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A Critical Discourse Analysis of Discursive Dynamics of Matriarchal Gatekeeping in the Girl Child Commodification in Nollywood Home Videos

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Abstract

This paper explores the intersection of motherhood, gendered power, and commodification of the girl child within Nollywood films—specifically *Touching Love*, *You Must Marry Him and His Money*, and *Against My Wish*. Using Van Dijk's Socio-Cognitive model and Lazar's Feminist Critical Discourse Analysis (FCDA), it analyzes how matriarchal language choices treat the girl child as a transactional entity within the marriage economy. The findings demonstrate that Interrogative utterances are tools through which maternal authority is weaponised to strip girls of agency, serve as discursive strategies that frame the girl child's resistance as irrational, and challenge, invoke shame, assert judgment, authority, and guilt-trip in order to enforce conformity. The Imperatives are goal-oriented actions of mothers that reflect commodification through obligation, manipulation, and authority. They serve as a **discursive act of domination for mothers as they use them to demand marriage, replace choice with duty, and autonomy with submission**. The imperatives also reflect a capitalist-matriarchal ideology, where marriage is not about love or agency, but about economic survival and social mobility. Declaratives are used to subsume a girl child's worth as social currency, determined by male wealth, approval, or marital status, while rationalising attributes that reassure, persuade, threaten, or assert commodification and female dependency ideologies; as well as manipulate the girl child to submission through maternal economic anxiety. The study concludes that these films serve not only as critique but also as cautionary texts, calling attention to the discursive violence embedded in commonplace maternal discourses.

Keywords: Matriarchy, Girl Child, Gatekeeping, Commodification, Nollywood, Critical Discourse Analysis

Introduction

In African literature, the portrayal of the girl child as a means of economic gain is a significant theme that highlights the complexities faced by the girl child in patriarchal societies. These themes revolve around the exploitation of the girl child through culture, bride price, slavery, trafficking, means of escape from poverty, familial social mobility, as well as denial of agency. Literature has portrayed men as key players in the destructive and abusive experiences of the girl child in a complex manner. Emecheta, in her work, *Bride Price*, explores the theme of girls being treated as commodities for economic gain through bride price. In *The Joy of Motherhood*, she exposes how the birth of a girl child is treated as an unwanted event, but as a fact that she is an economic investment. In Adichie's *Half of a Yellow Sun*, the intricacies of power dynamics and economic survival orchestrate the commodification of the girl child. Nwapa in *Efuru* recounts how the beauty of the

girl child was a currency in the marriage market. Sutherland in, *The Marriage of Anansewa*, offers a critique of how girls are commodified by patriarchal figures through the manipulation of multiple suitors to market the girl child like a product, maximizing her “value” through competition. In Kenyan literature, Macgoye’s *In Coming to Birth*, portrays commodification as transactional, where a girl’s worth is determined by the heads of cattle or other animals that are given in exchange for her in marriage. Hence, these views of daughters’ marriage do not see marriage as a union of love, but as a financial solution to traditional and familial expectations that reinforce marriage as a site of ownership, family social mobility, economic gain, and escape from poverty. Studies corroborate these concerns as expressed by these literary writers. Manganara, J. (2016) highlights that approximately 15 million girls get married before the age of 18 every year, and this is premised on poverty that results from unequal sharing of wealth between and within countries; hence, the girl child becomes a make-up by the decision of the father. In the same vein, UNICEF (2023) reports that over 12 million girls are married annually before age 18, especially across Sub-Saharan Africa, South Asia, and Latin America. This shows a minimal decline in the commodification exercise from 15 million in the 2016 report, according to Manganara.

The commodification of the girl child in most studies is premised mainly on poverty, economic gain, and family social mobility. Asare and Forkuor (2024) examined early marriage of the girl-child as an informal adaptation strategy among rural communities in Northern Ghana, where marrying off the girl child was seen as a coping strategy in the event of food shortages and poverty caused by climate change. Parsons et.al (2015) focused on the economic implications of early child marriage on the family of the girl child and established that early child marriage is seen as a means of livelihood due to the financial transaction that the early marriage is woven around. The study observes further that the younger the girl child, the greater the financial amount to be paid. Rees et. al (2016) explored the culture of bride price in Timor-Leste and established that the family looks up to the girl child to meet the basic needs of the family through bride price paid in various forms, such as cattle in Zambia, water buffalo in Timor-Leste, cash, and other substantial things or objects. Walker (2012) asserts that economic hardship pushes families to marry daughters off early for bride price or dowry, reinforcing a transactional view of female bodies. Another study by Akwara et al. (2010) reveals that poverty and low educational access heighten the likelihood of girl-child commodification through early unions. In **Tanzania**, Msafiri and Lianyu (2022) conducted a case study in the Mara region to examine sociocultural drivers of school dropout among junior secondary school girls. Their findings revealed that **early marriage**, often preceded by **female genital mutilation (FGM)**, is deeply embedded in local traditions and significantly disrupts girls’ education. In Kenya, Gitari, Odek, and Marima (2023) explored the socio-economic dimensions of school dropout among girls in Tharaka-Nithi County. While the study primarily focused on poverty, parental education, and family structure, it acknowledged that early marriage often arises as a coping mechanism in economically strained households. A study by Margie, Sugara, and Firnas (2022) examined the role of UNICEF’s efforts to combat child marriage in Nigeria between 2020 and 2022. The authors highlighted Nigeria’s ranking as the fourth highest in child marriage prevalence in West Africa,

attributing this to deep-rooted cultural norms, gender inequality, and slow policy implementation. Complementing this perspective, Bolarinwa et al. (2023) conducted a spatial and multilevel analysis of child marriage across Nigeria, revealing stark regional disparities. Their findings showed that poverty, low levels of education, rural residence, and religious affiliation were significant predictors of early marriage.

These portrayals are chilly behaviours linked to patriarchal power structures, which, over the years, have been under attack by feminist and womanist activists and writers. Yet, the girl child commodification situation seems to be a double jeopardy in the hands of the mothers, as portrayed in the movies for this study. Hence, the focus of this study is on the present-day exploitation, vulnerability, lack of agency, and denial of rights, the girl child happens to struggles with in the hands of matriarchy. In Nigeria, Nollywood movies have become a space where this commodification issue has been voiced loudly through the movie's subtitles and characters' narratives. The experiences of the girl child in the movies are not unverifiable as they reflect the happenings in society in a dramatic way. Unfortunately, the women writers and activists who picked on the men and their arm-twisting strategies of custom, tradition, and social expectations, that undermined the girl child's agency and rights, seem to overlook these concerns and their social implications as expressed by the girl child in these movies. Hence, the study will concern itself with such questions as: how does matriarchy commodify the girl child in the movies? What linguistic strategies does matriarchy employ in the commodification of the girl child? What ideologies give power to matriarchy over the girl child in the movies?

Commodification of the Girl Child and Patriarchy

The commodification of the girl child refers to the systemic transformation of girls into objects of economic transaction, social status, or familial redemption. This phenomenon is particularly pervasive in contexts where gendered power dynamics intersect with poverty, tradition, and cultural ideology. In such settings, girls are often viewed less as autonomous individuals and more as vessels for negotiating social mobility, alliance-building, or economic security. African society is a patriarchal society where the concept of the girl-child is deeply rooted in cultural beliefs and practices. These patriarchal cultural practices in African societies are deemed to have altered the identity of the girl-child, reinforcing negative perceptions and complicating her social image. Instances of these practices include: bride-price paid in the form of money, cattle, farmland, livestock, or other conditions that put the girl child under slavery, abuse of her body, and labour or other exploitation devices. These experiences shape her sociocultural identity and position her as an object of conformity and subservience to societal norms.

Many women literary writers exposed these patriarchal ideologies in their works and initiated resistance through the voice of the girl child in those works. Emecheta in *Second Class Citizen*, used the character 'Adah' who was sold out into early marriage to fund her younger brother's school fees to draw attention to how the girl child is abused, cheated, maltreated, and denied agency by patriarchy. In *The Marriage of Anansewa*, Sutherland exposes how patriarchal structures commodify

girls through marriage, using the auction strategy as in a business venture, thereby rendering her as a form of capital to secure wealth and social standing. The patriarchal power structure is also reflected in *The Girl with the Louding Voice* by Dare, where the girl-child is made a means of survival from societal issues such as poverty, used in pursuit and acquisition of wealth, for protection in times of war, and more. However, in some African societies, the commodification of the girl-child is also reinforced by matriarchal figures, who often perpetuate oppressive gender roles and practices such as early marriage, forced marriage, and domestic servitude. This implies that certain matriarchal figures are also culprits in the commodification of the girl-child. Here lies the attention of this study, which is to expose techniques and styles by which matriarchy commodifies the girl-child.

The Concept of Matriarchy: A Multidisciplinary Review

The concept of matriarchy has evolved through historical, feminist, and African lenses, each offering distinct interpretations of female-centered social structures. Historically, theorists like Bachofen (1861) posit that matriarchy preceded patriarchy in human development, suggesting a cultural evolution from promiscuity to maternal authority, and eventually to male dominance, a view later critiqued for its Eurocentric and colonial bias. Feminist scholarship emerged to challenge patriarchal supremacy, arguing that societal institutions are built on masculinist assumptions that marginalize women. However, contemporary feminism has been critiqued for replicating the same exclusionary tendencies it opposes, particularly when it fails to account for non-Western experiences of womanhood. In traditional African societies, matriarchy was not a mirror of Western feminist ideals but a complementary system of power tagged womanism, which coexisted with patriarchy. As Isife (2023) explains, African matriarchy operated through principles of balance and mutual respect, with women wielding significant influence in family, spiritual, and communal spheres, exemplified by institutions like the Umuada in Igbo culture. Yari (2024) further argues that colonialism disrupted these indigenous gender dynamics, replacing complementarity with hierarchical patriarchy. Today, African scholars advocate for a decolonised understanding of gender, where matriarchal values, such as communal leadership, motherhood, and moral authority, are reintegrated into contemporary feminist discourse to promote genuine gender equality. Thus, matriarchy in the African context is not merely a historical relic but a living framework that challenges dominant narratives and offers alternative models of power and social organization.

While matriarchy has often been celebrated as a framework of female-centered authority rooted in balance, moral leadership, and communal care, especially in African contexts, it is essential to confront the contradictions that emerge when women themselves perpetuate systems that commodify the girl child. As observed by Isife (2023), matriarchal societies were believed to honor maternal wisdom and social cohesion, as seen in African institutions like the Umuada, where elder women mediated conflicts and upheld communal ethics. Feminist theorists have long argued for the dismantling of patriarchal structures that objectify women, and have achieved successes. It is evident that matriarchy wields a certain degree of power

and authority in every society and uses that to accomplish some social roles. The challenge here becomes whether this power wielded by the patriarchy is not counter-productive in intra-female gender contexts. As observed from the data for this study, the present patriarchal power space lacks adequate surveillance strategies that ensure non-dominance of women over their fellow women, especially the girl child, as portrayed in the movies. The relationship between patriarchy and the girl child abuse in the movies is complex and influenced by multiple factors, including cultural norms, economic conditions, and social structures that portray marriage as transactional. Unfortunately, these transactional views are cloaked in the frame of love and care that makes them difficult for the uncritical mind to understand and resist; although resistance is also met with female authority impunity that subdues.

Some scholars have highlighted the complicit role of the female authority in the commodification of the girl child. As Chesang (2023) notes, adolescence for many girls marks not a time of self-discovery but a countdown to commodification, where resistance is met with violence, even from the female relatives. Ezech (2023) highlights how patriarchal norms in Nigeria continue to sabotage girl-child education, often with the complicity of female relatives who prioritise cultural expectations over empowerment. Similarly, Akpulu (2022) reveals how Igbo families devalue female children, denying them opportunities based on gender, even when women are in positions of influence. These contradictions expose the patterns of patriarchal power that are deviant from feminist ethics and underscore the need for a decolonized gender discourse that not only celebrates female leadership but also interrogates how such leadership is exercised. True patriarchy must transcend symbolic authority and embrace transformative justice, where women use their cultural power to protect, uplift, and empower the girl child, rather than perpetuate cycles of oppression and violent practices it claims to condemn. Hence, this study is set out to investigate the linguistic choices of maternal commodification, the discursive patterns of commodification, and the ideological representations and power structures of patriarchy in the movies.

Theoretical Framework

This study is woven around two theoretical lenses: Van Dijk's Socio-Cognitive Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA) Framework and Lazar's Feminist Critical Discourse Analysis (FCDA).

Van Dijk's Socio-Cognitive model of CDA focuses on how discourse shapes and reflects power, dominance, and inequality in society. It emphasises how language enforces gender roles, how societal expectations are embedded in everyday discourse, and how power is exercised through speech acts and silencing mechanisms. It is useful in examining narratives or language use that portray girls in ways that reduce them to economic or sexual value. This framework helps unpack patriarchal ideologies and power structures as embedded in their discourses that commodify the girl child. The framework is employed in this study to examine how patriarchy uses language to justify cognitive structures that sustain harmful norms in marriage, and how power dynamics perpetuate the commodification of the girl child.

FCDA investigates how language and discourse are used to exercise power, reinforce hierarchies, and marginalise groups. It challenges discourses that naturalise ideologies of inequality. It functions in this study to unravel how language and discourse shape and reflect social relationships, power dynamics and ideologies of patriarchy on the girl child; focusing on how girls are positioned in discourse as passive, obedient, or valuable, in relation to patriarchal authority; objectified through marriage; silenced and controlled through mechanisms of exclusion from decision making; as well as, reveal how women through cultural scripts, commodify the girl child in marriage.

Methodology

This study employs a qualitative discourse analytical approach, integrating linguistic and ideological tools to decode how maternal utterances in selected Nollywood movies perpetuate the commodification of female children through marriage. The primary data consists mainly of verbal exchanges of mothers to their daughters from three Nollywood movies: *Touching Love: Walking Out Love*, *You Must Marry Him and His Money*, and *Against My Wish*. These movies were chosen for their explicit portrayals of mother-driven marital decisions, framing daughters as instruments of economic elevation. Key maternal utterances were manually extracted from the movie dialogues between mothers and daughters as data for the study. Utterances were categorised based on speech function and ideological theme of power. The study adopted two theoretical lenses for analysis of data: van Dijk's Socio-Cognitive Critical Discourse Analysis, which accounts for the context model of utterances and mental representation of patriarchy, and Lazar's Feminist Critical Discourse Analysis that examines how femininity, motherhood, and other intersecting identities shape the value and agency of the girl child in the discourses.

Data Presentation and Analysis

Overview of *Touching Love: Walking Out Love*

In *Touching Love: Walking Out Love*, Loretta, the main character, struggles with the societal pressures placed on her by her mother, who holds traditional views about marriage and relationships. Loretta's mother believes in the importance of securing a marriage, often prioritising financial stability over emotional fulfillment. This patriarchal ideology clashes with Loretta's desire for a love-based, self-determined life. As Loretta navigates her romantic choices, she challenges her mother's expectations and seeks a balance between personal freedom and societal norms. Her journey reflects the tension between individual desires and family-centered, culturally ingrained values.

The following are excerpts from the female figures in the movie:

- "You must marry him for the good of this family."
- "He is wealthy and will take care of you."
- "Don't be ungrateful after all I've done for you."
- "This is your destiny."
- "You'll bring shame if you refuse."
- "She's a beautiful girl. Don't waste her on a poor man."

“You don’t even know your worth.”

“Do you think love will feed you?”

“What will people say if you disgrace us?”

“Is that boy better than the man I chose for you?”

“Have I not sacrificed enough for you?”

“Do you want to destroy this family?”

“Now, who is your father?”

“Is he a Chief Judge?”

“What is he?”

Or do you have brothers?”

“What is he? A banker? A stockbroker? Movie director? A lawyer? An accountant? Which is he?

“My father is a yam farmer in my village, but he is very hardworking ma”
(Emeka’s response)

“What can you offer my daughter? Love? Love doesn’t pay bills.”

“Poverty is as infectious as whooping cough, and I don’t want you to infect my daughter.”

“You don’t even know your worth... All these girls cruising around town in costly cars, are they not your mates?”.

“Loretta Amadi, whose father is a former rich man, now late, and the girlfriend of Temple Nwokedi, whose father is a yam farmer in the village.”

“But I love Temple. Doesn’t that matter?” (tearfully)

“All your mates own a G.S.M phone. You, you don’t have. Why can’t your Temple buy you a G.S.M. phone? Fine girl, no telephone.”

“Is love going to feed you?”

“What do you know about life?”

“You will marry Chief. He knows how to take care of women.”

Lexical Items Suggesting Commodification in the sentences i – vi in *Touching Love*

Must	Obligation	A duty without option/ a debt she owes the family	Family redemption	Social capital	She is controlled and silenced
Wealth/ care	Manipulation	Economic security over emotional compatibility	Internalized model of poverty	Marriage transactional	Her emotion is passive+
Ungrateful/ done for you	Emotional guilt	Cost-benefit logic in parenting	Emotional debt	Duty is sacrifice	She is guilt-tripped into being submissive
Destiny	Exploitation/ oppression	Matriarchal power	custom	powerlessness	She lacks agency and autonomy
Shame/ refuse	Emotional guilt	Societal expectation	Social capital	Symbolic commodification	Her resistance is rebellion

Beautiful/ waste	resource	Dominant economic ideology	currency	The body is transactional	Her body is objectified
Worth	manipulation	Economic ideology	Economic resource/value	Marriage brings financial gain	modification

Sentences vii to xi are interrogatives employed by Loreta's mother that portray wealth in marriage as equaling protection, survival, and prestige. She is a product of her socio-economic environment, and her interrogatives reveal economic anxiety that normalises internalised oppression. Though she believes she is protecting her daughter, these interrogatives enforce a system that devalues female autonomy. They serve as discursive tools that normalise the commodification of the girl child, framing marriage as a survival strategy rather than a personal choice. This can be buttressed more by the analysis of the sentences below.

"Do you think love will feed you?"	This is a rhetorical sentence that undermines emotional autonomy by privileging economic survival over personal desire.
"What will people say if you disgrace us?"	This invokes communal surveillance that uses shame as a tool of control.
"Is that boy better than the man I chose for you?"	A comparative evaluation that shows a mother's judgment based on her ideology of wealth, thus, a man who has wealth is a better person.
"Have I not sacrificed enough for you?"	Emotional blackmail of guilt to justify commodification as a reward for maternal sacrifice.
"Do you want to destroy this family?"	Here, the girl child becomes a currency of familial honor. Her attempt to resist maternal authority is framed as a dangerous rebellion.

Sentences xiii to xix.

Another angle of maternal materialistic and economic gain is encapsulated in sentences xiii to xix. As Emeka visits her house, she plunges into what is normal for a mother to do, which is to know who her daughter is hoping to spend her life with. In the African context, this is a common practice, where most parents engage in a fact-finding exercise about who their daughter wants to marry, the village or community, the family background, and whether they are people of integrity, accountability, and resourcefulness. The reason for this is to be sure they don't allow their daughter to go into a questionable family and to avoid uniting themselves with in-laws of questionable repute.

But in the case of Loreta's mother's interrogation of Emeka, they were employed as economic background manipulative tools to ascertain the suitability of Emeka and his family in becoming her in-laws based on her ideology of what constitutes wealth. Here also is expressed a common ideology held mostly among mothers, where morality in marriage is traded and a man who belongs or whose father or brother belongs to any of the professions: banker, stockbroker, Movie director, lawyer, or an accountant; accounts for suitability as in-law. This ideology contrasts with the family economic pedigree of Emeka, which is built on yam farming and hard work, which are framed as poverty indices by Loreta's mother. She ends the discourse with Emeka in a warning tone- not to infest her daughter with poverty. Thus, marrying based on love, into a family with farming as their occupation, is

looked down on by society, and mothers don't want to be looked down on by having in-laws from such backgrounds.

In sentences xxi to xxvi, she employs ridicule on her daughter and challenges her reasoning ability with contrastive materialistic evaluative utterances- her worth and her mates that are cruising around town with GSM phones, on one hand, and her father, a rich man, versus Temple's father ... a yam farmer. Thus, she uses ridicule to manipulate her emotional and personal autonomy, choosing love over wealth, but in sentence xxiii, her attempt to resist the manipulation with: "But I love Temple. Doesn't that matter?" (tearfully) was diffused by her mother's authority. Hence, she became powerless, and her resistance attempt was drowned by her mother's subsequent powerful rhetoric of emotional blackmail and of the ideology of wealth as the prime value in marriage.

Thus, the sentences, through Van Dijk's and Lazar's Feminist CDA frameworks, help us understand how social cognition-shared beliefs and ideologies, shape maternal discourses and affect the behavior, rights, and agency of the girl child. The utterances reflect a cognitive schema where love is devalued in favor of material wealth. The mother's discourse reproduces societal ideology that equates a woman's future with economic security, not emotional fulfillment. Additionally, her power structure enforces hegemonic norms dominant in socio-economic ideologies that commodify the worth of the girl child. Her questions reflect classist ideology, positioning Temple as socially inferior and unworthy based on family economic pedigree. To her daughter, her interrogatives are rhetorical, not seeking answers but asserting dominance and moral superiority. She operates from a schema where love is secondary to status, and maternal control ensures family honor. Her ideology resonates with marriage as a transaction, and not an emotional bond.

Against My Wish

An overview

Against My Wish is a fascinating Nollywood movie that describes one of the issues faced by the girl-child in society. It explores themes of forced marriage, parental control, and familial survival faced by the girl child and her struggle for autonomy. The story follows a young woman named Adanma, whose mother imposes her wishes on her marital choices, disregarding her personal desires. As she resists her mother's decision, tensions rise. The film highlights how poverty is used as a weapon of commodification of the girl child.

Below is the analysis of the mother's utterances in the movie in relation to her daughter's wish for marriage.

Mother's Commodification Utterances Analysis Table

Mother's Utterances	Textual Feature	Van Dijk's CDA/ mind representation	Lazar's FCDA/ power structure
"You know the kind of family you are born into. We are poor. So this family depends on	Declarative	Femininity, a tool for family economic upliftment/ survival	Denial of agency- A daughter is born to be a sacrifice for family uplift.

you. Adamma, our Ada to bring us out of this poverty level.			
"Have you ever taken a good look at yourself? You are a very beautiful girl, and rich men are already attracted to you."	Interrogative/ declarative	Beauty- a strategic asset for rich men's validation of her worth	Beauty is currency- a product with market value.
"I was told that the other day you were coming back from the farm, and the rich man with a big car stopped you on the road and was talking to you.	Declarative/ Reporting	A rich man with a car equals power and desirability; interactions with such is economic opportunity.	Commodifies Adamma through male possession/ reframes her as a transactional site of
"What I'm saying is that you must marry a rich man because this family depends on you. Everybody is looking up to you now as our savior to bring us out of this poverty. You must marry a rich man.	Imperative/ declarative	Marriage to a rich man equals economic salvation for the family/emotional manipulation—the female must sacrifice for the good of the family.	Lack of autonomy; enforced submission; commodifies her as a family utility.
You just dashed our hopes. The little light that was about to enter our family, you just put it off like that. Run after him, anywhere you meet him, go there and kneel down and tell him that you were joking, that you will marry him."	Declarative/ Imperative	Marriage to a rich man is "light" and "hope". Refusal is catastrophic-framed as emotional guilt to manipulate and enforce ideological conformity.	Shame-blame; denial of agency; enforces matriarchal expectations of sacrifice and submission

"You think love will feed you?"	Interrogative mood	Love is a bonus, survival is priority	dismissal of her romantic agency
"He has money. What else do you want?"	Declarative + rhetorical	wealth as the prime value in marriage	Silencing her emotional and personal autonomy
"You must marry him."	Imperative	Mother's authority/ culture	Forced obedience to mother's will/ lack of agency
"This is how you disgrace me?"	Interrogative + emotive verb	Emotional blackmail- guilt. Maternal duty equals sacrifice	Sacrifice justifies commodification
"That man is your ticket out of suffering."	Declarative + transitivity	Marrying a man with wealth is a treasured opportunity	Marriage as survival over self-fulfillment

Who gave you this money?... This is Interrogative/ what we call love. That's what I Declarative wanted your elder sister, your so- called elder sister, to be doing, but she refused. She chose poverty. Amaka has taken over"	Equates financial gifts with love; uses comparison to reinforce her ideology- Adanma, a bad market/ Amaka, an interchangeable commodity.	Condemns resistance to commodification; praises submission; erases female choice, and glorifies economic compliance for the family.
"I'm thinking you should remarry. Can't you see that your sister's Declarative husband has come back with so emotion much money, great wealth	of Remarriage is framed as a marital status as an strategic move to wealth, using economic tool; erases comparison as a manipulative autonomy; reinforces tool.	Treats women's worth through male wealth

Each of these statements functions as a **discursive tool** that reinforces commodification ideology, where **wealth, marriage, and obedience** are treated as the only valid currencies of worth for the girl child. They **erase emotional agency, silence resistance,** and **normalise matriarchal control**. The girl child is pressured to marry, not for love but for the wealth of the man. Her body and choices are treated as assets to be leveraged for financial gain for the family. Her agency is erased as decisions are made for her and not by her. Her attempt to resist the oppressive decisions is manipulated through guilt, shame, obligation, and silencing. She goes down in tears, which is symbolic of the girl child's powerlessness in the hands of the matriarchy. The utterances show how **discourse can be weaponised to enforce matriarchal power and economic ideologies**, especially in contexts of poverty. It is not just about marriage; it is about **power, control, and the erasure of girl child autonomy**.

You Must Marry Him and His Money

The story in the movie revolves around Oluchi, a young woman caught between love and societal pressure. Her mother, heavily influenced by materialistic values, insists that Oluchi marry a wealthy man, prioritizing financial security over emotional fulfillment. Oluchi, however, seeks love and personal happiness, but she is torn by her mother's strong belief that wealth and status should be the criteria for a successful marriage. This tension highlights the clash between individual desires and the maternal ideologies about marriage. Oluchi's internal struggle illustrates the impact of her mother's values on her identity and choices.

Analysis of maternal utterances from the movie

Mother's Utterances	Textual Feature	Van Dijk's CDA/ mind representation	Lazar's FCDA/ power structure
"You should be grateful we found someone willing to take you."	Imperative	Emotional blackmail- owe a debt to the initiator of "take you"	Objectification- transactional marriage
"Is there anything wrong in a rich man asking you to marry him?"	Interrogative	Wealth suffices. Emotion is invalid	Commodifies compatibility. Lack of agency
"A woman's worth is measured by the man she marries."	Declarative	Desirability in the marriage market equals her worth	Objectification/ marriage is transactional
"Men with money know	Declarative	Female well-being	Dependence- lack of

how to care for women."		outsourced to male responsibility/ men as provider, protector ideology.	agency. Women depend on men for survival.
"Your dreams won't feed you, marry him, and then dream in comfort."	Declarative /Imperative	Marriage to a man with wealth equals fulfilment. Economic survival over emotional fulfillment	Emotional need erased. Blackmailed into submission
"Love cannot cook food."	Declarative	Material possession over emotional compatibility	Marriage is a financial strategy
"Your marriage will restore honor to our family."	Declarative	Family social status uplift/ social currency	Commodification
"Do you think love will build a house?"	interrogative	Love is immaterial; wealth is prime	Emotional suppression/ economic survival
"Your generosity leaves me speechless. A whole pound for me?"	Declarative/ interrogative	Materialistic ideology	Marriage is transactional
"Is Amuche ready for marriage now? Will he take very good care of you?... I suggest you take this Okwuosisi's proposal more seriously."	interrogative/ polite imperative	Wealth is maturity/ material possession is security	Mother's concern, manipulation to submission/ silencing
"He has money. What else do you want?"	Declarative/ Imperative	Maternal authority subdues her desires and fears.	Her agency is silenced/ marriage is transactional/ emotional compatibility is dismissed.
"Thank you very much for the ride and all the gifts."	Declarative	Materialistic ideology	Marriage is transactional
"Have I not sacrificed enough for you?"	Interrogative	Guilt-inducing-emotional debt owed	Maternal sacrifice legitimises commodification
"She's our ticket out of suffering"	Declarative	Social currency to pay social debt	Objectification
"He has money - marry him"	Declarative/im perative	Marriageability of a man is tied to his wealth	Commodification/ denial of agency
"Rich men don't come twice."	Declarative	Economic anxiety-rich men's scarcity ideology	Manipulation to submission through fear
"Are you trying to disgrace this family?"	interrogative	Emotional blackmail-guilt	Manipulation to submission

Discussion of Findings

The study reveals how discourse, especially the use of interrogatives, imperatives, and declaratives, plays a critical role in the symbolic and literal commodification of the girl child. The interrogatives are used to silence the girl child's voice through ridicule, guilt-trip, or economic logic. Maternal figures use them not to elicit dialogue but to enforce conformity. Interrogative reinforces matriarchal and class-

based ideologies where deviation from commodified expectations (rejecting a wealthy suitor) is framed as disgrace. Interrogatives serve as tools through which maternal authority is weaponised to strip girls of agency while cloaking control in the language of love and sacrifice. They are discursive strategies that do not just ask a question; they frame resistance as irrational, and normalise the transactional view of marriage for the girl child under maternal influence. Interrogatives are used to challenge, invoke shame, assert judgment, authority, and guilt-trip in order to enforce conformity. Hence, they are **weaponised to enforce matriarchal power and economic ideologies**.

On the other hand, Imperatives are goal-oriented actions of mothers that reflect commodification through obligation, manipulation, and authority. They serve as a **discursive act of domination for mothers**: they use them not to suggest marriage, but to **demand it**. They are linguistic tools that **replace choice with duty**, and **autonomy with submission**. The imperatives reflect a capitalist-matriarchal ideology, where marriage is not about love or agency, but about economic survival and social mobility. The same are also used to normalise the idea that female worth is tied to male wealth, reinforcing commodification. These imperatives are used to redefine the girl-child's value in terms of economic exchange. They are mothers' linguistic tools that legitimise exploitation under the guise of survival; thus, they are manipulating the cognition of the girl child by presenting marriage to wealth as the only rational path, especially for economically vulnerable girls.

Declarative utterances are used to rationalise attributes that reassure and persuade, threaten, or assert commodification ideology. They are used to manipulate the girl child into submission through maternal economic anxiety and female dependency ideology. They subsume a girl child's worth as social currency, determined by male wealth, approval, or marital status.

Conclusion

These movies are a powerful critique of internalised matriarchal complicity. Within their conversations are embedded sociocultural expectations that perpetuate the commodification of the girl child under the guise of care and protection. Mothers see marriage as a marketplace in which the girl child is traded for status, wealth, or family redemption. Often, they replicate and reinforce oppressive structures through rhetorical interrogation. The girls' emotional and intellectual resistance is stifled not by external systems alone, but by the very women who are expected to shield them. Their discourses imply that economic status overrides all other considerations: character, consent, and compatibility in marriage. Thus, matriarchal figures reproduce patriarchal ideologies that treat young women as transactional entities within the marriage economy. Hence, the study demonstrates that maternal authority, rather than subvert patriarchy, often entrenches its values, transforming mothers into gatekeepers of the girl child commodification and silencing. Textually, the mother's language is rich in modality, rhetorical framing, and emotive appeals. Discursively, their speeches act as ideological reinforcement, shaping choices through guilt, fear, and obligation. Socially, their discourses reproduce dominant ideologies of economic pragmatism and maternal hegemony. These Nollywood narratives challenge conventional assumptions about maternal roles. Through Van

Dijk's and Lazar's lenses, the study reveals how matriarchal figures commodify their daughters through language, emotion, and coercion. The girl child's body and future are no longer hers but tools for social mobility, family honor, or economic survival. The films, thus, serve not only as critique but also as cautionary texts, calling attention to the discursive violence embedded in commonplace maternal discourses.

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