

A COGNITIVE STYLISTICS STUDY OF MIND-STYLE IN DUL JOHNSON'S *ACROSS THE GULF*

Ogechi Stella Mmeka

Department of English and Literary Studies, Faculty of Arts,
Bingham University Karu,
Nasarawa State, Nigeria

Abstract

This article adopts a cognitive stylistics perspective, applying Schema Theory and Text World Theory to examine mind style in Dul Johnson's *Across the Gulf*. Using qualitative textual analysis, it explores salient passages featuring Ifunanya, Janbut, and Ofala to demonstrate how linguistic choices and narrative structure construct distinct mental worldviews and guide readers' cognitive engagement. The analysis reveals layered text worlds and nested subworlds of memory, imagined futures, and traumatic recall that foreground a semantic split between characters' internal and external realities. Through deliberate schema affirmation and disruption, Johnson invites readers to reconstruct characters' perspectives: Ifunanya gestures toward a maternal schema while contesting imposed silence, Janbut unsettles masculine archetypes through vulnerability and displacement, and Ofala's communal authority fractures under threats to lineage. These stylistic strategies function as powerful devices that cultivate empathy, ethical response, and psychological complexity rooted in experiences of war and dislocation. The study contributes to cognitive stylistics and postcolonial reading practices by showing how text-world construction and schema dynamics mediate cognition and moral engagement with trauma and identity.

Keywords: Schema Theory, Text World Theory, Mind Style, *Across the Gulf*, Trauma

Introduction

Language, as the primary medium of literary expression, is both a vehicle for storytelling and a tool for representing thought, perception, and consciousness. In narrative fiction, linguistic choices shape how readers construct characters' mental worlds and interpret their worldviews. Cognitive stylistics, as described by Stockwell (2020), examines this interaction by treating readers as cognitive beings who draw on prior knowledge and experience to understand texts. It draws on stylistics, cognitive linguistics, discourse analysis, and cognitive psychology to explore how meaning arises during reading, emphasising that meaning is not fixed in a text's structures but negotiated through readers' engagement (Jefferies & McIntyre, 2010; Aluya & Iangba, 2025). Within this framework, mind style highlights how language shapes characters' psychological worlds, revealing their perceptions and emotional states. First conceptualised by Fowler (1977, 1996), and later developed by Semino (2002) and Nuttall (2018), mind style refers to the distinctive linguistic presentation of an individual's mental self and worldview.

In Dul Johnson's *Across the Gulf*, characters' mental functioning requires close analysis to understand how the fictional world is constructed and how readers interpret the author's message. Yet the application of mind style in cognitive stylistics to African war narratives especially those about the Nigerian Civil War, remains underexplored. Most scholarship on *Across the Gulf* foregrounds themes such as war,

identity, and reconciliation, often overlooking the systematic linguistic and cognitive processes that shape characters' worldviews and emotional states. This study addresses this gap by analysing the linguistic construction of mind style in *Across the Gulf*, using Text World Theory and Schema Theory to examine the narrative's representation of consciousness. In so doing, it contributes to scholarship on African war literature and expands the use of cognitive stylistics in analysing war and trauma narratives.

Accordingly, this study seeks to: (1) examine how Text World Theory accounts for the external, internal, and sub-worlds in the novel, showing how these elements project characters' perceptions and thought processes; (2) explore how Schema Theory explains readers' engagement with the text and their interpretation of traumatic and psychological experiences; and (3) identify the linguistic and stylistic patterns; lexical, syntactic, and discourse, that construct characters' mind styles in *Across the Gulf*. These objectives correspond to three research questions: (1) How does Text World Theory reflect the external, internal, and sub-worlds in the novel? (2) In what ways does Schema Theory explain readers' cognitive engagement with the text and their interpretation of trauma? (3) What linguistic patterns and stylistic features construct the characters' mind styles in *Across the Gulf*?

This study is significant for three reasons. It applies cognitive stylistics to African post-war fiction, a field still underexplored in stylistic research. It introduces mind style as both a textual and cognitive concept, demonstrating how Dul Johnson's linguistic choices reveal his characters' worldviews, emotional states, and psychological resilience. Finally, it enriches African literary criticism by moving beyond socio-political critique to explore the cognitive and linguistic layers of war literature, emphasising the psychological and emotional dimensions of conflict.

Empirical Review

The study of mind style has become a key focus within cognitive stylistics. In early stylistic works, Fowler (1977) introduced the term mind style to describe 'any distinctive linguistic representation of individual mental self'. Specifically, he presented mind style as a "cognitive impression" left on the reader by the consistent linguistic choices linked to a character or narrator's worldview. Fowler emphasises "the world-view of an author, or a narrator, or a character, constituted by the ideational structure of the text." However, later scholars, including Semino (2002) and Nuttall (2018), have broadened the concept of mind shift to encompass both the linguistic patterns in a text and the mental constructs that readers generate in their imagination. For example, Semino (2002) distinguishes between the terms mind style and world view, asserting that world view refers to the overarching perception of "reality" or the "text actual world" conveyed through the language of a text. Conversely, the idea of mind style is "most apt to capture those aspects of world views that are primarily personal and cognitive in origin, and which are peculiar to a particular individual or shared by people with similar characteristics" (Semino, 2002, p. 97). This suggests that mind style differs from worldview by focusing on a personal cognitive aspect of the mind, rather than an individual's broader perspective on the world. Semino employs schema theory to illustrate how deviations in narrative language can generate unusual mental perspectives, particularly in texts that depict mental disorders.

A notable area of agreement is the understanding that language underpins mind style. Another shared view is the importance of deviation and foregrounding in signalling mind style. Beyond these agreements, notable differences exist in how mind style is conceptualised. Stockwell (2020) and Nuttall (2018) differ by placing mind style at the interface between text and reader. For Stockwell, mind style is best seen as the experiential quality of reading that emerges from textual patterns, while Nuttall

highlights its dual nature as both linguistic structure and fictional mental construct within the reader's imagination. Unlike Fowler, who believed mind style was embedded in the text, these cognitive stylisticians argue that it is co-created through the interpretive strategic readers use.

In an effort to apply cognitive stylistics' mind style to literary texts, Lugea (2016) makes a notable contribution to the study of cognitive stylistics by focusing on the representation of dementia in fictional narratives. Accordingly, Suleiman et al. (2023) present a detailed analysis of how linguistic and stylistic features reveal the consciousness of characters in Adichie's *Purple Hibiscus*. Aluya & Uduma (2023) examine, in their analysis of *Selected Short Stories in Dul Johnson's Shadows and Ashes*, how linguistic patterns and narrative strategies expose the mental states of characters in Johnson's collection. The study uses qualitative textual analysis of selected short stories from *Shadows and Ashes*, focusing on linguistic features such as transitivity patterns, deixis, modality, and lexical choices, as well as deviations and foregrounding.

The use of mind style in cognitive stylistics for analysing literary texts, as outlined above, reveals both similarities and differences. A key similarity among the three studies is their reliance on cognitive stylistics as a methodological approach to interpreting mind style. They also agree that mind style is a valuable tool for examining how literature portrays internal psychological realities, especially in cases of trauma, silence, or cognitive distortion. However, the studies also highlight significant differences in their scope and focus. Lugea's (2022) research pioneers a large-scale comparative analysis of dementia mind styles across several contemporary novels. Her contribution lies in extending cognitive stylistics beyond single-text analysis to identify unique features of dementia representation across multiple works. Conversely, Suleiman et al. (2023) focus on Adichie's *Purple Hibiscus*, analysing how linguistic elements such as ellipsis and passivisation depict the protagonist Kambili's psychological state of suppression and muted resistance. Meanwhile, Aluya & Uduma (2023) apply mind style to African literature, emphasising how stylistic features like fragmented syntax, disrupted temporality, and shifts in deixis shape the psychology of characters in conflicting and traumatic situations.

Theoretical Framework

This study is grounded in the principles of cognitive stylistics, with a particular focus on the concept of mind style and its associated theoretical models. Mind style, within the framework of cognitive stylistics, can be examined from various theoretical perspectives, including schema theory, text world theory, conceptual metaphor theory, and mental space theory. Of these approaches, the study has adopted schema theory and text world theory.

Schema theory has become one of the most influential frameworks in cognitive psychology and has been effectively adapted for use in literary studies, particularly within cognitive stylistics. It proposes that people derive meaning from mental representations constructed from experiences linked to previous ones (Jefferies & McIntyre, 2010). The term 'schema' refers to background knowledge about a specific aspect of the world gained through direct or indirect experience. Schemata are dynamic and evolve through these experiences. The origins of schema theory can be traced back to Frederic Bartlett (1932), who argued that memory is not simply retrieval but an active reconstruction shaped by prior knowledge. Later, Jean Piaget (1952) expanded the concept within developmental psychology, explaining how individuals assimilate or accommodate new experiences into their schemata. During the 1970s and 1980s, scholars such as Schank and Abelson (1977) and Rumelhart (1980) extended the theory

into cognitive science, where it became central to understanding narrative, discourse, and comprehension. In literary studies, especially in cognitive stylistics, schema theory provides insights into how readers understand texts, negotiate meaning, and engage with characters' perceptions (Edem & Aluya, 2024). Cognitive stylistics emphasises that readers actively participate in meaning-making, as meaning is not solely contained within the text but also derived through their use of pre-existing background knowledge of the real world to interpret the text. Scholars generally distinguish between different types of schemata: content schemata represent background knowledge about the world; formal schemata regulate expectations of textual structures, including narrative conventions; linguistic schemata facilitate decoding at the level of lexis and syntax; and cultural schemata influence interpretation via shared traditions, values, and ideologies (Carrell, 1983). Writers often exploit, subvert, or disrupt these schemata to produce literary effects that challenge readers' interpretative expectations. This utilisation of pre-existing knowledge in text interpretation forms the core of schema theory in stylistics.

Text World Theory, a branch of cognitive stylistics, explains how readers derive meaning from texts. It relates to discourse processing and discourse semantics, with roots in Gilles Fauconnier's theory of mental spaces, developed during the 1980s and 1990s. Fauconnier's theory proposes that language users construct temporary mental models, called mental spaces. The text-world comprises world-building elements and function-advancing propositions drawn from the text. It depicts a reader's mental image of the text, formed through expressions of time, place, characters, events, and descriptions, known as "world-builders". In other words, discourse participants utilise textual and shared background information to construct a text world. The world-building elements within a text world can change at any point during discourse, leading to a world-switch (Gavins, 2007, pp. 45-48). The sub-world, which is the third level, is characterised by some form of temporal and/or spatial movement away from the primary text world. Characters' attitudes, expressed through modalised constructions such as boulomatic modal worlds (highlighting desire), deontic modal worlds (highlighting obligation), and epistemic modal worlds (highlighting belief or certainty levels), also help develop the sub-world.

Methodology

This study adopts an interpretative qualitative textual analysis within a cognitive stylistics framework to explore how linguistic and stylistic features reveal the mental worldviews ("mind-styles") of characters in Dul Johnson's *Across the Gulf*. Rather than analysing the entire text, eleven extracts were selected through a multi-step process designed to ensure relevance and coverage.

For the selection of extracts, this study focused on passages meeting three conditions: shifts in focalisation between narrator and character, clear presentation of characters' perceptions, memories or hypothetical situations, and activation of culturally significant schemas such as motherhood, lineage, war and displacement. Guided by these conditions, passages were purposively identified during a full reading of *Across the Gulf*. From this pool, eleven extracts featuring Ifunanya, Janbut and Ofala were chosen because they most clearly illustrated text-world construction, modality and schema affirmation or disruption. Each extract was recorded by page number to make checking and replication straightforward.

On the analytical framework and coding, the analysis combined Text World Theory, used to map discourse worlds, text worlds and sub-worlds, with Schema Theory, used to identify affirmed or disrupted cultural scripts. A coding template was created to capture world elements such as time, space, deictic centres, modality and

focalisation, schema categories including motherhood, hospitality, war, lineage and blacksmith craft, and stylistic features like lexical choices, multilingual insertions and narrative viewpoint.

Each extract was examined using the coding guide, as passages were analysed, a simple record of the codes was kept to track how often key features appeared and where, while short notes were written alongside each passage to explain interpretive choices and capture emerging ideas. As the study progressed, the codes and notes were refined until the main themes and patterns became clear.

The data interpretation after coding, patterns were grouped into three main text-world profiles; Ifunanya, Janbut and Ofala. For each profile, the analysis examined how linguistic choices and narrative structure produced distinctive mental worldviews and how these interacted with readers' likely prior knowledge. Schema disruptions such as Ifunanya's strategic secrecy, Janbut's survival among "strangers" and Ofala's failed patriarchy were linked to broader cognitive and postcolonial implications.

By specifying extract selection, coding procedures and interpretive steps, this methodology offers sufficient detail to enable other researchers to replicate or adapt the study.

Textual Analysis and Discussion

Dul Johnson's *Across the Gulf* shows how layered realities shape narrative structure by shifting between worlds. Focusing on Ifunanya, Janbut, and Ofala, this study identifies three interacting levels: the discourse world, the text-world, and the sub-worlds. The discourse world emerges through a third-person omniscient narrator whose fluid focalisation moves between public scenes and private consciousness. For instance, "Janbut threw the image into the fire and immediately regretted his action. It was like burning Ifunanya herself. He pulled it out and looked at the browning part that the flames had licked" (ATG: 131). Such moments reveal how public ritual worlds and intimate perceptual worlds; memories, dreams, and regrets coexist. This shifting narration also appears in indirect discourse and dense dialogue, as when Ofala and Ifunanya argue dramatically, blurring external action with inner perception by saying,

Extract 1

'Ifunanya, please!! 'What's the matter, Ofala?' ... 'But in order to do that, you also have to forgive me. 'Forgive you? I don't understand.' I'm going to take a new wife. I'm going to marry Chizurum.' (ATG: 113)

The adoption of multilingualism also functions as a world-building lexicon that initiates a cultural shift within the narrative. Johnson employs Igbo, Tarok, Hausa, and Pidgin English expressions to depict different cultural worlds. This is clearly illustrated in the Hausa phrase: "You saved me. Gaskiya nagode maku dayawa. Allah ya albarkace ku. Allah ya biya muku bukatunku" (ATG: 221). Through the characters' discourse, the narrator shares contextual knowledge of the real-life world with the readers. Regarding Ifunanya's character, the narrator assumes readers will relate to her experience of Igbo wartime suffering, maternal struggle, and gendered vulnerability. The narrator presumes readers already understand the cultural significance of motherhood, marriage, and childbearing. For example, when Ifunanya insists on raising Nnanna, the text does not explain why a single mother might be socially vulnerable but instead implies that readers will connect with her motherly love. This is shown when Ifunanya tells Ofala, "I want to be able to accommodate Nnanna. I want to be able to learn to love him" (ATG: 113).

In Ofala's case, the narrator assumes readers share the same cultural knowledge of lineage and continuity. Thus, the text does not explain why Ofala sees

Nnanna's birth as an ancestral blessing but simply states the child is male: "Man," Ofala uttered the word silently and remained silent thereafter" (ATG: 105). This positions readers within a traditional communal audience expected to understand the significance of a male child. Similarly, for Jambut, the narrator presumes familiarity with postcolonial war realities in Nigeria Biafran war, ethnic rift, betrayal, and desertion so his insistence on Tarok identity requires no further explanation. Thus, the narrator does not explain why Jambut insists on his Tarok identity, only noting his declaration: "I am Tarok to the bones! So, don't play games with me..." (ATG: 233). The text worlds of Ifunanya, Janbut, and Ofala are built from mental models shaped by time, space, characters, objects, modalities, and viewpoints. Temporal and spatial settings repeatedly used to construct and shift these worlds include Kano riots (1991 and 1994), Okigboli (town, arena, and pond), the nkelang, blacksmith's shop, Plateau, Langtang, Fabut, Mangu, and Jos. Ifunanya's text world centres on domestic and wartime spaces; her Okigboli household (kitchen, compound, market, maternal role, under the orji, and a hole in the canopy). Her worldview is marked by epistemic certainty, reflected in words like "must," "will," and "never," reinforcing her determination against cultural rejection. In her maternal voice, she often speaks with conviction, as in: "I will keep this child... I will raise him with or without your help" (ATG: 103). This certainty underscores her resilience. By contrast, the narrator presents Ifemelu's world as uncertain, evident in her frequent use of "Maybe" and "perhaps" to signal partial knowledge of events.

Extract 2

Janbut returned two days to the wedding and had read the note only the day before. He could not contain his shock. The note explained why she could not await his return, the sudden reappearance of Ofala, and the need for her to sort things out with him. "If I explain things to him and he decides to dump me, then I'm yours forever", the note said (ATG: 77)

On the other hand, Janbut's text world is largely transient, centred on warfronts. He moves constantly across the North and East, and symbolically between loyalty and betrayal. His secondary worlds include the CO's office, Janbut's forge, Nkelang, Tarok compound, Langtang gatekeeping, bodyguards, bricolage of jokes, Iko tree gatherings, mother's hut, beer cycles, Kayode's illness, health centre, the two-bedroom zinc house, separate rooms, and the renovated huts. The forge remains his deictic centre. His memory worlds emerge through carved images and photographs, objects that act as mnemonic sub-worlds, burned and then rescued. In the text, the narrator states that:

Extract 3

Janbut threw the image into the fire and immediately regretted his action. It was like burning Ifunanya herself. He pulled it out and looked at the browning part that the flames had licked. He took the carving knife and slowly scraped the brown off the wood. He would turn it into a handle for his hoe, he told himself. He would engrave her image on it. Since he returned home, Janbut had done everything possible to put Okigboli behind him, to keep Ifunanya out of his mind, but it was difficult. Sometimes he did not know whether it was Ifunanya herself he worried

about, or his child, which she was pregnant with at the time he left (ATG: 131).

Janbut's textual world emerges from fractured identities, occupying a space where he is neither fully trusted by the Igbo community nor secure in his Northern origins. To defend himself, he uses a modality of certainty, declaring, "I am Tarok to the bones! So, don't play games with me..." (ATG: 233), a line that affirms his identity, trauma, and guilt. Negations and hypothetical statements dominate his speech, revealing a wounded self, caught between loyalty and betrayal. For example, he protests, "I am not what you think... It is not my fault" (ATG: 122), exposing his defensiveness and internal conflict as an exiled father. By contrast, Ofala's textual world is rooted in ancestral compounds, communal gatherings, and cultural ceremonies a world of tradition, ancestral rights, and ritual landscapes. This is clearly shown when he urges his son to take up a chieftaincy title: saying

Extract 4

The Council of Chiefs has decided that you should be conferred with a chieftaincy title,' Ofala declared in an even voice. 'No, Father, I'm not interested. I... I don't want any title.' Ofala considered his son's response for a while. He was not surprised; it ran in the he thought of "blood", and then dropped the idea- it ran in the family (ATG: 179)

Ofala's primary social worlds are Okigboli's public sphere, Council of Chiefs and chieftaincy installations and his domestic compound. His worldview is framed through proverbial certainty and leadership authority, often rendered in narrator-reported direct speech. This is evident when he recounts the war scenarios, saying:

When I took aim, the man closed his eyes. But when I fired the first shot, which ripped through his chest, he opened his eyes, wide! It was his eyes, and not his mouth, that pleaded for mercy. But I knew that the man would not survive, and so I finished him off (ATG: 145).

The narrator allows Ofala to construct a mental world where images recur, as seen in: "He paused and squinted as if he was looking at the eyes he had been talking about. He nodded his head a couple of times and then said: 'And for three days, those pleading eyes continued to come at me'" (ATG: 145). Sometimes the narrator uses objective description like serving wine or receiving chiefs to show Ofala's social worldview, while at other times revealing his inner torment. In the text, the narrator notes that:

Extract 5

Ofala did not light a lamp. He sat on a stool in the darkness of his room, his head bowed but held firmly in his two hands. He was trying to understand his stepbrother's behaviour, but instead, his mind took him into the past; to the day his father sat with him, just as he had sat with Nnanna. It was in the dead of night like this, when the only sounds were those of crickets and toads, and the occasional hoots of owls and the flapping of bats, that his father had called him. He was tired and sleepy when the talk started. Bored, his mind had drifted away until his attention peaked at the point the subject caught his interest, and all sleep and tiredness vanished (ATG: 157)

Ofala's modality appears in deontic terms such as "It must be so" and "This is how it has always been," reflecting traditional roles of community, lineage, and male authority. His speech is confident and authoritative, as seen in, "The child is a blessing. He will bring honour to this house" (ATG: 113). Yet this certainty falters when Ifunanya challenges him, and he masks doubt with proverbial speech and elder wisdom. In text world theory, sub-worlds; or "world-switches" arise from memories, hypotheticals, and imagined futures. Ifunanya's world is built from memories of betrayal, trauma, and fractured motherhood, especially her forced relationship with Ikenna. The narrator states, "She wished she had not been caught in the whirlwind that brought Ikenna into her hut that night..." (ATG: 211), showing her pain and regret. Likewise, Janbut's sub-world reflects a shift from war trauma to imagined reconciliation. Walking down memory lane, he vividly recalls violence in the North, burnt villages, killings of Igbo people, and helpless victims. The narrator states that:

Extract 6

Scores of children spilled out of the many clusters of huts that formed the households in Fabut. They streamed towards the house, but would not go too close. Then the adults started to come, one by one, each heading to Rimbut's house. Before the Land Rover could come to a complete stop, the two soldiers in the back seat jumped down, their rifles firmly in their right hands. The children who were nearby scampered away, some screaming their lungs out. The elders shouted at them, sending them back to their houses. Janbut had disappeared into the house before they got to the compound. (ATG: 69)

Janbut's memory-worlds trap him in trauma, blocking his connection to the present. He also creates hypothetical worlds through unrealistic projections, as in, "If only the war had not cut him off, he might have been free to live among the Igbo without suspicion" (ATG: 138). This conditional statement signals alienation, longing for acceptance, and the impossibility of belonging. Ofala's sub-worlds, meanwhile, revolve around ambition, paranoia, and despair. He recalls his father's reign "He thought of how his father once ruled with authority, and how it was his turn to step into the shoes" (ATG: 233) a memory-world driving his desire for succession. His paranoia is voiced in, "What if Chizurum was already plotting with Njoku to undo him?" (ATG: 210), showing imagined threats shaping his trust and mental state. Ofala also constructs an imagined future sub-world where he envisions himself as the undisputed leader, but this is shattered by failure. His tragic death in the sacred pond marks the collapse of these sub-worlds. According to the narrator:

Extract 7

Early the next morning, just when the sun was streaking the grey skies in the horizon, screaming and yelling voices were heard from the direction of the sacred pond. People rushed out to meet the women running back with empty containers and heading for Ofala's house. Everyone was convinced that the women had seen Ofala, and that he had either gone mad and was pursuing them, or was pretending to be mad. The Council of Chiefs rushed to the house. But the news was different. Ofala's body was floating on the sacred pond, his hands bound (ATG: 217).

Schema theory explains how readers connect new information to existing knowledge frameworks. In Ifunanya, Johnson reinforces maternal schemata of caregiving, household chores, sexual fidelity, public reputation, and peacemaking. The narrator notes, “Ifunanya literally threw the basket down, the yams scattering and breaking. She was dripping with sweat, but not from the weight of the basket of yams she carried. It was from fear” (ATG: 143), signalling shared understandings of market and household labour. Another schema appears in the birth of a son, tied to lineage, pride, and social stability. In Igbo culture, a woman’s capacity to bear sons is highly valued, clarifying why the narrator underscores the birth of a male child, stating:

Extract 8

When Okigboli woke up on that first day of October in the year 1970, the celebration on their minds was Nigeria's independence. So, it was a pleasant surprise to hear that Ifunanya had given Ofala an added reason for the celebration. 'And she did not just give him a child, but a boy, a bouncing baby boy!! Yes. A boy so big that in spite of all his skills and experience in medicine, it took Ikenna one and a half hours to bring him out! Has that ever happened in Okigboli?' (ATG: 105 -106)

Giving Ofala a son aligns with societal expectations of motherhood, grounding a woman’s status as wife and safeguarding the husband’s legacy. The community celebrates Ifunanya’s male child as a contribution to continuity and tradition. This reflects the lineage schema that a male child carries the family name and future. Amara confirms this, saying, “She has given birth to the man who will inherit your homestead and keep your name alive, Ofala. Congratulations!!” (ATG: 105). This reinforces the patriarchal stereotype valuing male children over female ones. Ifunanya also fits the schema of women’s domestic competence. hardworking, skilled in household tasks like marketing, cooking, and managing chores. She reflects wartime narratives of women as victims of displacement, hunger, and loss, dependent on men for protection. Yet Johnson disrupts this schema by presenting Ifunanya as a mother with secrets. Instead of fully nurturing, she becomes an agent of strategic secrecy, confiding in her son rather than revealing truths publicly.

Extract 9

Again, she seized the picture as if someone else was competing for it. Nnanna stepped in and she turned to the door, the picture in her hand. 'I found it, Nnanna. I've found your father, your real father.' 'Thank you, Mother,' he said as he collected the picture, his hand trembling slightly (ATG: 192).

Additionally, Ifunanya’s calm acceptance of polygamy challenges the usual expectation of rivalry among wives, making her lack of jealousy unusual. Johnson also disrupts the hospitality schema: though hospitality is sacred in most cultures, Ifunanya refuses to offer warmth or protection during wartime. Readers expecting her to be welcoming instead see trauma and vulnerability diminishing her values. She also challenges patriarchal norms by voicing her concerns, unsettling readers who expect women to remain silent. In Janbut, Johnson depicts cultural and experiential schemas of blacksmith craft, war veteran, betrayed love, and absent father. As an artisan, the narrator informs us that ...

Extract 10

Janbut spent more and more time in his nkelang. The improvement in his skill at blacksmithing, in spite of his age, surprised him. He would wake up early in the morning, sweep the hut paying much attention to the hearth, which he methodically cleaned and got ready for the day's work. (ATG: 134)

Johnson initially affirms but ultimately disrupts readers' schemas through Janbut and Ofala. Janbut, a Tarok man in an Igbo territory during the Biafran War, evokes familiar wartime schemas of suspicion, exclusion and displacement; strangers are treated as rivals or spies, often killed or detained. Yet Johnson unsettles this expectation by allowing Janbut to survive and forge a fragile belonging among "strangers," challenging the schema of rigid ethnic boundaries and the idea of "home" as a stable refuge. Similarly, Ofala embodies the cultural schema of the titled elder ritual head, patriarch and custodian of continuity whose authority and pride are validated by the birth of a male heir. "So it was a pleasant surprise to hear that Ifunanya had given Ofala an added reason for celebration." (ATG 106). However, Johnson undercuts this archetype when Ofala, overwhelmed by Ifunanya's revelations, fails in his patriarchal duty and dies in anguish. In both cases, Johnson affirms culturally familiar patterns before overturning them, forcing readers to confront the instability of ethnic, familial and ritual certainties.

Extract 11

Early the next morning, just when the sun was streaking the grey skies in the horizon, screaming and yelling voices were heard from the direction of the sacred pond. People rushed out to meet the women running back with empty containers and heading for Ofala's house. Everyone was convinced that the women had seen Ofala, and that he had either gone mad and was pursuing them, or was pretending to be mad. The Council of Chiefs rushed to the house. But the news was different. Ofala's body was floating on the sacred pond, his hands bound (ATG: 217).

At this point, Ofala's public-order schema collapses, rendering his leadership ineffective. Traditionally, men provide, protect, and decide while women's worth centres on fertility and domesticity, yet Ofala's dependence on Ifunanya challenges this male-dominance schema. The narrator confirms that "she did not just give him a child" but was essential in his life. Wartime also disrupts the African hospitality schema: Ofala's generosity becomes selective, overshadowed by ethnic suspicion and survival fears. Likewise, festivity defies expectations rather than austerity during war, Ofala hosts lavish celebrations, enjoys pleasures, and displays wealth despite communal suffering. These reversals frustrate readers anticipating masculine authority, communal generosity, and wartime solemnity.

Conclusion

This study has examined mind style in Dul Johnson's *Across the Gulf* through cognitive stylistics, Schema Theory, and Text World Theory. The analysis shows that the novel not only recounts the devastation of the Nigerian Civil War but also presents distinct cognitive perspectives through characters like Ifunanya, Ofala, and Janbut. Their linguistic patterns, silences, and narrative voices reveal unique ways of viewing the world closely linked to the socio-political effects of war. Schema Theory demonstrates how these minds styles interact with, and sometimes deviate from,

cultural expectations, as seen in Ifunanya's defiant femininity, Ofala's waning authority, and Janbut's fragile masculinity. Text World Theory further highlights how Johnson constructs complex narrative worlds that reinforce these perspectives. Ultimately, the novel illustrates not only the physical scars of conflict but also the mental imprints left on those who experience it, showing how cognitive stylistics can illuminate the interplay between language, thought, and social experience in literature.

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