

## LANGUAGE USE IN *ARROW OF GOD*: A SOCIO-LINGUISTIC DIMENSION

Ngozi C. Anigbogu<sup>1</sup> and Festus Chukwuyere Ahizih (Ph.D.)<sup>2</sup>

<sup>1</sup>Directorate of General Studies, Federal University of Technology, Owerri

<sup>2</sup>Department of General Studies, Federal College of Land Resources, Technology, Owerri

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**ABSTRACT:** *This paper examines the lexis structure and other linguistic features that coalesce to convey the intended message in Achebe's Arrow of God. It highlights Achebe's adaptive use of the English language to capture peculiar cultural ideals in the Igbo traditional society. The study analyses the corpus of the novel. Arrow of God and portrays the vocabulary, syntax and expressions that depict the socio-cultural Igbo norms and setting. The analysis explores how Achebe employs lexical and syntactic formations to realize the central message of conflict in Arrow of God. Linguistics styles such as proverbs, transliteration, focalization, lexical borrowings, sentential code-mixing, imageries are discovered. It is these unique that make the novel a master piece in the Nigeria context.*

**KEYWORDS:** Language, Arrow of God, Socio Linguistics, English, Code-Mixing

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### INTRODUCTION

Language and culture are inseparably linked. In different socio-cultural contexts, has different characteristics. Therefore, Alo (2005:116) asserts that as a dynamic phenomenon, language is readily adaptable to encode new experiences and cultural development. It is obvious that the English language bears the imprint of contact with the Nigerian culture. Thus Omole (2011:4) remarks that the Nigerian culture and the English language have had mutual but inequitable impact on each other. Therefore, a critical characteristics of English as a second language in Nigeria is its domestication to captured the peculiarities in the Nigeria society. Linguistics and literacy critics analysis the domestication of English in written discourse. Ogbuehi (2009:28) sees the significant feature of ESL in Nigeria as the creation of new structures with words which are obviously English lexis but are direct translation from indigenous languages Awonusi (2013):6) states that modern African writes reflexify indigenous language by using English vocabulas but imposing mother tongue structure and rhythms on them. Dadzie (2004):97) explains that Nigeria novelists, in their attempt to record African sensibilities resort to translations in grammatically acceptable English structure but with meanings understood only by those who can conceptualize in the relevant language.

Palmen (1979:76) comments principally on Achebe's domestication of the English language. He points put Achebe's use of rhythms, speech patterns, idioms and other nusnces of Ibo. Thus, according to palmen, the English Language used by Achebe is grammatically correct but modified rhythmically and idiomatically. Furthermore, Alo (2005:11) posits that the domesticated variety of English manifests the phonological, syntactic, semantic, pragmatic and socio-cultural characteristics of the Nigeria environment. Therefore, many modern Africa writes have nativised the English language to capture African realities and unique experience.

Chukwunna (1991:11) asserts that Achebe's use of language lends much vigour and freshness to his work showing his craftsmanship and linguistics competence.

### **Achebe's Adaptive Use of the English Language**

Achebe's language use in Arrow of God reflects the Igbo cultural influences and presuppositions in English. He competently uses the English Language to describe ideas, circumstances, issues which are peculiar to the Igbo society and which portray the socio-cultural setting. To portray the Igbo cultural setting and ideals, Palmen (1979:76) observes that Achebe is rural characters who would normally use Igbo in actual situations are made to speak in English but that the English has been modified to reflect an African rural community and the thought patterns of native Igbo speaks. It is obvious that language and the society entwine. In Arrow of God, the interplay of language and the Igbo society depicts Achebe's adaptive use of the English language. Achebe, readily, readjusts and modifies the English language to suit the cultural norms, social interactions, ideas and ideals of the traditional Igbo society in Arrow of God.

The novel Arrow of God is an insightful story of conflicts, power and leadership. The conflict is portrayed in these forms: the conflict between the Igbo traditional schigim and Christianity; the conflict between the white administration and the Igbo traditional authority the conflict between Umuaro and Okperi; the conflict between ezeulu and his Chief rival Nwaka and the internal conflict in the protagonist "Ezeulu". Jabbi (1980:142) comments that the \_dramatic conflict and action in the novel are consistently informed by two basic concerns. The philosophic concern relates to the general quality of Ezeulu's personal apprehension of the highest purposes of the Utu priesthood. The second concerns the depth and consistency of his practical adherence to the fundamental principles and circumstantial dictates of an Eze-ulu historic destiny. (Jabbi, 1980)142).

Achebe uses his peculiar language to convey this story of power, conflict and leadership and their joint interplay with history and community. With these, there is, therefore, the need to adopt the functional discourse theory in the exposition.

Functional discourse model explains. How linguistics utterances are shaped based on the goals and knowledge of natural language users. The model originally developed by Simon C. Dik has undergone several revision. This study employs the latest version. This version is the expansion of the model with pragmatic and/interpersonal module by Kees Hengereld and Lachlan Mackenze (2008:10). Thus, according to functional discourse grammar, four components are involved in building up an utterances the conceptual component which is where the communicative intention that drives the utterance constriction arises; the grammatical component is where the utterance is formulated and stated according to the communicative intention; the contextual component which contains all elements that can be referred to in the history of the discourse or in the environment; the output component realizes the utterance as sound, writing or signing(Wikipedia).

This theory is relevant to the present study because Achebe's use of language in the novel portrays his communicative intention. His major goal for 'nativising' the English language is to capture obvious peculiarities in the Igbo traditional society. He resorts to the use of proverbs, translation imageries to achieve his intentions, to explain Igbo ideals' cultural norm/beliefs and to capture the Igbo traditional setting or environment. Achebe (1975:29) himself asserts:

The African writer should aim to use English in a way that brings his message out 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 out his peculiar experience.

### Textural Analysis

In discussing the linguistics features that coalesce to convey the intended meaning in Achebe's Arrow of God, the study will focus on the predominant linguistics features such as proverbs, transliteration, parallelism, focalization sentential, lexical borrowings to Achebe's Arrow of God is replete with proverbs.

The novel, through the use of proverbs, depicts the conflict between the Igbo traditional religion and Christianity. Ezeulu's critics question his decision to send his son to learn the white man's ways and religion. They criticize the decision and see it as ironical for the Chief Priest of Ulu to send his son to learn the white man's religion. Akuehue, Ezeulu's friend, tries to reason with Ezeulu and tells him what the people of Umuaro are saying. The proverbs italicised depicts the conflict:

If the Chief Priest of Ulu could send his son among those who kill and eat the sacred python and comment other evils what did he expect ordinary men and women to do? The lizard who threw confusion into his mother's funeral rite, did he expect outsiders to carry the burden of honouring his dead? (125). Thus, the people of Umuaro feel that the decision is totally wrong. Ezeulu replies and says that a disease that has never been seen cannot be curse with everyday herbs (133).

The resentment of some indigenes in Umuaro concerning the Christian religion. When Anosi learns about the imprisonment of the royal python in \_\_\_\_\_ box, he shows his condemnation of the Christian religion and states that what this new religions will bring to Umuaro wears a hat on its head (45)

Furthermore, Moses confronts Mr. Goodcountry when he asks the Christian faithful in Umuaro to be ready to die for their faith by killing the python as the people of the rivers killed the Igunana. Moses confronts Mr. Goodcountry:

I will not be lead astray by outsides who choose to weep louder than the owners of the corpse. If you wait to do your work in peace, you will heed to what I have, but if you want to be the lizard that ruined his own mother's funeral you may carry on as you are doing (50).

Still not satisfied with the conflict Mr. Goodcountry tries to cause amongst the Christian faithfuls, Moses warns Oduche and tells him that has nothing to say to a mere by whose duty it is to pick palmnuts for his mother and warns Oduche that 'a coward may cover the ground with his words but when the time comes to fight he runs away (50).

Achebe, uses proverbs extensively in Arrow of God to portray African nuances of speech and to give flavour to his characters' speeches. This, his characters use proverbs in their speeches advice and words of wisdom. Seldom will any elder speak without the use of proverbs to counsel, advice and show their wit and native intelligence. For instance, obesity Egonwanne advises the men being sent to Operi to be cautious in their interactions so that Okperi people would, not choose war. Egeonwanne counsel them by saying that he is an old man and that an old man is there to talk. He stresses his point:

If the lizard of the homestead should neglect to do the things for which its kind is known, it will be mistaken for the lizard of the farmland (18).

Ezeulu listens to his people and warns them on the futility of going for war. He tells them when an adult is in the house, the she goat is not left to suffer the pains of parturition on its tether. He goes further to remind his people that any boy sent by his father to steal do not go stealing but breaks the door with his feet. (18). In severe conflict, Achebe's characters use proverbs to outwit one another and display their traditional intellect and wisdom. Thus, in the case of the conflict and rivalry between Ezeulu and Nwaka, the use of proverbs becomes a weapon and effective device they resort to in order to outwit each other. When Ezeulu summons the elders of Umuaro to tell them of his invitation by the white man and asks for their reaction. Nwaka reacts violently using these proverbs.

A man who brings ant-ridden faggots into his hut should expect the visit of lizards...you tied the knot...you should know how to undo it. You passed the slit that is smelling, you should carry it away (144).

After these assertions, the elders of Umuaro share their views on the white man's invitation. Ezeulu answers them in another proverb:

Sometimes when we have given a piece of yam to a child, we beg him to give us a little from it, not because we really want to eat it but because we want to test our child (145).

Achebe's use of proverbs adds African colour, freshness and flavour to his language. His use of proverb shows the wit and wisdom portrayed by the Igbo man when making speeches. Thus, Chukwuma (1991:11) states that proverbs are incorporated into the characters' flow of speech, imbuing it with much vigour, sense and style. Achebe employs proverbs to manifest the local culture of the people in the English language.

Achebe uses transliteration or direct translation to imitate the speaking voices of the Igbo. The translated are Achebe's attempts to localize or nativise English to suit his intention. Oduche's moving box causes an uproar in Ezeulu's compound. The entire household reacts in different ways. When the box is opened and it is discovered that Oduche has imprisoned a royal python in his box, Matefi reacts: "if it is medicine, may it lose its potency (p44). Ezeulu, further, remarks that whether it is bad medicine or good one, he shall see it today.... He promises to 'kill the boy with his own hands (p 44).

These comments are direct translations from Igbo to English and they reflect the impact of Igbo culture on the English language. Direct translation is also seen in the conflict between Moses Unachukwu and Mr. Goodcountry. Moses asserts that neither the Bible nor the catechism demands that the converts kill the python. This assertion is made when Mr. Goodcountry tries to persuade the converts to be prepared to kill the python as the people of the rivers killed the Iguana. In the bid to answer Moses, Oduche replies that Adam was asked to crush the head of the serpent after it deceived his wife. Mr. Goodcountry becomes elated and tells Moses:

Today, a child who sucks his mother's has taught you the scriptures (49).

Moses replies:

Do I look like someone you can put in your bag and walk away? I have been the fountain head of this new religion and seen with my own eyes the white people who brought it (49).

Another instance of the use of direct translation is seen in the discussions between Umuaro Youth and Moses concerning their intention to stop working on the white man's road. Moses warns them that the white man would take their leaders to the prison at Okperi if they lodge their complaint.

Moses comments:

When suffering knocks at your door and says there is no seat left for him, he tells you not to worry because he has brought his own stool...I saw

with my own eyes what the white man did at Abame (84).

When Moses states that the white man has power which comes from the true God and it burns like five, the youth from Umuaro becomes agitated but Nweke Ukpaka, one of the youths, remarks:

We did not ask him to visit us, he is neither our kinsman nor our inlaw. We did not steal his goat nor his fowls; we did not take his land or his wife. All we know is that our ofo is held high between us and him. The stranger will not kill his host with his visit; when he goes he not go with a swoller back (85).

Ezeulu, also, suffers from internal dilemma and conflict and Achebe portrays this conflict through transliteration:

His power was no more than the power of a child over a goat that was said to be his. As long as the goat was alive-it could be his; he would find it food and take care of it. But the day it was slaughtered, he would know soon enough who the real owner is.

In these cases of transliteration, Achebe imposes lexico-syntactic structure of Igbo on English. Thus, according to Omole (2011) these lexical peculiarities are a reflection of Nigeria's cultural impact on the English language and the transliteration use by modern African writers confer on their work authentic cultural flavoue and tone.

### **The Use of Lexical Borrowing**

Achebe uses dialectal words while presenting his ideas in Arrow of God. These words cannot be represented in the English language. The meaning of most of these lexical items could be lost if interpreted in English. They are: Ikenga, Ofo, Okposi, alusi, Ora-obodo, ugoli, Ogulul-aro, Obi, Ai-nmo, jigioa, asa, chi, iru-ezi, Okeapka, ozo, ichi, anwansi, Ulu Omesike Mgba Agbogho, Oso nwanadi, Akwu nro, ilo, okwolo, Ogere, aru nmo, ugani, nk ekwe ilo, ekpili, Ndichie Oti-any a fuzo.

Thus, the lexical items portray the socio-cultural Igbo setting. Some of the Igbo expressions have no equivalent in British English.

### **Adjusted Expressions**

Certain English words and expressions are readjusted in the novel to give them local flavour. Some of them as Ogbefi (2001:32) asserts are experiences which for cultural and environmental reasons are not found in Britain and therefore cannot be expressed in standard English. They are senior wife

Young wife.

The land of men and the land of spirits

The laughter of deities

It was a fight of the gods

To placate the resentful spirits of kinsmen killed in war.

A new ancestral mask

It was a mask of high rank

The mystery of ancestral spirits

Maiden spirit

Sweet mouth

### **Imageries**

The use of imagery is clearly depicted the novel Arrow of God. Achebe's use of imageries give vigour, freshness and emphasis to his characters speeches.

The night bird is early coming home today. Everyone of you go back to the house, the inquisitive monkey gets a bullet in the face (44).

But I, Ogalanya, evil dog that warms his body through the head...

When I got there, the first friend I made turned out to be a wizard. I made another friend and found he was a poisoner.

I made my third friend and he was a leper

I Ogalanya, who cut Kpom and pulls waa, I made friend with a leper from whom even a poisoner flees (39)

Of course he had to live to such a great age that his blindness became like an ornament on him (1)

The moon he saw that day was as thin as an orphan fed grudgingly by a cruel foster-mother (1).

Obiageli's ting voice stood out like a small ogene among drums and flutes (2)

When he likes a man, wealth flows like a river into his house; his yams grow as big as human beings, his goats produce threes and his hen hatch nines (9).

And being as strong as rock he was always inflicting injury on others (11)

If you want to shout like a castrated bull, you must wait until you return to Umuaro (24).

It made him pant on top of her like a lizard fullen from an iroko tree (193)

They looked to him like rats growing away at the sole of a sleeper's foot biting and then blowing on the wound to soothe it and lull the victim back to sleep (145).

Who would bear such a thing?

What propitiation or sacrifice would atone for such sacrilege. How could the victim set about putting himself right again with his further unless he could say to them. Rest for the man paid with his head? (25).

Why had Okperi not deigned to send a message to Umuaro to say this was what happened? (25).

But why?...why had Ulu chosen to deal thus with him, to strike him down and then cover him with mud? What was his offence?

Had he not divined the god's will and obeyed it ever heard that a child was scalded by the piece of yam its own mother put in its palm? What man would send his sun with a potsherd to bring fire from a neighbour's hut and then unleash rain on him.

Whoever sent his son up the palm to gather nuts and the took an axe and felled the tree? What could it point to but collapse and ruin of all things? (229)

Umuaru became move and more silent. The kind of silence which burnt a man's inside like the blue quiet razor-edge flame of burning palmnut shells (219).

The imageries used by Achebe are very descriptive and they appeal to the readers sense of reasoning. The imageries are very vivid and give readers much to picture in their minds. The rhetorical questions promote critical thinking.

### **Paralle Construction**

Parallelism between units of speech is depicted in the move. Achebe, clearly, uses paralle constructive to protrary conflict and power.

Is she cooked a modest meal in her own but, matefi said she was starving her children so that she could buy bracelet. If she killed a cock as she did this evening, Matefi said she was seeking favour from her husband.

I said is it you afor

He said it is I afor

...I replied I am Ezeulu (71).

I have spoken it with my mouth

I have heard it with my ears

It has come through my children

### **Focalisations**

According to Alo (2005:120) focalization is a communicative process in language use in which the focus elements in a constructure conveys communicative importance. It is also a means of achieving emphasis. He outlines three major types of focus construction:

Emphatic Pre-modification Double subjects and Presumptive reverences.

The use of emphatic pre-modification is use of a redundant promodifier for emphasis. Achebe uses this linguistics in his novel Arrow of God for emphasis.

This my friend who took over the stomach of all his dead relatives.

### **Sentential Code-Mixing**

In sentential code-mixing, Achebe employs the English language and a Nigeria language in constructions. Within a sentence, linguistic elements from English and a Nigeria language are used. This is prevalent in Arrow of God:

The girls sang a song called Ifeoma...

And then prepare a stew of uziza (124))

Obiageli's tiny voice stood out like a small ogere among drums and flutes.

What happened next was the work of Ekwensu, the brings of evil Akukachia rushed after Ebo, went into the obi, took the ikenga from his shrine....

Go home and sleep and leave me to settle my quarrel with idemili....

These sentential code mixing shows time peculiar words which cannot be fully captured in the English language. Achebe uses them to portray words whose meanings would be lost in interpretation. He uses some because they have no equivalents in the English.

### **CONCLUSION**

Language is, indeed, a repository of culture. It is influenced by one's linguistics and cultural environments. Achebe uses Igbo lexico-syntactic structures to translate his ideas into the English language. His language is nativised and domesticated to capture Igbo cultural norms, ideas and ideals. His characters who are meant to speak the nativised English. Achebe has, indeed, succeeded in fashioning out the domesticated English which is able to capture his peculiar experience.

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