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# Slavery, Trauma and Healing: A Corpus-Based Analysis of Temporal Markers in Selected African-American Neo-Slave Narratives.

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## ABSTRACT

The study explored the frequencies of temporal markers in selected African-American Neo-slave narratives, combining corpus linguistics with literary studies. These narratives focus on the historical experiences of slavery and its continuing psychological effects. While these narratives have been largely studied for their themes of trauma, history, identity and memory, limited attention has been given to linguistic features that shape them. The role of temporal markers and their contribution to representing trauma and healing remained under-explored. The study employed a sequential mixed-methods design, analyzing a corpus of five African-American Neo-slave narratives, Beloved, Homegoing, Kindred, Underground Railroad, and The Water dancer, consisting of 540,843 words. AntConc was used to generate frequency lists and concordance lines of temporal markers, while NVivo was used to code the extracted data according to Dominick LaCapra's trauma theory. The findings revealed that past-oriented temporal markers are abundant in the corpus. This presence supports LaCapra's trauma theory concept of Acting Out. Present and future-oriented markers revealed a progression toward healing corresponding to LaCapra's Working Through phase. This imbalanced distribution, with Acting Out coded 212 times against
146 for Working Through, showed the complex but progressive nature of healing within these narratives. It offered an empirical framework for understanding the relationship between language, trauma, and healing. The study provided insights into psychological research by highlighting how language simultaneously recorded and transformed the effects of historical trauma, suggesting that healing remains gradual or incomplete rather than fully resolved in trauma narratives. The study contributed to both corpus linguistics and trauma studies, suggesting that temporal markers can be measured as evidence of psychological state rather than only interpreted through close reading.

***Keywords:*** *Temporal markers, Corpus linguistics, Neo-slave narratives, Trauma theory, Healing.*

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# 1. Introduction

## 1.1. Background of the study

African-American Neo-slave narratives are literary works that center on the history of slavery and its enduring effects on African-American lives. These narratives are a collection of experiences from enslaved people that relate past to present realities. Neo-slave narratives are narratives by contemporary writers, as opposed to the original slave narratives, in which the author interweaves fictionalized elements with the history of slavery. Their works will serve to remember the history and track the intergenerational impact of slavery. Many Neo-slave narratives focus on trauma, history, identity, resistance, and freedom, highlighting the ways in which the brutality of slavery continues to affect the lives of individuals even after its abolition.

Trauma is central to this genre, shaping not only what is narrated but how it is narrated. Memories of painful events interrupt present experiences and create shifts between present and past. Trauma is in these narratives, not just a theme, but a narration itself. The genre is structured by fragmented structures, non-linear chronology and recurring flashbacks, which emphasize the fact that traumatic memory is unconfined to past.

## 1.2. Research Problem

African-American Neo-slave narratives hold a prominent position in literary history because of the impact they have on history of slavery and its psychological, social and cultural impact. Existing research has largely approached these narratives through thematic analysis, focusing on memory, identity, oppression, history, and feminist perspectives. However, these narratives are fundamentally linguistic constructs in which meaning is shaped, trauma is portrayed, and healing is signaled through language itself. In particular, the way language simultaneously functions as both the representation of trauma and the possibility of healing remains theoretically overlooked. There is insufficient understanding of how linguistic structures, specifically the way temporal experience is encoded and shapes readers understanding of trauma and healing within these narratives. Hence, further empirical and systematic research is required to examine how the linguistic patterns specifically temporal markers shift between traumatic past and present experiences.

## 1.3.Research Gap

While existing studies have approached Neo-slave narratives through literary criticism, post-colonial theory, and cultural analysis (Friedman, 2021), systemic investigation of these texts remains overlooked. Caruth (1996) emphasizes trauma as a phenomenon that resists integration into non-linear memory, appearing through repetition and temporal disruption. Crespo and Fernandez-Lansac (2016) trace this pattern empirically, finding that tense shifts and disrupted temporal context correlate with severity and healing outcomes.

Specifically, no corpus-based study has examined how temporal markers shift across traumatic and healing-oriented narrative moments in this literary tradition. This represents both a methodological and analytical gap; the linguistic mechanisms through which these narratives move from trauma to healing have not been empirically examined. The study, therefore, responds to this gap by identifying temporal markers and their frequencies in

selected African-American Neo-slave narratives. This analysis reveals language as a double-edged sword, simultaneously destructive and therapeutic in the movement from trauma to healing.

### 1.4.Objectives

1. To identify the frequencies of temporal markers in selected African-American Neo-slave narratives..
2. To examine the temporal markers representing the transition from trauma to healing across selected African-American Neo-slave narratives.

### 1.5.Research Questions

1. What are the frequencies of temporal markers in selected African-American Neo-slave narratives?
2. How do the temporal markers represent the transition from trauma to healing across selected African-American Neo-slave narratives?

### 1.6.Significance of the Study

The study is significant in various dimensions. Firstly, it is significant to the field of literary linguistics because it moves away from thematic analysis to systematic analysis of linguistics for African-American Neo-slave narratives. This approach offers a way of thinking about the functioning of language in the process of building trauma and healing. Secondly, the study is of methodologically significance because it introduces a corpus-based analysis to a genre which has traditionally been studied in a qualitative literary critical style. This empirical approach enables to analyze the temporal markers systematically, which further enhances the analysis conducted on these narratives.

Thirdly, the study has important inter-disciplinary value. It combines literature and corpus linguistics, indicating that this kind of narratives can only be fully understood through the examination of the words used and their linguistic features. This inter-disciplinary approach has broader implications for how researchers engage with other literary traditions beyond the African-American context. Lastly, the study carries social and cultural significance by drawing attention to the expressive ability of African-American writers whose linguistic choices reflect deep psychological and historical realities of slavery.

## 2. Literature Review

Language plays a significant role in expressing pain, memory, and healing in literary narratives. Temporal markers are words or phrases such as before, after, then, and now that indicate transitions in a narrative. In trauma narratives, non-linear or recursive markers often reveal “psychological mutilation” produced by traumatic experience (Habli, 2023). African-American Neo-slave narratives have been studied for their reconstruction of slave history and their representation of the psychological effects of enslavement (Edwards-White, 2016). Edwards-White focuses on the lasting psychological effects of enslavement on the individual, Guettaia (2025) analyzed Edward P.Jones’ “The Known World” and Morrison’s “A Mercy, broaden the frame to show these narratives connect past experiences of slavery to present-day identity, memory, and resistance, shifting the focus of analysis from the individual psyche to collective identity formation. This review synthesizes literary-critical and corpus-linguistic

scholarship on trauma and temporality in order to situate the present corpus-based study of temporal markers within both traditions.

The study draws on Dominick LaCapra's (2001) trauma theory, particularly the concepts of Acting Out and Working Through. "Acting Out" appears when the traumatic past continues to haunt individuals and the narrative remains stuck in a cycle; linguistically, this shift is often signaled by recursive markers and disrupted chronological sequencing. In contrast, "Working Through" is a process in which individuals organize their experiences into a linear narrative and move toward reconstructing identity; linguistically, this shift is often marked by forward-oriented, resolving temporal markers that restore chronological progression. Scholars have applied LaCapra's framework directly to Neo-slave narratives, arguing that texts like Beloved and Kindred use narrative techniques such as haunting and time travel to achieve therapeutic witnessing of slavery's traumatic history (Madsen, 2010), treating Working Through as a psychological state internal to the protagonist. Chicholewski (2020), in contrast, reframes the same narrative techniques as "Chronopolitical interventions" that challenge linear history and foreground slavery's socio-political consequences, relocating Working Through from individual psychology to collective historical assessment. Examined through a critical lens, these two accounts suggest that Acting Out and Working Through operate on more than one scale at once, which is part of the motivation for analyzing temporal markers empirically rather than assuming a single, linear progression.

One of the recurring themes in this scholarship is the temporality of the Neo-slave narrative: the rejection of the temporal linearity, as a way to present trauma as a continuing process not something finished. Both, Habli (2023) and Abdulsahib (2026) examined Morrison's Beloved as an enactment of this temporal mutilation through repetition and displacement, arguing that this fragmentation is a window into the way of traumatic memory that obscures the past and present. Lee (2015) extends this focus on structure to the language itself, demonstrating how protagonist of Dessa Rose, Kindred and Corregidora oscillate between trauma and healing in different linguistic modes. These linguistic forms are oral testimony, words and songs, and suggest that language is a major means of oppression and resistance in these narratives.

Mu (2026) argues that trauma is not confined to the past but continues to persist in present. Lee's medium-based account and Edwards-White and Mu's identity-based account describe the same underlying interplay between Acting Out and Working Through, but locate its evidence in different contextual features: form of utterance versus content of identity. Examining temporal markers offer a way out of this conceptual split. Because these markers operate within both formal structures and expressions of identity, tracking them provides a single, unified method to analyze both dimensions simultaneously.

A second strand of this scholarship shifts from narrative structure to the social and communal functions of language. Focusing on relationship between language, trauma, emotion, race, and space in contemporary African-American literature, Mikic's (2025) emotion-race framework shows how racial and spatial oppression produce emotions such as fear, shame, guilt, anger, and grief, and how Black place-making practices convert these emotions into resistance and community-based healing.

Boularas (2024) and Viscuso (2024) narrow this communal lens to testimony, specifically, Boularas frames testimony as a tool for challenging racist stereotypes and reconstructing Black identity. In contrast, Viscuso treats individual traumatic moments as turning points that reshape identity, behavior and relationships across generations. Where Mikic operates at the level of individual utterance and life-event, suggesting that Working Through in these narratives is rarely a private achievement but can be achieved by communal structures.

Fontes (2021) and Ortega-Williams et al. (2024), both drawing on the concept of Post-Traumatic Slave syndrome, locate healing in collective rather than individual processes. This extends Mikic's and Boularas communal framing but shifts the focus from spatial practice or testimony to inter-generational transmission, suggesting that Working Through in Neo-slave narratives is collective.

Regardless of this literary-critical engagement with trauma and temporality, the field has examined almost entirely through qualitative and thematic methods. Salama et al. (2016) and Tazzioli (2021) rely on close reading and thematic analysis; Abood (2024) applies systematic functional grammar, but only to nineteenth century narratives. In contrast, Rodriguez (2021), Akter (2025), and Nelson (2026) foreground memory, identity and historical recovery without analyzing linguistic features at all. However, Nelson's treatment of language confined to eighteenth and nineteenth century texts. Using different analytical frameworks, all the stories remained focus on the idea that slave narratives do not follow a linear storyline.

However, corpus-linguistic engagement with this literary-critical tradition remains incomplete. Mohammed (2017) used frequency and percentage counts of lexico-syntactic features, sentence types, African-American Vernacular English markers, and cohesive devices to characterize narrative style of Morrison in Beloved and Paradise. This study finds that Neo-slave narratives are amenable to frequency-based analysis. Elmerot et al. (2026) apply a different corpus-based method to older material, building an annotated corpus of autobiographies and interviews of formerly enslaved persons, comparing key noun usage across sub-corpora. By using Linguistic Inquiry and Word Count on clinical trauma narratives, Ryan (2023) shifts the objective of study, finding that trauma leaves a measurable, lexical signature. Taken together, these studies differ in text type and in method but converge on a single point that frequency-based analysis provides evidences that close reading does not offer. This is a methodological warrant for treating temporal markers themselves as measurable evidence of the shift between Acting Out and Working Through.

In summary the reviewed literature establishes non-linear temporality, testimony, and communal healing as central to Neo-slave narratives. It also highlights the role of narrative structures in representing trauma, memory, pain, and identity in African-American Neo-slave narratives. However, a smaller body of corpus-linguistic research confirms the empirical viability of frequency-based method for trauma more broadly. No study bridges nineteenth century and contemporary Neo-slave narratives to trace a transition from trauma to healing. This gap underscores the need for an empirical investigation of how language operates in African-American Neo-slave narratives, representing transitions between Acting Out and Working Through.

## 3. Research Methodology

The study used mixed-methods sequential approach, whereby the quantitative analysis of the number of temporal markers was followed by a qualitative interpretation of the meaning of the temporal markers. In first step, quantitative approach is employed to determine frequencies of temporal markers in the selected African-American Neo-slave narratives. This quantitative method is most appropriate for the research problem since it allows the researcher to use objective frequency measurement and also conduct thorough statistical analysis of the data. The qualitative interpretation is guided by Dominick LaCapra's trauma theory, specifically his distinction between Acting Out and Working Through. Acting Out refers to a repetitive reliving of traumatic past in which the boundary between past and present collapses. In contrast, Working Through refers to the gradual progression from trauma to agency and engagement with life. These two concepts, in this study function as qualitative coding categories. Each temporal marker identified in the corpus is examined in the context and classified as either Acting Out or Working Through. This methodology best suits the present study because it will provide insights into how language functions in trauma narratives.

### 3.1.Sampling Method and size

The targeted population of this study comprises of African-American Neo-slave narratives, centered on the experiences of slavery, memory, trauma, and identity. The study uses non-probability sampling, specifically purposive sampling by selecting five narratives (N5) are selected as the primary dataset. The selected narratives include Beloved (1987) by Toni Morrison, Homegoing (2016) by Yaa Gyasi, The Underground Railroad (2017) by Colson Whitehead, Kindred (1979) by Octavia Butler, and The Water Dancer (2019) by Ta-Nehisi Coates. The entire corpus comprised of 540, 843 words. Each novel was selected on the basis of its standing within the Neo-slave narrative tradition and confirming a recurring use of temporal markers shifting between Acting Out and Working Through. Analyzing complete narratives rather than excerpts, ensures comprehensive identification of temporal markers.

Fifteen temporal markers were selected on the basis of their categorization into present, past, and future category for the frequency and concordance analysis: then, now, still, always, suddenly, finally, again, soon, after, before, while, since, until, and at last. These were chosen because they recur across Neo-slave narratives as linguistic signals of temporal orientation, giving a consistent dataset across all five African-American Neo-slave narratives.

### 3.2.Data Collection Tools

AntConc was used for data extraction, with the cleaned corpus loaded. Each of the fifteen temporal markers was searched individually, one marker at a time in order to generate its frequency list and concordance lines, rather than running a single combined search. This one-by-one procedure made it possible to identify each markers frequency, range, normalized frequency separately, and to read every occurrence in its surrounding context before moving to qualitative coding phase.

Nvivo used for qualitative coding. Concordance lines of each temporal marker were imported to NVivo and coded into one of two nodes: Acting Out and Working Through. In Nvivo, a

marker was coded Acting Out when its context showed the past interrupting or repeating within the narrative present in the form of recurring flashbacks, cyclic phrasing, and collapse of then and now. While, it was coded Working Through when its context showed resolution or forward movement in the form of explicit before or after contrasts, and narrative linearity. Applying this scheme across the corpus produced 212 coding references under Acting Out and 146 Under Working Through.

### 3.3.Data Analysis Plan

The present study analyzed data by employing a mixed-methods sequential approach. The quantitative aspect focuses on the identification of the frequency of temporal markers, while qualitative aspect examines how these temporal markers mark transition from trauma to healing in selected African-American neo-slave narratives. Firstly, all the narratives are prepared and loaded into AntConc, providing frequency lists and concordance lines of temporal markers. For qualitative analysis, NVivo is used to organize and categorize the extracted patterns following LaCapras's concepts of Acting Out and Working Through. This enables markers to be analyzed in terms of repetitive trauma or progression towards healing, making the analysis systematic and theoretically sound. The combination of both tools allows for a comprehensive analysis of narratives. This data analysis plan directly supports the research objectives and ensures both research questions are fully answered.

### 3.4.Ethical Considerations

The study was based on secondary data, selected African-American Neo-slave narrative, no human participants were directly involved in this study. So, issues regarding informed consent were not applied. However, the research strictly followed ethical standards of academic integrity and use of data. To maintain ethical responsibility, all the sources were properly cited and referenced following standard academic requirement. This study further ensured honest and accurate representation of data on the basis of evidence avoiding bias or prejudice. It also employed anti-plagiarism and citation compliance to ensure balanced, objective interpretation of literary data. The study consists of published literary works so, the analysis remains respectful and objective. All the collected data was stored in digital format, no authorized sharing or misuse of data occurred. Data collected during this internship remained the joint intellectual property of the Corpus Research Center (CRC), Minhaj University, Lahore, and the research to ensure transparency and ethical compliance throughout the internship.

## 4. Data Analysis and Findings

The study analyzed five African-American Neo-slave narratives as a primary corpus, comprising of 540,843 words. The selected narratives include Beloved (1987) by Toni Morrison, Homegoing (2016) by Yaa Gyasi, The Underground Railroad (2017) by Colson Whitehead, Kindred (1979) by Octavia Butler, and The Water Dancer (2019) by Ta-Nehisi Coates. For quantitative part, AntConc was used to generate frequency lists and concordance lines of temporal markers, facilitated the extraction of statistical data for further analysis. This method was based upon the principles of corpus linguistics, as described by Biber et al.

(1998) and the principles of frequency and concordance analysis described by McEnery and Hardie (2012).

For qualitative part, thematic analysis following principles of Braun and Clarke (2006) was applied, supporting identification and interpretation of recurring linguistic patterns and meanings across selected narratives. The dataset consisted of approximately 22 pages of purposively selected textual instances for further detailed analysis in NVivo. By employing Dominick LaCapra's (2001) trauma theory, particularly the concepts of Acting Out and Working Through, data was coded and analyzed. The integration of both qualitative and quantitative approaches ensured a comprehensive analysis of temporal markers within selected African-American neo-slave narratives.

The analysis followed seven steps: firstly, each narrative is cleaned in Notepad to remove footnotes and page numbers. Then, five cleaned novels compiled and uploaded in AntConc. After that, each of the fifteen temporal markers is searched individually in AntConc to generate frequency lists, concordance lines, and N-Gram patterns of size 3. Qualitative part includes importing the concordance lines into NVivo. In NVivo, each line was coded as per the definitions of LaCapra's trauma theory concepts of Acting Out and Working Through. Then, integrating the frequency list data (step 2) with the coding results (step 5) to trace how the balance between Acting Out and Working Through shifts across each narrative, answering both quantitative and qualitative research questions in a single, linked analysis.

To ensure reliability of the analysis, instrumental reliability was first achieved through AntConc and NVivo, which reduced the risk of inconsistency in automated frequency counting, supplemented by manual tabulation for verification and cross-checking of key findings. The contextual patterns were assessed under consistent criteria across the corpus. This computational approach was complemented by institutional oversight, Corpus Research Center, Minhaj University, Lahore, providing procedural supervision. The study was carried out over a planned period of 2 months, allowing the findings to be cross checked by the periodic experts. This combination of software counting, and institutional supervision was aimed to limit prejudice and strengthen the overall reliability of findings.

### 4.1.Findings Rol:

The analysis revealed that temporal markers serve as key linguistic features in African-American Neo-slave narratives, structuring narrative time, and shaping how trauma is expressed and processed. Corpus-Based analysis identified frequent recurrence of markers such as then, when, before and now, which recur across the five narratives, revealing that past-oriented markers are abundant as compared to that of present-oriented markers. The recurrences of markers organize memory construction and narrative continuity.

**Figure 1**

*Values represent normalize frequency per (10,000) words of each temporal markers highest frequency trigram across five narratives. Bars are ordered by descending frequency.*

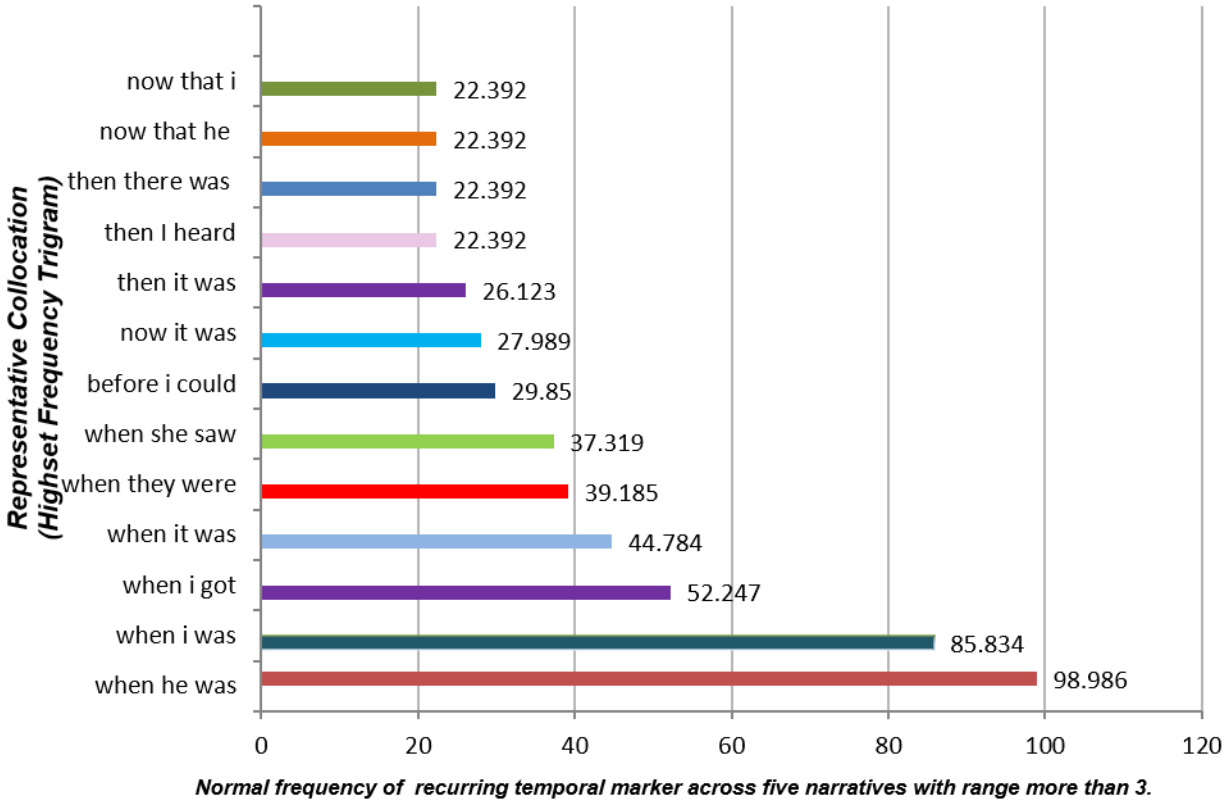



**Table 1**

| **No.** | **Temporal Marker** | **Representative Collocation** (Highest Frequency Trigram) | ***f*** (Collocation) | **Range** (Narratives) | **Total f** (Marker) | **Norm. *f*** |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| **1** | When | *"When he was"* | 53 | 5/5 | 1248 | 98.986 |
| **2** | Then | *"Then I was"* | 14 | 2/5 | 634 | 26.123 |
| **3** | Now | *"Now and Then"* | 16 | 4/5 | 463 | 29.855 |
| **4** | Before | *"Before I could"* | 16 | 3/5 | 304 | 29.855 |
| **5** | After | *"After a while"* | 21 | 2/5 | 235 | 39.185 |
| **6** | Until | *"Until he was"* | 10 | 4/5 | 150 | 18.66 |
| **7** | Again | *"Again and again"* | 9 | 4/5 | 147 | 16.794 |
| **8** | Still | *"Still in the"* | 7 | 4/5 | 132 | 13.062 |
| **9** | While | *"While I was"* | 15 | 2/5 | 104 | 27.289 |
| **10** | Since | *"Since the day"* | 15 | 3/5 | 76 | 27.989 |
| **11** | Soon | *"Soon as I"* | 11 | 4/5 | 62 | 20.526 |
| **12** | Always | *"Always said that"* | 4 | 1/5 | 39 | 7.464 |

| | | | | | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| **13** | At Last | *"At last I"* | 5 | 1/5 | 16 | 9.33 |
| **14** | Suddenly | *"Suddenly I was"* | 5 | 2/5 | 13 | 9.33 |
| **15** | Finally | *"Finally I got"* | 3 | 1/5 | 11 | 5.598 |

*The table shows the high normal frequency of each temporal markers appeared in AntConc with their frequency of the collocation patterns and clusters/N-Grams.*
*Function;Range(/5)= number of narratives, out of five in which the pattern occurred. Norm. f=Normal frequency per 10,000 words.*

Frequency analysis (figure:1 and table:1) shows that past-oriented markers, particularly then, now and when occurred frequently than present-oriented forms as now (When: 1248 total occurrences, 5/5 narratives, Then: 634 total occurrences 4/5; Now: 463, 5/5). This numeric dominance of past-oriented temporal markers is the evidence of the narrative's orientation toward memory toward memory and unresolved trauma. A pattern consistent with LaCapra (2001) concept of Acting Out in which trauma is relived rather than fully resolved. The comparatively lower but still consistently distributed frequency of now signal a point of character's agency and psychological stability. The remaining temporal markers such as after, until, again, always, today, finally, suddenly, at last, while, again, since, and soon occurred with comparatively lowered but consistently distributed frequencies (Table:1), reinforcing the corpus-based tendency toward past-oriented temporal markers.

Concordance Lines for the Temporal Marker "Now" Generated via AntConc's KWIC Function.

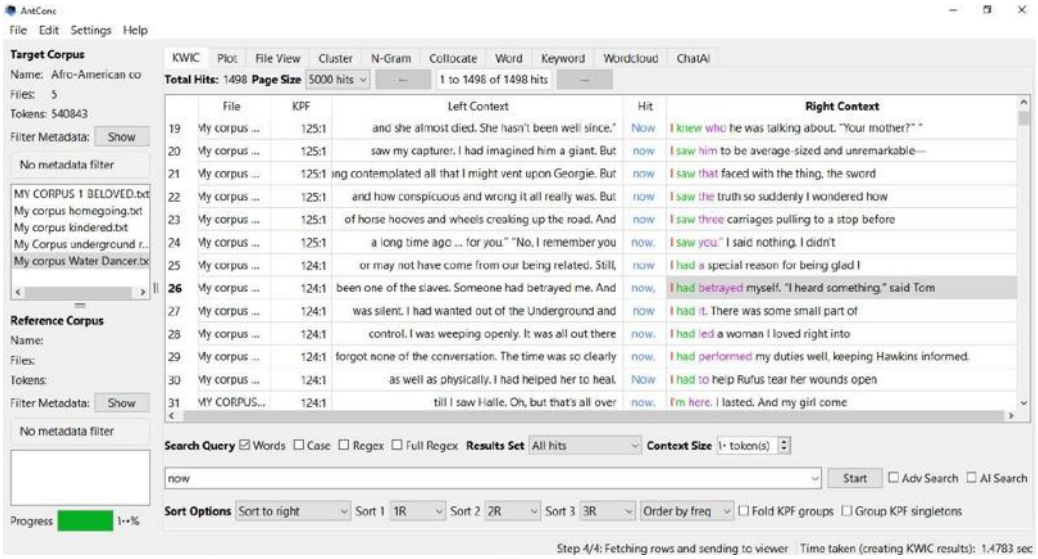



**Figure 2**

Concordance lines for the temporal markers generated using AntConc's KWIC function (Figure:2). This inspection of now in its immediate context reveals that the markers frequency co-occurs with verbs of cognition and perception (I knew, I saw, I had), situating in within moments of retrospection realization rather than present tense narration. It indicates its function extends beyond simple chronological marking to reflect deeper shifts in narrative perspectives.

These findings support the corpus linguistic framework of McEnery & Hardie (2012), emphasizing that frequency and contextual repetition help to uncover important meanings in discourse.

### 4.2.Findings RO2

Temporal markers organize and shape overall coherence of trauma and healing based experiences. Thematic and interpretive analysis of these markers revealed that these markers appear in the contexts of fear, harm, emotional sufferings, and healing. In Kindred, the line "Man cursing and lec-turing as he beats me" (Butler, 1979, p. 107), showed the moments of physical pain and suffering. In Beloved, "Then she heard close thunder crawling upon the stairs" (Morrison, 1987, p. 103), showed that temporal markers frame moments of fear and psychological tension. Overall, these instances demonstrated that how trauma repeatedly disrupts narrative consciousness, compelling characters to relive and process painful experiences. These extracts represented traumatic repetition, fear, and emotional suffering. This aligned with LaCapra's concept of Acting Out, where trauma is relived through fragmented memory and emotional pain.

In contrast, these Neo-slave narratives also carry the instances of gradual healing. In Water Dancer, "I tried to crawl, and I stood" (Coates, 2019, p. 45), showed gradual progression toward healing. In Kindred, "Then I got back under the cover, I am healing" (Butler, 1979, chap. 2, para. 4). These extracts aligned with LaCapra's trauma theory, particularly the concept of Working Through, where characters begin to move forward toward emotional stability and healing.

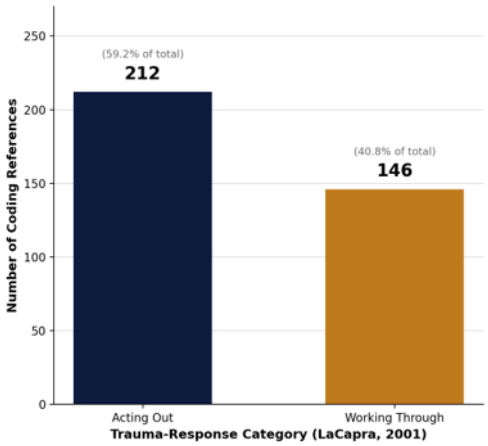



**Figure 3**

The coding references for the two phases: Acting Out identified in 212 instances, while Working Through appeared in 146 instances. Temporal markers related to trauma were found in code, Acting Out, while, healing related markers appeared in code; Working Through, created as per LaCapra's trauma theory definitions of Acting Out and Working Through.

**Table 2**

| Marker | Concordance Line | Source Text | Coded Function |
|---|---|---|---|

| | | | |
|---|---|---|---|
| ***now*** | "...how conspicuous and wrong it all really was. But now I saw the truth so suddenly..." | *Kindred* | Transition pivot — sudden insight following prior distortion. |
| ***now*** | "...I had wanted out of the Underground and now. I had it." | *Kindred* | Healing-marking — arrival at a previously unattainable state. |
| ***now*** | "...I had helped her to heal." Now I had to help Rufus tear her wounds open— | *Kindred* | Counter-evidence , 'now' marking regression; healing framed as non-linear. |
| ***today*** | "...it is hard on us. It exhausts us. Even today, I could only do this with the aid of my brothers." | *The Water Dancer* | Healing-marking — present endurance framed as relational, not as individual. |
| ***today*** | "...one of the police officers... shook his head, and said, 'Do that and you'll die today.'" | *Homegoing* | Trauma-marking — acute crisis-point that later leads tochange. |
| ***then*** | "Pain again shot through my ankle... And then I stood. I took one step. It was agony. I fell. And again..." | *Beloved* | Transitional pivot — sequences incremental, faltering physical recovery. |
| ***then*** | "...I am determined to get Thena out... Then she leaned over and kissed me lightly on the cheek." | *The Water Dancer* | Healing-marking — relational tenderness following trauma-testimony. |

The representative concordance lines for the temporal markers (Now, Then, Today) in Table 2, extracted from the corpus to provide qualitative evidence to show transition from trauma to healing. These coded instances provided evidence of varied functions performed by temporal markers

**4.3.Discussions**

The findings revealed that temporal markers are indicators of trauma, memory, and healing in African-American Neo-slave narratives. Their occurrence reflects how characters continuously move between past and present. Past-oriented markers such as then and when represent traumatic memory, return of suffering, and narrative fragmentation. However, present-oriented markers such as now and today indicated self-awareness, emotional stability and narrative progression. The findings further suggested that fragmented linguistic structures reflect unstable and non-linear nature of traumatic experiences.

**4.4.RO1**

The findings of the study supported previous research on trauma, memory, temporality, and African-American Neo-slave narratives. The frequent use of temporal markers such as then, now, when supported Habli (2023), argued that trauma narratives disrupt linear time through repetition and past memories. This numeric dominance also supported Madsen (2010) and

Chicholewski (2020), who both read repetition and non-linearity in in Neo-slave narratives as central to trauma representation, though their analysis was relied heavily on close reading. Similarly, the present study found that past-oriented temporal markers repeatedly occur in contexts related to emotional fragmentation, suffering of past, and flashbacks. However, the present study differs from the previous study such as Viscuso (2024), (Boularas, 2024), and Fontes (2021) which primarily focused on historical, psychological, and thematic representation of trauma. These studies discussed trauma, memory, and healing conceptually, paying limited attention to corpus-based analysis of linguistic patterns specifically, temporal markers. In this regard, the present findings extend the work of Mohammed (2017) and Elmerot et al. (2026), moving beyond stylistic or lexical frequency counts to reveal that temporal markers can be traced as measurable evidence of trauma and healing across an entire corpus rather than a single narrative

**4.5.RO2**

Temporal markers actively trace the psychological movement between trauma and healing supporting LaCapra's (2001) thematic distinction between Acting Out and Working Through. The dominance of Acting Out (212 coded instance) over Working Through (146 coded instances), aligns with Habli (2023) and Abdulsahib (2026), who argued that traumatic memory in Neo-slave narratives resists closure and continues to reappear in the present. However, the presence of a considerable number of Working Through (146), supports Madsens (2010) reading of Kindred and Beloved as therapeutic witnessing, in which healing gradually emerges alongside trauma rather than emerging as final narrative resolution.

Unlike Fontes (2021) and Ortega-Williams et al. (2024), who located healing primarily in collective or intergenerational processes, the present findings of RO2 suggests that healing is also traceable at the level of individual choice of language within a single narrative. The findings strongly supported Dominick LaCapra's trauma theory, particularly concepts of Acting Out and Working Through. The use of temporal markers such as then, before, and when, highlighted fragmented narration, non-linear progression, and emotional pain, corresponding to LaCapra's concept of Acting Out. In contrast, the markers such as now, after, and today highlighted emotional relief, gradual healing, and narrative linearity, corresponding to Working Through. Researchers, scholars, and psychologists can use temporal markers analysis to understand how language represents trauma, memory, and healing in Neo-slave narratives. The study may facilitate the identification of psychological and emotional patterns within literary texts.

The study successfully achieved both objectives. The first objective: To identify the frequency of temporal markers in selected African-American Neo-slave narratives, achieved through frequency lists and concordance lines analysis in AntConc. The second objective: To investigate temporal markers that indicate transitions from trauma to healing in selected African-American stories using KWIC analysis and coding in NVivo. The temporal markers used for the healing purposes were not concentrated on the endings but spread throughout the narratives. This distribution has shown that healing happens slowly over time in the aftermath of trauma, not just at the end of each story

## 5. Conclusion

In conclusion, temporal markers play a significant role not only in representing trauma but also healing within African-American Neo-slave narratives. The trauma related temporal markers recurrence highlights that trauma is not confined to past, instead it continues to haunt the individuals in present. Healing gradually becomes possible through testimony and communal voice, allowing for the reconstruction of the self and psychological stability. The integration of corpus-based tools with LaCapra's trauma theory helps to understand the role of language in trauma narratives.

The present study is limited to five narratives, while future research may analyze ten or more novels for broader findings. Additionally, researchers may employ the same corpus-based framework for narratives written by authors from distinct ethnic backgrounds, such as Caribbean and African diasporic literature. This comparative approach would reveal whether the linguistic patterns, more specifically the temporal markers are genre specific or appear in trauma literature globally. Future research is also encouraged to employ more diverse corpus tools such as Sketch Engine or Python, advancing frequency and collocation analysis. This would strengthen corpus-based studies in terms of both reliability and the depth of corpus-based studies.

Future research may benefit for combining corpus analysis with psychological assessments, examining how readers emotionally process temporal markers in trauma narratives. Such inter-disciplinary approaches would further bridge the gap between linguistic analysis, literary studies, and psychological research.

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