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Afro-American Literature: A Systemic Functional Analysis of Discourse in Selected Afro-American Slave Narratives

A Thesis

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Abstract

This research is an attempt to examine the major role of the language of some Afro-American slave narratives in formulating and expressing their sufferings in slavery. The study achieves this aim through the linguistic analysis of two slave narratives; *Incidents in the Life of a Slave Girl: Written by herself* (1861) by Harriet Jacobs, and *Narrative of the Life of Frederick Douglass, an American Slave: Written by himself* (1845) by Frederick Douglass. This study adopts the systemic functional model of M.A.K Halliday (2004) and the transitivity patterns of Geoff Thompson (2014). The researcher picks only one meta-function, the ideational meta-function, with its major three transitivity components; participants, processes and circumstances. The hallmark of the transitivity analysis in this research can be summarized in answering the following three questions; what are the dominant process types? What are the participant roles within the novel? And what types of circumstances are included, where in the text? Eight extracts from each novel are chosen to examine these previous components taking into account the role of gender in determining the author's choice of specific processes instead of others to represent his personal experience in slavery. This research reveals that gender has a great effect on the language of the two authors. Both of Douglass and Jacobs preferred material processes and circumstance of location rather than others to be used in formulating their painful experiences in bondage. In addition, they were the main participants of the six processes.

Key words: *Systemic functional grammar, Ideational meta-function, Transitivity components, Afro-American literature and Slave narratives.*

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Chapter One

Introduction

1.1. Introduction:

Language cannot be separated from human being's life. It is the most significant tool of contact and communication between people in society. Kroger and Wood (2000) assert that language can express one's needs, feelings, ideology, thoughts, describe things and understand the world around. Gee (2005) also explains, "Language has a magical property: when we speak or write, we design what we have to say to fit the situation in which we are communicating. But at the same time, how we speak or write creates that very situation" (p. 10). Pompan (1999) also suggests that "words have power; we should speak them with caution for we create our universe, our environment, our relationships, our experiences all through the power of how, where, when and what we speak" (p. 1). The current study is concerned with examining the language which is used by Afro- American writers in the nineteenth century in their Narratives¹. Through these narratives, they could introduce a full portrait of their horrible experience and suffering in slavery.

Allain (2013) defines *Slavery* as "the status or condition of a person over whom any or all of the powers attaching to the right of ownership are exercised" (p. 2). In other words, slavery means that someone owns another person and considers him/her a personal property that he/she has the right to exploit. Bales (2012) establishes:

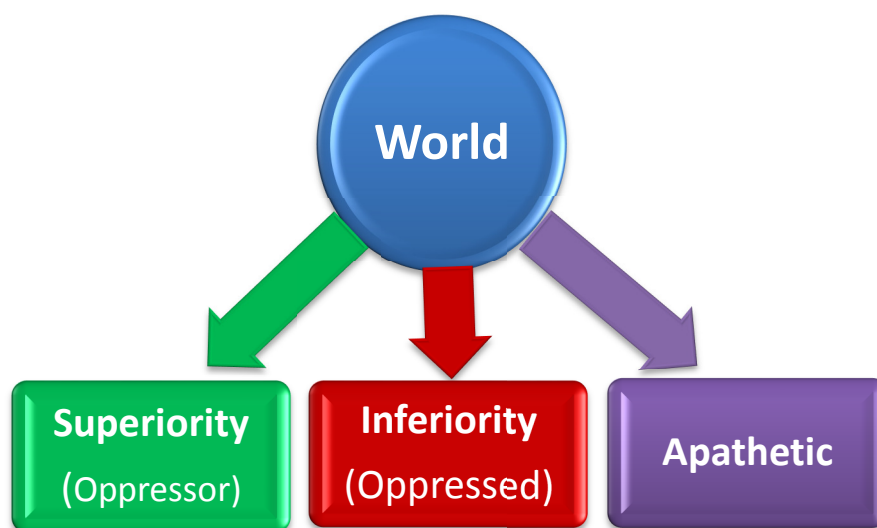
¹ The researcher will use the terms "novel", "narrative" and "autobiography" interchangeably.

Slavery is the control of one person (the slave) by another (the slaveholder or slaveholders). This control transfers agency, freedom of movement, access to the body, and labor and its product and benefits to the slaveholder. The control is supported and exercised through violence and its threat. The aim of this control is primarily economic exploitation, but may include sexual use or psychological benefit. (p. 13)

The notion of slavery exists from the ancient times and lasts until nowadays. The world consists of two groups of people; one group establishes itself as superior and considers the other group inferior such as the superiority of men versus the inferiority of women, the whites vs. the blacks, the ruler vs. the ruled, and the west vs. the east. The white people persecute and enslave the black ones and make them suffering. The black people suffer because of their own color; their only sin in life is the difference of their skin color. They are considered “exceptions” that have no right in life and are created to serve their white masters. (Joseph & Skerrett, 2002, p. 1)

Suffering, in general, is a result of people’s division into three categories; superior, inferior and apathetic people. The second group (the oppressed) suffers because of the blindness and the silence of the third group (apathetic people) for the tyranny of the first one (the oppressor). Therefore, the main purpose of slave narratives is to draw the attention of the third group of people to the second ones' suffering. In other words, the slave narrative is a loud cry from slaves asking the society to feel their existence and their sufferings. Figure (1.1) illustrates this idea:

Figure (1.1): Representation of the world's categorization of people



(The diagram is mine)

1.2. Research Methodology and structure of the analysis:

The study is concerned with applying Geoff Thompson's systemic functional grammar (2014) to some selected Afro-American slave narratives. Thompson follows Halliday's theory of systemic functional linguistics (2004). To achieve this aim, two literary works are chosen. These works are entitled; *Incidents in the life of a slave girl, written by herself* (1861) by Harriet Jacobs and *Narrative of the life of Frederick Douglass, an American slave: written by himself* (1845) by Frederick Douglass. First, the researcher reads the two novels, and then she divides them into extracts according to the sufferings of the two authors in slavery. The two novels are full of several themes such as literacy, search for identity, moral conflict between slavery and Christianity, family loyalty and the quest for freedom, but the major and dominant theme is

the slave's physical and emotional suffering. So, the main focus of the application is on the language which is used by the two slave authors in expressing and formulating their suffering.

These two novels belong to the autobiography genre which is related to recounting one's experience through life. The convenient analytical tool which fulfills this point is the experiential meaning (part of ideational meta-function) especially the system of transitivity in the light of its major components (participant, process and circumstance). So, the analysis of the two novels focuses on the transitivity choices of the two authors' language.

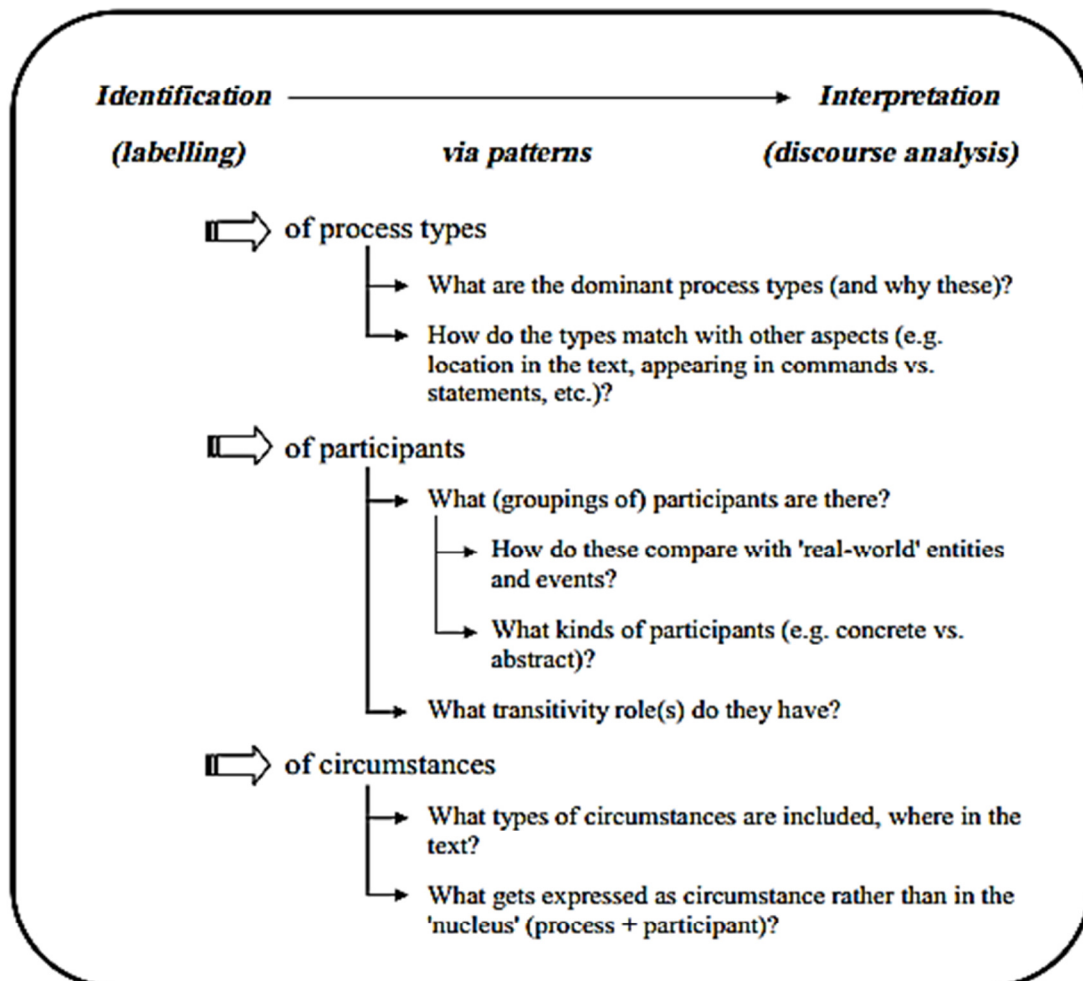
Based on this methodology, the analysis is structured as follow:

The analysis is presented in two chapters; chapter (3) handles the transitivity choices in Jacobs' narrative and chapter (4) tackles the transitivity choices in Douglass' narrative. To simplify the analysis, the researcher chooses eight extracts from each of the two novels focusing on the author's suffering in slavery.

According to Thompson's method of analysis, the researcher divides each extract into sentences and then into clauses to accurately determine which process type is embedded in the clause. These clauses are numbered and then classified according to the three constituents of transitivity (participant, process, circumstance). These previous components are represented in italic square brackets. These brackets precede the element to which it refers. In addition, each extract is provided by a table to calculate the selections of the different process

types. The following figure (1. 2) summarizes Thompson's method of analysis through some questions related to each component.

Figure (1.2): Working with transitivity.



(Thompson, 2014, p. 132)

The research sums up the findings of the two chapters and then compare between them to uncover how gender affects the author's language through the selection of a specific type of process to represent his own experience. This is discussed in chapter five.

1.3. Problem of the Study:

The major problem of this work lies in the researcher's notice of the lack of various linguistic analyses of the Afro-American literary works. Therefore, the researcher chooses this idea as a trial to enrich the field of the linguistic analysis, especially transitivity analysis, of the Afro-American literary works.

1.4. Objectives of the Study:

The main aims of this study are as follow:

- Reveal how transitivity system is applicable to Afro- American literature.
- Differentiate between the language of male and female in Afro- American literature.
- Analyze some linguistic features of two different samples of Afro- American literature.
- Clarify the main features of the theme of suffering in the light of transitivity system.

1.5. Research Hypotheses:

This study assumes that gender differences can affect one's language use by selecting specific type of processes and circumstances rather than others in representing his personal experience in life. Furthermore, systemic functional grammar is an effective and suitable tool of analysis that helps people to understand the language of the nineteenth century Afro-American slave writers. This is clear through

examining transitivity choices in expressing their own sufferings under slavery system.

1.6. Data of the research:

Two African American narratives are chosen to make a comprehensive and effective analysis. The reason for choosing these two novels goes to their popularity in the nineteenth century and their concern with personal experiences. The first narrative was written by the black female slave, Harriet Jacobs and the other was by the black male writer, Frederick Douglass. The two narratives are autobiographies which recount their painful experience in the brutal system of slavery. They were the most influential slave narratives in the nineteenth century and they were considered an addition to Afro- American literature.

1.6.1. Synopsis of Harriet Jacobs' autobiography:

Incidents in the life of a slave girl: written by herself (1861) is a sentimental autobiographical novel written by a black slave woman under the pseudonym, Linda Brent. Lydia Maria Child, the white editor, supported Harriet Jacobs in publishing her novel to prove its truthfulness. Gibson (n. d.) explores that “the majority of the abolitionist editors were extremely careful to record and publish only the factual details they received from the former slaves” (para.9). Jacobs' narrative is considered the longest novel in Afro-American narratives for it consists of forty one chapters. This narrative presents a painful experience of a female slave under the cruel system of slavery. It recounts the narrator's suffering and struggle from the childhood to the adulthood. When Linda was a child, she spent six years without being aware of her enslavement. She was

treated well by her kind mistress when she was a child. When her mother died, her grandmother, Aunt Martha, had the responsibility of taking care of her.

Her real suffering began in the Flint's house. When she became fifteen years old, Dr. Flint began to harass her by his indecent words and his some non- respectable behaviors. Mrs. Flint began to be jealous and angry with her. She tried to get rid of her for fear of stealing her husband. To Linda, Dr. Flint was the source of anxiety and fear. To escape from his control, she loved a free white neighbor called Mr. Sands and wanted to marry him. Dr. Flint rejected this marriage trying to convince her to make an illegal affair with him. But, she married her lover. She became pregnant and gave birth to her first baby, Benny. Dr. Flint and her grandmother outraged and rebuked her for her shameful offence. After a short time, she gave birth to her second child, Ellen. Dr. Flint beat her and threatened her that he will send her to serve in the plantation. He offered her to go to live with him in a small and remote cottage, but she refused. She planned to escape to get rid of the chains of her master and get her freedom.

She escaped to the north, though it was difficult for her to do so. She was so connected with her family especially her children. They were around her and supported her all the time. She hid in a small room in her grandmother's house. Her master searched for her everywhere and he never suspected that she was near to him. She spent seven years in this confinement which affected her mental and physical health. From this place, she could see her children and hear their voices and this made her reassured a little bit. Dr. Flint died and she at last got her freedom. She

triumphed over him and the cruel system of slavery through her resistance.

Jacobs not merely concentrated on reciting her personal life, but also cared about narrating some other stories of other slaves around her whom she witnessed their struggles and sufferings under the cruel system of slavery such as mother-children separation and permanently whipping till death because of trifle issues. She desired to attract the white reader's attention to the savagery of slavery. The significance of Jacobs' narrative lies on calling for the human rights especially women's rights in the oppressive white society. Stover (2003) asserts "antebellum African American women autobiographers, like Jacobs, chose to make their stories public in an effort to effect changes for themselves and for their black brothers and sisters" (p. 150).

Jacobs was able to depict women's suffering in slavery through her personal narrative. She uncovers some important and serious issues related to their sufferings. One of these issues is the sexual exploitation of the female slaves by their own masters. These females must keep silent of these despicable deeds for fear of disgrace and of being killed. Jacobs introduced this issue by using polite language (Yellin, 2001). Lockard & Penglu (2011) say that Jacobs' narrative "joins a global literature of witness to violence against women. These narratives document and trace the continued prevalence and acceptance of crimes against women's persons" (p. 6). The deprivation of mothers from their children is another issue. This matter is very difficult for any mother. She mentions a lot of stories about the mother-children separation such as her grandmother and her uncle Benjamin who were separated from each other and this makes

her grandmother suffering. Linda was separated from her children during her confinement to secure their freedom.

1.6.2. Synopsis of Frederick Douglass' autobiography:

Narrative in the life of Frederick Douglass, an American slave: written by himself (1845) is a novel written by an ex-slave male writer. It belongs to the autobiographical genre. It is a simple and short novel. It consists of an introduction, eleven chapters and an appendix. The introduction is written by William Lloyd Garrison; the most notable American abolitionist, to confirm the originality of Douglass' work. In this narrative, Douglass acts as both the protagonist and the narrator.

Douglass' narrative is concerned with a journey of suffering, struggle and then success of a black man in the white oppressive society. Starvation, mother- children separation, racism, violence against slaves, economical exploitation of slaves by their white masters, seeking for literacy and the dissociation of the black family relations are the prominent themes in Douglass' novel. Through his autobiography, Douglass introduces an atrocious image of slavery which makes the reader aware of the disadvantages of this savage and abusive system.

This narrative recounts the painful experience of a man from his childhood to his adulthood, from slavery to freedom. Like many black slaves, Douglass is unsure of his exact date of birth. He didn't know his father and never saw him. He only heard that his father is a white man called Captain Anthony, his master, but he was unsure of this matter. He was separated from his mother since he was a little child. He met her for a short time through the night. Their meeting was very difficult because she

was working all the day in the plantation and travelled a long distance to see and reassure him. He has two sisters and one brother working in the same house but never meet each other as an ordinary family. “The Black family structure was damaged severely when children were taken from mothers and husbands from wives and forbidden to reunite. Families were destroyed by practices of slavery” (Hamilton, 2005, para. 8).

After his mother’s death, he began to be transmitted from one master to another. He was taken to serve in the plantation of Mr. Colonel Lloyd. He found inhuman and severe treatment there. He was beaten and whipped as many other slaves. Then, he went to work in the house of a new master called Mr. Hugh Auld in Baltimore. Douglass was treated well by his kind mistress, Mrs. Sophia Auld. She began to teach him the letters to make him able to read and write, but her husband prevented her. He told her that education will give slaves the power and the realization of their human rights. In addition, they will be insurgent servants. After this situation, Douglass knew the value of being an educated person. He realized that education is the first step in achieving his freedom. He insisted on learn how to read and write.

After the death of his master, Douglass was taken to work in Mr. Auld’s plantation. Douglass experienced a hard life there. In this plantation, slaves have no clothes, no beds and walking with naked feet. The shortage of food makes children compete for getting enough to eat. Mr. Auld was a cruel man who claims religiosity to justify his criminal deeds against his slaves. He viewed Douglass as an inactive slave and unworthy to work in his plantation. He hired him for one year to a cruel man, Mr. Edward Covey, as a punishment.

Mr. Covey is an evil person who has a bad reputation. He is famous for humiliating his slaves both physically and spiritually. Douglass was regularly beaten and whipped at the hand of this man. Douglass became unable to bear this severe treatment, so he decided to resist his status and never be whipped again. One day, Mr. Covey entered the stable where Douglass works to whip him as usual. He was surprised by Douglass' advance in a trial of self-defense. Douglass triumphed over his master. He then resolved to run away with some slaves to get rid of this cruel man, but they are caught and imprisoned. Mr. Thomas Auld sent him to Baltimore again and there he worked as a carpenter at the shipyard of Mr. Hugh Auld.

Douglass faced the problem of racism there. Some of his white colleagues were disturbed from the presence of a large number of the blacks in their country and working with them. They were afraid about their jobs. One day, they gathered around Douglass to beat and kill him but, he fought them. He changed his name from Frederick Bailey to Frederick Douglass. He dispensed his old name as a slave and began a new life with a new name. At last, Douglass succeeded in achieving his ultimate goal of freedom, married and became an abolitionist speaker.

Both Jacobs' and Douglass' narratives are not ordinary at all; they are among the most well-known and widely read slave narratives for their representation of the painful experience of black people under the cruel system of slavery and revealing the hidden secrets of it. These narratives show the narrators' lives from birth to freedom. These narratives are influenced by the time and circumstances in which they published. They focus on the narrators' trail to improve their circumstances and those of

other black people in the white oppressive society. Therefore, the main focus of this study is examining the language of the black authors under these circumstances.

1.7. Background:

1.7.1. Afro-American Literature:

Literature can be defined as “the body of written works produced in a particular language, country, or age” (Merriam-Webster, 2016). It is divided into three categories; prose, drama, and poetry. It is not restricted to written factitious works, but it can be no-fiction and oral speech or songs. Each country has its own literature which reflects its language and culture such as Canadian, African, English, Indian and American literatures (Early, 2000).

American literature is a group of literary works produced by American writers concerning with the American society, life and culture. It emerged in America since its existence in the form of colonies by some English immigrant writers such as John Smith, William Bradford and Thomas Ashe (Gray, 2012). American writers refused the domination of authority and called for equality and democracy. This was reflected on their literary works. They use literature as an effective tool to improve their community and to treat the social problems. They refused the old direction and aspired to create a new tendency by which they could express their dreams, ideologies, feelings and social values. Among these writers are; Samuel Adams, Thomas Paine and Benjamin Franklin (Beers, 2007).

Macy (1921) defines American literature as “a branch of English literature, as truly as are English books written in Scotland or South Africa. It lies almost entirely in the nineteenth century when the ideas and books of the western world were freely interchanged among the nations and became accessible to an increasing number of readers” (para.1).

Afro-American literature represents an inevitable part of the American culture and literature. It is a revolutionary literary change which begins from Phillis Wheatley, a great black poet, to Toni Morrison, the modernist African writer. In the words of Warren (2011), African American literature is “a post emancipation phenomenon that gained its coherence as an undertaking in the social world defined by the system of Jim Crow segregation that ensued after the nation’s retreat from Reconstruction” (p. 1). This literature allows the Chicano, Asian and Native American literatures to appear.

Afro-American writing began to appear in the 18th and 19th century. It was established in United States, after its independence, by some black authors who wrote about their experiences in slavery after achieving their liberty (Dixon, 1987). Those authors struggle in the white society calling for equality and trying to prove their identity. They could publish their own writings with the aid of some white editors to be believed by the white community.

These writings take an autobiographical form which was known as slave narratives. These narratives are the consequence of the struggle between the northern white people who support the brutal system of slavery and the southern black slaves who call for their freedom in the late eighteenth and early nineteenth century (Fisch, 2007). Slavery,

racism, and social equality are the most prominent themes in Afro-American slave narratives (Wikipedia, 2016). Andrews & Adams (2004) argue:

Slave narratives were important means of opening a dialogue between blacks and whites about slavery and freedom. The most influential slave narratives of the antebellum era were designed to enlighten white readers about both the realities of slavery as an institution and the humanity of black people as individuals deserving of full human rights. (para. 3)

There are three important eras of disagreement on the major goal of Afro-American literature. They are; Harlem Renaissance (1919-1940), Civil Rights (1950) and Black Arts Movement (1960). Early (2000) argues:

Each [era] occurred during or immediately after a major American war; and in each instance, as has been the case for African Americans in their struggle in the United States since the end of Reconstruction, the major political concerns about citizenship and community are tied, often expressly so, with the meaning and function of African-American art, generally, and African-American literature, in particular. (p. 279)

Afro-American literature was flourished in the period of Harlem Renaissance (1917-1935). In this era, there were a huge number of black populations in the north. This movement was led by a group of new young generation of writers and artists who were proud of their African-

American identity. They aspired to remove the concept of racial discrimination and achieved equality in the white society. They also insisted to improve both the content and the form off their works. The most notable and significant black writer in this era was Jean Tommer. His novel *Cane*, as stated by Elliott (1991), “recovered both the beauty and the pain of African American life in the South and as celebration of racial self-discovery it recuperated an identity that had been undetermined and distorted by racial oppression and economic victimization” (p. 419).

After this period, the women’s writings began to increase as a trail of advocating the feminist identity and expressing the women’s persecution in slavery such as Toni Morison, Alice Walker, Harriet Jacobs and Zora Neale Hurston. A lot of significant Afro-American political and cultural institutions were established, such as *National Association of Colored People* (NAACP) founded by W. E. B. Du Bois, *Universal Negro Improvement Association* (UNIA) (1887–1940), by Marcus Garvey and the National Urban League.

There was a debate between critics and writers, a long time ago, concerning the importance and function of Afro-American literature. Some critics argue that the fundamental function of Afro-American literature is as propaganda for the advancement of the black society (Baraka, 1963; Du Bois, 1926; Joyce, 1987; Karenga, 1968; Neal, 1968 & Wright, 1937). They believe that propaganda is the principle for creativity in literary works.

W. E. B. Du Bois was another influential black individual in this time. He supported this opinion suggesting that “all Art is propaganda and ever must be, despite the wailing of the purists. I stand in utter

shamelessness and say whatever art I have for writing has been used always for propaganda for gaining the right of black folk to love and enjoy” (1926, p. 757). He also adds that one of the basic functions of Art is to develop and dignify the black society. Other writers and critics disagree with this view, they argue that art shouldn't be restricted to politics or have political purposes, but it should be for Art's sake (Baldwin, 1949; Baldwin, 1951; Ellison, 1963-1964; Johnson, 1921& Locke, 1925).

In short, regardless of the differences of opinion, Afro-American literature became a valuable independent art which has its history, writers and style. In addition, it became the concern of the readers and the researchers of the whole world.

The most notable black writer in the era of Civil Rights was Richard Wright. He opposed and criticized the black writers of the preceding era for concentrating on the others' issues than the Afro-American ones. In other words, he believed that the black writers should have a responsibility toward their community. In this period, poetry was the main focus in black literature. The black poets tried to simplify the language of their poetry to attract a large number of the white audiences. Among those writers was Amiri Baraka who reshaped and improved the form of the black poetry through his poem *Three Movements and a Coda*.

In the era of Black Arts Movement, Larry Neal was the most prominent writer who believed that literature is the basic instrument for the development of societies. He agreed with Wright's opinion of the Harlem Renaissance era in its “[failure] to take roots, to link itself concretely to the struggles of the community, to become its voice and

spirit” (1968, p. 711). Poetry and drama are the two literary fields in this period which accomplish Neal’s belief of the basic role of literature. These fields call for the unity of races and strengthening the black community.

1.7.2. Slave Narratives:

The slave narrative is a sub-category of Afro-American literature. It is defined as “...any first person account of the experience of being enslaved” (“the slave narrative”, p. 1). These narratives appeared at the hand of some former slaves who succeeded in achieving their freedom. Its main purpose is to recount the slave’s personal experience of enslavement and attract the American and European world’s attention to the victims of the brutal system of slavery. Its significance lies in increasing one’s knowledge of the American literature and culture. It also portrays the tough relationship between the white cruel slave holders and the weak, oppressed black victims.

Andrews (1993) states “Throughout the nineteenth century and well into the twentieth, autobiographies of former slaves dominated the Afro-American narrative tradition. Approximately sixty-five American slave narratives were published in book or pamphlet form before 1865” (p. 78). Many slave writers tried to describe “...how, as children, they slowly gained the harsh awareness that they were not free like the white children in their midst and how, as adults, they rebelled against their status as chattel property and strove for freedom” (National Humanities center, 2007, para. 1).

In the nineteenth century, White people prevented their slaves from being educated. Education was generally an illegal matter (Dodson, 1999). They believed that education represents a great threat and danger for it gives the slaves the opportunity to revolt against their masters. The ex-slave writers, through their autobiography, tried to prove their identity, independence and maintain their humanity. They recount their struggle, suffering, severe treatment, how they escape from enslavement and how they achieved their freedom at last.

Therefore, slave narratives, as explained by Andrews (2004), are considered valuable sources for readers by which they know the details of the slaves' daily life in the white master's house. Gibson (n. d.) also asserts in (Slave Narratives: Black autobiography in Nineteenth-Century America) that most of the slave narratives relied on a variety of sources such as diaries and letters of whites, plantation and local government records and documents, census records, newspapers, and the testimony of acquaintances of the narrators.

Olaudah Equiano was the first black writer to represent his personal life in an autobiographical novel, *The Interesting Narrative of the Life of Olaudah Equiano; or, Gustavus Vassa, the African, Written by Himself* (1789). Equiano's autobiography was very popular in the nineteenth century for it presented an explicit image of the brutality of slavery. In addition, it introduced a full detailed portrait of the life in Africa. He paved the way for the appearance of other slave narratives by some African American writers who also supported the abolitionist movement. These narratives are; *Incidents in the life of a slave girl: written by herself* (1861), *Twelve Years a Slave: Narrative of Solomon*

Northup (1853), *Narrative of William Wells Brown, An American Slave* (1884), *Narrative of the Life of Frederick Douglass, An American Slave* (1845), *The color purple* by Alice Walker (1982) and etc...

The authors of these narratives and other black writers, through their autobiographies, insisted to put an end to the oppressive, evil and cruel system of slavery. Their narratives are considered a source of encouragement for other slaves to fight for their liberty from the chains of the white oppressive society. These narratives led to the prominence of the Afro-American literature in American community and in the whole world as well.

Slave narratives have some common features. Olney (1985) and Bland (2001) state that the black authors began their narratives by giving some information about their birth place, their status as slaves, and their parentage. They give some details about the life in the master's house, their cruelties against slaves and the brutal treatment. In addition, they describe their own attempts for escape to achieve their liberty. They used the first person pronoun (I) to express their own mental and spiritual independence.

1.7.3. Autobiography:

Anderson (2001) defines autobiography as a “retrospective prose narrative produced by a real person concerning his own existence, focusing on his individual life, in particular on the development of his personality” (p. 2). This word is derived from Greek language; it is divided into three words *auto* (self) - *bio* (life) - *graphy* (to write) (Andrews, 1993). In other words, this word means that someone recounts

his experience through life depending on his memory as the primary source of information. According to Bates (1937), autobiography is a “narrative of the past of a person by the person concerned” (p. 2).

This genre emerged in the second century B.C and continues till nowadays. The first autobiography appeared at the hand of the Chinese historian, Sima Qian when he wrote a brief tale about his life in the *Shiji*. Autobiography can be classified into four categories; thematic such as *Mein Kampf* by Adolf Hitler’s, religious as *Sartor Resartus* by Thomas Carlyle, intellectual such as *The Education of Henry Adams*, and fictional such as *A Portrait of the Artist as a Young Man* by James Joyce (encyclopedia Britannica “autobiography”, 2016).

As stated by Lejeune and Eakin (1989), the autobiographer has three main functions; the author, the narrator and the protagonist. He is the focus of the narrative using the past tense to represent his own life. He uses the first person pronoun (I) to refer to his identity and to express his three functions by one term. He concentrates on some of his memory in forming his narrative. Some autobiographies used pen names and change the real names and places to avoid causing social problems. Therefore, truth is the most significant element in autobiography to differentiate it from fictional novels (Olney, 1985). The matter of truth represents some facts in one’s life, so the autobiographer doesn’t tell all the facts of his personal life which exist only in his memory. There was always something hidden in one’s life which can’t be uncovered.

Autobiography is different from biography. Biography is a story about person’s life written by another person using the third person pronoun as representative of the protagonist of the narrative. It includes

basic facts such as education, work, relationships, death and the person's experiences of these events. In biographical genre, the writer depends on various sources to get information about the protagonist of the narrative such as letters, diaries, newspapers, journals and etc... The following table (1.1) presents the distinction between autobiography and biography and its sub-types according to the narrator's voice in both genres.

Table (1.1): Representation of the narrator's voice in autobiographical and biographical genres

Grammatical person Identity → ↓	I	You	He
Narrator = principal character	Classical autobiography (autodiegetic)	Autobiography in the 2 nd person	Autobiography in the 3 rd person
Narrator ≠ principal character	Biography in the 1 st person (witness narrative) (homodiegetic)	Biography addressed to the model	Classical biography (heterodiegetic)

(Lejeune, 1989, p. 7)

1.7.4. Gender:

Gender can be defined as a “social distinction between masculine and feminine” (Graddol and Swann, 1989, p. 7). The term “gender” is used to refer to social, cultural and psychological constructs that

are imposed upon biological differences between males and females. These biological differences determine gender by causing persistent differences in capabilities and dispositions. Eckert & McConnell-Ginet (2003) argue:

Higher levels of testosterone, for example, are said to lead men to be more aggressive than women; and left-brain dominance is said to lead men to be more rational while their relative lack of brain lateralization should lead women to be more emotional. But the relation between physiology and behavior is not simple, and it is all too easy to leap for gender dichotomies. And the physiology itself is more complex than is usually acknowledged. It has been shown that hormonal levels, brain activity patterns, and even brain anatomy can be a result of different activity as well as a cause. (p. 12)

Gender is an old concept since the beginning of creatures; this concept differs according to the change of time and culture. God divides creatures into two groups; males and females (Goddard& Lindsey, 2000). Each group has its own characteristics and responsibilities in life.

Recently, there is a third group of people who doesn't feel comfort of his gender. It is very difficult to distinct its gender role. In other words, a man is physically male but his behaviors and attitudes are belonging to female ones and vice versa. Male and female are different in their bodies, tendencies, ideologies, emotions, speech and etc... they are socially and biologically different. The stereotypical idea of a man is the physical strength, intellectual, practical persona, aggression, rationality, and courage. The notion of female is related to emotion, smartness of mind

and accuracy. In this research, gender is generally used to clarify its effect on the authors in their selection of specific type of process in expressing the sufferings they experienced in their life as slaves.

Gender and sex as approximate terms are used interchangeably, but there is a difference between these two terms. As pointed out by Litosseliti (2006), “sex relates to a biological and generally binary distinction between male and female, then gender refers to the social behaviors, expectations and attitudes associated with being male and female” (p. 1). So, sex is related to the biological difference of people in which they have no choice, whereas gender is related to the social roles which both male and female have.

People believe that the difference between male and female lies on the biological body and psychological nature only, but it is not true. The matter of maleness and femaleness differs according to the surrounding environment, time, culture and the view of society such as (are the male and female equal in their social roles or not/ have the same rights or not?).

1.8. Research Organization:

This study is designed into six chapters as follow:

Chapter One (Introduction) introduces a general idea of the research topic. It handles the following points; research methodology, its problem, its objectives, some major terms related to the current study and the presentation of the two Afro-American narratives (data of the research).

Chapter Two (Theoretical Framework) is divided into two sections: section one tackles Halliday's systemic functional grammar theory and its three meta-functions. Section two presents Halliday's (2004) and Thompson's (2014) transitivity system and its three major components.

Chapter Three (Transitivity choices in Harriet Jacobs' narrative) applies Thompson's (2014) method of analysis to eight chosen extracts, concerning the narrator's suffering in slavery, from Harriet Jacobs' Afro-American narrative *Incidents in the life of a slave girl: written by herself* (1861).

Chapter Four (Transitivity choices in Frederick Douglass' narrative), as the previous chapter, handles also the application of Thompson's (2014) method of analysis to eight chosen extracts, dealing with the author's suffering under slavery system, from Frederick Douglass' Afro-American autobiography *Narrative of the life of Frederick Douglass, an American slave: written by himself* (1845).

Chapter Five (Results and Comparison) summarizes the findings of the research and draws a comparison between the two narratives in the light of how gender affects the authors' language in presenting their experience by the frequency of transitivity components.

Chapter Six (Conclusion and suggestions for further studies) handles the conclusion of the research in addition to recommendations for other researches.