

## MOTIFS AND PATTERNS IN ACHEBE'S NOVELS

**Jasper Onuekwusi**

Department of English and Literature, Imo State University, Owerri.

**Bernard Dickson**

Department of English, University of Uyo, Uyo.

**Adagogo Brown**

Department of Foundation Studies

Captain Elechi Amadi Polytechnic, Port Harcourt.

Email: [brownadagogo2@gmail.com](mailto:brownadagogo2@gmail.com). Tel: 08033094068.

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**ABSTRACT:** *This paper examines the novels of Chinua Achebe; Things Fall Apart, No Longer at Ease, Arrow of God, A Man of the People, and Anthills of the Savannah to determine common motifs and patterns running through them. These motifs and patterns are arrived at after a critical reading of the novels. Subsequently, the researchers apply Sociolinguistic Functional Stylistics (SFS) in the analysis of the motifs in the novels. The paper observes that the recurring literary elements and techniques include change in point of view, folktales, proverbs, rhetoric, Igbo (vernacular) words, songs, Pidgin English, prayers, corruption, and in medias res plot. The paper concludes that the motifs and patterns enhance the meanings of the works, add to their aesthetic quality, while the folklore elements give them the outlook of African Literature. Things Fall Apart and Arrow of God are concerned with the pre-colonial and colonial Igbo society, while No Longer at Ease, A Man of the People and Anthills of the Savannah are preoccupied with the developments in postcolonial or post-independence Nigeria. The paper recommends that critics and writers of African Literature should emphasize on the aesthetic, thematic and folkloric qualities.*

**KEYWORDS:** Motifs, patterns, rhetoric, folktale, *in medias res*.

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## INTRODUCTION

This paper points out literary elements and techniques which constitute style and common features in Achebe's novels. A motif "is a conspicuous element, such as a type of event, device, reference, or formula, which occurs frequently in works of literature (Abrams and Harpham, 229), while, according to Hornsby, pattern is "the regular way in which something happens or is done" (1077). Some of these techniques are identified as aspects of Sociolinguistic Functional Stylistics (SFS). This system has helped in the consideration of the significant features of the language of the texts quoted in this work. Largely, SFS has been seen as eclectic because of borrowing from various aspects of linguistics for the purpose of stylistic analysis of the language of literature.

### Theoretical Framework

Looking at the various borrowings by SFS, Nwanyanwu (41) has summarised them under four basic significance which include:

- i. To draw eclectically on trends in literary theory and other fields that may be found to be relevant text interpretation.
- ii. To draw on models and procedures provided by whatever aspects of linguistics relevant to the analysis of literature.

- iii. To relate literary effects observed in the text to linguistic features, especially where these are found to be useful; and
- iv. To analyse linguistic items in terms of their functional relevance, especially in shaping attitudes.

Guided by SFS, I point out the language features as used by Achebe in the novels.

Before engaging in the above task, it has to be pointed out that Achebe used the English language, a second language in a peculiar manner as to convey his Igbo African experiences in a way that he is understood even by the owners of the English language. Achebe's way of using the English Language is what has made him outstanding as a literary artist. It is in defence of his belief and position in the use of English as a second language in creative writing that he says:

The African writer should aim to use English in a way that brings out his message best without altering the language to the extent that its value as a medium of international exchange will be lost. He should aim at fashioning out an English which is at once universal and able to carry his peculiar experience.[...] But it will have to be a new English, still in full communion with its ancestral home but altered to suit its new African surroundings (Achebe, 1982: 61–62).

Through the use of the English language Achebe has exposed Igbo proverbs, images, idioms, and metaphors as seen in his novels.

### **Motifs and Patterns**

As narratives, Achebe's novels have been presented from narrative points of view. According to Abrams and Harpham (301):

Point of view signifies the way a story gets told – the mode (or modes) established by an author by means of which the reader is presented with the characters, dialogue, actions, setting, and events which constitute the *narrative* in a work of fiction.

As the angle from which a story is told, Achebe in the five novels adopts two points of view, maintaining either of the two all through a particular novel or a mixture of the two in a particular novel. The two narrative points of view employed in Achebe's novels are the first and third persons. In the first person point of view, the narrator is also a participant or a character in the narrative. In the opinion of Abrams and Harpham:

This mode, insofar as it is consistently carried out, limits the matter of the narrative to what the first-person narrator knows, experiences, infers, or finds out by talking to other characters. We distinguish between the narrator "I" who is only a fortuitous witness and auditor of the matters he relates [...]; or who is a participant, but only a minor or peripheral one, in the story [...]; or who is himself or herself the central character in the story [...] (303).

The first person narrator by his nature is limited to tell only what he observes, feels and knows about his fellow characters and events in the story and no more. Amongst Achebe's five novels, *A Man of the People*, from the beginning to the end is presented from a first person point of view. The narrator is Odili, who is also the principal character or protagonist in the story. The next text we see the use of the first person point of view in is *Anthills of the Savannah*. Out of the eighteen chapters, six are presented from the first-person point of view. The chapters and narrators are: Chapter One by Christopher Oriko; Chapter Four by Ikem Osodi; Chapter Five by Christopher Oriko; Chapter Six by Beatrice; Chapter Seven by Beatrice and Chapter Eight by unnamed. First person identified only by the first plural pronouns, "we", and "us", which suggests that the narrator is a participant in the story

among the first person plural subject, “we”, and object, “us”, pronouns. The remaining twelve chapters are presented from the third person point of view. Abrams and Harpham are of the opinion that: “In a third person narrative, the narrator is someone outside the story proper who refers to all the characters in the story by name, or as “he”, “she”, “they” (301). The third person point of view narrator can be omniscient or limited point of view.

By the multiplicity of points of view, *Anthills of the Savannah* can be likened to *The Whole Family: A Novel by Twelve Authors* (1908) in which the author of each chapter of the twelve-chapter narrative adopts a different point of view thereby exposing it to multiplicity of points of view without hindering the understanding of the issues therein raised. As Booth puts it:

When James and his eleven colleagues wrote *The Whole Family: A Novel by Twelve Authors* 1908, each author writing one chapter, each chapter using a different central intelligence to throw a different light on the events, no reader could help being mainly interested in the point of view rather than in what the point of view revealed.[...] (29).

In spite of the multiplicity of points of view, focus remains on the protagonist of the novel as an antihero. In the other three novels: *Things Fall Apart*, *No Longer at Ease* and *A Man of the People*, third person point of view remains the narrative technique employed in their presentation. Like the first person point of view used in *A Man of the People* and mixed or combined first and third persons used in *Anthills of the Savannah*, the third person point of view used in the other three novels does not hamper meaning as well.

In order to show the peculiarity of the African art form, as distinct from the European, Achebe incorporates in his novels, aspects of African oral literature or oral tradition, sometimes referred to as folk art or folklore. This form of African literature, according to Finnegan:

[I]s passed down word for word from generation to generation and thus reproduced verbatim from memory throughout the centuries; or, alternatively, that oral literature is something that arises communally, from the people or the ‘folk’ as a whole, so that there can be no question of individual authorship or originality (14).

From Finnegan’s definition, the key characteristics of folklore are orality, heredity, communality and absence of authorship. Abrams and Harpham appear to be in agreement with Finnegan when they say that:

Folklore, since the mid-nineteenth century, has been the collective name applied to sayings, verbal compositions, and social rituals that have been handed down solely, or at least primarily, by word of mouth and example rather than in written form. [...] It also continues to flourish among literate populations in the form of oral jokes, stories and varieties of wordplay; [...] Folklore includes legends, superstitions, songs, tales, proverbs, riddles, spells, and nursery rhymes, pseudoscientific lore about the weather, plants and animals; customary activities at births, marriages and deaths; and traditional dances and forms of drama performed on holidays or at communal gatherings (135–136).

By the definition and constituents of folklore, it covers a very wide scope. Considerably, Achebe has manifested many aspects of folklore in his novels, especially in *Things Fall Apart* and *Arrow of God*. In taking them one after the other, I begin with the folktales which are very prominent in the works. According to Abrams and Harpham, “The folktale is a short narrative in prose of unknown authorship which has been transmitted orally; many of these tales eventually achieve written form” (105). Nnolim throws more light when he defines it as “a popular tale handed down by oral tradition from

a more or less remote antiquity and usually told either about animals or the common folk, to draw attention to their plight and to teach a lesson” (16). In *Things Fall Apart*, chapter 11, pages 67–70, Ekwefi tells her daughter, Ezinma the story of the invitation of the birds and Tortoise to the sky, and how Tortoise got by its rough shell. The story teaches a lesson on greed and selfishness.

There is also another folktale by Ezinma about Tortoise, Cat and famine in the land of the animals. This story, however, is aborted by the intrusion of Priestess Chielo in Okonkwo’s compound at the time in chapter 11, page 70. The third folktale is about the quarrel between Earth and Sky, and the role of Vulture as Earth’s emissary. This is the kind of story that Nwoye enjoys told by his mother. The lesson of the story concerns Okonkwo. The vulture as an emissary is likened to Okonkwo as the emissary of Umuofia. Okonkwo returns from Mbaino with the lad, Ikemefuna, and a young girl given to Ogbuefi Udo to replace his murdered wife. On account of carelessness, the talons of the vulture pierce the rain carefully wrapped in a leaf meant to be delivered to earth, thereby causing a deluge which drenches both the vulture and the earth. Like the vulture that ruins his errand, Okonkwo despite advice not to partake, also ruins his by being involved in the killing of Ikemefuna whom he brings home as the fruit of his assignment. The folktale becomes relevant as it illustrates Okonkwo’s involvement in the destruction of Ikemefuna, the substance of his mission.

Like in *Things Fall Apart*, there are also folktales in *Arrow of God*. In chapter six, page 65, Obiageli tries to tell Nkechi the story of Dimkpolo killed by a fallen “*ukwa* fruit”. This is interrupted by the announcement of a town crier and discontinued. Subsequently, there is another story told by Ugoye to her children about the jealousy between two wives. The story teaches about envy, greed and punishment. The tale is relevant because it illustrates the rivalry and bickering between Ezeulu’s two wives: Ugoye and Matefi and the need for healthy relationship between them and among their children in the family.

In *Anthills of the Savannah*, there is a folktale told by the white bearded old man about the encounter between Tortoise and Leopard in chapter 9, page 128, used in illustrating “struggling. Perhaps to no purpose....” The folktale is typical of the rivalry between President Sam and two of his friends, Ikem and Chris, who struggle “to no purpose” and eventually all die without any achievement.

The presence of folktales in *Things Fall Apart*, *Arrow of God* and *Anthills of the Savannah* is for the purpose of re-enforcing the themes of the novels and teaching lessons. Myth is an aspect of folklore which is very evident in Achebe’s novels. In defining myth, Finnegan quotes Bascom who says that “[m]yths are prose narratives which, in the society in which they are told are considered to be truthful accounts of what happened in the remote past” (361). Slightly, Nnolim extends the definition of myth beyond that of Bascom. According to Nnolim, “[...] pure myth tries to offer explanations for the great forces in nature. In other words, it tries to explain away the origin of creation, the origin of life and death, and account for natural phenomena” (17). In his definition, Nnolim avoids the issue of “truthful accounts” as acknowledged by Bascom. This is probably because myths are not scientifically verifiable.

Guided by the above definition of myth, there are a handful of them in *Things Fall Apart*. One of them is the myth of the growth of Umuike Market narrated by Obierika (79). Others include the myths of the masked Egwugwu spirits (Chapter Ten); relationship between the mosquito and the ear (53); *Ogbanje* (Chapter Eight) and the snake lizard and the cooked vegetable. In *Arrow of God* there are the myths of Nwanyieke and the growth of Okperi Eke Market (19); the growth of Umuru Nkwo Market (19); Idemili deity and the wiping out of Umuama village (48); why women do not grow

beards (64); Onyekulum night spirits (80); getting out of the bed from the left side and foul mood (81), the wrestler who wrestled with his *chi* and got killed; and masked egwugwu spirits (223). The myths of why the Sky went high up (97); Idemili deity (Chapter Eight); Agwu, the twin brother of madness (125); Mosquito and the Ear (199) and the bedbug, her newly-hatched brood and hot water (199) are in *Anthills of the Savannah*.

As part of folklore, proverbs and sayings are replete in Achebe's novels. Proverbs have been defined by Abrams and Harpham as "short, pithy statements of widely accepted truths about everyday life" (10), while Finnegan sees proverbs as means by which language, through imagery, expresses abstract ideas, compressed and allusive phraseology clearly (390). In *Things Fall Apart* there are about eight proverbs. They are on pages 15, 16, 49, 66, 71, 121, 130-131 and 131. Among these proverbs two are used by Ogbuefi Nwakibie, a wealthy man whom Okonkwo, the protagonist had approached for assistance with yam seedlings. Nwakibie had declined such requests from other young men whom he had considered lazy and wasteful. He justified his decision with the proverb: "Eneke the bird says that since men have learnt to shoot without missing, he has learnt to fly without perching" (16). He explains, "I have learnt to be stingy with my yams" (16). This means that since men are lazy, he will not lend them his yam seedlings. This proverb is relevant to the extent that it shows Nwakibie's acknowledgement of Okonkwo's industry.

Nwakibie considers Okonkwo a different young man who has manifested evidence of hard work and as such deserves to be encouraged and supported with yam seedlings. In appreciation of Okonkwo's hard work and desire to succeed as a farmer, Nwakibie tells Okonkwo in another proverb: "As our fathers said, you can tell a ripe corn by its look" (16). This means, to Nwakibie, that Okonkwo has shown evidence of hard work and therefore deserves to be supported. These sample proverbs are chosen because they concern Okonkwo, the focus of the study in *Things Fall Apart*.

In *No Longer at Ease*, there are about 17 proverbs, on pages 5, 9, 18, 37, 54, 71, 72, 74, 88, 89, 90, 96, 98, 124, 134, 144 and 148. Of the lot, only two are discussed as they have direct bearing with Obi Okonkwo, the protagonist of the novel. On page 5, there are three proverbs relating to Obi. One of the members of Lagos branch of Umuofia Progressive Union opposed to the Union's intervention in Obi's bribery court case says: "He that fights for a ne'er-do-well has nothing to show for it except a head covered in earth and grime" (5). By this proverb, the member means that the reward for the efforts in trying to fight for Obi is disgrace and humiliation. The proverb discourages the need to assist Obi in his court case.

In another proverb, another member of the Union who is favourably disposed to Obi being saved by the Union says: "The fox must be chased away first; after that the hen might be warned against wandering into the bush (5). The speaker is of the opinion that Obi should first be saved from going to jail and later warned to desist from crimes.

Yet another member of the Union blames Obi's misfortune on lack of experience on the issue of bribery. According to the narrator, "He told the proverb of the house rat who went swimming with his friend the lizard and died from cold, for while the lizard's scales kept him dry the rat's hairy body remained wet" (5). The proverb suggests that Obi did what all other civil servants do but for lack of experience did not apply reasonable precaution and as such is apprehended. The proverb cautions against undue imitation of other people's habits.

In *Arrow of God*, there are about 50 proverbs between pages 17 and 226. However the one used by Anosi, Ezeulu's neighbour in commenting on Ezeulu, the protagonist of *Arrow of God* is very apt. Edogo overheard Anosi talking to two or three other men about the python Oduche, one of Ezeulu's sons, imprisoned in a box. According to Anosi: "What that man Ezeulu will bring to Umuaro is pregnant and nursing a baby at the same time" (52). The proverb forebodes and forewarns of very terrible evil that could emanate from Ezeulu. Eventually, the truth of the proverb manifests as Ezeulu himself, by delaying to eat the outstanding sacred yams and announcing the commencement of the New Yam Festival, brings untold economic hardship to the community.

There appears to be a fewer number of proverbs in *A Man of the People*. There are about 12 proverbs. However, attention is given to only one used by the protagonist, Odili Samalu, who is also the narrator. In anticipated reaction to a dismissal letter and one month's salary payoff, given to him by Mr Nwege, his proprietor and principal, Odili says: "I was about to thank him for so obligingly setting fire to a house that was due for demolition and saving someone's labour..." (102). By the proverb, Odili means that he had already intended to quit or resign from the employment of the school before his dismissal which makes easiest his excuse for severance.

About 20 proverbs are in *Anthills of the Savannah*. Among them is one relating to President Sam, the protagonist of the novel. Sam assumes a superior position when he thinks that "[i]t takes a lion to tame a leopard" (22). This proverb is a justification of his oppression and marginalization of the members of his cabinet in general, and his friends and classmates Chris Oriko and Ikem Osodi, in particular. The proverb projects his high handedness and suppression of his subordinates. Although proverbs have several functions, it can safely be said that Achebe uses them in his novels to effectively enhance meanings and embellish speeches in course of the discourses. Even as he translates, proverb is the palm oil with which words are eaten.

Rhetoric or oratory has been observed as a very prominent feature of Achebe's novels. Rhetoric or oratory is discourse, linguistic communication seen as a transaction between speaker and hearer (Leech and Shorts, 209). Abrams and Harpham (342) make the subject clearer when they refer to the definition of Aristotle. According to them Aristotle defines rhetorical discourse as:

[T]he art of discovering all the available means of persuasion in any given case, and focused his discussion on the means and devices that an orator uses in order to achieve the intellectual and emotional effects on an audience that will persuade them to accede to the orator's point of view.

It is in the light of the foregoing explanations that the rhetoric, orations, discourses, addresses and speeches of the characters of Achebe's novel can be appreciated. As a tradition, public oratory or address begins with the salutation of the addressee(s) by the addresser(s) and most times closes in like manner. In chapter Three of *Things Fall Apart*, Okonkwo approaches Nwakibie to lend him yam seedlings and he salutes him thus: "Nna ayi" (14) in Igbo, meaning "our father" before introducing the essence of his visit. Okonkwo makes his intention known when he says: "I have come to pay you my respects and also to ask a favour. [...] (14) I have come to you for help [...] I have cleared a farm but have no yams to sow (15) [...] If you give me some yam seeds I shall not fail you" (16).

As part of oratory and in order to drive home his point and enhance the smooth delivery of his message, Okonkwo introduces two proverbs: "a man who pays respect to the great paves the way for his own greatness" (14) and "The lizard that jumped from the high iroko tree to the ground said he would praise himself if no one else did" (15-16). In the first proverb, Okonkwo recognizes Nwakibie as a great man and a future mentor who would assist him (Okonkwo) to attain greatness, while in the

second one Okonkwo acknowledges and praises himself for having worked hard so far as a young man.

It is important to note that Okonkwo's speech presentation to Nwakibie has all the ingredients of African rhetoric or oratory. These include the salutation of the addressee by the addresser, the presence of proverbs, and the conviction of the addressee (Nwakibie) to grant the request of the addresser (Okonkwo), when Nwakibie said: "But I can trust you. I know it as I look at you.[...] I shall give you twice four hundred yams. Go ahead and prepare your farm" (16). Okonkwo's oratory and the positive response he receives from Nwakibie mark the beginning of his march to greatness and upward mobility in Umuofia. It should also be noted that it is partly on account of Okonkwo's rhetoric that he is able to persuade Nwakibie to positively respond to his request.

Another rhetoric is in Chapter Two, page 8 delivered by Ogbuefi Ezeugo at the gathering of Umuofia to take a decision over the killing of the wife of Ogbuefi Udo by Mbaino men. As characteristic of such presentation, Ezeugo salutes the gathering in Igbo: "Umuofia kwenu", facing different directions and the crowd responds: "Yaa!" (8). At the end of his speech, Umuofia is moved or persuaded to take a decision, asking Mbaino to make a choice between war and "the offer of a young man and a virgin as compensation." (8). In Ezeugo's speech, is seen the power of rhetoric to move men (Umuofia) to action (Nwanyanwu, 118).

While the preceding two examples can suffice in *Things Fall Apart*, another two are observed in *No Longer at Ease*. The first is the Welcome Address written and read by the Secretary of Lagos Branch of Umuofia Progressive Union at the reception ceremony of Obi Okonkwo in Chapter Four, pages 28–29. The presentation is followed by salutation in English: "Sir, we the officers and members of the above-named Union present..." (28), and closes with "cheers and the clapping of hands" by the Union members in appreciation. The cheers and clapping are evidence of the convincing academic brilliance and performance of the Union's Secretary, whom the members consider as deserving of scholarship "to England" (28) for further studies. The reactions are consequences of the Secretary's rhetoric on the Union members.

Obi's reaction or response to the address by the Union is also a rhetoric but not as impressive as that of the Secretary of the Union of Umuofia. According to the narrator, "Obi's English on the other hand, was mostly not impressive. He spoke 'is' and 'was'" (29). Although they clapped from politeness," (29) the Union members were not moved by the speech.

Another significant speech is the one delivered by Rev. Samuel Ikedi in Chapter One, page 7 – 10, telling Obi the essence of his travelling to England "... to bring knowledge" (9). Rev Ikedi also advised Obi against marrying a white woman in England which in reply, "[t]he crowd murmured its strong disapproval of such behaviour" (9). The disapproval of the crowd as reaction to the issue of Obi marrying a European woman is a consequence of the impact of the speech on them. The crowd is persuaded by the speech to react with disapproval.

There are about eight instances of rhetoric or addresses in *Arrow of God* which appears to be the novel with the highest number of speeches. They are on pages 15, 16, 18, 26, 28, 141 – 142, 145 and 206. However, only two are mentioned here. The first speech by Ezeulu, though started in the middle gives the history of Umuaro, Ulu deity, Ezeulu, the relationship between Umuaro and Okperi and discourages Umuaro from going to war against Okperi (14–15). It is the reaction to this speech that calls forth Nwaka's rhetoric. In commencing his speech, Nwaka salutes Umuaro: "Umuaro kwenu!"

and they reply: “Hem!” (15). This traditional mode of opening an address of a gathering is referred to as phatic communion. This ritualistic language is defined by Malinowski as “a type of speech in which ties of union are created by a mere exchange of words” (quoted in Anyanwu, 136). Nwaka ends his volatile speech in support of war against Okperi in the same manner he starts with phatic communion: “Umuaro kwenu!” and they reply: “Hem!” He adds finally: “I salute you all” (16-17). It must be pointed out that the aim of both instances of rhetoric is to persuade Umuaro to desist from war or go to war against Okperi over land. The speeches show both men as orators.

The speeches in *A Man of the People* start *in medias res* and are reported. On account of this, there is the absence of phatic communion resulting from salutation. One of such speeches is presented by Chief Nanga in Chapter One. It is a speech presented by Chief Nanga during “a family reunion” (13) at the Anata Grammar School. In Chapter Six, Chief Nanga gives another speech as the Minister of Culture while opening “the first ever book exhibition of works by local authors” (58). In this address, Nanga dwells on the promotion of “African Personality.” The two oral presentations by Chief Nanga, as rhetorics at gatherings are assumed to embody salutation and persuasion.

In Chapter Twelve, Max, the leader of Common People’s Convention (CPC) presents an unprepared and impromptu political campaign speech in Odili’s father’s compound which Odili considers impressive though not persuasive enough (123). In Chapter Eleven is observed another rhetoric delivered as a letter by Edna Odo and addressed to Odili. The letter embodies the elements of phatic communion and persuades Odili to “pity” her on account of her marriage issues (110).

As characteristic of Achebe’s novels, there are a couple of rhetorics in *Anthills of the Savannah*. Very outstanding among the lot is the speech of the bearded old man, among the six-man delegation from Abazon on a visit to the Palace, the seat of power in Bassa. The address of the old man to the gathering of Abazon people resident in Bassa centres on the need to persuade President Sam to believe in the genuine repentance of Abazon people to support the continuation of the President in office so that he can resuscitate the water bore-holes project in the region.

The rhetoric of the old man embodies all aspects and ingredients of oratory and discourse. The old man exhibits oratorical skills by employing proverbs, similes, personifications, myths and metaphors (122–128) in the delivery of his speech and message. Another speech is seen in Chapter Eighteen given by Elewa’s Uncle, an old man, during the naming ceremony of Amaechina, the daughter of Elewa and Ikem Osodi. Although the child had been named before the arrival of Elewa’s Uncle who is supposed to have performed the task. However, he is left only with the complimentary role of praying for the well-being of the new born baby. Although a prayer, it is also an apostrophe embodying all the elements of rhetoric. “An apostrophe is a direct and explicit address either to an absent person or to an abstract or non-human entity (Abrams and Harpham, 345). The old man’s prayer is addressed “to the Almighty” God, “owner of the world! Man of Countless names!” (227). The address follows the alternate pattern of sequential statements by the prayer and responses of “Isé!” (228–229) by the audience punctuating each statement. In the course of the prayer, the old man does not only invoke God’s blessings on the new born baby and those gathered at the ceremony but also on Kangan as a country and Bassa as a town, respectively (227–229). The prayer touches on the greed of their leaders who only use public funds to plan for their welfare and those of their family members leaving out the led.

There is another rhetoric in Chapter Twelve where Ikem Osodi is a guest speaker at the Bassa Rotary Club’s donation of a water-tanker to a dispensary in one of the districts of North Bassa (154–155).



The speech is not welcomed by the members of the club because Ikem emphasizes that charity would be unnecessary if the privileged members of the society who give charity concentrate on running a system that will provide the basic needs of the less-privileged.

In the examples of rhetoric cited in each of the novels, whether the addressees are human beings, deities or God, the discourses are intended to persuade them. Igbo (vernacular) words and expressions are critical elements of communication in Achebe's novels. The Igbo words and expressions are used in the absence of suitable English language equivalents and also for the purpose of conveying local colour, Igbo values and experiences. Igbo is the language of the ethnic people of the South-Eastern zone or much of the former Eastern region of Nigeria made up of present day states of Abia, Anambra, Ebonyi, Enugu and Imo.

There are about 35 words and expressions of Igbo in *Things Fall Apart*. A few of the words are names of musical instruments such as *ekwe* (hollow wooden drum) *udu* (hollow earthen pot) and *ogene* (hollow metal gong) (5). Beyond words, there are expressions of such as “*Agbala do-o-o-o!* (Salutation to deity-o-o-o!). *Agbala ekeneo-o-o-o!* (Greetings to deity-o-o-o!). *Chi negbu madu ubosi ndu ya nato ya uto daluo-o-o!*” (The deity or god that kills a human being the day life is sweetest to him/her, greetings to you-o-o-o!) (75. Italics as in the book while interpretations in the brackets are mine). These are the words of Chielo, the priestess of Agbala, with Ezinma on her back as she heads towards the caves. Another Igbo phrase resulting from the interpretation of the language of the Umuofia “hollowed-out” wooden drum (84) announcing the death of Ogbuefi Ezeudu is: “*Umuofia obodo dike,*” (Umuofia the land of the brave) (84). There are more of these words and expressions in the novel but only the above few are presented here as examples. Very outstanding among the brave in Umuofia, is Okonkwo.

In *No Longer at Ease*, there are very few Igbo words because of the dual environmental settings of the novel, one being the Umuofia Igbo Society and the other Lagos Yoruba cosmopolitan society. These settings account for the presence of Igbo and Yoruba words and expressions in the novel. Compared to *Things Fall Apart* and *Arrow of God*, there are fewer Igbo words and expressions in *No Longer at Ease*. These words include “*egusi*” (melon) (18), “*nza*” (specie of bird, small in size), “*chi*” (personal god) and “*Ndo*” (sorry) (all in 148).

Igbo sentences include: “Obi Okonkwo *nwa jelu oyibo* – Obi who had been to the land of the whites” (25) and the accompanying English translation. Another is “Umuofia *kwenu!* (a manner of saluting a gathering but literally meaning “Umuofia answer!)” which is normally followed by the response of the crowd: “*Ya!*” (71). One more Igbo expression is “*Ife awolu Ogoli azua n’afia*” meaning, it is now apparent that Ogoli, an important and rare commodity or item, is available in the market. The statement was made by one old male Umuofia Progressive Union member at the arrival of Obi and Joseph in the former's new Morris Oxford car at the venue of the meeting of the Union for the first time (71). “Ogoli,” the rare commodity referred to, is Obi.

*Arrow of God* parades a reasonable number of Igbo words and expressions. A few examples among the lot will suffice. The words include, *icheku* (a kind of wild fruit), *udala* (wild cherry), *ogene* (hollow metal gong), *egusi* (melon), *asa* (a type of dried fish) (all in 166). An example of Igbo sentence is: *Onye ebuna uzo cho anyi okwu* (199), meaning do not be the first to provoke us. This is a masquerade song by Obika's age group, Otakagu who are presenting a new ancestral mask during the *Akwu Nro* celebration (194). Another example of Igbo sentence is: *Eke nekwo onye uka!*” interpreted to mean: “Python, run! There is a Christian here” (204). By transliteration it should mean:

Python see a Christian! Nwafo and Obiageli, Ezeulu's children are reciting this to scare away a python around their compound (204).

Unlike Achebe's other four novels, *A Man of the People* does not have a word of Igbo expressed in it. This means that both the characters and the narrative consciousness did not use any Igbo word or expression despite the fact that there are ample evidence that most of the characters and some aspects of the setting of the novel are Ibo. The absence of Igbo words and expressions appears very deliberate, to detribalize the novel and give it a neutral or universal setting.

In *Anthills of the Savannah* there is a very minimal number of Igbo words. They are *ube* (94) (African pear) and *mmili* (95) (water) as contained in a folk song. In a phrase, is the inscription on one of the public transport buses at the Bassa Park travelling to the North: Ife onye metalu – what a man commits (202). The use of minimal number of Igbo words in the novel may be Achebe's effort at reducing the cultural localization of the novel to his ethnic group. Besides, the inscription on the bus may suggests that the owner is an Igbo man.

The heavy presence of Igbo words and expressions in Achebe's first three novels reveals their setting and affinity to the ethnic group of the author while their limited presence in *Anthills of the Savannah* is an evidence of reduced Igbo cultural influence and closeness to the ethnic background of Achebe. However, the total absence of Igbo words in *A Man of the People* reveals Achebe effort at detribalizing the novel and giving it a universal colouration.

The presence of songs characterize Achebe's novels. They are Achebe's signature in all of his novels. In *Things Fall Apart*, there are about seven songs beginning with "The rain is falling[...]" (25) followed by "Who will wrestle for our village?" (36), "Eze elina, elina!" (42), un-presented song reported thus: "Low voices, broken now and again by singing reached Okonkwo from his wives' huts..." 67, "If I hold her hands[...]" 83, "For whom is it well[...]" 95, and "Kotma of the ash buttocks,[...]" 123. The songs enhance meanings in the contexts they appear. Apart from serving as means of entertainment, they re-enforce meanings.

In *No Longer at Ease* there are about four songs. They include: "An in-law went to see his in-law[...]" 42; "Otasili osukwu Onyenkuzi Fada" which in English means "Palm-fruit eater, Roman Catholic teacher[...]" (45–46); "The song of the Heart" (117); and "Nylon dress is a lovely dress,[...]" (101–103). These songs in each of the contexts they are used re-enforce meanings.

There are about ten songs in *Arrow of God*. The novel appears to embody the highest number of songs compared to other Achebe's novels. The first in the series is prisoners' work song "When I cut and you cut [...]" (55); followed by Obiageli's "And who will punish the water for me?" (65); another work song: "Lebula toro toro toro[...]" (76); a dirge: Look! a python! (81); the women food song "Kwo-kwo-kwo-kwo-kwo! (117); and Obiageli's lullaby: "Tell the mother her child is crying" (124). Other songs include the repetition of Obiageli's lullaby: "Tell the mother her child is crying" (186–187); the Mask's song: "Eje-ya-mma-mma-mma-mma-mma-mma-eje-ya-mma!" (200); the burial song: "Look! a python" (221); and the dirge: "I was born when lizards were in ones and twos[...]" (222).

The narrative that has the least number of songs among Achebe's novels is *Anthills of the Savannah*. There are only two songs, Alice's rain song: "ogwogwo mmili" (95) and the rain's song to Beatrice:

“Uwa t’uwa t’uwa:[...]” (96). These songs are products of Beatrice reminiscences of her childhood days in her village.

Generally, Achebe’s use of songs in his novels proves to the world that Africa has a rich oral literature and cultural heritage which forms part of world literature and culture. The messages of the songs re-enforce the context and the circumstances that warrant their usage. The songs are aesthetic, entertaining and provide pleasure. They are also therapeutic and enhance relaxation.

Pidgin English has been seen as a very prominent feature of Achebe’s novels set in urban areas. According to Okon, Pidgin as a language has been traced by many scholars to the advent of legitimate trade and commerce between early white traders and missionaries of Dutch, Spanish, Chinese, English and Portuguese origin and the West African coastal peoples in the early 16<sup>th</sup> and 17<sup>th</sup> centuries before the advent of colonialism (520). Further, Kennedy-Oti says that “Pidgin is a language that develops and is used when groups of people originally speaking different languages come in contact with other people and languages. It is indeed no one’s native language but the language spoken in addition to a native language” (502). Apparently, what necessitates this development is the multi-ethnic nature of the environment and the educational and social background of the characters who must communicate in the course of their interactions. The Pidgin English, therefore, readily becomes a viable language of communication among the characters of all ethnic, educational and social backgrounds who have found themselves in the metropolitan areas in the novels.

In giving credence to the presence of Pidgin in some of Achebe’s novels, Okon observes that “Chinua Achebe uses Nigerian Pidgin in the dialogue of some characters in his *No Longer at Ease* (1960), *A Man of the People* (1966) and *Anthills of the Savannah* (1987)” (521).

In *No Longer at Ease*, the driver of the mammy wagon: *God’s Case No Appeal* which Obi Okonkwo boards to Umuofia his home village, questions Obi for obstructing his bribery of a policeman: “Why you look the man for face when we want give an him two shillings?” He remarks further: “Na him make I no de want carry you book people. Too too know na him de worry una. Why you put your nose for matter way no concern you? Now that policeman go charge me like ten shillings” (39). Apart from the driver, one of the policemen also uses Pidgin as he rebukes the driver’s mate who is about bribing him with money: “What you want here? Go way! (39). Also, the driver and his mate interacted in Pidgin when the former asks the latter: “How much they take?” and the mate replies: “Ten shillings” (39 – 40).

The above exchange in Pidgin, highlights the theme of corruption prevalent in Nigeria then even as a young independent nation. Although the novel dwells mainly on corruption in the civil service involving Obi Okonkwo, it also goes beyond to reveal how the canker worm ravages even the Police Force as a law enforcement agency.

As a characterizing element, the use of Pidgin by the driver, the policeman and the driver’s assistant, shows them as members of the not-well-educated and low income class of the society. Their choice of Pidgin as a means of communication exposes them as not well-educated and therefore incapable of communicating in the Standard English language and hence they resort to Pidgin which is within the limit of their academic exposure and learning.

One more example is shown of the police using Pidgin which further exposes and re-enforces the low level of education of some members of the force or security agency. Obi Okonkwo’s encounter with the police at Victoria Beach Road readily comes handy as an example. While in his car talking with

Clara, his girlfriend, the police on patrol around the area approaches them and the following dialogue ensues:

Policeman: Good evening, sir.

Obi Okonkwo: Good evening

Policeman: is she your wife?

Obi Okonkwo: No

Policeman: Where you pick am?

The last question asked Obi by the policeman, carries a note of insult to both Obi and Clara. By the question, both Clara and Obi are seen as people of easy virtue and low morals.

Zacchaeus, Obi Okonkwo's houseboy, also uses Pidgin. On being asked by Clara to bring more soup when Obi, Christopher and Clara ran out of soup in the course of their "pounded yam" and "egusi" soup meal, Zacchaeus murmurs to himself: "I like master too much, but this madam no good" (18). By his verdict, it is obvious that Zacchaeus hates Clara and before then "had made up his mind to resign as soon as Master married Madam" (18). Like the other characters who use Pidgin in communication, Zacchaeus also belongs to the same low social class as they. They are illiterate and barely literate members of the society.

In *Arrow of God*, there are about seven conversation sessions in Pidgin, between the white colonial officers and their African servants on one hand and among the African servants on the other. These conversations in Pidgin involve Captain Winterbottom and his servant, John Nwodika, on page 30 – 31; Captain Winterbottom's small boy, Boniface, and Mr Tony Clarke on page 35; Mr Clarke and his cook on page 105; police corporal and Edogo on page 153; police corporal and his police companion on pages 153–154; John Nwodika and the other African servants on page 155; and Mr Clarke and the Court Messenger on page 156. Of this lot, few are used as examples.

The following conversation ensues between Captain Winterbottom and his African servant, John Nwodika.

Winterbottom: What are they saying?

John: Dem talk say make rain come quick quick.

Winterbottom: Are all these your pickin, John?

John: No, sir. My pickin na that two wey de run yonder and dat yellow gal. Di oder two na cook im pickin. Di order one yonder na Gardener him brodder pickin (30–31).

The dialogue between White master and African servant ensues because of the number of "native children running around naked and singing to the coming rain (30) [...] on Winterbottom's lawn, which is the only space big enough for their play" (31). Captain Winterbottom is captivated by the number of children at play and needs to be sure that they belong to his servant alone. Through Pidgin, both the well-educated District Officer and the uneducated African servant are able to communicate and understand each other. This is evident in the questions posed by Winterbottom and the satisfactory corresponding answers offered by John.

Further, there is another dialogue between two Africans, a poorly educated police corporal and his companion on the mission to arrest and bring Ezeulu to the District Office at Okperi. The discussion in Pidgin commences when Ezeulu's son, Edogo, tries to dribble the police corporal on the identity

and whereabouts of Ezeulu who had set out on his way with his son to Okperi. In the bid to intimidate and extract the needed information from Edogo, the police corporal asks his companion to produce the handcuffs, which in the eyes of the villagers are the most deadly of the white man's weapons (153), for the purpose of arresting Edogo.

Police corporal: All right. Jus now you go sabby which Ezeulu. Gi me dat ting [...]. Sometime na dat two person we cross for road.

Police corporal's Companion: Sometime na dem. But we no go return back jus like dat. All dis waka wey we waka come here no fit go for noting. Sometime na lie dem de lie. I no wan make them put trouble for we head (153–154).

The essence of this dialogue is to clear all doubts and ascertain the identity of Ezeulu, as well as, extort material compensation for their effort and trouble in coming to Umuaro to arrest Ezeulu, who had already set out before their arrival. That the police corporal and his companion communicate in Pidgin suggests that they are probably from two different linguistic backgrounds and therefore find Pidgin as their only common means of communication. Their use of Pidgin also suggests that they are incompetent in the use of standard English language and readily find Pidgin as the only available alternative means of communication.

There are also pockets of conversations in Pidgin in *A Man of the People*. These conversations in Pidgin ensue between and among literate and illiterate African characters. Although there are a number of conversations in Pidgin in the text, only one example is used. The example of conversation in Pidgin is the comment by the man with one bad eye – a cowrie-shell eye (14) during the reception at Mr Nwege's lodge after Chief Nanga's family reunion with his constituency at Anata Grammer School which triggers off a conversation:

One-eyed man: You see how e de as if to say money be san-san. People wey de jealous the money gorment de pay Minister no sabi say no be him one de chop am. Na so so troway (14).

Odili: You must have spent a fortune today.

Minister: You call this spend? You never see something, my brother. I no de keep anini for myself, na so so troway. If some person come to you and say "I wan' make you Minister" make you run like blazes comot. Na true word I tell you. To God who made me. Minister de sweet for eye but too much katakata de for inside. Believe me yours sincerely.

One-eyed man: Big man, big palaver.

Josiah: Me one. I no kuku mind the katakata wey de for inside. Make you put Minister for my hand and all the wahala on top I no mind at all.

Mrs Eleanor John: No be so, my frien'. When you done experience rich man's trouble you no fit talk like that again. My people get one proverb: they say that when poor man done see with him own eye how to make big man e go beg make e carry him poverty de go je-je (14 – 15).

The observation by the one-eyed man is the acknowledgement of the generosity of Chief Nanga who appreciates the performance of the traditional music groups by sticking "red pound notes on the perspiring faces of the best dancers" (14). The comment is not only about Chief Nanga's generosity but also about his selflessness and willingness to share what he has with others. It is important to note, that the conversations which start with the generosity of Chief Nanga, dovetail to the debate on the advantages and disadvantages of the office of a minister. Despite the disadvantages and challenges associated with the office of a minister as presented by Chief Nanga, the one-eyed man and Mrs John on one side, Josiah, a shop owner, on the other, wishes to be a minister despite the troubles associated with it.

There are a number of conversations in Pidgin in *Anthills of the Savannah*. However for the purpose of illustration only one involving three characters is used. The conversation takes place at the Three Cowrie Bridge check-point among a soldier, Chris and his companion who alights from Braimoh's taxi while on their way to the northern part of Bassa. The conversation ensues in the course of Chris being interrogated by the soldier.

Soldier: Hey, stop there! Where you de go?

Chris' companion: We de go Three Cowrie Market

Soldier: Wetin de inside that bag? Bring am here. You there, come down here. Wetin be your name?

Chris': Sabastian

Soldier: Sabastian who?

Chris: Sabastian Ojo

Soldier: What work you de do?

Chris' companion: He de sell motor part

Soldier: Na you I ask? Or na you be him mouth?

Chris: I de sell motor parts

Soldier: How you de sell motor part and then come de march leg?

Chris' companion: Him car knock engine.

Soldier: Shurrup! Big mouth. I no ask you! (192–198).

Although the discourse among the soldier, Chris and his companion is in Pidgin, the language becomes useful as it enables people who do not know themselves to effectively communicate in spite of their social and academic backgrounds. From the foregoing, Chris who is well educated, a graduate who has a good grasp of the use of the English language is able to relate with the soldier who is less educated and Chris' companion whose background is unknown. Despite their differences, the three are able to communicate with one another by the use of Pidgin.

Prayer is one visible element in the novels of Achebe. The word is derived from the verb "pray" meaning, to petition or solicit help from a supernatural or higher being or human being. The presence of prayers in the novels is linked to the belief of the African in the psychic and spiritual forces that are greater than he, whose helps are solicited for in times of need from time to time. This belief is rooted in his traditional ancestral mode of worship which include God, deities, and ancestors which has classified them as heathens or pagans. Opposed to the heathens or pagans are the Christians who believe and worship only the Almighty God. What is common to both the heathens and the Christians is their belief in the existence of and reliance on supernatural spiritual powers greater than they.

In *Things Fall Apart*, a number of prayers are said during occasions, especially each time kola nut is presented. One of such occasions is the celebration of Obierika's daughter's *uri* – the day her suitor, having paid greater part of her bride-prize, brought palm-wine to her parents, immediate relatives and extended group of kinsmen called *umunna* (77). At the presentation of kola nut, the following prayer and responses follow:

Obierika's elder brother: Life to all of us. And let there be friendship between your family and ours.

Crowd: *Ee-e-e!*

Obierika's elder brother: We are giving you our daughter today. She will be a good wife to you. She will bear you nine sons like the mother of our town.

Crowd: *Ee-e-e!*

Closely following this prayer, is another said in the form of a reply by the oldest man among the visitors.

The Visitors' Oldest Man: It will be good for you and it will be good for us

Crowd: *Ee-e-e!*

The Visitors' Oldest Man: This is not the first time my people have come to marry your daughter. My mother was one of you.

Crowd: *Ee-e-e!*

The Visitors' Oldest Man: And this will not be the last, because you understand us and we understand you. You are a great family.

Crowd: *Ee-e-e!*

The Visitors' Oldest Man: Prosperous men and great warriors. Your daughter will bear us sons like you.

Crowd: *Ee-e-e!* (82).

Another prayer is also seen when the narrator reports that of Uchendu, Okonkwo's maternal uncle as he prays to the ancestors while he breaks kola nut:

We do not ask for wealth because he that has health and children will also have wealth. We do not pray to have more money but to have more kinsmen. We are better than animals because we have kinsmen. An animal rubs its aching flank against a tree, a man asks his kinsman to scratch him. He prayed especially for Okonkwo and his family. He then broke the kola nut and threw one of the lobes on the ground for the ancestors (117).

The above two prayers are examples, out of many others, present in the novel. It is proper to note that among the Igbo of Eastern Nigeria as reflected in Achebe's novels, whenever kola nut is presented to a guest or guests, prayer always follows as it is broken before distribution and consumption.

*Arrow of God* appears to have the most number of prayers among Achebe's novels. There are at least, six prayers in the narrative on pages 6, 72, 95, 98 and 119. However, only two are presented. In the first prayer, one of Ezeulu's wives, Ugoye, prays to Ulu during the festival of the First Pumpkin Leaves on the Nkwo market day:

*Great Ulu who kills and saves, I implore you to cleanse my household of all defilement. If I have spoken it with my mouth or seen it with my eyes, or if I have heard it with my ears or stepped on it with my foot or if it has come through my children or my friends or kinsfolk let it follow these leaves* (72) (Italics as in the book).

This prayer to Ulu deity is a request for purification and protection of Ugoye's family from defilement and harm. The second prayer is said by Ezeulu on the presentation of kola nut to his friend, Ogbuefi Akuebue, who pays him a visit. The narrative consciousness reports that "with his palm open and the thumb holding down the kola nut on the four fingers" (95), Ezeulu prays and his friend responds: Ezeulu: Ogbuefi Akuebue, may you live, and all your people. I too will live with all my people. But life alone is not enough. May we have things with which to live it well. For there is a kind of slow and weary life which is worse than death.

Akuebue: You speak the truth.

Ezeulu: May good confront the man on top and the man below. But let him who is jealous of another's position choke with his envy.

Akuebue: So be it.

Ezeulu: May good come to the land of Igbo and to the country of the riverain folk (95).

It should be observed that between the two prayers, the first is said to a deity while the second is to the spirits of the ancestors.

There are also prayers in *No Longer at Ease*. The first is said by the oldest man among the members of Umuofia Progressive Union, Lagos, before the commencement of one of their meetings. The narrator reports that “[t]he oldest man present broke one of them [three kola nuts], saying another kind of prayer while he did it” (5) and the response of the members of the Union follows:

Oldest Man: We do not seek to hurt any man, but if any man seeks to hurt us may he break his neck.

Congregation: *Amen*.

Oldest Man: We are strangers in this land. If good comes to it may we have our share.

Congregation: *Amen*

Oldest Man: But if bad comes let it go to the owners of the land who know what gods should be appeased.

Congregation: *Amen*.

Oldest Man: Many towns have four or five or even ten of their sons in European posts in this city. Umuofia has only one. And now our enemies say that even that one is too many for us. But our ancestors will not agree to such a thing.

Congregation: *Amen*

Oldest Man: An only palm-fruit does not get lost in the fire.

Congregation: *Amen* (5–6).

This prayer is an appeal to the ancestors of Umuofia not only to prevent Obi Okonkwo from losing his job and going to jail over his taking of bribe, but also not allow Umuofia community by virtue of Obi Okonkwo losing his civil service job, to also lose their status and position among the comity of towns that have “their sons in European posts in the city” (6).

Another prayer, a Christian one, is said by Mary, a good friend of Obi’s mother, Hannah Okonkwo. This is during a prayer meeting called by Obi’s parents a few days before his departure to Lagos. The narrative consciousness gives account of the prayer:

‘Oh God of Abraham, God of Isaac and God of Jacob,’ she burst forth, ‘the Beginning and the End. Without you we can do nothing. The great river is not big enough for you to wash your hands in. You have the yam and you have the knife; we cannot eat unless you cut us a piece. We are like ants in your sight. We are like little children who only wash their stomach when they bath, leaving their back dry....’ She went on and on reeling off proverb after proverb and painting picture after picture. Finally she got round to the subject of the gathering and dealt with it as fully as it deserved, giving among other things, the life history of her friend’s son who was about to go to the place where learning finally came to an end. When she was done, people blinked and rubbed their eyes to get used to the evening light once more (8).

Apart from reference to God and other bible characters, the prayer did not seem to make any request from God. However, it is assumed that the essence is to ask for God’s protection for Obi while he is in England.

In *Anthills of the Savannah*, the addressee of the prayer is the Almighty God, though the kola nut is present and traditional. However, Elewa’s uncle is the sayer of the prayer during the naming ceremony of Elewa’s daughter, Amaechina. The narrative consciousness presents the prayer:



Elewa's Uncle: Owner of the world! Man of countless names! The church people call you three-in-one. It is a good name. But it carries miserly and insufficient praise. Four-hundred-in-one would seem more fitting in our eyes. But we have no quarrel with church people. Their intentions are good, their minds on the right road. Only the hand fails to throw as straight as the eye sees. We praise a man when he slaughters a fowl so that if his hand becomes stronger tomorrow he will slaughter a goat.... What brings us here is the child you sent us. May her path be straight....

Company: *Isé!*

Elewa's Uncle: May she have life and may her mother have life.

Company: *Isé!*

Elewa's Uncle: What happened to her father, may it not happen again.

Company: *Isé!*

Elewa's Uncle: When I asked who named her they told me All of Us. May this child be the daughter of all of us.

Company: *Isé!*

Elewa's Uncle: May all of us have life!

Company: *Isé!*

Elewa's Uncle: May these young people here when they make the plans for their world not forget her. And all other children.

Company: *Isé!*

Elewa's Uncle: May they also remember useless old people like myself and Elewa's mother when they are making their plans.

Company: *Isé!*

Elewa's Uncle: We have seen too much trouble in Kangan since the white man left because those who make plans make plans for themselves only and their families. I say, there is too much fighting in Kangan, too much killing. But fighting will not begin unless there is first trusting of fingers into eyes. Anybody who wants to outlaw fights must first outlaw the provocation of fingers trust into eyes.

Company: *Isé! Isé!*

Elewa's Uncle: I have never entered a house like this before. May this not be my last.

Company: *Isé!*

Elewa's Uncle: If something pursues us we shall escape but if we pursue something we shall catch it.

Company: *Isé!*

Elewa's Uncle: As long as what we pursue does not belong to somebody else.

Company: *Isé!*

Elewa's Uncle: Everybody's life!

Company: *Isé!*

Elewa's Uncle: The life of Bassa

Company: *Isé!*

Elewa's Uncle: The life of Kangan

Company: *Isé!* (227 – 229).

Although a very long prayer, it covers the interest of all, from Elewa's uncle to Amaechina, the company of people there, the people of Bassa and Kangan at large.

With regard to prayer, *A Man of the People*, among Achebe's novels, is the only one without a single prayer in it. Perhaps what accounts for this is the absence of traditional ceremonies and meetings that would have required saying of prayers. It could also be Achebe's deliberate decision to deviate from

a pattern he has been identified with in the earlier novels. However, it must be observed that the presence of prayers in Achebe's novels is the reflection of the psyche of the African and their belief in the relationship between human beings and spiritual beings and forces – Almighty God, gods, deities and ancestral spirits.

Corruption appears a very strong recurring element in Achebe's novel. It is immorality and the impairing of integrity and virtue. The difference is in the treatment and level of prominence given it in each novel. In *Things Fall Apart*, there are three instances of corruption bordering on fornication, bribery and inflation of fine. In the case of fornication, Ekwefi the wife of Anene, goes to Okonkwo's house where they have sex. The narrative consciousness reports:

She [Ekwefi] went in and knocked at his door and he came out. Even in those days he was not a man of many words. He just carried her into his bed and in the darkness began to feel around her waist for the loose end of her cloth (76).

This report leaves the reader to conjecture the meaning of Okonkwo's action. That Okonkwo carried Ekwefi, another man's wife into his house and bed suggests the use of force and possible rape. This act is immoral, condemnable and reduces Okonkwo to a savage and an antihero.

Another aspect of corruption is the report of bribery alleged against the messengers and interpreter of the District Commissioner in the land dispute between Aneto's and Nnama's families. Obierika tells Okonkwo: "The white man's court has decided that it should belong to Nnama's family, who had given much money to the white man's messengers and interpreter" (124). It is this alleged bribery that tilted judgment in the favour of Nnama's family.

The third corruption is the inflation of the fine of the arrested six elders of Umuofia of whom Okonkwo is one, from two hundred bags of cowries to two hundred and fifty. The narrator tells us: On the morning after the village crier's appeal the men of Umuofia met in the market place and decided to collect without delay two hundred and fifty bags of cowries to appease the white man. They did not know that fifty bags would go to the court messengers, who had increased the fine for that purpose (139).

The excess or increase of fifty bags of cowries by the court messengers and interpreter without the knowledge and approval of the District Commissioner is both inflation and extortion, and therefore corruption and criminal.

In *No Longer at Ease* there are many reports and allegations of corruption. However only few are discussed. One of them is the payment of bribe to procure certificates of illness to excuse people of Umuofia from going to work and instead be in court to witness Obi Okonkwo's High Court bribery trial. The narrative consciousness informs us that "[s]ome civil servants paid as much as ten shillings and six pence to obtain a doctor's certificate of illness for the day" (1) of judgment on Obi Okonkwo's bribery trial.

However, the chief among the corrupt practices in the novel involves Obi Okonkwo. Before his arrest, trial and imprisonment, Obi compromises himself with a girl who applies for a scholarship to enable her to study abroad. To ensure that she secures the scholarship the school girl offers herself to Obi during her visit to Obi's house. The narrative consciousness tells the story: Obi steered her towards his bedroom. She made a half-hearted show of resisting, then followed.

Obviously she was not an innocent school-girl. She knew her job (153).

Obi had carnal knowledge of the girl, despite the fact that “[s]he was on the [scholarship] short list already” (153). By sleeping with the girl, Obi commits fornication as well as accepts bribe in kind, which all amount to corruption and degrade Obi as the dishonest “other”.

The corruption in *No Longer at Ease* is the bribe of twenty pounds received by Obi to facilitate scholarship award to an applicant. Eventually he is arrested, tried and sentenced to jail. The narrative consciousness reports the comment of the President of Umuofia Progressive Union, Lagos, on the matter: The President said it was a thing of shame for a man in the senior service to go to prison for twenty pounds. He repeated twenty pounds, spitting it out” (5). The President’s comment is a product of the review of Obi’s offence, the efforts of Umuofia Progressive Union at saving Obi, and the court judgment. Obi’s jail sentence is punishment for corruption.

In Achebe’s novels examined so far, Africans are the criminals involved in corruption. This is not different in *Arrow of God*. The African police corporal and his companion who come to arrest Ezeulu openly ask for bribe. He tells Ezeulu’s friend, Akuebue, and members of Ezeulu’s household: “But we cannot come and go for nothing. When a masked spirit visits you you have to appease its footprints with presents. The white man is the masked spirit of today” (154). In response to their request, they are served yam pottage with chicken which they eat and palm wine which they drink. And they also take away two live cocks and two shillings (154). The food, palm wine, live cocks and cash are items of bribery and therefore evidence of corruption. Ezeulu’s family members make the presentations to avoid being arrested as threatened by the law enforcement agents.

Chief Nanga laments over the cash gifts he periodically gives to journalists to prevent them from writing damaging reports about him. The one he laments over is the cash gift of five pounds after the journalist had had two bottles of beer and many cigarettes. The narrator reports: “He [the journalist] drank two bottles of beer, smoked many cigarettes and then got a ‘dash’ of five pounds from the Minister after on account of his trouble with his landlord over arrears of rent” (66). Chief Nanga’s opinion is that: “If I don’t give him something now, tomorrow he will go and write rubbish about me (66). From both the giver and the receiver of the cash gift, this is bribery and therefore corruption.

The Minister of Foreign Trade, Alhaji Chief Senator Suleiman Wagada and Chief Nanga, who until two years before was also the Minister of Foreign Trade, are accused of leaking official government decisions and policies to private companies for financial benefits. Both Chiefs Wagada and Nanga are accused of leaking information on Government’s decision to increase import duties before announcement and implementation to British Amalgamated who circumvent the policy. The narrative consciousness reports that:

The *Daily Matchet* for instance carried a story which showed that Chief Nanga, who had himself held the portfolio of Foreign Trade until two years ago, had been guilty of the same practice [as Chief Wagada] and had built out of his gains three blocks of seven-story luxury flats at three hundred thousand pounds each in the name of his wife and these were immediately leased by British Amalgamated at fourteen hundred a month each (99–100).

These sharp practices by both Chiefs Wagada and Nanga are in public domain and attract condemnation as acts of corruption.

A lot of sharp practices which amount to corruption are associated with Alhaji Abdul Mahmoud, a business man and an alleged business front for President Sam in *Anthills of the Savannah*. Apart from preventing customs officials from going near his jetty, he is also rumoured to be prince of smugglers (117). In linking Alhaji Mahmoud's criminal activities, Chris Oriko tells Beatrice: "What I find worrying and I don't think I can quite believe it yet is that (voice lowered) he may be fronting you know for... your host [President Sam] (117). These reported and alleged sharp practices are all corrupt.

President Sam is accused of financial rascality which indirectly means sharp practice and corruption. His predecessor, President Ngongo built the Presidential Retreat with about forty-five million while President Sam is rumoured to have spent twenty million in its refurbishment. According to the narrator:

The rumoured twenty million spent on its refurbishment by the present administration since the overthrow of the civilians who had built it at a cost of forty-five million may still be considered irresponsibly extravagant in our circumstances but... But what? (73).

The comparison and analysis of the gap between the costs of construction and renovation, and the condemnation that follows smack of corruption on the part of Sam.

Sharp practices and corruption as presented in all the novels of Achebe, have Africans at their centre. This portrayal of the Africans as criminally-minded, dubious and corrupt, appears to show Achebe as aligning with the Europeans on the principle and practice of othering. By projecting Africans in this negative light Achebe condemns them as sub-humans, evil, criminally-minded and barbaric, deserving of attitudinal re-orientation and civilization.

Another very important feature that all Achebe's novels have is that they begin *in medias res*. They start "in the middle of things, at a critical point in the action" (Abram and Harpham, 109). *Things Fall Apart* begins in the middle with the introduction of Okonkwo as a man whose fame had already been established throughout the nine villages of Umuofia and beyond, rather than with his childhood and family background which follows later.

In *No Longer at Ease*, the narrative opens with Obi Okonkwo facing court trial in the case of bribery. This end part of the plot is brought forward, while Obi's early school days and family background which should form the beginning of the novel are tucked in the middle. The presentation of the plot of *Arrow of God* follows the same pattern. The novel opens with Ezeulu looking "for signs of the new moon" (1), a precursor to the new yam festival, only to follow later in the narrative with information on his family background and how he emerges as the Chief Priest of Ezeulu which should have opened the narrative.

Like the other novels before it, *A Man of the People* also starts *in medias res*. It opens with Chief Nanga, the Member of Parliament and Minister of Culture being received at the Anata Grammar School with a fanfare. It is only later in the narrative that information is provided about the Minister's family and career background which should have introduced the story. *Anthills of the Savannah* is not different in this style of arrangement of events in a plot. The novel opens with arguments involving President Sam and members of his cabinet over visit to Abazon region. It is only much later in the narrative, about the middle, that information is given on why President Sam refuses to visit the area, it is also later too that information is given on the childhood, background and emergence of Sam as the President of Kangan.

The beginning of his novels *in medias res* appears to be Achebe's peculiar style of delaying the supply of critical information, creating suspense and tension before resolution. By this consistent and beautiful management of style of arrangement of events in the plots of his narratives, Achebe carves a niche for himself in creativity.

## CONCLUSION

In this study of the novels of Achebe, some motifs and patterns have been observed as recurring. These include various aspects of folklore, Igbo words, Nigerian Pidgin English, myth, legend, songs, peculiar plot arrangement and oratory. Also running through the novels are the theme of corruption and inconsistent points of view. The presence of all these elements in Achebe's novels define his peculiar artistic talent and enhance meanings.

## Recommendation

The paper recommends that writers should include folklore elements in their works to give them African outlook, while critics should observe such elements and how they enhance meanings and add to aesthetics.

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