

**AFRICAN LINGUO-CULTURAL AESTHETICS IN BARCLAYS AYAKOROMA'S A
MATTER OF HONOUR**

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ABSTRACT: *Language and culture are not only inherently intertwined, but are also veritable elements for literary imagination and production which constructs and documents distinctive patterns of human existence. Hence modern African literature is essentially characterized by aspects of the African existential reality, as subtly or overtly encapsulated in the fabrics of oral tradition. With insights provided by the socio-semiotic theory espoused by Ferdinand De Saussure (1986) and expanded by Hodge and Kress (1988), Thibault (1991) and Kress and Van Leeuwen (2001), as the analytical template, this study, therefore, examines the deployment and appropriation of indigenous devices, such as native rhetorical patterns, proverbs, native similes, traditional belief system and transliteration, for the expression of cultural meaning in Barclays Ayakoroma's A Matter of Honour, as an exemplification of how African authors deploy African linguo-cultural elements and aesthetics to capture the African existential reality, sensibility and essence in their works written in an imperial language. The study not only adumbrates the interface between language, culture and literature and the concept of literature as an evocation or microcosm of society, but also further enhances and enriches extant knowledge and perspectives on the African world-view, mores and values.*

KEYWORDS: language, culture, African literature, Barclays Ayakoroma, socio-semiotic

INTRODUCTION

It is perhaps trite to state that modern African writers deploy elements from African traditional oral sources to achieve functional and aesthetic purposes in their works. Apparently, these writers seek to construct and document the distinctive African identity in the mainstream of global literary consciousness by privileging and valorizing various strands of the African character or behavioural pattern, customs, belief systems, world views, values, philosophies, perceptions, ethos, emotions and mores, all of which combine to paint an authentic and unadulterated picture of the African existential landscape. This is the Kernel or central focus of Achebe's (1995:45) often quoted assertion:

I would be quite satisfied if my novels (especially the ones I set in the past) did no more than teach my people that their past- with all its imperfections- was not one long night of savagery from which the first Europeans acting on God's behalf delivered them.

The critical point here is that, it is this African existential landscape that has given African literature its distinctive artistic pattern and flavour. Adedimeji (2008:72/73) highlights this point inter alia:

By literature, we mean any piece of writing that expresses human experience and feeling through imagination. This writing becomes African when it addresses aspects of African life, society, philosophy and experience, regardless of whatever language in which it is written.

African literature is, thus, defined by its focus on and portrayal of aspects of the African existential reality, which is subtly or overtly encapsulated in the fabrics of oral tradition; hence, it is safe to state that this tradition constitutes the fulcrum of modern African literary products. As Igboanus (2004:219/220) lushly captures it:

The oral tradition is very important to Africans in general because their behaviours, thoughts, language and rhetoric are moulded and shaped by their tradition. Similarly, their creative imagination, history, medicine, technology and philosophy were orally passed down to different generations through various forms of oral performance. The writer's experiences and world-view are nurtured by this tradition, in spite of the language of expression.

There is no doubt that language is also crucial or fundamental to any worthwhile discourse on what constitutes African literature in whatever genre mainly because of the continent's colonial roots. Suffice it to state however that, in this study, our interest in this subject or concept is restricted to its significance as an integral part of the African existential reality from which African literature springs. Beyond this, and the fact that it is the prime vehicle for the conveyance of the oral traditions and cultural exigencies or touchstones we have privileged above, language also serves as a mirror and an index of culture, in the sense that it not only expresses the latter but also provides certain pragmatic nuances which help to decorate and reinforce it. Adedimeji (2008:72) captures the inextricable link between the two concepts inter alia:

One crucial aspect of culture is language as every culture has a language that expresses it; there is no culture without a linguistic basis. This statement is still true when it is reversed: there is no natural language without cultural foundation.

Thus, Wellek and Warren (1949:22) observe that "... language is not a mere inert matter like stone but is itself a creation of man and thus charged with the cultural heritage of a linguistic group." Trask(1995:85) echoed a similar viewpoint when he averred that, " language is a very powerful means of declaring and maintaining one's identity". The relevant point is that, in order to 'declare' and 'maintain' their distinctive African identities in a foreign language, such as French, English or Portuguese, as the case may be, as a result of the historical accident of colonialism, it is inevitable that African writers resort to deploying idioms from their indigenous linguistic and cultural

repertoire. Although Bloomfield (1988:44) refers to this practice as “the adoption of features which differ from the main tradition”, there is no doubt that it imbues African literary or artistic creations with a kind of functional and aesthetic dualism. According to Alo(1998:26), There is the natural human tendency to innovate in Language, either for the sake of being creative and original or as a result of the need to express new objects, things or ideas.... Innovations in non-native English occur as a result of new cultural realities.

Hence, Kachru (1986:12) observes that African writers in English (for instance) necessarily “... mould the language for new contexts” alien to the traditions of European literature, and that such writers are “... suspect as fostering new beliefs, new value systems, and even new linguistic loyalties and innovations ...” for, as Brumfit and Carter (1986:145) put it, “the more culture-bound the style becomes, the more distance is created between the native varieties of English and the non-native varieties.” On the basis of this view, Kachru (1982:330) further refers to African literature as a solid example of what he termed “contact literatures”; other examples being the literatures of English-speaking India and Persian, Francophone Africans and Hindi-speaking Fiji, Trinidad and South India. Igboanusi (2004:217/218) explains that “such literatures (i.e contact literatures) result from multilingual and multicultural situations” and that they have their own identities in addition to acquired identities. Hence Grieve (1964:13) observes that if English (for instance) is to be an effective medium of communication in Africa, it needs to be adapted to the linguo-cultural modes of meaning making in the continent, so that it can express concepts, objects, or phenomena that do not exist in the English cultural and semantic universe (see Adedimeji, 2008:80).

In view of the foregoing, and particularly of Kachru’s (1986:161) contention that these new literatures give birth to “... a new literary sensibility and extended cultural awareness” on the part of non-indigenous or native readers, as a result of the inherent problems of cross-cultural transfer of meaning, the present study focuses on the functional and aesthetic value of African linguo-cultural elements in Barclays Ayakoroma’s *A Matter of Honour*, against the backdrop of “... the African concept of art as a composite of expressiveness, meaning and utility” (Osani, 2008:95).

THEORETICAL FOUNDATION

The concern of a socio-semiotic theory, as espoused by Ferdinand De Saussure (1986) and subsequently expanded by Hodge and Kress (1988), Thibault (1991), and Kress and Van Leeuwen (2001), which we have adopted in this study, is the explication of meaning making modes in specific social and cultural contexts. It emphasizes a comprehensive theoretical and analytical framework which can be used to explore or examine various signifying practices in social contexts, and sees meaning making as a social and cultural activity, in the sense that ‘codes’ of language and communication are moulded or shaped by social and cultural processes. In other words, the main task of this theory, as we have earlier mentioned, is to develop analytical and theoretical frameworks that can explain meaning making in a specific socio-cultural context, for as Caruso and Weidenbumer (1997:1) observe, “context affects our perception of visual, verbal and even social situation.” In the main, as Thibault (1991) put it, the theory encapsulates meaning making and interpretation devices or strategies which cut across the visual, verbal, or aural, and stresses

the social dimension of human signification and interpretation practices and the role they play in shaping human lives and their societies. Kress and Leeuwen (2001) observe that these areas of meaning making are referred to as semiotic modes or ‘channels’ and can be written gestural, imagistic, musical or multimodal i.e a configuration or ensemble of different modes.

The critical plank is that, although in Ferdinand De Saussure’s postulation, structuralist semiotics deals primarily with invariable or fixed linguistic or semiotic structures or systems called ‘langue’, social semiotics extends the theory to linguistic and semiotic designs which vary according to the social and cultural circumstances or environment and the linguistic targets or idiosyncrasies of the user known as ‘parole’. Thus social semiotics gives room for writers’ or speakers’ individual creativity and the varying historical and socio-cultural experiences or existential patterns of societies which language users must adapt to, or reflect, in their writings and speeches. This singular fact explains why socio-semiotic theory is usually deployed by writers and scholars in pragmatics, sociolinguistics, cultural studies, and even Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA).

Significantly, M.A.K Halliday’s (1978) *Language as a Social Semiotic*, which highlights the inextricable nexus between language and society, introduced the term in linguistic/theoretical circles. This nexus is explained in the three metafunctions of language i.e. interpersonal, ideational and textual. According to Hodge and Kress (1988), the following summarize the major planks of Halliday’s social semiotics which are clearly relevant to our view or use of language and culture in the present study:

- i. Language is a social fact.
- ii. We shall not come to understand the nature of language if we pursue only the kinds of questions about language that are formulated by linguists.
- iii. Language is as it is because of functions it has evolved to serve in people’s lives.
- iv. There are three functions or ‘metafunctions’ of language viz: ideational (about something), interpersonal (doing something) and textual (the speaker’s text-forming potential).
- v. Language is constituted as a discrete network of options.

We need to stress that what is particularly germane to the present study is that a socio-semiotic theory emphasizes meaning in contexts, and not abstract, formal associations or texts, or unchangeable codes or rules. This means that it focuses on socially or contextually determined linguistic items, such as the ones which originate through social and cultural practices. In other words, it is a critical interpretive and functional theory which can be applied to a broad spectrum of sociological or communicative contexts, like Ayakoroma’s traditional society in *A Matter of Honour*.

Language, Culture, and African Literature

As we have already indicated in the preceding section, the language question in African literature is traceable to the historical accident of colonialism, which was a by-product of the Berlin Conference of 1885, where African nations were balkanized among imperial powers (i.e Britain, France, Portugal), for administrative purposes. The corollary is that African countries are either Anglophone or Francophone, etc, implying that these countries are inevitably bilingual, a term which reflects a phenomenon where two languages are used side-by-side, whether by an individual

or a given society. Bloomfield (1933) defines the term as the native-like control of two languages. Lambert (1977) sees it as the existence of two languages in the repertoire of an individual or a speech community.

Quite fundamentally, bilingualism is a product of language contact. In other words, as Appel and Muystan (1987) put it: language contact inevitably leads to bilingualism. The inference of this fact is that, at least, two different languages with distinctive features (i.e lexical, semantic, phonological and syntactic) must come into contact for bilingualism to occur or manifest. Akindele and Adegbite (1992) identify factors such as colonialism, commerce, conquest, annexation and war, etc, as having the latent potentials to precipitate such language contacts, as we have observed in the African situation. As literature is an expressive art, the consequent complex linguistic environment has dire and far-reaching implications for the literature of African countries and various writers have devised convenient ways of circumventing it. Against this background Alo (1998) has outlined some devices deployed by African writers to reflect local or indigenous contexts and nuances in their styles viz:

- i. Coinages, borrowing, etc.
- ii. The use of native similes and metaphors
- iii. The transfer of rhetorical devices from native languages
- iv. The translation of native proverbs, idioms etc.
- v. The use of culturally dependent speech styles
- vi. The use of native syntactic devices and deviation.
- vii. Code-switching and code-mixing
- viii. Transliteration

A critical look at the foregoing outline etches the strategic importance of language and literature as an instrument for the expression of the cultures of given societies. Hence Okoh (1995) holds the view that language expresses the cultural equipment of a people. Babatunde and Shobomehin (2007:149) refer to Sapir's (1914:20)

... Affirmation of the cultural content of language and his view of culture as the means by which members of the society express their thoughts and ideas to one another ...

Culture itself is a pervasive or omnibus term which is succinctly defined as the way of life of a people. This definition implies that it subsumes the speech pattern, cosmology, dress code, occupations, religious practices and general behavioural psychology of a given people. Adedimeji (2008:72) captures the pervasive character of the term 'culture' as,

... a dynamic phenomenon encompassing the totality of attitudes, behaviours, beliefs and world-views. It is an integral part of every human society and all social groups are characterized by it. In other words, it is that complex pattern of behaviour and material achievement which are produced, learned and shared by members of a community.

Hence the socio-cultural setting of literary works by writers such as Barclays Ayakoroma, exudes images drawn from the Niger Delta landscape (or riverscape) such as floods, rivers, aquatic birds and animals, water lettuce, tidal flow, shores, mangrove swamps etc; and a preponderance of

characters who are fishermen, hunters, lumberers, and farmers in such crops as plantain, cassava, cocoyam, water yam etc. The critical fact is that, as we have earlier mentioned, literature is an index of society, as the entire worldview of the given society is encapsulated and articulated in literary texts. Izevbaye (1974:138) corroborates this viewpoint when he hints at the “background of vernacular culture” which has

... helped to give Nigerian (or African) literature its character, and can provide a touchstone for understanding and identifying the peculiar characteristics of the literature.

Thus, there is a watertight relationship between language, literature and society. Since literature recreates or clones society, the language for its expression must also be familiar with the nooks and crannies of the people’s psychology and worldview. Ojaide (1996:12) echoes this viewpoint when he averred that the “language of modern African literature... is informed by African languages.” Clark (1970:52) lends credence to this viewpoint in his affirmation that the African writer swims “in a stream of double currents, one traditional, the other modern”. In Adejare’s (1992:192) view,

The representation of African speech form in literature in English is a common feature of the works of several African writers in English.... Traces of mother tongues are most pronounced in the works of Nigerian writers.

The implication of this phenomenon is that the critic of African literature should be conscious of and conversant with the linguistic and cultural traditions of the writer’s indigenous background as well as western and European styles and traditions to appropriately and adequately reflect the fusion or hybridity engendered by the bilingual tendencies of the African literary artist, as exemplified by Ayakoroma’s *A Matter of Honour*.

A Brief Biography of the Author

Barclays Foubiri Ayakoroma is a frontline dramatist and cultural administrator in Nigeria. He attended L.A. School and St. Enda’s College (Now Agbarho Grammar School) in Agbarho, Delta State, and read Theatre Arts at the University of Calabar, Ibadan and Port Harcourt, specializing in Directing and Film Studies. Apart from *A Matter of Honour*, Ayakoroma is also the author of several other plays including *Dance on His Grave*, *A Chance to Survive and other plays*, *Castles in the Air*, and *A scar for life*. A former staff of the Rivers State Television (RSTV), Port Harcourt, Ayakoroma was also a Lecturer in the Theatre Arts Department of the University of Port Harcourt and the Executive Director, Bayelsa State Council for Arts and Culture, Yenagoa. He is, at present, the Executive Secretary, National Institute for Cultural Orientation (NICO), Abuja, Nigeria.

Socio-Cultural Context of the Text

Ayakoroma’s *A Matter of Honour* revolves around a thriving cultural or traditional practice among the Niger Delta people (and other parts of Nigeria) of according so much reverence to a corpse that where it is buried is of prime or utmost importance. Ironically, when a man is alive, he weathers the storms of life alone, with his immediate family. His extended family members do not care a hoot how he survives or resolves the multiple and exacting crises that assail him. Even when he falls sick, or is indisposed, the extended family members may not show an iota of concern or

involvement in any effort to seek a cure. The crux of the matter is that, as soon as he gives up the ghost, they appear and hold series of meetings to plan an elaborate and ‘befitting’ burial ceremony for the deceased, particularly if he belonged to the upper echelon of the social ladder.

This is the sociological malaise or irony of a tradition that is re-enacted in Ayakoroma’s vastly engaging and riveting play. Oweibi, a paternal son of Amabiri, who lived all his life with his mother’s people at Angiama, dies. The paternal people insist that the corpse must be interred at their place (Amabiri) because it is a matter of honour, to which the mother’s people predictably disagree and decline. Abere feverishly articulates and defends this matter in the text:

That is what we live for. It is this tradition that makes us distinct from those machete-carrying, brainless people of Angiama. They act without thinking, we think before acting. It is this tradition that differentiates us from apes. You want us to be laughing stock for the whole clan...? By the time Oweibi is buried at Angiama, we will be seen as people who could not bury their dead. (p.11)

This hostile and desperately charged scenario provides the conflict of the play, and the two communities go to the trenches, deploying both brawn and brain, to outwit or outsmart the other. At a deeper interpretive level, the play captures the irrational tendencies of human beings who invest their valuable time and energy in chasing shadows while real or worthwhile issues are left unattended to.

Textual Analysis

This section explores the linguistic and cultural elements in Ayakoroma’s text, such as native rhetorical pattern, proverbs, native figuration/tropes, African pantheon/belief system and transliteration etc, which help the author to effectively encode his message, as a signifying system, and also domesticate or nativize the text. In other words, these elements or devices perform functional roles and also imbue the text with local colour or aesthetics, signaling or underpinning it as a product of a distinctive African heritage, even though the conveyor language is English.

Native Rhetorical Elements

In social or communal gatherings in the native African context, the call-and-response mode of communication is a very critical rhetorical ingredient or element as speakers typically demonstrate their oratorical skills or potentials by not only stridently but eloquently making such calls, but also by injecting or introducing personal drama into them. A ready case in point in African literature is ‘Umuofia Kwenu!’ of Chinua Achebe’s *Things Fall Apart* (1958). The basic purpose of such a rhetorical preliminary is to instill order or draw attention to the matter at hand and set the stage for a profound public discourse or conversation. In Ayakoroma’s text, this device is preponderantly deployed, to capture or recreate the authentic African speech environment, mode and essence. Since the text deals with a critical public or communal issue, it is certainly no coincidence that it opens with such a call:

PAPA: Aaahh Ama!
 ALL: Iyeah!
 PAPA: I greet you all.
 (p.1)

In this context, Papa's daughter has just been given out in marriage. He uses the call as a prelude to, or as a stage-setting device for a speech or homily on the trado-cultural value and exigency of chastity and unblemished character among the young ones, particularly the female folk, who have just led in the couple. As he puts it, this is expedient in order not to discourage potential suitors from "knocking on our door" (p.2), which is a direct translation or transliteration from the Izon/Ijo 'wari gbolo' meaning to make marriage proposals. It must be underscored that Ayakoroma creatively captures a very sensitive existential issue in that, in an ideal (that is rustic or idyllic) African social setting, chastity is a sine qua non for the reputation, dignity and acceptance of the womenfolk and their families of origin. In other words, the pride of an authentic African family is largely anchored or hinged on the chastity of its womenfolk, among other things, and potential suitors make concrete and determined enquiries in this regard, before marriage proposals are made for, as Adedimeji (2008:76) observes "marriage is a sacred institution in Africa...."

From a rhetorical point of view, it is also apparent in the context that Papa addresses a community or town (i.e 'ama'), hence the call 'Aaahh Ama!' Sometimes the addressee could be a family, clan, kingdom or a group of tribesmen, depending on the identity or colouration of the assembly. At other times, the appellation or cognomen of the group is used, instead of the collective name, as we find in the following context, for instance:

ABIDE: Ahnn Izon!
 ALL: Iyeah!
 ABIDE: Ahn Aken! (Directed at his people only)
 ALL: Iyeah!
 ABIDE: If you see, will you act?
 ALL: We will act!
 (P.20)

Note that 'Ahn Aken' which is directed at the speaker's people (i.e the people of Angiama) only, carries their communal appellation or epithet 'Aken.' In the same breath, 'Ahnn Izon' is a more generalized call, referring to the two groups of people (i.e Amabiri and Angiama), both of whom are Izon/Ijo tribesmen. It is instructive to note also that when there is a mixed assemblage, the call is a simple 'the house' or 'people in the house, to reflect the pot pourri, as when Abide addresses the emissaries from Amabiri and his own towns people:

ABIDE: People in the house, I greet you all.
 ALL: Iyeah!
 (P.17)

Also noteworthy is the last segment of the preceding context (i.e 'If you see, will you act?'). This is a solidarity signal; a forceful and feverish call that appeals to the emotions of the addressees, to place them in one charged mood for collective action. It can be gleaned from the foregoing contexts that what is expedient or paramount in such native rhetorical situations is the power of perception of the speaker, who must perfunctorily apply the appropriate call. Significantly, this form of rhetoric which makes for contextual variation is in consonance with the socio-semiotic theory that

is adopted for the study, in that, it emphasizes modes of communication that are shaped or conditioned by social and cultural environments or circumstances.

Closely, related to the call-and-response rhetorical configurations explored above is the author's copious deployment of individual praise names or epithets, reflective of what obtains in public or communal gatherings or conversations in a rustic African/Ijo society, as exemplified in the following context:

IN-LAW: That is how it is. Akpali ama-otu Oge!
 PAPA: That is me! The festival of frogs is always celebrated on water, not on land. Do the ones in your village celebrate theirs on land?
 IN-LAW: Not at all.
 PAPA: Inside the bottle...
 IN-LAW: It is in every family. You are inside the bottle or some other person in your family; so, don't talk about my own (P.2).

It is clear from this context that the two characters or co-interactants bear two distinctive epithets viz: 'Akpali ama-otu oge' (the festival of frogs) and 'Inside the bottle!' As the contexts show, a notable aspect of this native rhetorical imperative is that the addressee (i.e the owner or bearer of the cognomen) eloquently justifies its appropriateness, validity or enduring wisdom, as a matter of necessity. This is a veritable mark of identity which depicts some incontrovertible reality and is very crucial for one's integration or initiation into manhood; that is, as a mark of maturity and independence, young men adopt personal epithets and refrain from using their fathers'. In the same vein, women adopt their husbands'. It should be noted that, as identity markers which depict or reflect the character, personality and pedigree of the bearer, such epithets are effective modes of communication. Hence Crystal (1997) observes that language performs the role of identifying or signaling who we are and how we can be classified or grouped.

Proverbs

Proverbs permeate the African linguo-cultural milieu and this is consciously captured in many African narratives, plays and poems. A very attractive reference point is Achebe's picturesque and memorable description of the form in his *Things Fall Apart* (1958:6) as "...the palm oil with which words are eaten", a description which does not only essentialize the inherent economy and robust semantic potentials in the form, but also highlights the fluidity and adaptability of its imagery in the creative enterprise. Hence Osani (2008:96) defines the term as "a short saying in more or less fixed form which expresses a general truth in a delightful and figurative way." This scholar (Ibid) further describes the form as "a crystal of experience" in the sense that, In terms of content, proverbs may refer to any situation because they emanate from the reservoir of a people's collective history, knowledge, and wisdom. They embody their norms and values, thoughts, ideas and beliefs. They also reflect and articulate a people's philosophy, mythology and religion as well as their empirical observations of their physical and social environments.

Osani (2008:104) believes that writers generally utilize proverbs for "... rhetorical purposes and for the creation of rhythmic and expressive beauty," because they are, by their very nature, marked by "... terseness, rhythm and vigour." Akporobaro (2001:395) also alludes to the "poetic form in

which many are expressed... (which) serves ... to set them apart from everyday speech.” In Ayakoroma’s text, proverbs are given their due prominence as the hub or nucleus of African native rhetoric, as demonstrated in the following two contexts, for instance:

Context I: The village clown or jester, in breaking the news of Oweibi’s death at Angiama, his maternal home, presents it thus:

EGBERI: I don’t know how to start. But then our people say the message does not kill the bearer. What is happening is a matter of honour. A son of Amabiri, Oweibi, who had been with his mother’s people at Angiama, has joined our ancestors.

(P.5)

Context II: Kuro emphasizes the urgency of the matter at stake, to which Papa and the crowd readily acquiesce:

KURO: They say a man with fire in his hands has no time for pleasantries; he welcomes no delays. We have a serious matter on our hands. It is a good thing we have finished everything about our daughter’s bride price. Apparently, we cannot sit here and be drinking as if all is well. I suggest our in-law be taken indoors while we quickly plot a line of action.

CROWD: Yes, Yes. We agree with you.

PAPA: I cannot agree with you more. He who is responding to the urgent call of nature, never knows a bad waterside.(P.7)

It is evident in these contexts that proverbs are veritable linguo-cultural tools for validating or reinforcing a speaker’s or writer’s proposition, in an ideal African socio-cultural setting, as they provide a kind of incontrovertible and pragmatic aura or hedge around one’s thought, feeling, observation or position. This is essentially because they sprout or evolve from the very fabric and depths of native wisdom and tradition and thus, contain imagery which reflects every aspect of communal life. For example, Context I above shows that the proverb resolves the dilemma of the speaker, as it provides him with an entry point; while the two proverbs in context II justify the need for urgent and decisive action on the part of the people of Amabiri, to stave off the impending shame and humiliation of not being able to bury the corpse of a blood brother. This is an instance of validation or reinforcement of a rhetorical position(s) or an exalted African traditional philosophy or value which pervades the entire text and is central to the overall linguo-cultural mould in which it is cast. Igboanusi (2008:220) has drawn our attention to the fact that,

... When an African uses proverbs, for example, in his works, it may not be merely to add a touch of local colour, or even for aesthetic purposes, but to emphasize an important value of the African society.

Ayakoroma has evidently used proverbs in his text as profound analogical or allusive expressions which do not only help to encode or extend textual meaning, but also as a device which adds a special seasoning to conversations or speeches in African communal or traditional environments. We must emphasize that, as Ayakoroma’s text shows (in its pervasive use of the device), a salient feature of this form is its wide-ranging scope, as every subject which pertains to the people’s socio-

cultural experience and behavioural psychology is covered and this is passed from one generation to another as part of folklore. Proverbs, therefore, do not only garnish or burnish native speech; they are a cardinal plank of African oral traditions and typically contain the native wisdom of the people which guides their daily conduct in all spheres of their existence, since they are themselves products of man's deep observation of his world.

Native Figurations/Tropes

In Balogun's (1996) view, figurative language refers to the imaginative uses to which language is deployed, especially by the poet, whereby language acquires extra meaning beyond the literal. Ogbolugo (2005) avers that, in a semantic study, figures of speech operate from the point of extension of meaning, resulting in polysemy or transfer of senses and that, in a more general sense, figurative language covers different devices which are semantically or grammatically marked or unusual. It goes without saying that, since literature is a microcosm or clone of the larger society, any worthy artistic creation that seeks to express the pulse of African existential landscape must characterize such figures of speech or tropes, which are highly powerful and cognitive linguo-cultural tools that mean by associating or comparing images from the society's milieu. Like proverbs, which we have explored above, native figurations are an important aspect of African native speech and they imbue literary texts with an unabashed kind of local flavour and pushes meaning forward. As we have earlier noted, this is very critical in the creative process of the African writer who perfunctorily expresses himself in a foreign language, as it helps him to capture and contextualize the intricate nuances of African speech and imagistic pattern.

In Barclays Ayakoroma's A Matter of Honour, native similes are clearly the most dominant trope. Trope used and they help to concretize and contextualize indigenous meaning. It must be noted that the following contexts from the text are merely illustrative or representative and in no way reflect the pervasive range or scope of the use of the device in the text:

- i. DOUBRA: Look, my father did not die like a fowl. We can't hurriedly bury him like that. (P.15)
- ii. ABERE: Go on! Say what you like! Look child, your world may have changed but we still have our ways, our customs, and our traditions. Ignore them and you live like a reed in the tide. (P.23)
- iii. PIFA: it is not as easy as garri, as you make it appear. (P.31)
- iv. EGBERI: When we are talking something serious, they are quarrelling like women. (P.39).
- v. PIFA: Remember that words are like the wind. No one can predict the direction (P.49)
- vi. PIFA: Such is life. Man will always have problems but we don't have to carry these problems on our heads like lobsters. (P.57)
(emphasis mine)

These contexts apparently do not need any explication, as they are not vague or ambiguous. In fact, one noteworthy attribute or feature of African native similes (or metaphors), as we can glean from the contexts above, is clarity; that is, they yield their meanings without any difficulty or hurdle as sufficient contextual signals or clues are typically provided. Additionally, their easy

comprehensibility is also largely facilitated by the fact that they evolve from shared communal, cultural or traditional experiences. The latter aspect is very critical to the present study, particularly if we share Holman's (1980:445) definition of tradition as "a body of beliefs, customs, sayings or skills handed down from age to age or from generation to generation." In other words, the African scholar/reader has some advantage in the comprehension and explication of literary texts written by African authors because, as Igboanusi (2008:221) puts it,

Many aspects of their texts are typical adoption of the oral style to written tradition. There is, for instance, a preponderance of figurative language and idiomatic expressions with local colours in direct translation or transliteration from their mother tongues. To understand and interpret their meanings properly, one must have to understand the tradition from which they are drawn. Otherwise, attempts at interpreting these works will result in semantic distortion or information skew.

This is the crux of the socio-semiotic theory we have adopted for the study, which is, viewing meaning making as a social and cultural activity, in the sense that language codes and communication strategies are determined or conditioned by social and cultural processes. The critical point is that such figurative locutions as the foregoing contexts from Ayakoroma's text show decorative texts and endow them with aesthetic value in addition to conveying functional contextual meanings which validate or invalidate propositions, as the case may be, and in the process, enrich a text. Hence Ogbolugo (2005) observes, quite aptly, that they help to structure and elaborate an argument for the purpose of moving the emotions of the audience.

Local Pantheon/Religious Belief System

There is no doubt that Ayakoroma foregrounds the African/Ijo belief in traditional gods, deities and ancestral spirits, through linguo-cultural and dramatic processes in his text. Religion plays a central role in the affairs of man and this is quite prominent and far-reaching in African/Ijo cultural or traditional existential milieu, as all activities revolve around the gods, ancestors, incantation, libations, rituals and sacrifices. Ayakoroma (2002:29) points out that,

... the Ijaws (Ijos), like the other Africans, have a place for traditional African religion, in their belief system. There is belief in the Almighty God, Tamarau (Our Creator), Woyengi (Our Mother, which sees God in the feminine gender), Tamuno, Ayebarau, and so on. However, there is the belief in lesser gods and ancestors, who are seen as intermediaries between man and Woyengi, who is in heaven.

Papa's prayer for the couple on the 'happy occasion' of the marriage of his daughter, which opens the play, is quite telling in this regard:

PAPA: (Taking bottle) Our prayer is that our gods and ancestors should give them long life and prosperity. As we ask for good life, we also want good money and good children for them. When the man starts sleeping with her, even if he touches her side, let it be a child. Even if he touches her buttocks, let her be carved big with a child.(P.2/3)

Of note here is the lexical repetition or reiteration (i.e 'good' is repeated three times, to foreground its focus or centrality in the supplications) and the parallel imperative structures (i.e ... even if he touches her side ...'; 'Even if he touches her buttocks...'). These elements which typically approximate native speech in such contexts do not only perform the discourse function of tying the various segments of the text together, they also give the prayer a recognizable and measured cadence and enhance the solemnity of the setting. The overt semantic underpinning of this strategy is that it helps in the ordering and sequencing of the prayer items and ensures a free, and even picturesque, thought progression. In other words, it helps in both linguistic and imagistic foregrounding of the items, as seen further in the following excerpt:

ABERE: Even if he touches her breast, we want a child, let her be pregnant (P.3)

Instructively, even the village clown or drunkard, Egberi, in spite of his intractable buffoonery, echoes or intones the same lines, even though Papa tries to restrain him because "we have poured libation to the gods and ancestors." (P.4). This singular fact eloquently suggests an ingrained linguo-cultural pattern of prayer in the psyche of the people on such occasions, which they offer without effort, with little individual creativity or drama:

EGBERI: That was you now. I am free to offer my own prayer, abi? See me O! (Turning to the girl). Look my daughter, anywhere he touches when he is sleeping with you, we want children. Your lap O, Your waist O, Children! Your stomach O!, children! Your navel O, children... (P.5)

The authorial comment in this context further reinforces the solemnity and ritualistic undertone of the occasion and the centrality of the gods in the text:

The crowd responds at appropriate points to reinforce the prayers. As he ends, he pours libation with his right hand for the gods and ancestors; then the left hand for the evil spirits who may be skulking around. He drinks his and gives a second to the bridegroom who sips a little and gives the rest to the bride. She drinks too and hands over the glass to him... (P.3).

The point is that the prayer pattern can be termed a speech culture; a culturally dependent speech style which is clearly an integral part of the behavioural psychology of the people in the world of Ayakoroma's text such as the native calendar i.e 'one market week turned to one full moon' (P.10) and the paralinguistic or non-verbal strategy of protest, as when the three emissaries from Amabiri refuse to accept a polite and decorous gesture of 'entertainment' or offer of drinks from the people of Angiama, an example of what Adedimeji (2008:76) describes as a "... face threatening act, a sign of hostility ...", like Akukalia's refusal to shake the hands of Ebo in Achebe's *Arrow of God* (1964).

No doubt, Ayakoroma's text is enmeshed in tradition, hence local idioms and behavioural patterns saturate it. As we have earlier established, the arguments and counter arguments, which constitute the conflict of the text itself have a tinge of tradition:

GBAKI: ... How can you bury a man away from the graveside of his ancestors? (P.22)

PIFA: Then have you considered the issue of conveying the body of a dead man from one town to another as if he is a woman? How ridiculous! (P.23)

The interrogative sentence used by the two speakers here is very strategic. It performs the semantic function of pinpointing and foregrounding the absurdity (i.e. of burying a man away from his ancestors and of moving the corpse of a man like a woman's which must be taken from her husband's place to her hometown for interment). In the second context, the absurdity is further reinforced or foregrounded by the following exclamation. The critical point in all this, however, is that tradition, in this sense, has a deep religious or metaphysical angle to it, which borders on the African belief in life and death:

ABERE: Burying your father here is against tradition. His body will not rest and we don't want to go about appeasing the restless spirits of the dead. (P.23).

(emphasis mine)

The salient fact that emerges from the underlined aspect of this excerpt is that religious belief is a veritable aspect of African tradition, which is sacred. This fact is further re-echoed when Enemo and Dikumo question the wisdom in fighting over a corpse which does not have the powers to appreciate what they are doing:

PAPA: That is where you are mistaken. He is there to see what we are doing, just as our ancestors would be restless if we are unable to bring Oweibi to join them. The joy of the dead is in their kindred joining them when they answer the final call. (P.42).

Note the use of the pronoun 'he' for the corpse and the general reference to life after death in the context.

Transliteration

Transliteration simply refers to a linguistic process whereby words and letters which mean in one language are expressed in another language, essentially a target language; hence Catford (1965) describes it as word-for-word translation. Alo (1998:28) corroborates this viewpoint when he defined the concept or term as the "process whereby the units of one language, e.g. words, structures, are replaced by those in another language i.e. from a Nigerian language into English...." In other words, the term entails the replacement of each source language word, or other units, with the units of the target language. Instructively, in Ayakoroma's text, words or structures in the Ijo language are expressed in the English language to maintain the lexico-grammatical texture and pattern of signification of the source language. This is a core organizational principle and a very critical strand of linguo-cultural aesthetics deployed in the text, though not in the vehement or programmatic mould of Okara's *The Voice* (1964). In the main, it helps the author to adapt the register and syntax of the English language to the linguistic and cultural nuances of the Ijo language and in, in the process, foreground the semantic properties of the native sociolinguistic milieu. The implication is that the language of the text, as we have earlier mentioned, is traceable to the author's mother tongue. Though this device cuts across the entire text, the following selected contexts sufficiently represent its use and purpose:

- i. PAPA: We have all tasted the drinks from our in-law. It is apparent that they are not the head-scratching in-law. We have not prayed for that kind of in-law and we have not got such (P.2)
- ii. IN-LAW: Well, we wouldn't bother if our mother-in-law visits every moon ... (P.8)
- iii. I was in Angiama when the death news came (P.6)
- iv. EGBERI: (Angry and flares up) Did I block your mouth? (P.12)
- v. EGBERI: Did they send you? If they sent you, go and tell them you did not see me... (P.12)
- vi. PIFA: What is this world turning into? What will one's ears not hear?(P.19)
- vii. PIFA: Are my ears deceiving me? (P.19)
- viii. ABIDE: Are you saying it does not pain us? (P.27)
- ix. AGBEYE: I do not know about you, I can't walk across your mind. (p.27)
- x. DOUBRA: If I abuse you, what are you going to do? (P.30)
- xi. PIFA: Let him beware. If he is learning how to talk, let him know where to direct his month. I am not his age mate (P.32)
- xii. LAGHA: We will bury the body of Oweibi, even if they cry blood today till the end of the world. (P.32)
- xiii. EGBERI: Look, just go and fight your fight there. (Pointing at Dikumo) don't open your eyes at me. When it comes to Egberi-Egberi, your eyes will shine waan. Tell them you did not see me! (P.41)
- xiv. KURO: Yes, I am not talking with water in my mouth (P.55)

We may not bother to discuss or explain the foregoing instances of transliteration and their semantic implications in the various contexts any further, since they are apparently self-explanatory even to the non-native speaker of the source language. However, suffice it to state that the following forms, for instance, have helped the author to communicate or transmit his artistic vision and, in the same breadth, pragmatically approximate and contextualize how the Ijo/African thinks or speaks:

- i. "head-scratching in-laws" i.e. miserly, poor, unworthy
- ii. "death news" i.e. news/information about the death of".
- iii. "every moon" i.e. monthly.
- iv. "block your mouth" i.e. stop you from talking
- v. "pain us" i.e. infuriate, make angry.
- vi. "walk across your mind" i.e. decipher your intention or reason.
- vii. "cry blood" i.e. complain, protest, or cry bitterly and inconsolably.
- viii. "open your eyes" i.e. intimidate, act smart, city-wise.
- ix. "Shine waan" i.e sound and gesture indicative of emphasis – in this

Context, emphasizing the brightness of the eyes (smart, city-wise) and the attendant impunity.

- x. "water in my mouth" i.e. unserious or without meaning what one says.

This is certainly the functional or pragmatic use of language to reflect the specific socio-cultural typology in which it grows. Okara (1973) gave some insight into the nitty-gritty of this technique when he observed that one can use the idioms of his own language in a way that is understandable in English. Brumfit and Carter (1986:144) believe that such language forms "may be one way to

manifest the user's identity through language".

CONCLUSION

In this study, we have explored the African linguistic and cultural elements deployed in Barclay's Ayakoroma's *A Matter of Honour*, using the parameters of the socio-semiotic theory which is not only functional but also sociological, in the sense that it readily accommodates social structures and patterns of language use in cultural situations. We can glean from the study so far that the author demonstrates significant appropriation of indigenous idioms for the expression of cultural meaning, as many of his linguistic choices and predilections exhibit or reflect overt oral traditions, hence Nnolim (1999:XI) observes that "deep knowledge of tradition... (and) an ear for the local idiom..." mark the dramaturgy of this playwright. Importantly, the study does not claim or pretend to have exhausted the entire gamut of Ayakoroma's deployment of LI nuances in the text, but suffice it to state that it captures the salient variables of the strategy, such as native rhetorical elements, proverbs traditional belief system, native figurations or tropes and transliteration, which have combined to negotiate or mediate meaning for the text.

It is also fundamental and useful to state that we have interpreted and systematically analysed Ayakoroma's text as an example of what Kachru (1982:330) has referred to as "contract literatures", which merely represents the broad African perspective. Apparently, the point is that there is no uniform language or culture known as African, therefore, the Ijo pattern of indigenous signification and mother tongue contextualization which characterize the text can only be said to effectively represent the African mode. Perhaps, to put it more precisely, even in the Nigerian situation, for example, there is a multiplicity of indigenous languages and cultures numbering about 450, all of which have their distinct potentials and idiosyncracies. The corollary is that linguists have identified Igbo English, Hausa English and Yoruba English, for instance, according to the speech of English of English-as-a second-language speakers of the three major languages, respectively. Thus there can be no uniform linguo-cultural pattern even among Nigerian writers who resort to their roots for inspiration and signification. Kachru (1986:140) captures this notion when he observed that "... no broad generalizations which apply to all linguistically and culturally pluralistic countries are possible".

In spite of the foregoing thesis, Osani (2008:97) has drawn our attention to the fact that "language, as the substance of literature, is able to express ideas and feelings as well as reflect the realities of a given social group" Firth (1962) also presents language as a social material that performs the function of facilitating and promoting the shared values of members of a speech community. The major impetus for this study, therefore, is to show the interface between language, culture and literature in a specific African context in order to reflect and project the African linguo-cultural environment, as captured in African literature, and by implication, further enhance and enrich the knowledge and perspectives on the African world view, mores, values and sensibilities; and the concept of literature as an evocation or representation of society. Adedimeji highlights this imperative inter alia:

There is a symbiotic relationship between language, culture and literature as each reinforces, projects and distils the other The need for the projection of African culture has thus informed the development of modern African literature which serves to enlighten, educate and showcase the African world-view, practices and problems.

No doubt, such an enlightenment or education is continually necessary in order for scholars/critics of African literature, particularly non-Africans, to acquire “additional knowledge of the socio-cultural variables present in the context of (the African) situation” for, as Schiffrin (1987) observes, the meaning conveyed by a text is the meaning which is interpreted by speakers and hearers based on their inferences about the propositional connections underlying what is said.

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