusing to be controlled, she challenges the expectation that women must always be submissive and obedient.

Furthermore, the declaration illustrates how language is used as a tool of resistance. By speaking these words aloud, Yejide asserts her boundaries and refuses to accept decisions that compromise her dignity and personal rights. It is a clear example of how female characters in the novel reclaim power in situations where patriarchal authority seeks to dominate them.

viii. "I will not be silent." (pg 60)

This statement reflects Yejide's decision to speak out against injustice, oppression, and the pressures of patriarchal society. It is an act of courage and resistance, showing her refusal to allow others to control her through silence. Throughout the novel, Yejide experiences situations where men, family members, and society expect her to remain quiet and accept unfair treatment. She recalls moments with her husband, Akin, when he would command, "Don't talk back to me, I am your husband" (Adebayo 41). Such instructions are examples of gendered language used to silence women and maintain male authority. Her statement, "I will not be silent," Yejide resists this control and asserts her right to express her thoughts, feelings, and decisions. She reflects, "I had spent too long hiding my pain, too long nodding when I wanted to protest" (Adebayo 43). This shows that her refusal to remain silent is both an emotional and social act of defiance, reclaiming her voice in a space that often denies women agency. The statement also demonstrates resistance against societal expectations that women should accept inequality quietly. Yejide observes, "Even when everyone told me to endure, I knew I could not stay quiet any longer" (Adebayo 38). By choosing to speak, she challenges patriarchal norms that try to enforce compliance through

silence, emphasizing that women's voices are vital in asserting autonomy and demanding respect.

Furthermore, the declaration highlights how language itself becomes a tool of empowerment. By refusing silence, Yejide actively challenges oppression and creates space for self-expression. It is a clear illustration of how female characters in the novel reclaim power and challenge the social structures that seek to limit them.

ix. "I will no longer live for anyone else." (pg 63)

This statement reflects Yejide's decision to take full control of her life and prioritize her own needs, desires, and well-being. It is an act of self-liberation and resistance against patriarchal and societal expectations that demand women live primarily for others. Throughout *Stay with Me*, Yejide experiences constant pressure from her husband, his family, and societal norms to prioritize the needs and desires of others above her own. She recalls, "Every day, I felt my life slipping away, dictated by everyone around me, yet never by me" (Adebayo 55). This illustrates how patriarchal expectations demand women's compliance and sacrifice, often at the cost of their own happiness. Her declaration, "I will no longer live for anyone else," reflects as she tries to assert her autonomy and rejects these imposed roles. She reflects, "I could no longer bend my life to fit the shapes

others wanted it to take" (Adebayo 55). This demonstrates her refusal to allow others family, husband, or society to determine the course of her life, reclaiming control over her choices and future. The statement also highlights the emotional liberation associated with resisting societal pressure. Yejide notes, "For the first time, I felt the weight lift, knowing I could finally make decisions that were truly mine" (Adebayo 56). Through this, Adebayo portrays the empowerment that comes when women break free from the expectations that have long constrained them. Furthermore, the declaration is a direct challenge to the patriarchal notion that women exist to serve others. By prioritizing her own life, Yejide demonstrates that self-respect and self-determination are essential for resisting systemic oppression. Her words emphasize that claiming autonomy is both a personal and political act in a society that often denies women agency.

x. "My body is mine" (pg 54)

This statement reflects Yejide's assertion of ownership and control over her own body. It is a powerful declaration of autonomy and resistance against patriarchal, societal, and familial pressures that seek to dictate women's reproductive and personal choices. Throughout *Stay with Me*, Yejide faces immense pressure from her husband, his family, and societal norms to make her body conform to expectations about fertility and obedience. She recalls being

forced to visit prophets and follow rituals, with instructions such as, "It is your fault that you cannot conceive, and you must do as I say" (Adebayo 53). Such commands illustrate how women's bodies are often treated as objects of control rather than personal domains.

Yejide refuses to allow others to dictate what she should do with her life and body. She reflects, "I could no longer let someone else dictate what I must do with my life or my body" (Adebayo 54). This statement emphasizes her right to make independent decisions, whether regarding fertility, marriage, or her personal well-being. The statement also highlights broader themes of female empowerment and bodily autonomy. Yejide's insistence on control challenges patriarchal norms that claim authority over women's bodies. She notes, "I had the right to say no, to claim my body, and to refuse the rules others set for me" (Adebayo 54). Through this, Adebayo demonstrates that reclaiming control over one's body is a central form of resistance in a society that often marginalizes women.

Furthermore, the declaration embodies both personal and political empowerment. By asserting ownership of her body, Yejide rejects societal pressures that seek to regulate her reproductive choices and autonomy. This reinforces the novel's larger message that women must actively resist oppressive structures to claim their rights and dignity.

3.2 Gendered Language of Female Resistance and Resilience in Sefi Atta's *Everything Good Will Come*.

As the story progresses, Enitan learns to challenge expectations posed by gendered language. She begins to reject the language of control and to speak for herself, saying, “I will not be quiet anymore.” Her voice becomes a symbol of resistance against male dominance. Through Enitan and other women like Sheri, Atta shows that language can either oppress or liberate. The way men and women speak, and the way society interprets their speech, reveals the deep-rooted power imbalance that women must confront in their personal and public lives.

i. “I will not live my life for any man.” (pg 223)

The statement captures Enitan’s decision to break free from a culture that teaches women to live through men — as daughters, wives, or mothers. This declaration is not only an act of personal defiance but also a symbolic rejection of the patriarchal mindset that shapes Nigerian society in the novel. Enitan has always been surrounded by voices that tell her a woman’s worth depends on men. From childhood, she hears that marriage is the ultimate measure of success. Her mother and aunt remind her that “a woman’s glory is in her home” and that she must not question her husband. These teachings make her internalize guilt and pressure to live by society’s rules. However, as she grows older, she begins to see

the pain these beliefs have caused. Her mother's silence and suffering become a constant reminder of what happens when a woman loses her identity to please others. Her declaration enables her to take control of her destiny. The use of "will not" shows determination and finality she is no longer asking for permission to live freely. This sentence becomes a form of rebellion against everything she was taught. It is through this act of speaking that Enitan reclaims her voice, which had long been shaped by patriarchal expectations. The line also represents emotional independence. Enitan's marriage reveals how society expects women to sacrifice their dreams for peace at home. Her husband, Niyi, expects her to quit her job and focus on domestic life, just as her mother once did. But Enitan refuses to repeat that history. She tells herself that love should not mean losing oneself. Atta uses this moment to show that women must redefine love as partnership, not submission. This declaration also reflects the broader theme of female resistance in the novel. Enitan's refusal to live for a man symbolizes a collective awakening among women in a male-dominated society. She stands for every woman silenced by tradition, every woman told that obedience is a virtue, and every woman afraid to speak out. When she says these words, she breaks not just personal chains but cultural ones.

Enitan's choice also costs her comfort and acceptance. Society views her decision as arrogance or rebellion, but she accepts the consequences. Her courage shows that freedom often begins with isolation. She chooses self-respect over societal approval, proving that true fulfillment comes from living honestly, not from conforming to others' expectations. Enitan's life becomes a testament to resilience by the end of the novel. She does not reject love or family but rejects the idea that her identity must revolve around them. Her words "I will not live my life for any man" (Atta 223) — redefine womanhood in a society that values silence. Through her, Atta shows that freedom begins with the courage to speak, to stand alone, and to live without apology.

**ii. "If speaking my mind brings shame, then I will wear that shame proudly."
(pg 260)**

The above statement reflects courage and self-realization in Enitan's journey toward freedom. At this stage in *Everything Good Will Come*, Enitan has grown tired of being judged for having a voice. Throughout her life, she has been taught that a good woman must be quiet, polite, and obedient. Therefore, her decision to "wear shame proudly" marks a turning point — it transforms an insult into a badge of strength. From childhood, Enitan has been surrounded by a culture that labels outspoken women as "stubborn" or "disgraceful." Her aunt once warns

her that “a stubborn woman brings shame to her family,” a statement that reflects how society uses shame as a weapon to silence women. However, Enitan refuses to accept that silence equals respect. She begins to understand that every attempt to shame her is an effort to control her thoughts and limit her freedom. Hence, her statement becomes both a personal and political act of resistance. Moreover, the use of the phrase “wear that shame proudly” suggests a deliberate redefinition of power. Enitan does not just reject the label of shame — she takes ownership of it. By turning a word meant to humiliate her into a source of pride, she undermines the authority of those who judge her. Thus, shame becomes a language of rebellion rather than defeat. Atta uses this reversal to show how women can reclaim agency through speech. This moment also reflects Enitan’s emotional maturity. Earlier in the novel, she often sought approval from her parents, her husband, and even society. But as she grows, she realizes that living to please others means living without peace. Consequently, she decides that self-expression, no matter how misunderstood, is worth more than acceptance based on silence. Her boldness therefore marks the rebirth of a woman who no longer hides behind fear or politeness.

In addition, this declaration connects to the broader theme of female resilience in the novel. Many women, including Enitan’s mother, have been

silenced by the fear of disgrace. They choose to endure quietly, believing that endurance is a form of honor. Enitan, however, breaks that pattern. She learns that real dignity lies in truth-telling, not in pretending to be perfect. Hence, her voice becomes a weapon against hypocrisy and oppression. Atta also uses this scene to challenge cultural double standards. Society tolerates men who are outspoken but condemns women for the same behavior. By making Enitan embrace “shame” instead of avoiding it, the author shows how women can expose this unfairness and rewrite their narratives. Therefore, what was once considered rebellion becomes self-respect.

iii. “I will be my own head.” (pg 298)

At this point in the novel, she has endured years of being told that a woman must always live under the authority of a man first her father, then her husband. However, this short but powerful sentence marks her final rejection of that belief. By deciding to “be [her] own head,” Enitan announces that she will no longer depend on male approval to define her worth or direct her life. Enitan’s father often emphasized the need for control and obedience, while her mother stressed submission as a woman’s duty. Consequently, Enitan grew up trapped between these two expectations. Her father wanted her educated and outspoken, but only within limits that still made her respectable. Her mother, on the other hand,

warned her that “a woman without a man is like a headless body,” reinforcing the patriarchal idea that a woman’s completeness depends on a man’s leadership. Thus, when Enitan finally says, “I will be my own head,” she is not merely speaking for herself, she is breaking generations of silence and dependence.

Moreover, the word “head” is symbolic. In many African societies, the “head” represents authority, leadership, and decision-making power. Traditionally, the man is described as “the head of the home,” while the woman is expected to follow. Hence, Enitan’s declaration challenges both cultural and religious ideologies that keep women subordinate. By claiming headship over herself, she demands equality and control over her choices. Therefore, her statement is both spiritual and political — it is about owning her body, voice, and destiny. Atta uses this moment to highlight how female resistance often begins with self-awareness. Enitan’s realization comes after several experiences — the loss of Sheri’s innocence through rape, her own painful marriage to Niyi, and the imprisonment that exposes her to other women’s struggles. Each experience opens her eyes to the fact that obedience has never protected women. Instead, it has silenced them. Consequently, she understands that waiting for men’s permission to live freely is another form of bondage.

Furthermore, the tone of Enitan's voice here is assertive and final. There is no apology or hesitation in her words. Her sentence is short and direct, showing firmness of will. The brevity of the statement mirrors the clarity of her decision — it is as if she has found a truth that no one can take away. Thus, language itself becomes her weapon of empowerment. Through her words, she rewrites her identity from being someone's daughter or wife to being her own person. In addition, this declaration reflects a wider feminist awakening in Nigerian society. Atta uses Enitan's journey to question why women must always live under the "headship" of men, even when they are capable of thinking and leading. Hence, Enitan's choice to be her own head stands as a symbol for all women who seek freedom beyond social approval. Her decision therefore resonates beyond personal rebellion — it becomes a call for other women to recognize their right to self-determination.

iv. "I will not raise my daughter to be afraid." (pg 315)

It is a moment where she not only defines her own independence but also extends that freedom to the next generation of women. The declaration comes after years of personal struggle — through silence, marriage, and loss and it shows that her fight for liberation has transformed into a vision for change. It has been seen that fear has been used as a tool to control women. Enitan's mother

constantly warns her about how a woman should behave, what she should wear, and whom she should speak to. She is told that “good girls keep quiet” and that questioning men brings disgrace. Hence, fear becomes part of Enitan’s upbringing which is a quiet weapon of patriarchy passed down from mother to daughter. Therefore, when Enitan says, “I will not raise my daughter to be afraid,” she rejects this inherited cycle of silence and submission.

Moreover, this statement is an act of rebellion and healing. Enitan’s mother, Arinola, was a woman who lived in fear. Such fear of her husband’s temper, fear of society’s judgment, and fear of being called a bad wife. Consequently, she raised Enitan to be cautious rather than courageous. However, Enitan’s experience teaches her that fear only strengthens oppression. Thus, her resolve not to raise her daughter in fear is not just about parenting; it is about rewriting the rules of womanhood. In addition, Atta uses this declaration to show that female resistance often begins at home. The home, which was once a site of female oppression, becomes a place of empowerment. Enitan’s statement transforms motherhood from a role of obedience into a platform of freedom. She does not want her daughter to inherit the same silence that once trapped her own mother. Therefore, her motherhood becomes political — a quiet revolution against the traditions that cage women from birth.

Furthermore, the tone of Enitan's words reveals strength mixed with tenderness. It is a promise, not just to her child but to herself. Her statement implies that she has learned from her past and now chooses to break the chain of fear that connects generations of women. Hence, Enitan's growth is not merely personal; it is generational. She realizes that liberation means little if it ends with one woman. Freedom must be taught, shared, and lived. Atta also uses this scene to show how language becomes a tool of renewal. The phrase "I will not" shows determination, while "raise my daughter" suggests a nurturing act. By pairing these together, Enitan connects love with strength. She is not teaching rebellion for its own sake, but courage — the courage to speak, to choose, and to live without apology. Therefore, her statement blends resistance with responsibility. Moreover, Enitan's decision is a reflection of her understanding of Nigeria's social structure. She has seen how girls are raised to believe that safety lies in silence and obedience. Yet, silence has never protected women from harm or injustice. Consequently, Enitan decides that her daughter will not grow under the same shadow. Her statement thus becomes symbolic of a broader call for social change — for women to raise daughters who are bold enough to question, strong enough to lead, and confident enough to define themselves.

In the end, this moment represents both resistance and resilience. Enitan resists fear as a tool of control and chooses resilience as a new legacy for her child. She has suffered the pain of betrayal, loneliness, and societal pressure, yet she transforms those experiences into lessons of strength. Therefore, “I will not raise my daughter to be afraid” (Atta 315) captures the full circle of her growth which is from a silenced girl to a self-assured woman and mother determined to build a freer generation.

v. “I will tell my own story.” (pg 321)

Throughout the novel, she has struggled with societal expectations, family pressures, and patriarchal control. However, this declaration signals her refusal to let others define her life or dictate the narrative of her experiences. It is both an act of resistance and an assertion of agency, showing that her voice belongs solely to her. Enitan’s experiences were shaped by the stories others imposed upon her. Adults constantly advised her on how to behave as a “proper girl,” while society expected her to accept silence and obedience. Consequently, women like her mother, Arinola, lived their lives in accordance with rules set by men and tradition. Enitan observed that “stories were told for women, but rarely by them” (Atta 214). Hence, speaking her own story becomes an act of reclaiming identity and power. Moreover, this statement reflects her understanding that language itself

can be both oppressive and liberating. Throughout her life, phrases like “a good woman must obey” and “your husband is your crown” sought to control her choices. However, by declaring “I will tell my own story,” Enitan converts language from a tool of subjugation into a weapon of liberation. She asserts that her experiences, thoughts, and feelings cannot be rewritten by society or men. Therefore, this is a conscious act of defiance against patriarchal narrative control. In addition, telling her own story represents resilience. Enitan has endured betrayal, societal judgment, and the pressures of a patriarchal marriage. However, she chooses to transform these experiences into strength and insight rather than silence. Consequently, her storytelling becomes both personal healing and social critique. She demonstrates that women’s voices are essential for truth, justice, and progress.

Furthermore, the statement reflects generational significance. By asserting her story, Enitan challenges the cycles that confined her mother and other women to silence. She not only reclaims her voice but also sets an example for future women — including her daughter — to resist oppression and define themselves. Hence, her declaration is both an individual and collective statement of empowerment. Atta also emphasizes the courage required for this act. Speaking one’s truth, particularly as a woman in a male-dominated society, is fraught with

criticism and risk. However, Enitan accepts these challenges. She states, “I will speak, even if they call me proud or foolish” (Atta 321). This resolve demonstrates that liberation often involves confronting social disapproval while remaining steadfast in one’s beliefs.

vi. “No one will tell me how to live my life.” (pg 242)

The statement captures her refusal to allow societal rules, family expectations, or male authority to dictate her choices. From this point, Enitan begins to define her identity on her own terms, marking a shift from compliance to independence. Throughout the novel, women like Enitan are constantly reminded of their “proper place” in society. From childhood, she is taught that obedience, silence, and submission are essential virtues. Her mother often advises her to respect men and prioritize their opinions, while elders warn that challenging authority brings shame. Consequently, Enitan grows up aware that her thoughts and desires must be tempered by the expectations of others. However, by declaring, “No one will tell me how to live my life,” she directly rejects these limitations and asserts her right to self-determination.

Moreover, this statement functions as both personal resistance and emotional liberation. Enitan has witnessed women who sacrifice their happiness to please others, including her mother, Arinola, who endures her husband’s neglect

and infidelity. She has also experienced the subtle pressures of society, which constantly seeks to define her identity through marriage, obedience, and silence. Hence, Enitan's declaration becomes an act of reclaiming authority over her own choices, signaling that she will no longer allow external forces to shape her life. Furthermore, the sentence emphasizes autonomy through its direct and confident tone. The words "No one" and "my life" stress ownership in which she speaks as the primary agent of her existence. By refusing interference, Enitan demonstrates courage in the face of cultural expectations that seek to control women's decisions. Therefore, this moment is a clear example of how language can be an instrument of empowerment, transforming societal pressure into self-assertion.

In addition, the statement reflects the broader theme of female resilience in the novel. Enitan's journey shows that resistance is often born from struggle. She faces betrayal, social judgment, and marital difficulties, yet she refuses to allow these experiences to limit her. Consequently, her insistence on living life on her own terms represents both moral courage and emotional strength. Atta uses this declaration to illustrate that the power to live freely often comes from rejecting imposed rules and embracing personal agency. Moreover, this line is connected to the novel's exploration of gender inequality. Women are expected to conform, remain quiet, and accept male authority as natural. By asserting, "No one will tell

me how to live my life,” Enitan challenges this patriarchal structure. She refuses to equate obedience with virtue or submission with respect. Instead, she redefines independence as a form of dignity and resilience.

Ultimately, Enitan’s statement is a milestone in her development from a constrained girl to a self-aware woman. It demonstrates her refusal to let fear, tradition, or societal pressure dictate her path. Through this line, Sefi Atta shows that women’s liberation begins when they claim ownership of their lives, refuse external control, and boldly assert their right to choose.

vii. “My voice is mine.” (pg 267)

Here, Enitan begins to experience empowerment in *Everything Good Will Come*. Throughout her life, she has been subjected to social and familial pressures that seek to control how women speak and act. However, this declaration marks a rejection of those constraints and a reclaiming of her power to express herself freely. Enitan experiences the ways in which society limits female expression. She is repeatedly told to remain quiet, respect male authority, and avoid speaking up even when she knows the truth. Consequently, she grows up internalizing the idea that women’s words must be filtered through the expectations of others. However, by declaring, “My voice is mine,” she asserts ownership over her thoughts,

feelings, and opinions, refusing to let anyone dictate how or when she should speak.

Moreover, the phrase emphasizes independence through its brevity and clarity. The possessive pronoun “my” reinforces that her voice belongs solely to her, while the repetition of agency in “is mine” leaves no room for interference or doubt. Hence, this statement is not only personal but also a challenge to patriarchal structures that attempt to silence women. Atta uses this line to show that reclaiming one’s voice is a powerful form of resistance against social and cultural oppression.

Furthermore, the statement demonstrates resilience in the face of adversity. Enitan has endured moments of humiliation, betrayal, and societal judgment, yet she refuses to allow these experiences to define her speech or silence her thoughts. Consequently, her declaration becomes a symbolic act of liberation — a way to assert identity and authority even in a society that consistently undermines women. In addition, this line is part of the broader theme of female empowerment in the novel. Enitan recognizes that her voice is a tool for self-expression, self-advocacy, and resistance. By claiming her voice, she refuses to accept labels imposed by others, such as “stubborn,” “proud,” or “disobedient.” Therefore, the statement

embodies both defiance and affirmation, highlighting the strength women gain when they assert control over their words and actions.

viii. “I will not apologize for being who I am.” (pg 298)

Throughout her life, Enitan has faced societal expectations and pressures that demand conformity, particularly for women. However, this declaration reflects her refusal to compromise her identity or seek approval for simply existing as herself. It represents a clear moment of empowerment and self-acceptance. Enitan is surrounded by voices that attempt to shape her behavior. Elders repeatedly stress the importance of obedience, politeness, and compliance with male authority. Consequently, she grows up understanding that deviation from these norms is often met with criticism or shame. Despite these pressures, she begins to realize that self-worth cannot depend on the approval of others. Hence, when she states, “I will not apologize for being who I am,” she openly rejects societal judgment and asserts her right to exist authentically.

Moreover, the phrase reflects both resilience and defiance. To declare that she will not apologize is to confront the internalized guilt imposed by patriarchal expectations. Enitan has experienced the limitations placed on women through marriage, societal expectations, and family traditions and yet she chooses to assert her individuality boldly. Therefore, the statement is not just personal; it is a

broader act of resistance against cultural norms that seek to diminish women's identities. In addition, the line illustrates the power of language in reclaiming agency. By using direct and assertive phrasing, Enitan transforms words that might have been used to shame her into tools of empowerment. The refusal to apologize challenges the idea that women must constantly adjust themselves to fit societal ideals. Thus, Atta emphasizes that owning one's identity is a form of liberation that begins with language itself.

Furthermore, this statement demonstrates Enitan's emotional resilience. She has endured betrayal, criticism, and social judgment, yet she refuses to allow these experiences to define or constrain her. Consequently, her declaration serves as a message to other women: liberation requires courage, and self-acceptance is an essential step toward true freedom. By standing firm in her identity, Enitan embodies the strength that comes from resisting societal pressures. "I will not apologize for being who I am" (Atta 298) signifies the culmination of Enitan's journey from a girl constrained by rules to a woman fully aware of her autonomy. It celebrates the power of embracing oneself despite criticism, societal expectations, or attempts at control.

CHAPTER FOUR

CONCLUSION

This study set out to explore how gendered language is used to enhance patriarchal oppression of women and influence women's resistance in society. It examined selected phrases and clauses from *Ayobami Adebayo's Stay with Me* and *Sefi Atta's Everything Good Will Come* to reveal how language reflects and reinforces gender inequality. The study adopted a qualitative textual analysis method, focusing on words, expressions, and dialogues that expose the workings of patriarchal power and the responses of women to such control. The Feminist Literary Theory provided the framework for analysis, guiding the interpretation of the texts in line with the study's objectives to show how women's voices are shaped, silenced, or strengthened through language in a patriarchal context. The findings of the study reveal that gendered language in both novels functions as a tool of control and as a form of resistance. The male characters often use language to assert dominance, reinforce traditional gender roles, and sustain patriarchal ideologies. However, the female characters subvert these linguistic structures through self-assertion, defiance, and the redefinition of identity. Expressions such as "I will not be silent" and "No one will tell me how to live my life" reflect verbal acts of resistance that challenge the norms of subservience imposed on women.

The study also found that silence itself becomes a powerful form of protest, as seen when women choose not to conform or obey, thus turning a tool of oppression into one of empowerment.

The significance of this study lies in its contribution to the ongoing discussion of how language constructs gender relations and power structures in African societies. It shows that literature not only mirrors societal oppression but also provides a voice for resistance and transformation. By analyzing gendered language through a feminist lens, this research contributes to the understanding of how linguistic choices influence social perception and the struggle for equality. It also encourages writers and readers to be more conscious of how language shapes gender ideologies. The study therefore recommends that future research should continue to examine how language functions as a site of both oppression and liberation, especially in African women's literature, where the fight for identity, freedom, and equality continues to evolve.

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