Pragmatic Strategies In The Representation Of Plus-Size Women In Nollywood Films: A Case Study Of Skinny Girl In Transit.

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Abstract
This study investigates the pragmatic strategies employed in Skinny Girl in Transit, a popular Nollywood web series, to examine how language reflects and challenges societal norms about body image. Focusing on conversational implicature, speech acts, and politeness theory, the analysis explores how the protagonist, Tiwa, a plus-size woman, navigates societal pressures concerning her weight and identity. The case study approach is utilized, selecting key scenes from the series where body image is discussed, either implicitly or explicitly. Through the application of pragmatic theories, the research reveals that while language in the series often reinforces societal expectations about slimness, it also provides a platform for resisting stereotypes. Characters use humor, indirect remarks, and polite strategies to address sensitive issues, creating a nuanced portrayal of plus-size women in Nollywood. The findings highlight how Skinny Girl in Transit both mirrors and critiques cultural attitudes toward body size, offering a more complex representation of plus-size women in Nigerian media. This study contributes to the fields of pragmatics, media representation, and African cinema by demonstrating the power of language in shaping cultural perceptions.
Keywords: *Pragmatics, Nollywood, body image, conversational implicature, speech acts, media representation*

I.   Introduction

Background

Nollywood, Nigeria's film industry, is recognized as one of the largest in the world, both in terms of output and cultural influence. With thousands of films produced annually, it has become a significant medium for shaping societal norms and influencing public perception, particularly in West Africa and across the African diaspora. As a cultural force, Nollywood has contributed to shaping contemporary narratives around gender, class, and body image. Its films often serve as mirrors of societal expectations, while also reinforcing or challenging prevailing stereotypes. One of the recurring themes in Nollywood films is the representation of body image, particularly the portrayal of women who fall outside of the socially idealized thin body type.

Body image in Nollywood films is often presented through a binary lens: slim bodies are idealized as beautiful and desirable, while plus-size women are frequently relegated to comedic roles or portrayed as undesirable, lazy, or lacking self-control (Mefoh & Asante, 2018). These stereotypical representations perpetuate social stigma and marginalization, which affect how women, particularly plus-size women, are perceived and treated in real life. *Skinny Girl in Transit*, a popular web series produced by Ndani TV, disrupts this norm by presenting a more nuanced portrayal of a plus-size woman, Tiwa, and her experiences navigating love, career, and societal expectations in Lagos.

In the context of film and media studies, pragmatics is a crucial tool for understanding how language use shapes meaning and reinforces societal norms. Pragmatics, which deals with language use in context, encompasses elements such as conversational implicature, speech acts, and politeness theory (Grice, 1975; Austin, 1962). These pragmatic strategies are integral to how characters in films like *Skinny Girl in Transit* communicate implicit and explicit messages about body image, identity, and societal expectations. By analyzing the pragmatics of dialogue in the series, we can gain deeper insights into how Nollywood portrays plus-size women and how these portrayals either reinforce or challenge existing stereotypes.

Rationale

The portrayal of plus-size women in media, especially in Nollywood, is significant because media representations directly influence societal perceptions and individual self-identity. Nollywood's influence on public discourse surrounding beauty standards and body image is profound, particularly because of its reach in shaping norms in Nigerian society and beyond. Historically, plus-size women in Nollywood films have been

portrayed through a lens of ridicule, often used as comedic relief or depicted as characters struggling with low self-esteem, as noted in studies on the representation of plus-size women in Nigerian films (Adepeju & Ojo, 2018).

However, *Skinny Girl in Transit* challenges these portrayals by offering a narrative that centers a plus-size woman as a complex, fully realized character. Tiwa, the series' protagonist, is shown navigating societal pressures regarding her body while simultaneously asserting her identity and value beyond her appearance. This shift in representation makes *Skinny Girl in Transit* a pivotal case study for examining the intersection of body image, identity, and media representation. The series provides a unique platform to explore how language reflects and shapes societal attitudes toward plus-size women and how these attitudes are embedded in implicit and explicit dialogue.

The significance of studying the language used in *Skinny Girl in Transit* lies in its potential to reveal underlying social norms and expectations. Pragmatic strategies such as conversational implicature allow for the transmission of societal messages indirectly, while speech acts and politeness theory help to explore how interactions in the film either reinforce or challenge stereotypes. Analyzing these elements can provide valuable insights into how media representations can both mirror societal biases and offer avenues for challenging them.

Research Questions
1. How does language use in *Skinny Girl in Transit* convey implicit and explicit messages about plus-size women?
2. What pragmatic strategies (conversational implicature, speech acts, politeness theory) are employed in the dialogue to reinforce or challenge stereotypes?

Thesis Statement
Pragmatic strategies in *Skinny Girl in Transit* reflect societal attitudes toward plus-size women and simultaneously provide a platform for challenging prevailing stereotypes. Through the use of conversational implicature, speech acts, and politeness strategies, the series both mirrors societal biases and offers a critique of them, portraying the complexity of identity and body image in a contemporary Nigerian context.

II.   Literature Review

Pragmatics in Media Representation
Pragmatics, a subfield of linguistics, is concerned with the way context influences the interpretation of meaning in communication. Its application in media studies is particularly valuable for analyzing how film dialogue reflects and reinforces societal norms and ideologies. Pragmatic tools like conversational implicature, politeness theory, and speech acts provide a nuanced understanding of how characters in films convey implicit and explicit messages, often aligning with or challenging societal expectations.

Conversational implicature, a concept developed by Grice (1975), refers to the way meaning is conveyed indirectly through context rather than explicitly stated. In films, characters often use indirect language to convey deeper social norms, and these unstated meanings can perpetuate stereotypes or highlight underlying tensions in society. For instance, in *Skinny Girl in Transit*, characters may use humor or seemingly benign comments to indirectly reference Tiwa's body size, reflecting societal biases without overtly insulting her. This form of communication subtly reinforces social norms around body image, demonstrating the power of conversational implicature in shaping audience perceptions.

Similarly, speech act theory, as introduced by Austin (1962) and later developed by Searle (1969), is concerned with how language is used to perform actions. In the context of media, speech acts such as compliments, insults, or even advice can carry significant social weight, particularly when they relate to sensitive topics like body image. Nollywood films, including *Skinny Girl in Transit*, often feature characters using speech acts to either support or critique societal standards of beauty. For example, characters may compliment or criticize Tiwa based on her appearance, and these acts of speech contribute to the larger narrative of how plus-size women are perceived in Nigerian society.

Politeness theory, developed by Brown and Levinson (1987), focuses on how individuals navigate social interactions to avoid causing offense, particularly through positive and negative face strategies. In media, this theory can explain how characters mitigate face-threatening acts when discussing sensitive issues like weight or body image. In *Skinny Girl in Transit*, characters may employ politeness strategies to soften remarks about Tiwa's size, using indirect or euphemistic language to navigate potentially offensive territory. This careful use of politeness strategies highlights the social delicacy surrounding body image discussions, reinforcing societal norms while attempting to mitigate direct conflict.

Body Image and Media Representation
Media representation of body image plays a critical role in shaping societal perceptions and expectations of beauty. Research has consistently shown that film and television contribute to the construction of body ideals,

often reinforcing narrow, unrealistic standards of beauty (Tiggemann & Slater, 2014). These standards, which typically valorize thinness, can have profound effects on how individuals, particularly women, perceive themselves and their bodies. In the African context, Nollywood has been a significant cultural force in shaping these ideals, often replicating Western beauty standards, despite the continent's diverse cultural views on body size (Adepeju & Ojo, 2018).

Studies have shown that body image in media, particularly in African cinema, tends to privilege slim, light-skinned women as the epitome of beauty, while plus-size women are often relegated to comedic roles or portrayed as unattractive (Mefoh & Asante, 2018). This portrayal mirrors global media trends, where larger bodies are stigmatized, and slim bodies are idealized. Nollywood's adherence to these norms has had a noticeable impact on societal attitudes toward body size, particularly among women. However, there has been a growing counter-narrative in recent years, with films like *Skinny Girl in Transit* challenging these established ideals by presenting a plus-size protagonist in a positive light.

In the global media context, Western cinema has also been critiqued for its narrow portrayal of body size. Gill (2007) notes that mainstream media often presents thinness as synonymous with success, desirability, and health, while larger bodies are depicted as lazy, unhealthy, or unworthy of romantic attention. This dichotomy is pervasive in both Western and African media, although African films tend to incorporate additional cultural elements, such as the link between body size and wealth or fertility in traditional societies. Despite these cultural nuances, the overarching message in many films remains the same: slim bodies are ideal, and plus-size bodies are often marginalized.

Representation of Plus-Size Women in Films
The representation of plus-size women in films, particularly in Nollywood, has historically been shaped by stereotypes that emphasize negative traits associated with larger bodies. Plus-size characters are often depicted as comedic, undesirable, or socially marginalized, reinforcing societal biases against larger women (Adepeju & Ojo, 2018). These portrayals are consistent with global media trends, where plus-size characters are frequently assigned secondary roles that reinforce their inferiority in terms of beauty, desirability, and social status.

In Nollywood, plus-size women are often portrayed in limited roles that align with the stereotypes of being lazy, always eating, or incapable of romantic relationships (Mefoh & Asante, 2018). For instance, in *My Pounds and Dollars*, the plus-size protagonist is portrayed as socially awkward and only desirable because of her wealth, rather than any inherent qualities. This type of portrayal perpetuates the stereotype that plus-size women are only valuable when they possess material wealth or can provide some other form of compensation for their body size (Adepeju & Ojo, 2018).

However, *Skinny Girl in Transit* breaks from these conventions by presenting Tiwa, a plus-size woman, as a multi-dimensional character who grapples with societal expectations but does not conform to them. Rather than being relegated to a comedic role or portrayed as undesirable, Tiwa is shown as a professional woman with agency, engaging in romantic relationships and pursuing her goals. This shift in representation is significant, as it challenges the long-standing stereotypes associated with plus-size women in Nollywood films and contributes to a more inclusive narrative around body size and identity (Annase, 2023)(Annase Project v5 LL (1)).

The global film industry has seen similar shifts, with more recent portrayals of plus-size women that challenge traditional stereotypes. For instance, films like *Dumplin'* and *Phat Girlz* have featured plus-size protagonists who reject societal pressures to conform to narrow beauty standards. However, these portrayals are still relatively rare, and the dominant narrative in both Western and African cinema continues to favor thin bodies as the ideal. As the representation of plus-size women in films like *Skinny Girl in Transit* becomes more prevalent, there is hope for a more nuanced and diverse portrayal of body size in the media.

In summary, the portrayal of plus-size women in Nollywood and global media is slowly evolving, with some films beginning to challenge the long-standing stereotypes that have historically marginalized larger women. By employing pragmatic strategies such as conversational implicature, speech acts, and politeness theory, films like *Skinny Girl in Transit* offer a more complex narrative that reflects both societal biases and the potential for change.

III.   Theoretical Framework
Conversational Implicature
Grice's theory of conversational implicature, introduced in his seminal work "Logic and Conversation" (1975), provides a foundational understanding of how speakers convey meaning indirectly. According to Grice, communication often relies on unstated assumptions and implications rather than explicit statements. The theory is grounded in the Cooperative Principle, which suggests that interlocutors adhere to four maxims—Quantity, Quality, Relation, and Manner—to ensure that their contributions to a conversation are appropriate, informative, and relevant. When speakers deviate from these maxims, they generate implicatures, which allow listeners to infer meanings beyond what is explicitly stated.

In *Skinny Girl in Transit*, conversational implicature plays a significant role in how body image and identity are discussed. For instance, characters often refer to Tiwa's size indirectly, using humor or euphemisms to soften the impact of their comments. These indirect references can either reinforce societal stereotypes about plus-size women or offer subtle critiques of those stereotypes. For example, when Tiwa's family members comment on her eating habits or appearance, they may avoid direct criticism but still convey underlying societal expectations about body size. As Grice explains, such indirectness allows speakers to communicate more than what is said explicitly, leaving room for the audience to infer deeper social norms and attitudes (Grice, 1975).

In Nollywood films, conversational implicature is a common strategy for addressing sensitive topics like body size, allowing filmmakers to navigate cultural taboos while still engaging with controversial issues. Through this indirect language, *Skinny Girl in Transit* conveys implicit messages about beauty standards, health, and desirability, reflecting the complex ways in which body image is constructed in Nigerian society.

Speech Acts

The theory of speech acts, developed by Austin (1962) and further elaborated by Searle (1969), focuses on the idea that language is not merely descriptive but performative. In other words, by speaking, individuals perform actions. Austin distinguishes between three types of speech acts: locutionary acts (the actual utterance), illocutionary acts (the intention behind the utterance), and perlocutionary acts (the effect of the utterance on the listener). Searle expands on Austin's work by categorizing speech acts into different types, such as assertive, directives, commissive, expressive, and declarations.

In media representation, particularly in films like *Skinny Girl in Transit*, speech acts are crucial in shaping character interactions and advancing the plot. The way characters use language to perform actions—whether by making promises, offering compliments, or delivering insults—reflects societal attitudes and power dynamics. For example, when Tiwa is complimented or criticized based on her appearance, these speech acts carry social weight, influencing how she and other characters navigate relationships and societal expectations. A compliment about Tiwa's weight loss, for instance, is not merely an observation but a reinforcement of the societal belief that thinness is desirable.

Moreover, insults or indirect criticisms, often couched in humor, perform illocutionary acts of maintaining social hierarchy and enforcing normative behavior. As observed in many Nollywood films, larger-bodied characters are often subjected to jokes or disparaging comments disguised as concern or advice. These speech acts serve to remind the characters—and by extension, the audience—of the societal expectations they are meant to adhere to, thus perpetuating stereotypes about plus-size women (Adepeju & Ojo, 2018).

In *Skinny Girl in Transit*, speech acts related to body image, whether through direct comments or indirect implications, play a pivotal role in illustrating how plus-size women are both judged and empowered through language. The series uses speech acts to explore the tension between societal expectations and individual agency, with Tiwa often navigating these tensions through her responses to the speech acts directed at her.

Politeness Theory

Politeness theory, developed by Brown and Levinson (1987), focuses on how individuals manage face in social interactions. "Face" refers to a person's self-image, which they seek to protect and maintain during communication. The theory distinguishes between positive face (the desire to be liked and appreciated) and negative face (the desire to maintain autonomy and avoid imposition). In communication, speakers often use strategies to maintain politeness and avoid face-threatening acts (FTAs), especially when discussing sensitive topics.

In the context of Nollywood films, politeness theory is particularly relevant when analyzing how sensitive subjects like body image are addressed. Characters often employ politeness strategies to soften potential FTAs, especially when discussing weight or appearance. For instance, in *Skinny Girl in Transit*, when Tiwa's family or friends discuss her weight, they frequently use positive politeness strategies to mitigate the impact of their comments. Rather than directly criticizing her appearance, they may frame their remarks as concern for her health or well-being, thereby maintaining the appearance of care and support while still reinforcing societal norms about body size.

Negative politeness strategies are also employed when characters seek to respect Tiwa's autonomy, particularly when addressing her romantic life or career. By using hedges, indirectness, or offering her the option to refuse, characters attempt to preserve her negative face, even as they engage in discussions that could be considered intrusive or judgmental. For example, when Tiwa's mother suggests she lose weight to find a partner, she may couch this advice in terms of wanting the best for her daughter, thus attempting to soften the FTA while still expressing her societal expectations (Annase, 2023)(Annase Project v5 LL (1)).

In *Skinny Girl in Transit*, the use of politeness strategies underscores the social delicacy surrounding body image, particularly for plus-size women. The series highlights how politeness is not just about maintaining social harmony but also about reinforcing or challenging societal expectations. Characters' use of positive and

negative politeness strategies reflects broader cultural attitudes toward body size, illustrating how language can be used both to maintain and subvert social norms.

Grice's theory of conversational implicature, Austin and Searle's speech act theory, and Brown and Levinson's politeness theory provide a robust framework for analyzing how language is used to convey implicit and explicit messages about body image in *Skinny Girl in Transit*. These pragmatic strategies reveal the complex ways in which Nollywood films reflect and shape societal attitudes toward plus-size women, offering insights into how language can both reinforce and challenge stereotypes. By examining the dialogue in *Skinny Girl in Transit*, this study will demonstrate how pragmatic analysis can uncover deeper social meanings embedded in everyday communication.

IV.   Methodology

Case Study Approach

The choice of *Skinny Girl in Transit* (SGIT) as a case study for this research is both strategic and relevant, given the series' central focus on a plus-size protagonist navigating societal pressures regarding body image. SGIT stands out in Nollywood for its nuanced portrayal of a plus-size woman, Tiwa, who is depicted as a multifaceted character, both professionally and personally. The series disrupts traditional Nollywood portrayals of plus-size women, who are often relegated to secondary roles characterized by comedic relief or negative stereotyping (Adepeju & Ojo, 2018).

In addition, SGIT offers a rich site for exploring pragmatic strategies in media because of its emphasis on everyday social interactions. The dialogue in the series is filled with moments of indirect communication, humor, and tension, making it ideal for analyzing how societal norms about body size are both reinforced and contested through language. The show uses conversational implicature, speech acts, and politeness strategies to navigate sensitive topics such as weight, relationships, and societal expectations. As a result, it provides fertile ground for examining the implicit and explicit messages about body image conveyed through dialogue.

Moreover, the creators of SGIT Temi Balogun and Abimbola Craig who are directly involved in the narrative construction as plus-size women themselves, further justify its selection as a case study. Their insider perspectives offer a more authentic representation of plus-size women in Nigerian society, in contrast to the stereotypical portrayals that have historically dominated Nollywood films. The series, therefore, presents a unique opportunity to analyze how language is used to reflect or challenge cultural standards of beauty.

Data Collection

To conduct a pragmatic analysis of how SGIT represents plus-size women, specific scenes will be selected from across the series that focus on moments of significant interaction, character development, and dialogue. The selection criteria for these scenes are based on their relevance to key themes of body image, identity, and societal expectations. The following elements will guide the data collection process:

1. **Scenes Highlighting Body Image Discourse**: The analysis will focus on scenes where Tiwa's body size is either directly or indirectly addressed by other characters. For example, scenes involving Tiwa's family members discussing her weight or romantic prospects offer rich moments for analyzing conversational implicature and politeness strategies. One key scene occurs when Tiwa's mother subtly advises her to lose weight to improve her chances of finding a partner. The implicit messages embedded in these interactions provide insight into societal expectations regarding body size.

2. **Scenes of Romantic Interactions**: Tiwa's romantic relationships are central to the series, and moments where her size is referenced or implied in relation to her romantic desirability will be included. These scenes are crucial for understanding how speech acts such as compliments, insults, or expressions of affection are employed to shape perceptions of plus-size women. For instance, Tiwa's interaction with a potential partner who repeatedly refers to her size during a date demonstrates how implicit meanings about desirability are conveyed.

3. **Scenes of Professional Interaction**: Tiwa's career as a radio host is another significant aspect of her character. Scenes that depict her professional growth or challenges, particularly when her body size is commented upon by colleagues or superiors, will be analyzed. These moments provide opportunities to explore how politeness strategies are used in professional contexts, especially in dealing with face-threatening acts related to appearance.

4. **Character Development Moments**: As Tiwa evolves throughout the series, her self-perception and responses to societal pressures also shift. Scenes where Tiwa asserts her identity or challenges societal norms will be included to analyze how language reflects personal agency in relation to societal expectations.

These key scenes will be transcribed and coded for analysis, focusing on the use of conversational implicature, speech acts, and politeness strategies. By concentrating on moments of heightened interaction, the analysis will reveal how language is used both to perpetuate and resist stereotypes about plus-size women.

Analytical Framework

The analytical framework for this study draws on three key pragmatic theories: conversational implicature, speech act theory, and politeness theory. These frameworks will be applied to the dialogue in SGIT to uncover both the explicit and implicit messages about body image and societal expectations.

1. **Conversational Implicature**: Grice's theory of implicature will be used to analyze how indirect meanings are conveyed through dialogue. In particular, the study will focus on how characters in SGIT imply judgments about Tiwa's body without stating them explicitly. For example, when Tiwa's mother discusses her romantic prospects, her comments often contain hidden assumptions about the relationship between weight and desirability. By analyzing these moments of implicature, the study will reveal how societal norms about body image are subtly communicated in everyday interactions.

2. **Speech Acts**: Austin and Searle's speech act theory will guide the analysis of how language is used to perform actions in the series. This includes examining how compliments, insults, or advice about Tiwa's appearance function as speech acts that reinforce or challenge societal expectations. For instance, when Tiwa receives backhanded compliments about her weight loss, these speech acts not only perform the act of complimenting but also carry deeper social meanings about beauty and success.

3. **Politeness Theory**: Brown and Levinson's politeness theory will be applied to understand how characters navigate sensitive topics, such as weight, in ways that maintain social harmony. The study will examine how positive and negative politeness strategies are used to either soften or emphasize comments about Tiwa's body. For example, when Tiwa's friends or family members make suggestions about her weight, they may employ positive politeness strategies to show concern and solidarity while still reinforcing societal norms.

The application of these pragmatic theories will provide a detailed analysis of how SGIT uses language to convey complex social messages about body image, identity, and societal expectations. By focusing on both the explicit dialogue and the implicit meanings embedded in the language, this study will demonstrate how Nollywood films like SGIT reflect and challenge cultural standards of beauty.

V.   Analysis And Discussion

Conversational Implicature in *Skinny Girl in Transit*

In *Skinny Girl in Transit*, conversational implicature plays a key role in conveying implicit messages about body image and social norms. Grice's (1975) theory of implicature explains how speakers often imply more than what they explicitly state, relying on the listener to infer meaning based on context. This is particularly relevant in the portrayal of Tiwa, the plus-size protagonist, whose body size is frequently the subject of indirect comments. Instead of openly criticizing or commenting on her weight, characters use humor, euphemisms, and subtle remarks that convey societal expectations without direct confrontation.

One notable example of conversational implicature occurs during a dinner scene where Tiwa's mother, a central figure in reinforcing societal norms, discusses her daughter's romantic prospects. Rather than overtly stating that Tiwa's weight may be a barrier to finding a partner, her mother makes a humorous comment about the size of Tiwa's portions. This indirect reference to Tiwa's eating habits implicitly conveys the belief that her weight is tied to her romantic success. The humor in this context acts as a shield for the implicit critique, making it easier for both the speaker and the listener to navigate a sensitive topic. As Grice (1975) suggests, this type of indirectness is a way to uphold social harmony while still conveying meaningful (and often critical) messages.

Similarly, when Tiwa's coworkers comment on her physical appearance, they often do so through jokes or indirect suggestions. In one scene, a colleague remarks, "You must have a secret recipe for happiness; you're always so full of life." While the comment seems complimentary on the surface, the phrase "full of life" subtly refers to Tiwa's size, implying a correlation between her body weight and her demeanor. This form of conversational implicature reflects the societal norm that plus-size women are often viewed in relation to their size, whether directly or indirectly (Mefoh & Asante, 2018).

These examples illustrate how conversational implicature in SGIT serves to reinforce existing social norms about body image without overtly addressing them. By using humor and indirect language, characters avoid direct confrontation while still perpetuating the societal belief that thinness is more desirable.

Speech Acts and Stereotyping

Speech acts, as theorized by Austin (1962) and Searle (1969), are actions performed through language. In *Skinny Girl in Transit*, speech acts such as compliments, insults, and advice often reveal underlying stereotypes about plus-size women. These speech acts serve as a means for characters to either affirm or challenge societal expectations regarding body image.

Compliments in SGIT frequently function as double-edged swords, simultaneously offering praise while reinforcing stereotypes. For instance, when Tiwa begins to lose weight, she receives compliments such as, "You look amazing, much slimmer now." While the compliment appears positive, it implies that Tiwa's worth or attractiveness is tied to her weight loss. This speech act reinforces the stereotype that slimness equates to beauty

and success. In this context, the compliment is not merely an acknowledgment of Tiwa's appearance but also an affirmation of societal standards that valorize thinness over other body types.

Conversely, speech acts in the form of insults or unsolicited advice often serve to reinforce negative stereotypes about plus-size women. In one episode, a character advises Tiwa to "consider the gym," framing it as concern for her health. However, the illocutionary force of this advice is not about Tiwa's health but rather about her conforming to societal beauty standards. The speech act here functions as a form of social control, reminding Tiwa of the expectations placed upon her body. This aligns with the findings of Adepeju and Ojo (2018), who note that speech acts related to body image often reflect underlying societal pressures to conform to idealized standards of beauty.

However, SGIT also features moments where speech acts challenge these stereotypes. Tiwa, in her interactions with friends and romantic interests, often asserts her confidence and self-worth regardless of societal expectations. When she responds to a backhanded compliment with, "I'm comfortable in my own skin, thank you very much," Tiwa performs a speech act that resists the notion that her value is tied to her size. This moment of defiance disrupts the stereotype that plus-size women must always seek validation through weight loss or conform to societal ideals of beauty.

Politeness and Body Image
Politeness theory, developed by Brown and Levinson (1987), focuses on how individuals navigate face-threatening acts (FTAs) in social interactions. In *Skinny Girl in Transit*, politeness strategies are frequently employed to mitigate the potential offense caused by conversations about body image. These strategies are particularly important when characters attempt to discuss Tiwa's weight without causing discomfort or conflict.

Positive politeness, which seeks to affirm the listener's desire to be liked and appreciated, is often used in SGIT to soften comments about Tiwa's size. For example, when Tiwa's sister advises her to "maybe cut down a little on the rice," she frames it as a suggestion rather than a command, using a tone of care and solidarity. This strategy helps to mitigate the face-threatening nature of the comment, allowing the speaker to offer advice without overtly criticizing Tiwa's appearance. By using positive politeness, the speaker attempts to preserve Tiwa's positive face while still reinforcing societal expectations about body size (Brown & Levinson, 1987).

Negative politeness, which aims to respect the listener's autonomy and minimize imposition, is also present in SGIT, especially in scenes where weight and body image are sensitive topics. In one episode, a friend tells Tiwa, "I hope you don't mind, but have you thought about joining a fitness class?" The hedging in this statement "I hope you don't mind" is a classic example of negative politeness. It acknowledges the potential offense of discussing Tiwa's body while attempting to soften the impact. By using this politeness strategy, the speaker tries to minimize the face-threatening act of suggesting that Tiwa needs to lose weight.

These politeness strategies in SGIT reflect the social delicacy surrounding discussions of body image, particularly for plus-size women. Characters often navigate these interactions carefully, using politeness to maintain social harmony while still conveying implicit societal judgments. The use of positive and negative politeness strategies underscores the tension between upholding societal norms and maintaining interpersonal relationships in the series.

The analysis of conversational implicature, speech acts, and politeness strategies in *Skinny Girl in Transit* reveals how language is used to both reinforce and challenge societal expectations about body image. Through indirect communication, speech acts, and politeness, characters in the series navigate sensitive conversations about Tiwa's size, reflecting the broader cultural attitudes toward plus-size women in Nigerian society. By examining these pragmatic strategies, this study demonstrates how SGIT both mirrors and critiques societal norms, offering a more nuanced representation of plus-size women in Nollywood.

VI.   Findings
Summary of Key Findings
The analysis of *Skinny Girl in Transit* reveals that language in the series both reflects societal norms surrounding body image and creates space for resisting stereotypes about plus-size women. Using conversational implicature, speech acts, and politeness strategies, the series engages with deeply ingrained societal expectations regarding beauty and body size while simultaneously offering a critique of these norms.

One of the key findings is that *Skinny Girl in Transit* consistently uses indirect language, particularly conversational implicature, to address sensitive topics such as Tiwa's weight. Characters frequently rely on humor and subtle remarks to comment on Tiwa's body without directly addressing it, thereby reinforcing the societal belief that slimness is more desirable. These indirect comments serve as a reflection of the larger cultural discourse on body image in Nigerian society, where discussions about weight often remain implicit rather than over.

However, the series also challenges these norms by presenting Tiwa as a complex, confident character who navigates societal pressures on her own terms. Rather than passively accepting the judgments of others, Tiwa frequently asserts her self-worth, using language to resist societal expectations about her body. This creates a

space for alternative representations of plus-size women, countering the stereotypical portrayals often seen in Nollywood (Adepeju & Ojo, 2018).

Pragmatic Strategies and the Portrayal of Plus-Size Women

The use of pragmatic strategies in *Skinny Girl in Transit* specifically conversational implicature, speech acts, and politeness plays a central role in shaping the portrayal of plus-size women.

Conversational Implicature is employed to convey societal messages about body image in subtle, indirect ways. For example, characters often use humor to imply that Tiwa's size is a concern, without directly criticizing her. This reflects the societal tendency to avoid explicit discussions about body image while still conveying implicit judgments. By relying on these implicatures, the series mirrors real-life social interactions where body image is a sensitive topic that is often addressed indirectly (Grice, 1975).

Speech Acts, such as compliments, insults, or advice, are key to understanding how language is used to reinforce or challenge stereotypes. Compliments directed at Tiwa following her weight loss are not merely acts of praise; they also reinforce the societal ideal that thinness equates to attractiveness and success. On the other hand, Tiwa's assertive responses to backhanded compliments or unsolicited advice act as speech acts of resistance, allowing her to challenge the stereotypes imposed upon her. This use of speech acts highlights the dual function of language in SGIT: it both reinforces and subverts societal norms (Austin, 1962; Searle, 1969).

Politeness Strategies are frequently employed to mitigate the potential offense caused by discussions about body image. Characters use positive politeness to maintain harmony and express concern for Tiwa, even when indirectly commenting on her weight. Negative politeness is also evident in the way characters hedge their remarks, acknowledging the sensitivity of the topic while still expressing societal expectations. These politeness strategies illustrate how language can simultaneously uphold and critique social norms, offering a more nuanced portrayal of the complex interactions surrounding body image in Nigerian society (Brown & Levinson, 1987).

In summary, the pragmatic strategies used in *Skinny Girl in Transit* shape the portrayal of plus-size women in ways that reflect societal norms while also creating opportunities for resistance. By analyzing these linguistic elements, the study demonstrates how language both perpetuates and challenges stereotypes about body size, offering a more complex and empowering representation of plus-size women in Nollywood.

VII.   Conclusion

Summary of Key Points

This study has analyzed the use of pragmatic strategies in *Skinny Girl in Transit* to examine how language both reflects and challenges societal norms regarding body image. The findings indicate that conversational implicature, speech acts, and politeness strategies are crucial in shaping the portrayal of plus-size women in the series. Using indirect language, the series reinforces societal expectations about slimness and beauty, but it also creates space for alternative representations by allowing Tiwa, the protagonist, to assert her identity and challenge these expectations. In this way, *Skinny Girl in Transit* offers a more complex portrayal of plus-size women than is typical in Nollywood, illustrating both the constraints and possibilities of media representation in shaping cultural perceptions of body image.

The implicit messages conveyed through humor and subtle remarks often reinforce societal beliefs about desirability and thinness, but the series simultaneously empowers its protagonist to resist these judgments through language. By focusing on these pragmatic elements, this study demonstrates how Nollywood media can both uphold and contest entrenched stereotypes about plus-size women, offering valuable insights into how media shapes societal attitudes toward body image in Nigerian culture.

Contribution to the Field

This study contributes significantly to the fields of pragmatics, media representation, and cultural studies by exploring how language use in film reflects broader societal norms and values. In the field of **pragmatics**, the analysis of conversational implicature, speech acts, and politeness strategies expands our understanding of how language conveys implicit and explicit messages about body image. The application of these linguistic theories to a Nollywood film like *Skinny Girl in Transit* highlights how language can serve both as a tool for reinforcing social norms and as a means of resistance.

In the realm of **media representation**, this research provides new insights into the portrayal of plus-size women in Nollywood, a significant yet underexplored area of study. By focusing on how language constructs these representations, this study deepens our understanding of the intersection between body image, identity, and media in African cultural contexts. The findings challenge the stereotypical portrayals of plus-size women as merely comedic or undesirable, showing how nuanced linguistic strategies can contribute to more complex and empowering characterizations.

In **cultural studies**, this research adds to the ongoing discussion about how media representations shape and are shaped by cultural norms. The study of a popular Nollywood series like *Skinny Girl in Transit* allows for

a critical reflection on the role of media in constructing and deconstructing societal expectations regarding body size, beauty, and identity. The research underscores the importance of media as a site of cultural production where societal values are both reflected and contested.

Suggestions for Further Research
There are several avenues for future research that could build on the findings of this study. One promising direction is to **expand the analysis to other Nollywood films** that feature plus-size characters, to explore whether the pragmatic strategies identified in *Skinny Girl in Transit* are consistent across the industry. By comparing different films, future research could identify patterns in how body image is constructed and whether there are broader trends in Nollywood's treatment of plus-size women.

Another important area for further study is the **exploration of media forms beyond film**, such as television, social media, or web series. As media landscapes evolve, particularly with the rise of digital platforms, representations of body image and societal norms are likely to change. Analyzing how language in different media forms conveys implicit and explicit messages about body image would provide a broader understanding of how societal expectations are maintained or challenged in diverse contexts.

Finally, research could focus on the **audience reception** of these media portrayals. Understanding how viewers interpret the implicit and explicit messages conveyed through language in films like *Skinny Girl in Transit* could offer insights into how media representations of body image influence real-life attitudes and behaviors. This would provide a more comprehensive view of the relationship between media, language, and societal norms, particularly in the context of body image and identity.

In conclusion, this study not only sheds light on the portrayal of plus-size women in Nollywood but also contributes to a deeper understanding of the power of language in shaping media representations. By using pragmatic theories to analyze dialogue, this research highlights the potential for media to both reinforce and challenge societal norms, offering new perspectives on the complex interactions between body image, identity, and culture.

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