

Gender Disparity in the Use of Paralinguistics in Spousal Discourse: Evidence from Dul Johnson's Collection of Short Stories

By

Jibrin, Muhammed Badar Salihu

Department of English and Literary Studies, Faculty of Arts & Humanities, Prince Abubakar Audu University, Anyigba, Kogi State; **Email:** jibrin.mbs@ksu.edu.ng

Onoja, Ojone Gift

Department of English and Literary Studies, Faculty of Arts & Humanities, Prince Abubakar Audu University, Anyigba, Kogi State; **Email:** ojonegift.ng@gmail.com

Ocheje, Daniel Ojochegbe

Department of English and Literary Studies, Faculty of Arts & Humanities, Prince Abubakar Audu University, Anyigba, Kogi State; **Email:** ochejedanielojochegbe@gmail.com

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Abstract

This study investigates gender disparity in the use of paralinguistics in spousal discourse in Dul Johnson's collection of short stories. The study is anchored on Dell Hymes' Speaking model and Halliday's Model of Context. The study employs a qualitative textual analysis of four purposively selected short stories of Dul Johnson, focusing on six representative spouses whose interactions vividly illustrate both verbal and non-verbal communication. These include: Mr Changara Plank and Mrs Makara Plank, Mr Buku Bandara and Mrs Senata Bandara, Mr Kata Pangara and Mrs Tata Pangara (*Why Women Won't Make it to Heaven*); Mr Mamfa and Mrs Mamya Mamfa (*The Gift*); Mr Tangtakh and the Wife Proper (*Sour Dregs*); Mr Okonkwo and Mrs Nneka Okonkwo (*Hand of Destiny*). The methodology involved close reading and interpretation of relevant episodes, with particular attention to paralinguistic cues such as tone, pitch, body language, and facial expressions. Findings reveal that male and female characters are portrayed in ways that reflect traditional gender roles and power dynamics. Male characters were depicted as dominant and authoritative, frequently utilizing commanding tones and assertive body language to reinforce their status. In contrast, female characters were portrayed in submissive roles, conforming to societal expectations of obedience and deference to their husbands. However, instances of female resistance were also observed, highlighting evolving gender dynamics within the literary representation of spousal relationships. The study further observed that male characters frequently utilized authoritative tones and commanding body language, reinforcing their perceived dominance in marital interactions. Female characters, conversely, relied more on expressive facial gestures, softer tones, and indirect communication strategies, reflecting societal expectations of emotional sensitivity. The study concluded that spousal communication within the selected short

stories was deeply influenced by traditional gender roles, reinforcing existing power structures. The study underscores the significance of non-verbal communication in shaping marital dynamics in African literary contexts.

Keywords: Gender; Paralinguistic; Spousal discourse; Dul Johnson's short stories; Dell Hymes' Speaking model; and Halliday's Model of Context.

Introduction

Communication between spouses involves a variety of verbal and nonverbal elements that significantly influence the quality and effectiveness of marital interactions. While verbal communication forms the explicit content of spousal discourse, paralinguistic features—the nonverbal aspects that accompany speech—often carry substantial communicative weight, sometimes conveying more meaning than the words themselves (Adegboyega 72).

The term "spousal discourse" describes the exchange of ideas and interactions between spouses in a married partnership. This form of discourse is crucial in shaping the dynamics of a marriage, influencing emotional bonding, problem-solving, decision-making, and conflict resolution (Obiemeka *et al.* 61-66 and Uye *et al.* 374). It includes both verbal and nonverbal interactions, which are crucial in determining couples' relationship, degree of trust, and general level of contentment. The influence of spousal speech on the stability and well-being of marriages has made it a prominent topic in sociolinguistics and interpersonal communication studies. Research suggests that nonverbal communication constitutes a significant portion of human communication, making it a critical component of interpersonal interactions, particularly within intimate relationships such as marriage (Grillo *et al.* 294).

Gender differences in communication styles have been extensively documented across various contexts, and these differences extend to the paralinguistic domain. Men and women tend to employ distinct paralinguistic features when communicating, which can lead to misunderstandings and miscommunications in spousal discourse (Esere *et al.* 50-61). For instance, women typically use more listening noises or back-channeling such as "mmm," "ah," and "oh," often accompanied by nodding, primarily to indicate active listening and encourage continued conversation. Men, on the other hand, use such paralinguistic cues less frequently and often with the intention of signaling agreement rather than merely acknowledging receipt of information.

This fundamental difference in the communicative function of seemingly similar paralinguistic behaviours can create significant misalignment in spousal communication (Agyemang *et al.* 2340). The paralinguistic system encompasses various nonverbal elements including voice tone, pitch, speech rate, pauses, and other vocal qualities that modify or enhance verbal messages. These elements serve multiple functions in spousal communication—expressing emotions, emphasizing points, indicating turn-taking, and conveying attitudes that may remain unstated in verbal content (Febriantini *et al.* 53-56). Research indicates that women tend to be more expressive in their paralinguistic communication, using a wider range of vocal variations and emotional indicators, while men often adopt a more authoritative language style with minimal use of tentativeness.

In intimate conversational interactions between spouses, gender-linked variations manifest in the use of particular conversational signals, strategies, and speech genres. Studies have shown that women-wives use more qualifiers and tag questions, making them appear less assertive in communication (Bruno 106-120). However, when social roles demand it, women may switch to more assertive communication styles, particularly when protecting their home or relationship. Conversely, men-husbands demonstrate different patterns, using more pause fillers when uncertain or anxious, especially when expressing overwhelming feelings.

Literary works, particularly short stories that depict spousal interactions, provide valuable insights into these gender-differentiated paralinguistic features (Okesina 162-179). By analyzing fictional representations of marital discourse, researchers can identify patterns that reflect real-world communication dynamics between spouses. Despite extensive studies on gender differences in communication, there remains a gap in exploring how these differences manifest in literary representations of spousal discourse, particularly within African literature. Hence, this study specifically explored the gender-specific patterns in the use of paralinguistic features in spousal discourse as portrayed in Dul Johnson's collection of short stories. By examining these fictional representations, we seek to identify how paralinguistic elements contribute to the construction of gender identities within marriage and how they influence the dynamics of spousal communication. Understanding these patterns can provide valuable insights for improving communication between spouses and potentially reducing miscommunication that stems from gender-differentiated paralinguistic usage.

Theoretical Framework

This study adopts Dell Hymes' SPEAKING model and Halliday's model of context to analyze the paralinguistic dimensions of spousal discourse in Dul Johnson's collection of short stories. These theoretical frameworks offer robust tools for understanding how language use in marital communication is shaped by socio-cultural contexts, with particular emphasis on the role of gender in shaping both verbal and nonverbal interaction. Hymes' SPEAKING model provides a comprehensive framework for examining communication as a culturally situated social act (Setyawati 61). By analyzing the Setting, participants, ends, act sequence, key, instrumentalities, norms, and genre of spousal discourse. Specifically, the model allows for an examination of how paralinguistic features such as tone, pitch, and nonverbal cues function alongside verbal communication within the couple's interaction.

Halliday's model of context, which focuses on field, tenor, and mode, offers a complementary analytical tool by focusing on the social functions of language. In the current study, Field examines the content of spousal discourse, such as decisions, conflicts, and negotiations, revealing how gendered expectations shape the topics of communication. Tenor focuses on the interpersonal relationships between the spouses, providing insight into how power dynamics, emotional proximity, and gendered roles influence paralinguistic elements such as prosody and gestural communication (Hymes 3). Mode, which concerns the way language is employed in

communication, is particularly pertinent to understanding how the interplay between verbal and non-verbal communication reflects broader cultural expectations of gender in marriage.

Together, Hymes' and Halliday's models provide an integrated approach that allows for an in-depth exploration of both verbal and non-verbal aspects of communication in Dul Johnson's stories. This framework is critical for understanding the paralinguistic dimensions of spousal communication, as it not only helps to identify the gendered elements in verbal exchanges but also draws attention to how nonverbal cues such as tone, silence, body language, and facial expressions serve as important tools in the communication process. These theoretical tools are pivotal in analyzing how gendered power dynamics in marriage are manifested through both spoken language and paralinguistic features.

Methodology

The short stories selected for this study (*Why Women Won't Make it to Heaven*; *The Gift*; *Sour Dregs*; and *Hand of Destiny*) were all written by Dul Johnson. The stories were selected because they contain ample examples of spousal discourse that are relevant to the study and both the linguistic and paralinguistic features of spousal communication were really made apparent and exhibited in the four stories. The chosen stories were thoroughly read, interpreted, and relevant spousal communication episodes were selected from them. A total of six couples were purposively selected for the study based on their relevance to this study. The couples selected include: Mr Changara Plank and Mrs Makara Plank, Mr Buku Bandara and Mrs Senata Bandara, Mr Kata Pangara and Mrs Tata Pangara (*Why Women Won't Make it to Heaven*); Mr Mamfa and Mrs Mamya Mamfa (*The Gift*); Mr Tangtakh and the Wife Proper (*Sour Dregs*); Mr Okonkwo and Mrs Nneka Okonkwo (*Hand of Destiny*). The study was based on textual analysis with the phenomenon of spousal discourse in four selected Dul Johnson's short stories.

Results and Discussion

The examination of Dul Johnson's short stories reveals diverse portrayal of gender differences in the use of paralinguistic within spousal discourse, reflecting broader social and psychological dynamics that govern intimate communication. The male characters in Johnson's narratives often display bodily reactions that externalize their internal emotional states, particularly anxiety and discomfort. For example, in *Why Women Won't Make It Heaven*, the depiction of Changara Plank and Buku Bandara highlights this tendency: Outside, Changara Plank and Buku Bandara are getting quite anxious and angry. Plank begins to sweat again. Bandara scratches parts of his body that do not itch (8). This vivid description of involuntary physical responses - sweating and scratching - serves as a clear paralinguistic marker of tension and unease. These involuntary gestures function as nonverbal signals that may betray feelings men might otherwise seek to conceal verbally, thus providing subtle yet powerful insight into their psychological state during spousal interactions.

In addition to involuntary signs of anxiety, Johnson's male characters also employ deliberate paralinguistic behaviours to assert presence and control within social and marital contexts. In *The Gift*, Mamfa's conduct exemplifies this phenomenon:

This was the moment he had been waiting for. Slowly, Mamfa rose to his feet, unnecessarily cleared his throat and greeted the guests. Gradually, silence fell upon the room, and all attention turned to his direction. He cleared his throat again, unnecessarily and intoned (51).

The repeated, unnecessary throat clearing and measured movements are not mere nervous ticks but strategic body language intended to command attention and establish authority. These paralinguistic acts underscore a gendered pattern whereby men use body language not only to communicate emotion but also to manage the flow of interaction and assert dominance, a finding consistent with the theoretical framework of nonverbal communication and supported by Mensah's empirical observations of spousal discourse.

In contrast, Johnson's female characters tend to express emotional states through more internalized, subtle bodily sensations rather than overt physical gestures. This is poignantly illustrated in *The Gift* through Mamya's reaction upon observing the children:

I want you to look at my guests very well, I mean the ones I led myself into the house. These are God's gifts to us.' Just one quick glance at the children revealed to Mamya that they all looked alike. In fact, they did not just look alike, they also looked like her own children. This must be some joke. She felt her mouth drying up and her head began to spin (52).

Here, the paralinguistic cues are internal and somatic—dry mouth and dizziness—reflecting shock and psychological distress. Unlike the men's externalized bodily signals, women's paralinguistic expressions in Johnson's narratives often manifest as embodied sensations that signify emotional vulnerability and cognitive dissonance. The study supports findings in nonverbal communication research, such as those by Gyasi and Bangmarigu (37), which show that couples commonly express their anger and discontent through nonverbal cues like frowning, making eye contact, fisting their hands, refusing to eat, and denial of sex.

The negotiation of power and emotional control through body language is further explored in *Sour Dregs*, where the commissioner's physical comportment reveals a complex interplay between vulnerability and dominance. The narrative details:

The honourable commissioner took a glass of bottled spring water. The girl suspected that he would take more than a glass and so she held on to the opened bottle as she watched his gullet move up and down with each draught he swallowed. She offered to refill his glass as soon as he brought it down from his mouth. He downed the second glass as if the first did not even wet his throat. The girl had not expected that. Although she had not left, she had corked back the bottle. She quickly removed the cover but the commissioner assured her by the wave of his hand that he had had enough (71).

The commissioner's rapid consumption of water and his dismissive hand gesture function as paralinguistic signals of control and self-assurance. Meanwhile, the girl's attentive and accommodating body language reflects a nurturing posture, resonating with established research that women's nonverbal behaviors often emphasize affiliation and support within intimate relationships.

Moreover, Johnson captures the subtle tension between emotional concealment and involuntary disclosure in male body language. The passage, "Sometimes his anxiety showed through beads of perspiration that formed on his forehead. But his grin did not allow his feeling of discomfort to be obvious to all, but to the very few discerning ones" (*Sour Dregs* 69), illustrates this duality. The character's attempt to mask anxiety with a grin typifies the social expectation for men to maintain composure and emotional restraint, yet the physical signs of perspiration betray his true feelings. This dichotomy exemplifies the complex function of paralinguistic cues in male spousal communication, where body language simultaneously conceals and reveals, reflecting internal conflict between societal norms and authentic emotional experience.

More so, the use of silence is another paralinguistic feature observed in spousal discourse that conveys complex emotions and relational dynamics without the need for spoken words. Dul Johnson's collection of short stories offers rich examples that illustrate how silence functions differently for men and women within intimate relationships, reflecting gendered patterns in nonverbal communication. For instance, in *Why Women Won't Make It to Heaven*, silence emerges as a charged space filled with unspoken tension and emotional restraint. When Mrs. Plank is confronted by her husband's harsh words, the narrative notes: Mrs. Plank does not respond. Ordinarily, she would count this as an insult and make a big issue out of it....No word from Mrs. Plank, and they drive on, silent, everyone chewing and swallowing their own thoughts.... (4).

Here, Mrs. Plank's silence is notable not only because it represents a departure from her usual assertiveness but also because it encapsulates a complex emotional state-anger, hurt, and perhaps resignation-that she chooses not to verbalize. This silence functions as a paralinguistic cue that signals displeasure and emotional withdrawal without escalating the conflict verbally. It also reveals a gendered communication pattern where the woman, despite feeling insulted, opts for silence as a form of resistance or self-protection, suppressing her usual verbal assertiveness. The shared silence among all parties in the car further illustrates how silence can create a collective emotional atmosphere, where thoughts are internalized rather than expressed, highlighting the relational impact of unspoken communication.

Similarly, in *Hand of Destiny*, silence operates as a medium of unresolved tension and unexpressed judgment within spousal interaction. The narrator recounts:

Nneka had become silent long before I decided to leave the room, and I was not surprised when she made no response to my parting words. Something else was disturbing her but I couldn't tell what it was. The look she gave me said something like: you are leaving an unfinished business; you too are a coward (75).

This silence is pregnant with meaning, functioning as a nonverbal reproach and an indictment of the narrator's perceived failure to confront or resolve an issue. Nneka's silence, coupled with her expressive look, embodies a paralinguistic strategy that communicates dissatisfaction and emotional distance without explicit confrontation. This example underscores how women in Johnson's stories often use silence not merely as absence of speech but as a deliberate communicative act that conveys complex emotional states and relational judgments. The silence here becomes a space where unresolved conflict simmers, reflecting a gendered tendency to express dissent or disappointment indirectly, through nonverbal means rather than overt speech.

The metaphorical use of silence is also poignantly captured in *Hand of Destiny* through the narrator's reflection on loss and memory:

The three of us had made a perfect triangle - what mathematicians would call an equilateral triangle - in terms of our sense of humour, that is. In terms of age, we were an isosceles triangle with me forming the shorter line. In many ways I was their student. Even now, I'm learning from the silence of their departure - the silence of the red earth on the graves (68).

Here, silence transcends interpersonal communication to embody the profound absence and finality of death. The "silence of the red earth on the graves" is a powerful paralinguistic symbol that conveys grief, remembrance, and the ineffable nature of loss. This passage highlights how silence can function as a shared space of reflection and emotional processing, a universal language that surpasses gender but is deeply embedded in human relational experience. It also suggests that silence, while often associated with withdrawal or avoidance in spousal discourse, can also be a site of learning and emotional depth.

Dul Johnson's collection of short stories also offers a rich canvas for exploring gender differences in the use of paralinguistic cues, particularly facial expressions, within spousal discourse. The extracts provided reveal how men and women in Johnson's narratives employ facial expressions in markedly different ways, reflecting broader gendered patterns of communication and emotional expression. These literary depictions resonate with contemporary research on nonverbal communication in intimate relationships, which underscores the essential role of facial expressions in conveying emotional states and managing interpersonal exchanges between spouses.

In *Why Women Won't Make It To Heaven*, the interaction between Mrs. Plank and her husband, Makara Plank, vividly illustrates how facial expressions function as a site of emotional negotiation and gendered communication. Mrs. Plank's initial reaction to the wigs is described as a frown that clearly communicates her dissatisfaction: Her eyes sweep through the range of wigs hanging on the rack by the dressing table. There are six in all, of different shapes and colours. It is obvious, from the look on her face-the frown really-that none of the six appeals to her as what should go with the dress she is wearing (1).

This frown is a subtle but potent paralinguistic cue, signaling displeasure without immediate verbalization. When she turns to her husband and asks, "Sweetheart, will this go with this dress?"

the ensuing exchange is charged with facial expressions that reveal underlying tensions. Mr. Plank's retort, "Like hell. It will go with anything! Anything at all; even with nothing!" is accompanied by a facial expression that registers shock and amusement on Mrs. Plank's part. The narrative notes, "The look on Mr. Plank's face now registers. Mrs. Plank is half shocked and half amused.... 'Are you seeing me in a wig for the first time?' 'No I'm not.' 'And you never complained before, so what's the problem now?' 'I might not have used words, but I had complained in so many ways. Just look at the time (1).

Here, the interplay of facial expressions—shock, amusement, and the implied frustration behind Mrs. Plank's words—demonstrates how women's facial cues often serve as nuanced conveyors of dissatisfaction and emotional complexity. Mrs. Plank's frown and her husband's facial reactions create a dynamic nonverbal dialogue that complements and complicates their verbal exchange. This interaction exemplifies how women may use facial expressions to express subtle emotional cues, while men's facial expressions may reflect a mixture of defensiveness and dismissiveness, highlighting gendered differences in emotional expressivity. The tension between verbal and nonverbal communication continues in the same story when Mr. Plank reacts to his wife's forgetfulness:

What is it again?' 'Look at my feet, dear.' Mr. Plank looks down, and then looks up quickly, his face red with anger. For a moment he is lost for words. 'Well, you'll have to go like this.' Mrs. Plank cannot believe her ears...'My goodness, can you believe it dear, that in my haste I forgot the gift?' At the word 'haste' Mr. Plank gives her a deadly look as he swings the car back onto the road, making a U-turn (4-5).

Mr. Plank's facial expressions—his reddening face and “deadly look”—are clear paralinguistic markers of anger and frustration. The fact that he is momentarily “lost for words” but communicates strongly through his facial expression underscores the potency of nonverbal cues in expressing emotions that may be difficult to verbalize. This extract also illustrates how men's facial expressions in Johnson's stories often convey authority, control, and sometimes aggression, reinforcing traditional gender roles within spousal communication.

Similarly, the discomfort and emotional tension experienced by male characters are vividly portrayed through facial expressions in *Why Women Won't Make It To Heaven*: Mr. Buku Bandara.... The discomfort on his face can be read from a hundred metres away... Senata says nothing, although she is watching him all the while in the mirror (6).

This description highlights how male characters' facial expressions often betray internal emotional states such as discomfort or anxiety, even when they remain verbally silent. The female character's observation of his face through the mirror suggests a heightened sensitivity to these nonverbal cues, emphasizing women's role as attentive interpreters of their spouses' emotional expressions.

The gendered dynamics of facial expressions are further complicated in the interaction between Mrs. Tata Changara and Mr. Pangara:

Mrs. Tata Changara does not know whether to get angry or be amused. She just sits there, looking from himself to the floor, to her nails and back to himself. The silence in the room increases. Slowly and mechanically she returns to the mirror. And now, for the first time he notices the weirdness of the make-up on her face. 'Tata, we are going to the church for a wedding, not to a brothel or a fashion fair.' 'I am a woman, please, understand that.' She reaches for her make-up kit and....The frown on Mr. Pangara's face could unsettle even a madman. His nose begins to twitch, his eyes turning red and teary. The veins in his forehead bulge and breathe under the skin (*Why Women Won't Make It To Heaven* 9).

Here, the facial expressions of both spouses communicate a complex emotional landscape. Mrs. Tata Changara's shifting gaze and return to the mirror reflect ambivalence and perhaps a desire to assert her femininity on her own terms. Mr. Pangara's intense frown, twitching nose, reddening eyes, and bulging veins vividly portray anger and emotional agitation. This passage exemplifies how men's facial expressions in Johnson's stories often externalize strong emotions physically, while women's facial expressions may be more nuanced and internally reflective. The detailed description of Mr. Pangara's face underscores the physicality of male emotional expression and its potential to intimidate or unsettle.

Facial expressions also function as critical communicative tools in moments of conflict and emotional intensity, as seen in *The Gift*:

Just let me pluck out that lying tongue! Or at least let me de-ball the he - goat! Oh my God, but when did all this happen?' Responding to the Reverend's eye signals someone had gently sneaked up to her back. In a swift, karate-like move, he locked her two arms in a vice-like grip. The knife fell out of the limp hand and the Reverend picked it up (53).

Although this passage focuses on physical action, the mention of the Reverend's "eye signals" highlights the importance of subtle facial cues in coordinating nonverbal communication, especially in high-stakes or tense situations. The eye signals serve as a silent but powerful form of control and intervention, illustrating how facial expressions and eye contact can convey intentions and warnings without words. Additionally, in *Hand of Destiny*, the emotional weight of facial expressions is poignantly captured in the interaction between the narrator and Nneka:

Nneka was stung by shock and disbelief when I revealed to her, even as she sobbed by the bedside of her fast - fading star, that they had lived in a dream world for about - eight years. Her first incredulous reaction spoke of my betrayal, if not envy, of the family. The

question rang loud and clear in her eyes: 'how could you say such a thing about my family?'.....'Eight years... eight years ...' I heard Nneka mumble to herself, her face down, her voice cracked.' You are a liar. You are a damned bloody liar and a traitor. No... But no...not from you Jorfa, not from you'....'I cannot lie to you. At least, not at this point'. But there was no sign that I had convinced her. She just looked on, waiting, expecting me to say something. The silence was intense though short (69).

Nneka's facial expressions-shock, disbelief, incredulity, and sorrow-are central to the emotional tenor of this exchange. Her "face down" posture and cracked voice convey deep hurt and betrayal, while the "question rang loud and clear in her eyes" emphasizes how facial expressions can articulate complex emotional responses that words may fail to capture. This moment of intense nonverbal communication illustrates the profound role facial expressions play in conveying vulnerability and emotional truth in spousal discourse.

Dul Johnson's collection of short stories further offers a vivid exploration of the paralinguistic elements that shape spousal communication through tone, pitch, and intonation. In Johnson's work, the gendered deployment of tone, pitch, and intonation in spousal discourse not only reveals underlying power structures and emotional tensions but also reflects broader patterns of gendered communication observed in real-life marital interactions. The extract from *Why Women Won't Make It to Heaven* where Mrs. Plank asserts herself vocally is particularly illustrative:

You dare not,' she roars, but he is at the door already. 'Then get done and be out of here. I give you two minutes, do you hear me! Two minutes, I mean. I will be waiting in the car.' Mrs. Plank shoots out a nasty heavy hiss and returns to her business...In the car parked outside, Mr. Plank's anxiety is mounting, small beads of perspiration forming on his brows (2-3).

Here, Mrs. Plank's use of a "roar" and a "nasty heavy hiss" demonstrates how women in Johnson's stories can employ heightened tone and sharp intonation to convey authority, anger, and impatience. The "roar" is not merely a loud voice but a paralinguistic signal of emotional escalation and assertiveness, challenging the stereotypical expectation of female passivity in marital discourse. The hiss, on the other hand, is a nonverbal vocalization that expresses contempt and finality, effectively closing the conversational space. The impact of these vocal cues on Mr. Plank is immediate and physiological, as his mounting anxiety is described through beads of perspiration, emphasizing the powerful effect that tone and intonation can have on spousal dynamics.

In contrast, male characters in Johnson's stories often use tone and pitch to assert dominance or express frustration, but their vocal strategies can shift dramatically in response to emotional intensity. This is evident in the scene:

...He chews his lower lip, spits and then screams at the top of his voice: 'Senata! Senata!! What are you still doing inside, for God's

sake?'....'But they should not come and be waiting for us, Senata. Oh, please.' He is now behaving as if he will go down on his knees. Then, all of a sudden he stops, dumbstruck by what he beholds...But he is speechless and overwhelmed by anger (why women won't make it to Heaven 6).

The transition from a scream “at the top of his voice” to a pleading tone, and finally to speechlessness, encapsulates the fluidity with which men’s paralinguistic vocal cues can move from aggression to vulnerability. The initial high pitch and loud volume are paralinguistic markers of frustration and urgency, intended to exert control and prompt immediate action. However, the sudden shift to a softer, pleading tone reveals an underlying emotional complexity, suggesting that male authority in spousal discourse is not always stable or unidirectional. The eventual silence, “dumbstruck by what he beholds,” further demonstrates how intense emotion can disrupt verbal communication, leaving tone and intonation as the primary conveyors of meaning.

Another compelling example is found in the extract: "...He now turns his face upwards and in a pleading voice intones: 'Dear God, you have given us a big responsibility. You have placed women under us men, charging us to present them spotless unto you. Dear God, just look at my wife,' now pointing at his wife..." (*Why Women Won't Make it to Heaven* 19-20). The phrase “in a pleading voice intones” highlights the use of pitch and intonation to express supplication and a sense of burden. The upward inflection and softer tone signal humility and a desire for understanding or intervention, contrasting with the earlier displays of dominance. This shift in vocal strategy reflects a gendered pattern where men, despite their social positioning as heads of households, may resort to softer, more conciliatory tones when confronting situations that challenge their authority or evoke vulnerability.

Conclusion

This study examined the paralinguistic dimensions of spousal communication in selected short stories by Dul Johnson. The study observed that male characters frequently utilized authoritative tones and commanding body language, reinforcing their perceived dominance in marital interactions. Female characters, conversely, relied more on expressive facial gestures, softer tones, and indirect communication strategies, reflecting societal expectations of emotional sensitivity. The study concluded that spousal communication within the selected short stories was deeply influenced by traditional gender roles, with both verbal and non-verbal interactions reinforcing existing power structures.

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