

ARTICLE



The depiction of *chiramu* register and the female voice and communicator in Tsitsi Dangarembga's *Nervous Conditions*

Tyanai Charamba^a and Terrence Musanga^b

^aFaculty of Education, Department of Humanities, Business Development and Arts Education, Midlands State University, Gweru, Zimbabwe; ^bFaculty of Arts, Department of Languages and Culture, Midlands State University, Zvishavane, Zimbabwe

ABSTRACT

This article examines Tsitsi Dangarembga's depiction of the *Chiramu* register in *Nervous Conditions*. The article argues that, in Shona culture, the type of relationship one enjoys in the family determines the register that he/she employs in order to score success in communication. Therefore, as the article argues further, an appreciation of these relationships and registers is critical to our understanding of the politics and power dynamics in *Nervous Conditions*. In order to successfully argue the spelt viewpoint, this article demonstrates with examples that the character Lucia strategically manipulates the *Chiramu* register in her engagement, negotiation and bargaining with the character Babamukuru to further her interests and maximise her security. Such an exercise underscores the flexibility and fluidity of relationships in the text. In the final analysis the article concludes that Shona traditional society provided checks and balances on how power and authority was exercised.

ARTICLE HISTORY

Received 15 November 2021
Accepted 26 May 2022

KEYWORDS

Chiramu register;
communication; negotiation;
Shona culture; *Nervous Conditions*

Introduction

This article examines Tsitsi Dangarembga's (1988) depiction of the *Chiramu* relationship and register in *Nervous Conditions*. Dangarembga employs the *Chiramu* relationship and register as a strategy of promoting women's status and the female voice and communicator in the text. Thus, the article argues that, in Shona culture, the type of relationship one enjoys in the family determines the register that he/she employs during communicative interaction and success in communication is hinged upon the correct and acceptable employment and manipulation of the register which aids him/her. Therefore, an appreciation of these relationships and registers is a critical and practical new paradigm for understanding the politics and power dynamics in *Nervous Conditions* and in the Shona culture. That view is advanced in this article following an understanding that, 'Literature (of which the novel *Nervous Conditions* is part), is quite pivotal in cultural revival against the crippling character of Eurocentrism' (Tembo & Mutasa, 2019, p. 126). P'Bitek (1986) argues that, 'Son', 'mother', 'daughter', 'father', 'uncle', 'husband', 'grandfather', 'wife', 'clansman', 'mother-in-law', 'chief', 'medicine man' and many other such