

Self in the Postcolonial Novel: a Cognitive Stylistic Analysis of Chika Unigwe's *On Black Sisters' Street*

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Abstract:

The exploration of “self” in literature currently faces a significant methodological gap. It is well-established that using cognitive linguistic theory is more rigorous than abstract philosophical negotiations of the “self”. Since cognitive linguistic theories grant an understanding of types of communication and cognitive processes, stylisticians are trying to benefit from useful frameworks from this interdisciplinary field to analyze literary texts. This study aims to demonstrate how Cognitive Linguistic theory can handle and give a comprehensive image to “split-self” phenomena found in narrative texts referring to Chika Unigwe's *On Black Sister's Street*. Specifically, the researchers investigate how characters' selves oscillate between polar modes of self in a narrative which in turn reflects the sense of fragmentation of identity in postcolonial society. They draw on Lakoff's (1992, 1996) works on the ‘self’ metaphor and the division of subject-self. The analysis reveals that the author projects the traumatic experiences of characters through using split-self metaphors which proves the utility of Cognitive Linguistics in providing important techniques that assist in understanding latent themes in literary texts.

Keywords: cognitive linguistics, split- self metaphor, subject, self.

ملخص :

يواجه استكشاف "الذات" في الأدب حالياً فجوة منهجية كبيرة. من الثابت أن استخدام نظرية اللسانيات المعرفية يعد أكثر صرامة من المفاوضات الفلسفية المجردة حول "الذات". نظراً لأن اللسانيات المعرفية تمنح فهماً لأنواع الاتصالات والعمليات المعرفية، يحاول باحثو الأسلوبية الاستفادة من أطر مفيدة من هذا المجال متعدد التخصصات لتحليل النصوص الأدبية. تهدف هذه الدراسة إلى توضيح كيف يمكن لنظرية اللسانيات المعرفية التعامل وإعطاء صورة شاملة لظاهرة "الانقسام الذاتي" الموجودة في النصوص السردية مشيرة إلى رواية لما بعد الاستعمار: "شارع الأخوات السود" لشبكا يونيجوي. على وجه التحديد، يتحرى الباحثون كيف تتأرجح ذوات الشخصيات بين الأنماط القطبية للذات في السرد الذي يعكس بدوره الإحساس بتجزئة الهوية في مجتمع ما بعد الاستعمار. سنستند إلى أعمال لاكوف (1992 ، 1996) على استعارة "الذات" وتقسيم الذات. يكشف التحليل أن المؤلف يعرض التجارب المؤلمة للشخصيات من خلال استخدام الاستعارات المنقسمة على الذات والتي تثبت فائدة اللسانيات المعرفية في توفير تقنيات مهمة تساعد في فهم الموضوعات الكامنة في النصوص الأدبية.

كلمات دالة : اللسانيات المعرفية، استعارة انقسام الذات، الموضوع، الذات.

1. Introduction

The 'self' is a pervasive concept that grabs the attention of a wide range of literary criticism. Since 'self' is a ubiquitous term, its exploration in literature currently faces a significant methodological gap due to two factors. First, literary analysts rely mostly on general abstract intuitive and impressionistic interpretations of 'self' that hinder plausible results. Second, the lack of homogenous theoretical frameworks that are based on scientific evidence while approaching the concept of 'self' minimizes the validity and reliability of literary interpretations. Hence, literary critics find it more scientific to resort

to linguistic analysis that uses narrative texts as data drawing on the assumption that language mirrors the experiences of people. This trend of linguistic analysis is called stylistics. Although stylistic analysis usually unveils minute details about style, author, and characterization, it does not provide a cut-clear theorization of ‘self’. This is why some stylisticians find that cognitive linguistics can handle and provide a comprehensive frame to the concept of ‘split-self’ in narrative texts.

The ‘split-self’ is a prevalent theme in narrative texts. It assists in providing multi-faceted aspects of self which in turn help the author develop main themes such as the effect of diasporic experience on characters’ psyche which creates a subconscious dramatic ambiance to the literary text. It is fruitful to explore and analyze ‘split-self’ phenomena vis-à-vis cognitive linguistic theory since the latter concerns itself with the way the human brain classifies information drawing on sensory-motor experience which reflects the way the author perceives the world and mirrors this perception on his literary production. Put a little differently, the author’s mind classifies information according to basic sensory-motor experience and perceives other experiences by means of this background experience. Likewise, the self as an abstract notion is conceptualized using background experience and will be reflected as a ‘self’ conceptual metaphor.

In the present study, we explore the ‘split-self’ phenomena in Chika Unigwe’s *On Black sisters’ Street*. We will refer to examples of the correlation between ‘split-self’ metaphors and diasporic

experience. Furthermore, we will demonstrate how the analysis of metaphorical projections of self can provide a comprehensive image of characters' identities. We will use the term 'split-self' to refer to the oscillation between polar selves, the changing self, and the division between self and subject. We aim to clarify how authors use self-metaphors for describing the impact of the sexist and racist diasporic experience on the character's sense of oneself. In demonstrating this, we need a descriptive analysis that sets conceptual metaphor as a cognitive linguistic model. Our choice of conceptual metaphor as a framework is twofold. First, we strongly believe that "metaphors conform in significant ways to the structure of our inner lives as we experience them phenomenologically." (Lakoff & Johnson, 1999). Second, there exists a bond between metaphors and the expression of feelings. Therefore, we put our text against the theoretical framework of 'self' proposed by Lakoff's (1992, 1993, 1996) works that thoroughly treat 'self-metaphor'. In parallel, we demonstrate the ability of cognitive linguistic models and frameworks to deal with and explain 'split-self' phenomena found in narrative texts. In this study, we hypothesize that Unigwe expresses the theme of identity fragmentation through the use split-self metaphors, and we use Conceptual Metaphor Theory to test this hypothesis. We further investigate whether cognitive linguistic models can provide tools for answering deep philosophical questions concerning Self in the postcolonial context.

2. Literature Review

There has been a wide range of studies in cognitive linguistics dealing with metaphorical systems and their everyday use (Lakoff & Johnson 1980; Lakoff, 1987, 1992, 1993, 1996). From these investigations, it appears not only that metaphors underlay most of our expressions and ways of representing the world to the extent that they are shared by people and go unnoticed* but also that these metaphors reveal much about our inner lives and selves. Though Vervaeke and Kennedy (1996) point to the danger of reductionism in assuming the dependency of all abstract thought on metaphorical projections of embodied experience which entails the need for premetaphoric and independent abstract thought, Lakoff and Lakoff and Johnson's accounts on self-metaphors specifically provide critic-proof metaphoric conceptualizations of 'self' drawing from real-life examples. Studies on metaphors and their projections of 'self' (Lakoff, 1992, 1996; Lakoff & Johnson, 1999) maintain that there could be a relationship between the use of self-metaphors and negative or positive emotions. However, some stylisticians and literary analysts attempt to use 'self' metaphor models to unveil authors' and characters' emotions (e.g. Emmot, 2002; Gómez, 2015).

* For example, the phrase 'go unnoticed' is a metaphorical expression that conceptualizes the subject 'metaphors' employing a schema of motion because 'motion' is a basic process extracted from experience with the world.

Emmott (2002) investigates ‘split selves’ in fiction and medical ‘life stories’ showing instances of these phenomena in short narrative texts. She builds on Lakoff’s seminal works of conceptual metaphor stressing the ability of cognitive linguistics to handle discourse data while pointing out that her inquiry does not establish a correlation between feelings and metaphors. Thirteen years later, Gómez still with short texts, analyzes the divided self-metaphor using a cognitive linguistic approach in two poems by Nabokov. She uses embodied realism along with conceptual metaphor models to link between Nabokov’s real life in exile and his feelings of anguish reflected in the poems. She further explains the way Nabokov’s use of the divided self-metaphor thematically structures his poems (Gómez, 2015).

Surprisingly, all the literature reviewed on split self-metaphor in literary texts points to the limitations of cognitive linguistics to treat lengthy literary texts because, in essence, it provides artificial examples. Cognitive linguists, like Lakoff and Johnson (1999), however, argue that the study of the self-reveals the structure of our inner lives and who we are suggesting that Conceptual Metaphor Theory is an infallible approach to arrive at a comprehensive understanding of the inner workings of self. Hence, in our investigation, whilst examining self-metaphors, we demonstrate how cognitive linguistic analysis of artificial examples can be adapted to handle the analysis of literary texts. In this procedure, we extract the range of ‘split-self’ metaphors in two postcolonial novels and align these metaphors with an analysis of important events and diasporic experience demonstrating that they together connote a fragmented

identity in postcolonial society in which protagonists lead different lifestyles and develop an alter ego.

3. Cognitive Poetics

Before exploring the scope of cognitive poetics and its significance to our present study, let us define what cognitive poetics is and is not. It was not until Lakoff and Johnson's publication of their seminal work 'Metaphors We Live By' (1980) that the co-ordination between cognitive science and literary criticism has become possible. The most popular definition of Cognitive Poetics is as follows: the application of cognitive linguistics to the study of literature (Gomez, 2015). This definition seems superficial and trivial as it runs the risk of treating literary texts as independent linguistic data; however, Stockwell (2002, p.6) who is one of the pioneers in Cognitive Poetics stresses the fact that cognitive poetics goes further than the previously mentioned definition. In this respect, merely applying cognitive linguistic approaches to literary texts without ever having knowledge about context, literary criticism, or literary philosophical interrogations is pointless and does not meet with the aesthetic nature of literature. Alternatively, Cognitive Poetics considers context and literary knowledge as central entities to arrive at an efficient methodology that takes for granted the linguistic dimension as reflective of the author's mind along with an appreciation of the literary work (Stockwell, 2002).

As we mentioned in the introduction, some abstract philosophical questions that have long received wide controversy in literary studies urge literary analysts to search for new approaches that

grant reliable results. Though we know that human phenomena, because of their relative nature, resist clear-cut theorization, cognitive linguistics delves into the mysteries of the human species' inner lives and arrives usually at some surprising and plausible results. According to Stockwell (2009), the process of engaging in cognitive poetic analysis extracts certain textual patterns that might be subconscious or unnoticed. In this sense, if literary analysts have a full grasp of literary theory and cognitive science that considers language as a mirror to the inner workings of the human mind, the interpretations will probably be valid and reliable to a large extent because they are drawn on solid evidence from science and philosophy. In order not to exaggerate the promises of cognitive poetics to give foolproof results, one should be aware that the combination of objectivity and subjectivity is not always appreciated as it is considered one of the major challenges for cognitive poetics. (Vandaele & Brône, 2009, p.6)

With the objectives of our research in mind and based on the aforementioned scope of Cognitive Poetics, we analyze split-self metaphors as literary motifs that indicate the fragmentation and dividedness of postcolonial identity. These metaphors as embodying authors' experience form a literary motif which is the *alter ego* where one Person leads different lives. Lakoff explains this phenomenon via metaphors demonstrating that the beliefs of the Subject are generally incompatible with the values of the Self or the Person has distinct opposing selves.

4. Experiential Realism and Split-self metaphor

In contrast to the objectivist approach which studies language strings in isolation to human experience, experiential realism or experientialism views meaning in terms of embodiment. Embodiment is the capacity of the human mind to form conceptual structures from pre-conceptual structures which are directly internalized from the contact of our bodies with the world (Lakoff, 1987; Evans & Green, 2004). Put differently, basic level structures that are meaningful and direct render indirect abstract thought meaningful. Contrary to what people think, metaphors are not only literary devices per se; but they are also central daily linguistic manifestations that are part and parcel of our daily life. Previous research in neuroscience reveals that on average, people use a metaphor every 20 words. Other studies show that in the brain, the metaphoric conceptual structures stem from the same region of bodily experience; for example, if you hear *it was a bitter experience*, the regions associated with taste are activated. It is, therefore, no wonder that when Lakoff and Johnson (1999) delve into the mechanism of representing the ‘self’ in metaphors, they have found that our mind produces an unlimited set of ‘self’ metaphors in terms of a small number of source domains like space, force, possession, etc. To illustrate, *step out of yourself* and *he’s out of his mind* are self-metaphors which characterize ‘self’ with container schema and possession model respectively.

One of the abstract thoughts that take the lion’s share in controversy among philosophers and scientists is the concept of Person. Proponents of cognitive linguistics argue that cognitive theoretical frameworks, though drawn from artificial examples, can

discuss wider philosophical questions of the concept of Person^{*}. In much similar vein, Lakoff and Johnson (1999) postulate that “the fact that abstract thought is mostly metaphorical means that answers to philosophical questions have always been, and always will be, mostly metaphorical” (p.7). Likewise, Lakoff (1992) suggests that cognitive linguistics defies western philosophical and religious traditions that conceive the concept of Person as having a single locus of consciousness that is separate from and independent of the body. Instead, drawing from cognitive and neuroscience studies which assert that cognitive processing is distributed over many centers of brain activity, he maintains that within our conceptual systems and our language, there is an unconscious metaphorical conception of a locus of consciousness separable from the body which provides a set of incompatible metaphorical models postulating a different separation of body and consciousness. In simpler terms, the metaphoric system can exhibit the different patterns of bifurcations between body and consciousness.

The structure of the metaphoric system for the concept of ‘self’ is first discovered by Lakoff and Becker (1992) in an unpublished paper for George Lakoff’s course (Lakoff, 1992). This structure consists of two fundamental entities: subject and one or multiple selves. The ‘Subject’ is the locus of consciousness, will, and judgment; the self is everything else including our bodies, our social roles, etc. Based on this subject/self-duality, Lakoff (1992) and Lakoff and Johnson (1999) extend this system to forge new ways of

* In this point, Lakoff and Johnson (1999) argue that philosophical inquiry, uninformed by cognitive science; lacks the empirical methodology to establish the validity of its results.

understanding and categorizing the different patterns of subject-self bifurcations that are reflected in self-metaphors. One of these categorizations is split-self models that focus primarily on the criteria of compatibility. We mean by compatibility the extent to which Self values and beliefs are compatible with Subject values.

According to Lakoff (1992), people usually have contradictory beliefs, values, and decisions. These contradictions are metaphorically foiled as splitting of the Self into two or more selves. He, therefore, proposes four models to Split self: Undetermined Compatibility, The Inner and Outer Self, The First True-Self Model, and The Second True-Self Model.

1- Undetermined Compatibility: this model refers to conditions where the Subject's values are incompatible with one set of values or another. Metaphorically, it is expressed by indecision over location. In this case, the Subject is undetermined between locating itself with one Self or another. For example, *I'm split between my scientific self and my religious self.*

2- The Inner and Outer Self: a model inspired by the metaphor KNOWING IS SEEING where a person tends to hide his real self and exhibits a false outer self. As a result, the false self serves as a mask to keep the real self unseen. The real self, in this case, is compatible with the Subject's values and the outer self is the social self that is known to people. For instance, *put on a happy face.*

3- The First True Self Model: the Self is split into opposing selves and the Subject does not know which Self to associate with. This True Self is likely to be compatible with the values of the Subject. Therefore, these cases are conceptualized as the Subject being

in a quest to find a compatible Self. For example, *he found himself in writing*.

4- The Second True-Self Model: The Subject considers the True Self which is compatible with the values of the Subject as a moral standard. Metaphorically, the True Self is conceptualized as a person whose values you can honor or betray in your actions. E.g. *Be true to yourself*

A closer scrutiny to the self-metaphors can give us a more nuanced image of the texts beforehand. We will argue that these self-metaphors aid the thematic development of the novels aligning the sorts of a split between self and subject and compatibility issues, with the sense of dividedness in the diasporic experience the protagonists undergo.

5. Identity Fragmentation in Postcolonial Novels

Postcolonial literature is the range of literary body written by formerly colonized people. It generally treats issues related to the problems of colonized countries after independence and which are rooted in the colonization period. Since postcolonial writings share quite the same history and purpose, there are several interrelated and common themes that are persistent in this branch of literature. One of the most pervasive themes in postcolonial literature is racism; especially in migrant literature where characters experience segregation which renders them aware of their difference. It is the colonizer's presupposed white race superiority that transforms the colonized people's interstitial differences into inferiority (Bhabha, 1994). In effect, colonized people often have an identity fragmentation

and some psychological deficiencies because of the internalization of colonizer's prejudices. Frantz Fanon, one of the pioneers who tackled the psychological disorders as an aftermath of colonization, remarks that the major effect of the systematized negation of colonized people's humanity from the part of colonizers is the colonized constant question "Who am I in reality?". Thus, the theme of identity fragmentation is also prevalent in postcolonial narratives and is remarkably manifest in the instability and perpetual clash of opposing beliefs in characters' lives. Chika Unigwe is a Nigerian female author who excels in exhibiting the theme of identity fragmentation in her novel *On Black Sisters' Street*. She shares with other postcolonial writers the basic structures of postcolonial experience namely, immigration, neoliberalism, racism, and identity fragmentation.

The novel *On Black Sisters Street*, written by Chika Unigwe, tells the story of four girls who are sent to Belgium to work. They found themselves helpless in front of their employers who exploited them as sex-workers. The story revolves around a girl 'Chisom' who immigrates to Belgium in search of money to better her life and her parents'. The miserable life in Nigeria and the dying flames of hope and expectations in her parents' eyes after she graduated and became jobless inflamed her with regret. After meeting 'Dele' a procurer who offered to send her to Belgium in order to work and earn money, she accepted in a moment that changed her entire life direction. This important event is preceded by her total dismissal of his offer until she returned home and scrutinized the inescapable rough conditions of living in a country like Nigeria and her feelings of regret for her parents. Since the beginning of the story, one notices from the non-

linear mode of narration that fragmentation makes the basic infrastructure of the novel including the double names of Chisom. This fragmentation is also reflected in the protagonist's lifestyle which is full of contradictory decisions. One of the many appealing aspects to Unigwe's fiction is that the protagonist 'Chisom' leads a double life; one is led by 'Chisom'- the good girl with the good Christian faith; and the alter ego 'Sisi' - a name proposed by Dele to the vulgar prostitute.

What is captivating about the novel is the ability of its author to depict protagonists as Dual Person through the co-existence of polar selves. Another goal of depicting protagonists as Dual Person in postcolonial novels is to break stereotypes and present the African Person as a complex creature who is not perceived as a narrative totality.

6. The Split-self Metaphor as Literary Motif

Lakoff (1993, 1996) views language and metaphor as a key to access the concept of 'self'. He notes that English has a rich repository to depict the 'self' as divided. In this vein, the split self-metaphor is an aspect of everyday language yet it can also function as a literary motif. The literary motif that accords with Lakoff's split self-metaphor is the alter ego. It is firmly agreed upon that the term alter ego was first coined in the first century in Rome by Cicero, one of the greatest Greek philosophers, to refer to one's second self. Surprisingly, the studies that tackle the motif of the duality of Person in *On Black Sisters' Street* are scarce noting that scholars refer to the motif briefly without further examination, among these studies Chukwudi (2017)

and Okolo (2019). The alter ego in literary analysis refers to an alternative self that is usually unseen and that is distinct from a character's authentic personality. It is an artistic technique that authors may use to explore the multi-faceted nature of their characters' identities, to depict the sense of psychological instability and dividedness, or to grab the interest and excitement of readers. According to Zweig and Abrams (1991, p.3), every human being has a personal shadow that embodies the hidden attributes of his personality and this shadow goes by many names, such as the disowned self, the double, the alter ego, and id. They further declare that when we encounter our shadows, we use metaphors to describe these encounters: meeting our demons, midlife crisis, etc. This psychoanalytic reflection on the works of Freud and Jung conforms strictly to Lakoff's correlation of the concept of 'self' and the human species' metaphorical system.

In the coming section, we will argue that in *On Black Sisters' Street*, in depicting protagonists' shadows or alter egos that are made visible in important moments like traumatic events or uncomfortable situations, the author occasionally exploits the split-self metaphor.

8. Reading Unigwe's *On Black Sister's Street* as a Novel Using Split-self Metaphors to Develop Identity Fragmentation in a Postcolonial Context

Unigwe uses a set of metaphorical projections in her narrative exhibiting overtly her protagonist's identity fragmentation. The novel orbits around Chisom and her struggle while oscillating between her polar personalities: one of Chisom, the good student and daughter, and

that of Sisi, the alter ego which appears in her job as a prostitute and coincides with her immigration to Belgium. Chisom has witnessed two significant events that have twisted her life and personality altogether: immigration and meeting Luc, who later becomes her boyfriend and offers help to escape Dele's manipulation. Let us first examine the metaphors that appear in the first event:

- 1- "And even then she had no destination in mind until she found herself at an office on Randle Avenue, standing at the address on the gold-edged card, which she had somehow, without meaning to, memorized." (p.27)
- 2- "She did not tell them that she had decided already to adopt a name that she would wear in her new life (...) She would rename herself. She would go through a baptism of fire and be reborn as Sisi: a stranger yet familiar. Chisom would be airbrushed out of existence, at least for a while, and in her place would be Sisi." (p.36)
- 3- "Funny how she had started to call herself the name even in her thoughts." (p.80)

Unigwe uses the metaphor *she found herself* twice to describe this particular event throughout her narrative to focalize and confirm Chisom's lack of self-control by the Subject. According to Grossman (2017), the use of the verb 'find' within the reflexive construction indicates the Narrator's motivation to accentuate the Experiencer's Awareness of some perception/experience. This particular metaphor can partially refute literary analyses, as Reinares's 2019 article, that claim Chisom's total consent to work as a prostitute. They are the rough conditions of her country along with her parents' expectations that have extracted Chisom's alter ego which is responsible for her

action. The reflexive pronoun in this case has two referents that signal an identity fragmentation. It is not until Sisi has seen the portrayal of the naked black woman on her room's wall that she retained slightly self-consciousness; she realizes by then her exotic nature as an African. In the second example, the narrator uses the metaphor *rename herself* with the reflexive pronoun which is co-referencing the old and new versions of Chisom. Upon drawing on the verb *wear*, the narrator assumes a model of Inner and Outer Self in which a new self serves as a mask to conceal the True inner self: the outer Self ought to meet the requirements of Chisom's new life and profession; the true Self embodies Chisom's essential beliefs and values. The third example, however, assumes the replacement of Chisom by Sisi that her false Self absorbs her true Self that is beginning to falter and disappear.

When Chisom indulges herself in the new profession, Unigwe uses the metaphor *force herself* twice to stress Chisom's clashes of her different versions. Her Subject accords with one set of beliefs but contradicts the false Self's beliefs and values. This is well confirmed in the first moments of her job where she allows other people to touch her instead of following her instinct "but in her new life common sense ruled over instinct." The hollow between Chisom and Sisi grows deeper as she inhabits the fact that she needs a false outer Self that helps her to make money. In depicting this disparity, the narrator prefers to use the word *smile* to serve as a veil that hides Chisom's real Self: "The smile stayed on. But unhappiness permeated her skin and wound itself around her neck and forced her head down so that she walked as if something shamed her."

While readers inhabit the fact that the traits of the personality of Chisom are gradually faltering to be replaced by those of the new personality of Sisi, Unigwe insists upon Chisom's resistance to survive:

“Yes! Yes! Yes!” she whispered in triumph. She looked at her bed, dressed in the white sheets Madam for some reason insisted upon, raised her eyes to the picture on the wall, whispered “Yes” again, and said to the room, as if addressing a Sisi who was separate from her, “Tomorrow it will be all over. Tomorrow you shall be free. Sisi will be dead.” (p.216)

The narrator uses the Social Model as suggested by Lakoff (1999). This model projects the sorts of social relationships to describe the type of the relationship between Self and Subject. The example above assumes the parts of the Person as two distinct people. The use of the indefinite article ‘a’ defines the type of the relationship between these two people which is mapped into the type of the social relationship between the Sisi and Chisom. The indefinite article suggests that Sisi is anonymous to Chisom. This Schizophrenic representation signifies the severe fragmentation of identity that the postcolonial subject suffers from during immigration.

The juxtaposition of traumatic experiences narration with the use of split-self metaphors confirms their correlation. The identity of little Ama when continuously raped by her stepfather, the assistant pastor Brother Cyril whom she believed he is her real father has split ever since: “Sometimes she saw herself on the ceiling, looking down at a man who looked like her father and a girl who looked like her.” The verb *saw* construes Ama's numbness where her Subject is out of her body and examines a Self that is no longer compatible with its

beliefs. Thus, the use of the reflexive pronoun is ambiguous because it refers to two versions of Ama. Another important metaphor that is used in describing this traumatic experience is when Unigwe portrays Brother Cyril as a pedophile; she uses the model of Outer and Inner Self using the verb ‘*wear*’ which means that the glowing white clothes symbolized as purity are his outer social Self. THE KNOWING IS SEEING metaphor underlies this model as Lakoff (1992, p.20) states: “The KNOWING IS SEEING metaphor motivates our characterizing what we don’t let other people know as being ‘unseen’ and hence internal.” Moreover, she tries to highlight the double nature of psychopaths who deceive people by wearing a veil that hides their real selves. The effects of trauma have been latent until Ama faces another upsetting event, her failure in an exam, where her alter ego has attacked verbally her stepfather. After she retains consciousness, she recognizes that the Self that is responsible for this attack is strange to her true Self. This event is metaphorically projected as being *possessed* in which another person’s Subject has control of Ama’s Self. The metaphor SELF CONTROL IS OBJECT POSSESSION can best reflect this idea. Ama has lost control of herself to the extent that she has felt she is controlled by another locus of consciousness (Subject).

These instances reflect the ability of our mental system to make a myriad of metaphorical systems to describe the Self.

Conclusion

This study approached Chika Unigwe's *On Black Sisters' Street*: from the perspective of embodied experientialism in Cognitive Linguistics. Our central aim was to explain the utility of split-self metaphors to construe identity fragmentation in postcolonial novels and how they are juxtaposed with characters' traumatic experiences. Thus, the underlying goal of our paper was to demonstrate the ability of Cognitive Linguistics models, mainly metaphors, to discern the concept of Self which has long received controversy among philosophers. Through understanding the various metaphorical projections and constructions of Self by our mental system, the researcher may confidently delve into exploring identity in literary analysis based on empirical research from mental and neurological sciences. In *On Black Sisters' Street*, we noticed remarkable juxtapositions of immigration along with traumatic experiences and split-self metaphors. The cognitive stylistic reading of *On Black Sisters' Street* allowed us to appreciate the authors' use of split-self metaphor as a literary motif. In this novel, we used the set of Self metaphors to identify the events in which the alter ego operates by describing the kind of split between Subject and Self and relating it to the themes of the novel.

Our analysis of self-metaphors intended primarily to demonstrate the way we can use the metaphoric system as a tool to analyze identity in literary works. We highlighted as well the possibility of applying Cognitive Linguistics models to analyze the actions and decisions of characters in a given literary work answering

such questions as why a certain character consents to or performs an act that is radically contradictory to his/her original set of values.

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