

CLAREP JOURNAL OF ENGLISH AND LINGUISTICS

C-JEL VOLUME 5, 2023

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Edited by

Alexandra Esimaje

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PREFACE

The fifth volume of the CLAREP Journal of English and Linguistics (C-JEL 5) contains ten high-quality papers in the fields of English Linguistics and Literary Studies, and one article on creative writing. In the first paper, Esimaje raises the awareness of researchers of the corpus method of language research by introducing the field of corpus linguistics, describing the different types of corpora and illustrating their applications in language teaching and learning. She argues that corpus linguistics is beyond the conventional introspective methods of language investigation. To further buttress this argument, the author richly exemplifies the utility of the learner corpora to second language acquisition which depends on good quality data to reveal the mental developmental processes of learners and helps to reliably identify their learning difficulties.

In Paper 2, Taiwo examines how discursive expressions of *alterity* are constructed online. He attempts to provide answers to questions such as: what factors encourage such expressions, and what are the implications of such expressions for a multi-ethnic nation like Nigeria? Taiwo analyses the commentary behaviour of Nigerians drawn from *Nairaland Forum* based on van Dijk's (1996) social representation theory and Boreus' (2006) typology of discursive discrimination. The findings of the study reveal that prejudices and stereotypes are based on experiences and opinions that lead to generalisation, group polarisation, illusory correlation, and attribution errors. Negative-other representations are achieved through labelling, deployment of environmental-based peculiarities, struggles for socio-economic goals, ethnic socio-cultural peculiarities, behaviour and appearances as well as perceived personality traits.

Udoudom and Essien (Paper 3) examine spelling errors in the written discourse of Nigerian university students, who are users of English. They investigate the extent to which non-standard usages are evident in the writings of educated Nigerians as a result of their use of internet language. They examined three hundred students from six universities in South-

South Nigeria. The authors report that internet language features such as alphanumeric features, initialisms respelling, shortening, and symbols occur in varying frequencies in their subjects' discourse. They conclude that these internet language features are not necessarily induced by the electronic medium alone, but also by other factors such as inconsistencies in the language system as well as the inability of English language users to discern the demands of specific writing contexts.

In Paper 4, Jibowo and Omotosho examine the use of the English language in Christian assemblies in Nigeria. They trace the history of the English language in Nigeria and argue that the role of Christian missionaries in the introduction and continuous usage of the English language in Christian assemblies cannot be underplayed. According to them, the advent of the English language in Nigeria was championed by the Church Missionary Society and other Christian missions. The need to propagate the gospel to the nook and crannies of Nigeria effectively necessitated the introduction of literacy education, which was conducted in English. They also emphasise the roles the English language continues to play in Nigerian churches. For example, they note that it is common for preachers to address the congregation in English due to the multi-ethnic and multilingual nature of our country, Nigeria.

In Paper 5, Idegwu analyses Ibiwari Ikiriko's *Oily Tears of the Delta and Sophia Obi's Tears in a Basket*, which demonstrate the collective silence towards the exploitation of the Niger Delta region of Nigeria, examines the mutuality between human beings and their ecologies and the inevitable role of literature in critiquing these relationship. He investigates the current state of the nation acquaints the people with the view that ecologies are over exploited by the Nigeria ruling class, in connivance with the multinational oil companies, leaving behind monumental and devastating ecological imprints on the landscape, fauna and flora. Using Ecocriticism, a trans-disciplinary approach, which scrutinises the relationship between biological sciences and literary imaginative works, Idegwu stresses the poets' intervention, the governments nonchalant attitude towards the peoples' predicaments, the geometrical progression of poverty in the land and the way out of the dilemma. The author concludes that there is a deliberate debasing of the nation's landscape and calls on the government to do the needful. He also calls on the Nigerian people to rise up to the challenges of the moment in view of government insensitivity.

Ojumah, in Paper 6, explores selected proverbs as culture carriers in Chinua Achebe's *Things Fall Apart*. The author examines how words are used to perform different functions and reveal the richness of Igbo culture in the novel. Eleven randomly selected proverbs used in the novel as means of communication between diverse characters are analysed to display the traditions in which the vocabularies epitomized constituted actions based on the principles of pragmatics, which comprise the making of utterance, context of utterance, meaning and effect. The author reports that, among other things, proverbs in *Things Fall Apart* accomplished diverse roles such as representing utterance acts, and concludes that proverbs constitute an aspect of Igbo discourse and clearly express the Igbo culture.

Okurobo's study in Paper 7 examines Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie's use of repetition to foreground silence, a predominant theme in *Purple Hibiscus*. She examines Adichie's choice of the lexical item *silence* in varied derivative forms (noun, adverb, adjective and verb), the use of its synonym and its incorporation into sentence structures. The author reports that the choice of these diverse linguistic forms in the presentation of the theme of *silence* is not accidental, but a deliberate attempt to get Adichie's message out to the public and thereby raise the consciousness of the society of its damaging effect.

In Paper 8, Ayieko uses Wole Soyinka's novel *The Interpreters* to investigate the comprehension rate of some university students in Kenya. The author adopts a pre-test, post-test experimental design. Sixty university undergraduate students from three universities were selected and placed in two groups: experimental and control. The experimental group was taught using the schema theory, while the control group was taught using the conventional method which entails the whole class lecture, teacher-led instruction. The findings of the study show that there are statistically significant differences in comprehension level of the students due to the Schema theory method. The author concludes that different aspects of the stream-of-consciousness such as interior monologue, association, montage, plot structure and myth and archetype contribute to the difference in comprehension rate.

The ninth paper by Ntam investigates the communicative abilities of landscape beings as depicted in selected poems of Thomas Hardy and Gerard Manley Hopkins. The author adopts the eco-critical views of Cheryl Glotfelty, Christopher Manes and Michael J. McDowell to argue that the

notion of language and communication is not limited to humans. He argues that non-human beings are endowed with the ability to communicate and that it is possible for humans to learn the language of other beings for mutual communication. He further stresses that an understanding of the speech and communication potentials of the non-human neighbours of humankind will prompt a reconsideration of the suppressive position human beings have ascribed to other creatures. The author concludes that mutual communication between landscape beings will curb the indifference, negligence, and cruelty the supposed stigmatised ‘inferior’ non-human beings endure from human beings.

In Paper 10, Ohia examines the use of the mask motif to navigate socio-political spheres in Osaro et al’s *The Outcast*. The author analyses the ways in which the poets exploit the image of the mask to make social, cultural, political, artistic, oil exploration and exploitation statements in their entire poetic oeuvre. Ohia concludes that the poets use their poems to aptly condemn and fiercely question the predators of the Niger Delta. The volume ends with a short story entitled “the floating bottle” by Esimaje.

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Because “War is much too serious to be left to the military,” Corpus linguistics is a thing, and it is a very useful thing too¹

Alexandra Esimaje

Benson Idahosa University, Nigeria

Email: alexandra.esimaje@live.com

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Abstract

Corpus linguistics, although a relatively new field of research endeavour, has made great strides in language research and teaching. It has enhanced the reliability and productivity of the results of language research. Yet, it is relatively unknown in particularly African linguistic academies and as such its gains lost to the communities and language teaching-learning contexts where it has made its most significant impacts. This study has the primary objectives of raising the awareness of researchers on the corpus method of language research and proving its value beyond the conventional introspective methods of language investigation. Therefore, it introduces the field of corpus linguistics, describes the different types of corpora and illustrates their applications in language teaching and learning.

Keywords: Corpus linguistics, corpora, language research, teaching and learning.

1.0 Introduction

It may be necessary to explain why I have chosen to speak on this topic and perhaps what it means. In 2014, I was on an academic visit to the University of Lancaster, UK and in my interactions with academics and native speakers of the language, I encountered the use of the following expressions “different than”, how long will you be staying for, whereabouts are you going? I found these expressions a bit odd, especially the first one. Consider the sentence –

¹ This paper is an excerpt from an inaugural lecture delivered by Alexandra Esimaje on the 18th of October, 2022. Consequently, some portions of the text have appeared in the previous works of the author.

In what way is Law different than History? As a teacher, I will immediately encircle “different than” and mark “than” for replacement with “from” to get the expression “different from” which I consider correct grammatically. I reasoned that since I was among native speakers, I should ask what the correct expression was. So, I asked a professor-native speaker. The response was remarkably shocking. He said, “I would write that too but you can find out what is most acceptable and adopt that”. I said where? He replied “online” Google it to find out how many people use “different than” and how many “different from”. I did and found that more persons use “different from”. When I reported my finding, he simply said, go with the result – that is the established usage. The question is – who/what determines correct usage: the teacher, the grammar books, the user/student or the internet. Here the internet represents the corpus of language data – attested language or real language as they occurred. In effect, the teaching of usage should not be left to the teacher alone just as war should not be left to the soldiers alone. We all have a part to play: the teacher, the student, the books, and language data. Corpus linguistics enables this free-for-all playing ground where everyone contributes to the learning process through what is called the corpus driven approach, as well as the corpus-based approach. Therefore, I chose this topic to address all of this possibility and my fervent hope is to be able to show you how at this propitious occasion of the 12th inaugural lecture of the Benson Idahosa University, Benin City, Nigeria.

Allow me to take you on a tour of the field called Corpus Linguistics, a branch of Applied Linguistics. I will do this in three ways: First, I present an exegesis on “What is Corpus Linguistics?”. Second, discuss “Corpora and second language teaching and learning”. Third, I describe my contribution to the field and my current research activities. I hope I am able to achieve this and thus enlighten you on the role of a corpus linguist in the war raging in education and about education, a war that must not be left to the military alone, that is, to teachers and researchers. Our concern is with those that bear the brunt of this war – the students.

2.0 What is Corpus Linguistics?

2.1 *Conceptual clarifications: Corpus & Corpus linguistics*

A **corpus** (plural: corpora) is a collection of written or spoken material, occurring naturally, stored on computer, and typically used to

carry out some kind of linguistic analysis (Esimaje & Hunston 2019). It is characterized by:

- i. naturally occurring texts; that is, the texts are not written specially to go into the corpus, but are collected from sources such as newspapers, novels, blogs or (transcribed) conversations.
- ii. texts selected to represent a language or a variety of a language (Francis 1982; Nelson 2000). According to Biber (1993: 243), “representativeness refers to the extent to which a sample includes the full range of variability in a population”.
- iii. relatively large text. This means that there are so many texts in the corpus it would be difficult to study them ‘by hand and eye alone’ (McEnery and Hardie (2012: 2). Instead, the corpus is stored on computer and accessed using specialised software.

Corpus linguistics is any kind of language enquiry which relies on corpus data or corpus evidence to answer questions about language, including those related to the description of a language variety, theories of language, how language is learnt, and how language is used in specific contexts (Esimaje & Hunston, 2019).

2.2 Corpus linguistics debate: Is CL a Theory or Method

I would like to introduce you to the major debate in the field of corpus linguistics. This is the debate as to whether it is a theory or method; that is whether it establishes a relationship between language and the world. According to Stubbs (1996:230-231):

Corpus linguistics has as yet only very preliminary outlines of a theory which can relate individual texts to text corpora, which can use what is frequent in corpora to identify what is typical in language and which can use findings about frequently occurring patterns to construct a theory of the relation between routine and the creative use of language. It is not surprising that the nature of corpora and the methods used to study them have hardly been theorized... Within a very short time, linguists have acquired new techniques of observation. The situation is similar to the

period immediately following the invention of the microscope and the telescope, which suddenly allowed scientists to observe things that had never been seen before. To that extent, the heuristic power of corpus methods is no longer in doubt.

Although there are arguments supporting corpus linguistics as an independent theory of linguistics (e.g., Tognini-Bonelli, 2001), and there are even those who claim it is both theory and method (e.g., Gabrielatos and Baker, 2008), they are not in equilibrium with the others who see it as a method that can be applied to any theory of language (McEnery, Xiao and Tono (2006:8). There seems to be a penchant toward accepting that, as it is today, corpus linguistics is more method than it is theory, a method which has enabled insights into language in magnitudes and depths previously unimagined. I stand with this latter group. Yet, one can easily insinuate that the present status of corpus linguistics might just be a close precursor to its theoretical status. A compromise between these positions, and one that is increasingly adopted, is to argue that corpus linguistics is a method that can be applied to any language theory, but that it tends to lead towards particular theories of language, some of which have been developed specifically in response to corpus evidence (Esimaje & Hunston, 2019, 23-25).

2.3 Types of corpora

There are different kinds of corpora depending on the different purposes for which they are made. I will describe the major ones according to Esimaje and Hunston 2019, and especially those that have influenced my research in the field.

General corpus

A general corpus is a systematic collection of texts of different types and genres, which is normally very large in size and used for comparing languages (it is also called a reference corpus). Kennedy (1998) observes that such corpora are made simply with the aim of providing database for unspecified linguistic research, hence the name, and notes that since such corpora are designed to meet a wide range of research tasks, they normally aim at representativeness and balance; having in them texts representing different genres and different domains of language use, spoken and written alike. Examples of general

corpora are the British National Corpus of 100 million words and the Bank of English of 400 million words. The BNC, for instance, represents a wide range of spoken and written British English from the 1990s. It includes texts from newspapers, periodicals, academic books and journals, fiction, letters, memoranda as well as college and university essays.

Specialized corpus

Unlike a general corpus, a specialized corpus is compiled with a particular research task in mind. It therefore is representative of a given type of text and used to investigate a particular type of language or topic. For instance, a collection of newspapers articles, works of genres of fiction, works of a particular author, in a specific context or time, students' conversations, female writings are all illustrative of this kind of corpus. Specialized corpora are often also compiled by individual researchers to investigate language phenomena of interest to them. For example, Esimaje (2012) compiled a corpus of religious sermons of a well-known preacher in Nigeria in order to investigate the lexical characteristics of sermons. This corpus, called Chris Oyakhilome sermons (COS), contains 200 sermons and is made up of 65,000 words. Many such corpora are not published and consequently are not known or at best little known. Another example is the Michigan corpus of academic English (MICASE) of 1.7 million words. In some cases, a specialised corpus can be built from a general corpus. Su (2015), for example, built a corpus of biographical texts from a part of the BNC.

Learner corpus

A learner corpus is a collection of texts produced by learners of a language. The purpose of building a learner corpus is often to study features of interlanguage, frequently in comparison with native language, and to analyse learner errors with the aim of identifying learner needs. This second aim has been a topic of controversy because some believe that learner language is a genre in its own right and should not be expected to match native-like production (Granger 1998) nor be subjected to correction (Truscott 1996; Broughton et al. 2003: 135). There are corpora by learners, corpora for learners and corpora with learners. An example of learner corpus is the international corpus of learner English (ICLE) compiled by Sylvianne Granger (1998) and her team. This includes samples of writing from learners of English in

20 countries. There are others such as a corpus of Polish learners of English (PELCRA) (Lenko- Szymanska 2004) or the corpus of Nigeria and Cameroon English learners' language (Conacell) (Esimaje 2016) which has proved very useful in various analyses of learning needs and contrastive studies of learning in the two contexts.

2.4 Corpus design

If a researcher wishes to compile a corpus for their own use, a number of issues have to be considered: what is going into the corpus (content), how large it should be (size), and to what extent the corpus can be balanced and representative. Each of these issues is explained here, as explicated in Esimaje and Hunston 2019, pp13-16.

Content

What goes into a corpus will depend on the use that is to be made of the corpus (Hunston 2002: 25). This means that the content of the corpus will depend on the aim of the study. Once that aim is decided, the texts have to be found. For example, if the aim of a project is to study research articles written in the field of Applied Linguistics, journals devoted to Applied Linguistics will be the most obvious source of material. It is likely that a variety of journals will be selected, with expert informants consulted to recommend the most highly-regarded journals in the field from which texts can be chosen.

Considerations such as what texts are available for use, permissions, issues of copyright or ethical considerations are also important, and can restrict corpus construction. It is not ethical, for example, to build a corpus of student essays unless each student has given informed consent for their work to be used in this way.

Size

Corpora have increased in size dramatically since the early days of corpus linguistics and it is usually said that the larger the corpus the better. This is because many words and phrases occur relatively infrequently, so to study them adequately a large amount of data is needed. For example, in the Times sub-corpus of the Bank of English, the word *very* occurs 678.3 times in every million words, but the word *exceptionally* occurs only 9 times in every million.

Therefore, to study the patterning of very, one million words would be quite sufficient, but to repeat the exercise with *exceptionally*, many millions of words would be needed. Considerations here are the availability of data, the pressure of time, and the balance of the corpus.

Balance

In those cases where a corpus will consist of a number of different parts (or sub- corpora), and where a large amount of data is available for each part, it may be wished to achieve balance between the sub-corpora. Biber (1993) gives details on how to achieve corpus balance through sampling. First the population to be studied is defined; for example, the population may consist of publications in English in a certain country in a certain year. This is the sampling frame. Then the hierarchical structure (or strata) of the population is determined; for example, the publications are divided into newspapers, novels, non-fiction books, web pages and so on. The next consideration is how many texts from each stratum should be included. This involves some difficult decisions. For example, there will probably be many more newspapers than novels published. A very large corpus consisting of thousands of newspaper articles but only two novels could be built, but that would not be balanced between newspapers and novels.

Representativeness

As well as being balanced, a corpus is often designed to be representative of a given population. According to Biber (1993: 243), “representativeness refers to the extent to which a sample includes the full range of variability in a population”. How difficult it is to achieve true representativeness depends on the aim of the corpus compilation. For example, it may be possible to achieve a ‘saturation’ corpus, that is, a corpus that contains all possible texts. A corpus containing all the plays written by Shakespeare, for example, is of necessity representative of Shakespeare’s plays. If it is wished to compile a corpus of newspaper texts reporting a natural disaster in a given country it may be possible to identify all the articles written, and to make a balanced selection from them, or include all of them. On the other hand, if the objective is to study tweets written by teenagers the task of achieving representativeness may be much more difficult, as it may not be known how many such texts exist or who is writing them. If the population or the strata are not known, then achieving either balance or representativeness can be a problem.

To some extent, size, balance and representativeness are conflicting requirements. Again, building the corpus is a compromise between these demands. In many cases, what is to be represented is adjusted to allow for balance and corpus size.

To summarise, corpus linguistics is a method of linguistic research which relies on real or naturally-occurring language or language-in-use as data. What, in Chomskyan linguistics (Chomsky, 1957, 1965) is called performance data as opposed to competence data, is proved to be much more than performance data because it is a collection of actual utterances or writings of people. Therefore, it is in fact actual human behaviour. This highlights the first merit of corpus linguistics. Beyond having, as data, actual language in use, its second strength is the ability to 'see' far beyond the ordinary 'eyes' of man because of computer technology, i.e. software and corpora which now enable a spectrum of observation of linguistic phenomena that was previously impossible. The third strength is the quantification of data and the application of statistical measures which make possible the systematization of research handling, thereby increasing the reliability of findings (Esimaje, 2012, p.84).

3.0 Corpora and Second Language Teaching and learning

In discussing this topic, I will make reference to one of my publications which examined the advent of the computer in language research and teaching to show how the linguistic research communities in multilingual settings like Nigeria stand to benefit from the engineering of language. I argue that researchers and teachers need to revise their methods in line with current but proven trends for better and valid results to be obtained. This entails taking advantage of the triple resource which the computer, the corpus and the access software provide, and adding to it the human intelligence. Let us look at how corpora have fared in research and in teaching.

3.1 Corpora in language research

A corpus by itself can do nothing at all, being nothing other than a store of used language. Corpus access software, however, can re-arrange that store so that observations of various kinds can be made. If a corpus represents a speaker's experience of

language, the access software reorders that experience so that it can be examined in ways that are usually impossible. A corpus does not contain new information about language, but software offers us a new perspective on the familiar (Hunston, 2002, p.3).

The above quotation is an apt introduction to the significance of the corpus in language research. As those who have ventured into corpus linguistics attest, it has very many advantages. As earlier stated, it enables observation of vast language beyond the ability of human observation and beyond the capability of human memory. It also makes possible the investigation of those phenomena which are far too apart in texts, and increases research speed without sacrificing content (Biber, Conrad & Reppen, 1998; Hunston, 2002). Corpus linguists argue that corpora are a more reliable guide to language than a native speaker intuition because much of a native speaker's experience is hidden from introspection. In support of this argument, Hunston (2002 p. 20-23) mentioned four areas of language that intuition cannot reliably handle: collocation, word frequency, semantic prosody/pragmatic meaning, and the details of phraseology.

Commenting on the significance of corpus researches, Kennedy (1998 pp. 276- 277) noted how corpus linguistics has benefitted from computational linguistics and how this has made it a mainstream methodology for natural language processing because the linguistic ruled-based paradigms proved inadequate to model normal language in use. He explained that linguists have been well aware of the complexity of natural language and how the formal rules have been unable to capture its structures, so it is not a surprise that attempt to do so through computer assisted methods though lauded, has also proved very difficult given the adaptability and unpredictability of language in use. Sinclair (2004 p.10) poignantly captured the value of the corpus as a research tool when he noted that "linguistics was formed and shaped on inadequate evidence because of the shortage of information and evidence available to linguists." As such, there has been much speculation about language. This, he argued, is because the human ability to recall or remember is limited; but now so much language is available on record; both written and spoken.

The use of corpus data such as The Bank of English of 400 million words and the British National corpus of 100 million words, which represent native speaker language, is invaluable because it provides another perspective

to research and models the teaching and learning of English in non-native contexts like Africa. The significance of such corpora is two-fold. First, it serves as a uniform and acceptable sample of the population because it is usually a very widely sourced data covering decades of time, wide geographical zones and covering the whole variability of language types or linguistic contexts. It is normally clearly beyond the capability of a single person or even a few persons to compile. Second, it transfers the energy of the researcher from the search for data to the exploitation of the data thereby achieving time savings and reducing the error occasioned by data collection processes.

Any error in the data gets transferred to the results, from the results to the classroom, and from the classroom to the linguistic world now beyond the control of both the teacher and the researcher. Such an error becomes almost irredeemable, but when we have authentic populations of written and spoken language, the work of research is halved, eased, facilitated and more efficient. Such collections of language in use are conspicuously missing in the African linguistic environments: academic institutions, libraries, research institutes, and individual data banks.

My first marvel with the corpus approach was during my PhD research. I had collected and digitized 800 sermons of Pst. Chris Oyakhilome. I needed to explore a sample of 200. The most natural way in the languages was to do textual analysis which meant that all 200 sermons would have to be read manually to 'search' for features. This method would have taken me months to achieve or at best weeks if I do nothing else everyday but read the sermons. However, the corpus method was applied; using computer software of Wordsmith 4, the data was computer read in seconds and the explorations returned more items than would otherwise have been possible. So indeed, the corpus approach lends incredible speed and precision to research activities. But beware, the computer has no brain, it cannot think; it relies on the human researcher to make sense of the data it throws out. And often times, the computer throws out so much data that overwhelms the researcher. In summary, corpora along with its access software is the necessary companion of the researcher; it makes his work easier, faster, better and more reliable but it relies on the intuition of the researcher to be meaningful. This is why Hunston 2002: 3) says that "a corpus by itself can do nothing at all, being nothing other than a store of used language. Corpus access software, however, can re-arrange that store so that observations of various kinds can be made".

3.2 Corpora in language teaching

The student centred paradigm of discovery learning . . . can scarcely be better exemplified than through the use of the computer corpus. Almost uniquely, among the information resources, of which students make use in education, a text corpus is of primary interest because of what it is . . . ; a rich resource of authentic data waiting to be ‘unlocked’ by the human intelligence. Perhaps the nearest equivalent, in other disciplines, is in the direct confrontation with data that occur in the scientific laboratory, or in field work. It is this experiential confrontation with the material of study that can make corpus work so rewarding to the student.

Leech (1997, pp. 1-30) argues that ‘there is every reason to believe that language corpora will have a role of growing importance in teaching. In tracing the history of computer corpora, it would be noticed immediately that the first decades had their focus on research - to describe language behaviour, and to write its grammar. Hidden behind this function was that of its use in language teaching because of the symbiotic relationship between research and teaching. So, it was not long before the findings of research began to trickle into teaching so that theory and practice could be matched.

This was the observation of Leech (1997:2) that ‘the corpus, purely as a resource, is rather like a shelf in a university library: it is there to be exploited, and the same resources are equally usable for research and teaching. He noted that the use of corpora in teaching will transform teaching from imparting knowledge to teaching as mediated learning because it removes the gulf between teaching and learning and places the student at a similar position as the teacher; to investigate and make sense of the data by observing the corpus. Sinclair (1997:28) also examined the importance of corpus-based research on language description and teaching and outlined ways in which ‘computer-processed language data can, should and will have a powerful impact on language teaching.’ Some of the benefits of corpora in teaching cited are automatic searching of data at speed; promotion of learner-centred learning with flexibility of place, time and learner needs; open-ended supply of language data to encourage discovery method of learning; and tailoring learning to adapt to the needs and wishes of the learner.

As Scott (1999) observed, the computer does not and cannot think, but, the researcher can, and since the researcher understands the data if he effectively directs the computer, reliable results will emerge. It is essential to point out that the use of computers in research is a case of complementarity. It maximises the potential of the researcher/teacher, enhances his output, enlarges the utility of the machine and allows for the benefits of cross fertilization of ideas. As the research stands, this method of language enquiry is permeating the Western countries where corpus findings are being applied in almost every conceivable area of language learning and to its teaching.

For example, translations of languages are fast taking place; grammars and dictionaries are written which are based on corpus researches, and students are also introduced to corpus learning or discovery learning. In this method, both the student and his teacher are placed on equal grounds to explore data and come up with independent results. Corpus linguistics has opened up wide perspective for teaching/learning. Currently, there is a project examining the possibility of using the worldwide web as a classroom. For example, Mick Short (2003) developed www-based course in literary stylistics. His aim was to experiment teaching on the web by running two versions of the course; online and in the conventional classroom, to measure the degree of effectiveness of each medium of teaching. This is, of course, one way of using corpus materials. In America also, teachers exploit the resources of the web to research and teach to the extent of using the net as a mega corpus. It appears though that this trend does not yet apply to the global linguistic research community as would be shown in the assessment of the application of corpus linguistics in Nigerian universities which follows shortly.

3.3 Computer assisted research in Nigeria

Language research in the Nigerian context is predominantly done with the conventional method of direct observation of data: mini collections of language sample, which are then typically organised and handled manually, to investigate phenomena and time is a major limitation of research still. The reason is obvious; human speed is at best slow. The use of computers is mainly for the typing of completed research and sometimes for some processing tasks such as numerical counts. The useful role of the computer to analyse and sort data using relevant software has yet to take root among academics based in the country. The limited knowledge and information manifested by academics

at conferences and other academic forums whenever the topic is broached are attestations. Even worse is the attitude toward the use of computerized techniques.

Some believe that it will stifle creativity; a self-defeating argument in itself because the computer is itself a product of creativity. When applied to data organisation and exploitation the computer reproduces the data in a variety of interesting formats and enables the researcher to do a number of creative things with the data to the extent that his imagination can allow. So, teacher attitude is, therefore, one issue that demands attention. The other is the availability of the raw materials for computer analysis; the corpora and the software. The latter has been sufficiently taken care of by other sister nations especially the UK and USA where some software exist for computer-based language research. These are available to anyone around the globe; some are provided free online while some are available at a price, but the former, corpora, begs for urgent attention.

There is a great need to construct corpora of languages; English and indigenous languages in Nigeria for the purposes of linguistic enquiry. There are a few recorded attempts like the corpus of Nigeria and Cameroon English learner language (Conacell) (Esimaje 2016) and other DIY (Do it yourself) corpora. These will serve as a benchmark data against which to compare the mini or specific collections of language sample which researchers investigate for answers to their research questions. Even these data can be culled from the extensive collections already made. This is now the practice all over the world; to have a large collection of English in use or a huge data bank from which further specific and smaller samples can be drawn. Also, in the African language scenario, most language-oriented research either examines one language within the confines of another language, or employs the tenets of one language to study another.

A recent (Esimaje 2022) practical evaluation of the extent of the application of corpora in the language classrooms in Nigeria returned the following survey results. The population of this investigation comprised 69% university lecturers, those with specialization in language studies being 79% and those with experience ranging from 1 to 30 years. However, the results were without bias to teaching experience. The survey result shows that 84.8% of the participating universities did not offer corpus linguistics as a course;

71.2% of the participants lacked exposure to corpus linguistics; 66.7% does not have knowledge of corpus methods; 53% does not know any language teaching corpora. Although 47% knows about the existence of language corpora, 80.3% has never used corpora in the language classroom; and 68.2% has not used corpora in their personal research. The last question as to whether the participants were interested in corpus linguistics returned a 97% positive response. The implications of these results are clear:

1. This is a policy and curriculum issue to start with. Once corpus linguistics is made a curriculum item, it becomes possible for institutions to plan its administration; make available the resources (human and material) for its effective implementation.
2. There may be other factors beyond institutional support. The individual researcher is probably unable to seek out this knowledge through self-directed learning due to the inadequacy of such allied computer infrastructure such as internet, software, power, and also poverty.
3. The linguistic communities in Nigeria are grossly underrepresented in this area of research and underserved because they are unable to utilize the output of corpus research and as such those linguistic investigations that are only possible through the corpus methods remain unattended and untapped.
4. The students are worse off because not only is knowledge transferred to them, ignorance is equally transferred and perpetuated from one group of learners to another, following the computer parlance of “garbage in, garbage out”. What is worse is that relevant knowledge is lost to both the learners and their society.

Other challenges are: It is not often possible to equip classrooms with computers: many available corpora contain language unsuitable for younger learners; corpus investigation may not fit neatly into exam-driven syllabuses; most corpora tend to comprise the language of native speakers only whereas many non-native speakers will never communicate with a native speaker; and native speaker corpora may de-value the language of the non-native speakers and perpetuate colonialist attitudes towards English.

It is my hope that this university will join the 13.6% of institutions that included corpus linguistics in their curriculum to remedy the already deep-seated loss but also to open new vistas of knowledge about all aspects of

language for the learners and their useful applications to society. The logical question on your mind, I expect, is how can corpora help in language teaching. I will answer this predictable question shortly.

3.4 Applications of corpora in language teaching and learning.

Corpus linguistics can be used for the study of virtually all aspects of language but our interest here is its application in the field of language pedagogy. Therefore, I present the learner corpus to illustrate the utility of corpora in the language classroom.

The learner corpus

Of all the exciting developments in corpus-based studies, the creation and use of learner corpora in language pedagogy holds the most attraction for those of us involved in language education. Notable among this research is the work of Sylviane Granger, who led the compilation of the ‘most used’ learner corpora – the International Corpus of Learner English (ICLE 2009). As Myles (2005) argues, SLA research depends on good quality data sets through which the mental developmental processes of learners can be observed and corpora of learners’ language remain the only central evidence of such. Myles’ point is illustrated in a study of tense uses by university learners in Nigeria carried out by Esimaje and Hunston (2016), which revealed a pattern of errors involving lexical BE and thus pointed to a pedagogical need of the learners in this area. For example, in the following sentences from a student’s essay showed consistent errors relating to the lexical BE: “We were also asked the reason we **are** not with our invitation card” and “I was afraid because I **am** alone, on that day nobody is with me.”

Earlier, Hunston (2002) pointed out that the essence of work on learner corpora is comparison: between corpora produced by different sets of learners, and between corpora produced by learners and those produced by native speakers. Such comparisons help students ‘notice’ the gaps between their interlanguage and the language they are learning. This point was highlighted by Granger (2012:3237), who explained that “one of the best ways of uncovering the features that are typical of learner language is to compare it to other samples of learner language and /or to a control corpus of expert production”. A learner corpus is a systematic collection of the language produced by foreign

or second language learners which is stored and processed on a computer. It consists of principled collections of learner language which give insight to how foreign or second language is acquired (Lüdeling et al 2005).

Granger (2002) traces the history of computer learner corpora (CLC) to the period between the late 1980s to the early 1990s when investigations into non- native varieties of English language began through the collections of English usage by learners which came to be referred to as learner corpora. As she pointed out, learner corpora provide a new type of data which informs thinking in second language acquisition (SLA) and foreign language teaching (FLT), revealing the mechanisms of acquisition, and improving the learning and teaching of second and foreign languages. As she notes, formerly SLA/FLT had drawn their data from language use data, metalingual data, and self-reports but these sources notoriously excluded the learner output. Through learner corpora, this void has now been effectively filled and corpora have also illuminated the other variables of learning such as learning styles and needs.

The main reason for compiling a learner corpus, Granger (1998) says, is to gather objective data for describing learner language. However, generally, learner corpora are important because they provide a record of divergence from the standard language, however that is defined, and by investigating this contrast researchers can focus on theoretical and/or pedagogical issues while educators can concentrate on the needs of learners (Pravec 2002). Granger (1998:6) further argues that by examining a corpus annotated for error, researchers have access not only to learner errors, but also to learners' total interlanguage (IL). Granger (2002) notes too that approaching learner errors through learner corpora or language output rather than through experimental processes or self-reports is more reliable because this way, we can have a wider understanding of learner language and so attention can focus on more generalized errors.

Despite the importance of the learner corpora, only a handful exists (e.g. the Learning Prosody in a Foreign Language (LeaP) corpus, Gut 2009), and the ICLE (Granger et al. 2009). Most of these do not contain samples of learner language in Nigeria. This is why my research in this area makes incalculable contribution, as the following example from the corpus of Nigeria and Cameroon English learner language (Conacell, Esimaje 2016) illustrates.

An **embarrassment** is a situation in which you **fine** yourself which you less expected. This situation is always a bad one which most of the times **disgraces** you and **in** public. I have had many of such challenges in life but below, we shall see the most **embarrassing** one **w** which made me almost **lost** my character trade of contentment and satisfaction.

On this particular day, we were **suppose** to have a contest for the miss of my village. I knew I could make it because I had all that was required from the **delegates** candidates. This particular contest, I saw it as a **way** step into my career of modeling **d** but the **embarrassment** I **recieved** made me **lost** that dream till today. I prepared so well that I knew nobody could meet up with me **d** but just a small thing spoiled everything.

The night before the contest, I had invited all my friends and **talk** to them about it with **alot** of confidence. There was one thing which made me mad. I had my best dress prepared for this day but I had no shoes, not even a sister that I could get one from. I had to borrow one from my neighbour which was really nice and I practiced with it the whole night and everything was fine.

On **The** set day, I **met** with the other girls, we discussed and shared ideas and **every-body** was set to go **in** when time came **d** **Every-body** was to enter when your name **is** called. The judge called about five names and they performed so well. I could hear the crowd shouting from where I was standing. I was the next person he called. I **move** in but I felt some strange behaviour with the shoe I had **practice** with. I struggled **her** to **elate** walk with it but behold when I got to the center of the stage, my heels came out. I was **domfounded**, I could not take any further step but the judge told me to continue. **with** the **childings** I **recieved** from the crowd I was **confuse** and more than the word **embarrassed**. I **look** at the other contestants who had already talked **her** on my right, they were all laughing, deep in me I knew I had already lost it. I **strugled** to talk but all **what** I prepared **d** out of the embarrassment had left my head. I could hardly say out anything clear so I was asked to go. **while** leaving the stage I was called to come and pick my broken heel along. **with** all the shame I took **it** out with me.

When I got home that day I could not even explain to anyone what happened. when I **open** my mouth tears **whil** will drop from my eyes and I will stop. The other girls came to our **housemy** home that day, I **though** they were coming to console me but unfortunately for me **They** came to mock me and left. Even my own family members could not encourage me. I was all left alone.

In this example, a student's essay is error-tagged and shows the various errors identified, tagged and/or corrected. The tags were named following the error types, for example, spelling error is tagged 'spelling' and is shown in 'red' while tense errors are tagged tense and shown in purple. In both cases, the software enables the annotator to both identify the error and provide the correct forms. This means that learners are able to 'notice' the errors as well as learn their correct forms.

4.0 Corpus research outcomes

This section presents my research in the field of corpus linguistics to serve the main purposes of: (1) supporting the argument for the relevance of the field in language teaching and learning, (2) to encourage readers to utilise the corpus approach in their research, and (3) to apply the outcomes of the research endeavours as resources for teaching and research, especially in Africa where such resources are scarce.

4.1 Conacell

My milestone contribution to the field of corpus linguistics and by extension the academic community is the construction of the corpus of Nigerian and Cameroonian learner language (Conacell) in 2016. Conacell

is a learner corpus project which set out to compile and analyse a corpus of Nigeria and Cameroon English Learner Language, thus the acronym, Conacell. The three-year project, which was funded by The Volkswagen Foundation, Germany, has built and annotated for errors a corpus of 442,939 words. The project is motivated by two major factors: the non-existence of corpus-based studies on learner language in Nigeria and Cameroon, and the need for a systematic characterization of the types, features and patterns of students' language production in the countries. The aim of the project is to produce resources for measuring learners' development as well as for showing the current state of their learning. The corpus data comprises 998 student writings: 383 university learners (235 from Nigeria and 148 from Cameroon), who produced texts amounting to 224,927 words (153,629 from Nigerian students and 71,302 words of data from Cameroonian students); and 615 secondary students (428 Nigerian students and 187 students from Cameroon), who produced texts amounting to 218,012 words (131,827 from Nigeria and 86,195 from Cameroon). The Nigerian sub-corpus comprises 285,456 words and represents 61% of the entire corpus while the Cameroon sub-corpus comprises 157,497 words and represents 39% of the entire corpus. The corpus has been annotated for syntactic, morphological and spelling errors and can be explored through contrastive interlanguage analyses for language teaching and learning in the various contexts.

Data collection

The first stage in the compilation of Conacell entailed the collection of language productions of intermediate and advanced learners of English in both countries. 'Intermediate learners' refer to final year students at the secondary level of education, aged 16-17, while 'advanced learners' are university students in their pre-final and final years of study, aged 18-28. The data elicited from these learners was in the form of essays and examinations. All the data was collected in its original form, i.e. the essays were handwritten. The decision to collect written rather than oral data was informed by the interest of the research in writing because it is a problematic area for English as Second Language (ESL) learners but also because written texts are generally used in high-stakes assessment in academic environments whereas oral texts are less consequential.

Corpus annotation

The corpus was annotated using Pacx (Platform for annotating corpora in XML (Voormann & Gut 2008; Wunder, Voormann & Gut 2010). XML is one of the two mainstream data formats used in corpus data management. The XML data format is suitable for the integration of raw data as well as linguistic and non- linguistic annotations (metadata). Some of the features of Pacx which make it suitable for the Conacell project are that it enables collection and annotation of large amounts of language data (audio, video, texts), based on Eclipse (www.exclipse.org), reduces annotation errors drastically, offers search options and easy project compilation, distribution and archiving. Corpus building in Pacx entails five main processes as shown graphically in figure 1. Their applications in Conacell are described below.

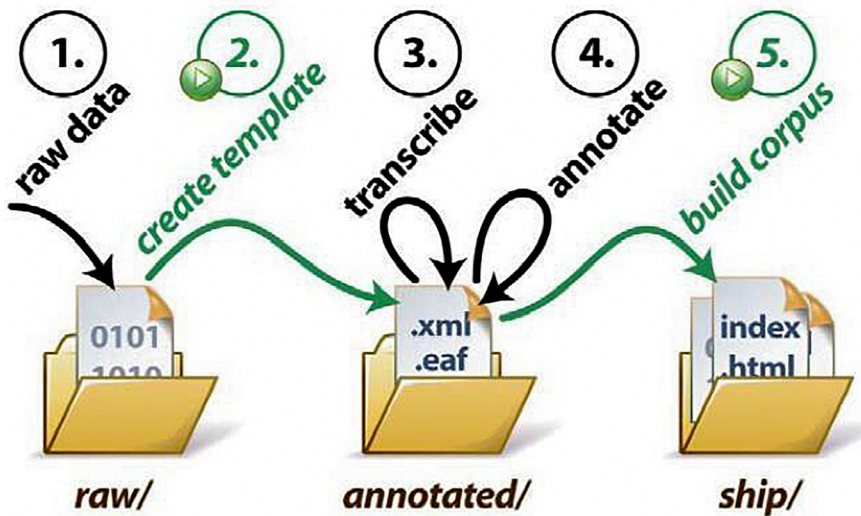


Figure 1: Reproduced from Wunder, Voormann and Gut (2010:79)

Conacell makes a useful addition to the list of existing learner corpora whose general purposes are to portray the state of learning, to reveal the current needs of the learners, to enable a description of learners' competence at different stages of learning and to guide the production of teaching materials such as curricula and textbooks.

As linguistic research continues to suffer the dearth of data and specifically, authentic data. Conacell and a few other corpora such as ICE Nig

and ICE Cam (Greenbaum 1996; Wunder, Voorman & Gut 2010; Nkemleke 2008) and now ICLE (Granger 2009 (although Nigeria and Cameroon are not included yet) are attempts to solve this problem and to position linguists to contribute to the global academic scholarship towards tackling the issues in language studies.

It is my hope that Conacell will indeed be a useful resource for language teaching, curriculum development and textbook writing as it directs attention to what learners in Nigeria and Cameroon know and what they do not yet know, as well as facilitate contrastive studies of language learning in the multi-linguistic, multi-cultural contexts of Nigeria and Cameroon.

4.2 Conacell-based studies

Following the completion of Conacell, a number of studies have been carried out. Summaries of two of the studies are represented below to illustrate the possible applications of the resource and to call attention to it for further exploitation.

Case study 1

Esimaje, A. U. (2017). Comparing Spelling Usage by Advanced Learners in Nigeria and Cameroon: A Conacell - based Study
Syllabus Review Vol. 7(1), 2017, 168-189

Purpose of study

The purpose of this study was to assess the acquisition of competence in terms of forms of lexical items, particularly spelling and capitalisation, by 383 university students in Nigeria and Cameroon. The study attempted to answer two research questions: 1. Do university students in Nigeria and Cameroon demonstrate sufficient competence of the English lexical form? 2. Are there specific patterns of spelling in the various contexts of use?

Results

As the result shows, normalised frequency of misspelling in the Nigeria sub- corpus is 23.7 while that of Cameroon is 14.9. This means that out of every 1000 words written by a Nigerian learner of English, about 24 are likely

to be wrongly spelt while for the Cameroon learner, 15 words are wrongly spelt. This translates to approximately 2% and 1.5% respectively for Nigeria and Cameroon. Therefore, the assumption stands correct. Interestingly, in both the contexts of Nigeria and Cameroon, certain words posed equal difficulty in spelling. For instance, the personal pronoun 'I', and the content word *embarrassing* occurred with incorrect spellings in both contexts. The personal pronoun 'I' was further analysed in order to create more insight into its usage.

The study of spelling concludes that such errors at 2% and 1.5% respectively are negligible and as such do not pose a significant threat to learning and communication at that level. Also, the results of the investigation do not reveal any peculiar spelling patterns used by the students in Nigeria and Cameroon and so the second research question of whether there are patterns of spelling specific to the learning contexts could not be answered/confirmed. However, the high occurrence of capitalisation errors called for more analysis of the spelling form to identify patterns and to suggest possible remedies. The results showed that the instances where the learners used capitalisation where it was not required far outweighed instances where it was omitted where it was required. The implication is that competence in spelling form can be measured along educational levels and across educational contexts. Relative to the sample sizes of each of the corpora, it can be estimated that the extent of spelling errors is the same in both countries.

Case study 2

Esimaje, A. U. & Hunston, S. E. (2016). A corpus-based study of tense uses by advanced learners of English in Nigeria. In Josef Schmied & Daniel Nkemleke Eds. *Research in English and Applied Linguistics 10: Academic Writing across Disciplines in Africa*, Chemnitz: CurvillierVerlag, pp 123-136.

Purpose of the study

The purpose of the study was to examine tense uses by university students in Nigeria in order to identify and quantify non-standard vs standard features of tense uses in the language production of 112 university students. To achieve its objective, the study set out to answer three questions: 1. What

is the frequency of tense errors in the language of the students? 2. With what kind of verbs are these errors made? 3. Do students from different regions have similar frequency of tense errors?

Results

There is a total of 5605 verb phrases in the sub-corpus. Out of this number, the analysis reveals a total of 621 tense errors which represents about 11% of the total verb phrases. It also reveals that the tense forms do not pose equal difficulty to the students because out of the 621 errors found, 594 are of a particular kind: use of the present or unmarked form where the past tense is required. Further, it shows the proportion of errors is different depending on the type of verb carrying the tense. Lexical verbs (i.e. excluding BE, HAVE and DO) which carry tense are the most likely to be used erroneously. On closer examination, it was shown that the frequency of errors also varied along regional lines.

The study revealed that the greatest problem in tense use by Nigerian university learners of English is past tense marking and the most misused forms are shown to be the base form of the lexical verb and the BE forms. It also shows that tense marking is influenced by the learners' geographical region. It should not be forgotten that almost 90% of the verb phrases in the corpus did not show this kind of error. However, even an 11% error rate is likely to be cause for comment, and there is inconsistency between regions, meaning that the rate is substantially higher in some regions of Nigeria. To some extent, then, tense remains a learning need for university students in Nigeria despite 16 years of English medium education. This study has implications for language teaching and curriculum development.

5.0 Concluding remarks and recommendations

5.1 For linguistic communities: corpora, tools & applications

Given the established relevance of corpus linguistics studies, the diversity of its applications and the force of its outcomes, it becomes desiderative for all linguistic communities, that is the language departments of institutions of higher learning to invest time and resources in the acquisition of corpus methods and tools as well as inspire the drive for corpus research both in

themselves and their students. One sure way to achieve this is to establish collaboration with corpus research centres around the world, take advantage of corpus linguistics summer schools as well as invite experts in the field to hold local workshops to train interested staff in the department or invite corpus linguists on short term lectureship visits at our universities. Equally, it will be very beneficial for researchers to indulge in corpus building projects, for example building corpora of their local languages, local varieties of English, English for specific purposes and most especially language produced by different categories of learners in their various teaching contexts. While the former kinds of corpus output will contribute to research and eventually enhance learning, the output of the collection of learners' language (i.e learner corpora) has a direct bearing on teaching and learning as strongly attested by learner corpus studies around the world. Furtherance to this objective is the application of extant corpora in the language classroom. Nothing can best explain the utility of corpora more than its actual exploration in real life contexts of teaching. And there is quite a bit of them in existence.

Another important consideration is multidisciplinary; cooperation in research and teaching has become quite commonplace since it has been proved to be very productive in knowledge making. As corpus linguistics is a science, it is necessary that those involved in it acquire some level of scientific knowledge as well as collaborate with related disciplines such as computer science and computing departments to achieve a desirable level of complementarity and knowledge outcomes that each of the disciples may not boast of individually. To achieve all of this, I would recommend capacity building through exposure to the field via involvement with corpus research centres such as the University Centre for computer corpus research on language (UCREL) at Lancaster University, UK; the Centre for corpus research, Birmingham university, the Centre for English Corpus Linguistics, Catholic University Louvain, Belgium. Such exposure would impart knowledge of how to use the corpus methods such as corpus based and corpus driven methods; corpus tools such as frequency, keyword and concordance; how to utilize corpus linguistics software such as wordsmith, Concgram, Wmatrix, Antconc, SketchEngine; and to understand the utility/exploration of existing corpora. Such corpora as the British National corpus (BNC of 100m words), the Bank of English of 400m words, the International Corpus of English (ICE), which includes 23 (23 million words) varieties of English, the *Longman Spoken and Written English* corpus (40m words), The International Corpus of Learner

English (ICLE, 5.5 million words) the Oxford English Corpus (of almost 2.5 b words), and the online corpora are good starting points.

5.2 For educational stakeholders: curriculum, resources & learning contexts

Beyond the major recommendation for teachers of English in higher education is the role of other educational stakeholders. To start with, there are issues bothering on educational policy and curriculum. Once the course is made a curriculum item, it becomes possible for institutions to plan its administration; make available the resources (human and material) for its effective implementation. I therefore recommend that education stakeholders, especially universities, should include corpus linguistics in their core curriculum and provide resources to run it. There may be other factors beyond policy support. The individual researcher is probably unable to seek out this knowledge through self-directed learning due to the factors of such allied computer infrastructure such as internet, software, power and poverty. So, another recommendation is infrastructural development and incentivization of the staff which can take various forms; financial and material.

Therefore, international exposure through study abroad programmes & provision of research infrastructure e.g. corpora and their tools are necessary steps to help the students aspire to self-directed learning and develop their creativity in the study and use of language. Beyond all of this is the need to create conducive learning environments to mitigate the factor of poverty earlier identified as a challenge in all teaching contexts in Africa. Therefore, the provision of library resources, especially digital ones and other online databases are requisite conditions to encourage facility with the field.

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Yanmiri, Aboki, Afonja: Discursive Construction of Ethnic Others in Nigerian Online Discussion

Rotimi Taiwo

Obafemi Awolowo University Ile-Ife

Email: ferotai@yahoo.com

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Abstract

How are discursive expressions of alterity online constructed? What factors engender this form of discourse and what is the socio-cognitive basis? What are implications of this construction of ethnic otherness online for a multiethnic nation like Nigeria? This study anchors on these questions. These issues were explored based on theories of social representation and discursive discrimination, such as social constructionism, biological determinism, symbolic interactionism. The study analysed the commenting behaviour of Nigerians drawn from *Nairaland Forum* based on van Dijk's (1996) social representation theory and Boreus' (2006) typology of discursive discrimination. The findings revealed that prejudices and stereotypes are premised on experiences and opinions that lead to generalisation, group polarisation illusory correlation, and attribution errors. Negative other presentations are achieved through labelling, deployment of environmental-based peculiarities, struggles for socio-economic goals, ethnic socio-cultural peculiarities, behaviour and appearances as well as perceived personality traits. These issues are accentuated through the deployment of linguistic and discursive forms and strategies, such as the mood system, adjectivisation, metaphorisation, lexicalisation, humorisation, and essentialisation. The study concludes that despite the fact that expressions of alterity are identified as online phenomena, they often impact offline intergroup relations

Keywords: discursive construction, othering, alterity, prejudices, stereotypes, Nairaland, ethnicity

1. Introduction

Ethnic slurs, also known as ethnophaulisms are regular features in daily discussions on *Nairaland forum* (<https://www.nairaland.com>), Nigeria's largest online discussion board. Ethnic slurs are words deployed to express intergroup hostility and prejudices towards outgroup members (Mullen and Leader 2005). They are used to reflect prevailing social perceptions of others who do not belong to the group of users. They also portray the sense of identities and belongingness of the users, as well as how they function to express their values, norms, beliefs and experience within the social structure. Online interactions have the tendency of encouraging group norms over individual personal standards of behaviour (Postmes, Ressel, and Martin 2002) and such group norms sometimes encourage stereotyping of others who do not belong to the group by labelling them, as shown in the posting above.

Depersonalisation of individual standards of behaviour in online discourse leads to reduction on self-awareness and this, in turn, encourages the development of a sense of convergence and belongingness and ultimately the spread of group dynamics. The formation of groups and awareness of group identities create power contestations, boundary-drawing and discursive construction, and resistance of others. The construction of others starts with the strong beliefs of a group that it possesses what the others do not possess and that confers on it the power to amplify its perceived differences, which in many instances, maximises the negative perception of others. The more such prejudices which categorise groups spread online, the more polarised interactants become.

The freedom to participate in online interaction has made it possible for individuals to associate with groups that share their aspirations. Over some time, such individuals gradually build attitudes through their social interactions with other group members and start to discursively express such attitudes (van Dijk, 1988: 141). In spite of its democratic nature, cyberspace encourages the spread of divisive and negative ideas, such as racism, hate expressions, bigotry, extremism, aggression, terrorism, stereotypes and discriminatory discourses. Cyberspace therefore has been turned to "a breeding ground for the expression and dissemination of a range of exclusionary, intolerant and extremist discourses" (Kopytowska, 2017; KhosraviNik & Esposito, 2018).

Intolerance and discriminatory discourses have always existed before the advent of online communication. However, the communicative affordances of the Internet, where anonymity, deindividuation and disinhibition play major roles have turned it to the space for constructing, replicating and perpetuating pre-existing social prejudices and inequalities (Suler, 2004; Joinson, 2007). It then means that interactions online have fostered an increase in negative discursive behaviour (Rost, Stahel & Frey, 2016). While scholarship on discursive construction of ethnicity has been quite extensive, many of them focus on the construction of migrants, refugees, asylum seekers, race and ethnicities in different offline contexts (Sommier 2019; Oriji, 2020; Martin, 2020, Friberg, 2021). Studies on the construction of ethnic others online are still unfolding, especially in Nigeria and other developing world. Existing ones (Chiluwa, 2014; Kamalu & Atoma, 2019; Ondigi, 2019; Nartey & Ladegaard, 2021) are yet to sufficiently explore the underlying socio-cognitive basis for the understanding of these discursive forms. This is the focus of this study, which is quite significant for understanding the socio-cognitive bases for inter-ethnic group relations in the complex multiethnic/multicultural and multilingual Nigeria. The study also draws attention to the implications of negative construction of others for Nigeria's fragile democracy.

2. Ethnicity in Nigeria

Nigeria is a creation of colonial rule arising from commercial interest and easy administration of the British. Like most former colonies in Africa, the country is made up of several ethnic groups. Different sources put the figure at between 250 and 300 ethnic groups as measured by self-identification or the presence of different languages (America Historical Association, Nigeria Fact Sheet). Blench & Dendo (2003) puts the number of ethnic groups in Nigeria at over 500. Features of these groups include: common origin, kinship ties, traditions, cultural uniqueness, shared history and language. The major ethnic groups given recognition by the constitution in terms of their population are: Hausa (in the North), Igbo (in the South East) and Yoruba (in the South West). There are other numerous minority ethnic groups, prominent of which are: Fulani, Kanuri, Nupe, Igala, Tiv, Efik, Ibibio, Edo, Urhobo and Ijaw.

The pre-independence and immediate post-independence era witnessed pressures for strong regionalism due to uneven development of the regions. The First Republic witnessed the growth of ethno-regional groupings; and

political parties were organised along ethnic considerations. There arose an ethnic tension that ensued after the first military coup of 1966. The tension was caused by the mass killing of the Igbo people in the North as a form of revenge on them for the execution of the 1966 military *coup d'état* in which some military officers of Northern Nigeria origin were killed by mainly Igbo officers. Consequently, in less than a decade after independence, Nigeria witnessed a civil war due to the attempted secession, arising from the mass killing, of the southeastern provinces of Nigeria as the Republic of Biafra. Ethno-regional polarisation has always been compounded by religion. There has always been the fear that the North, with a large Muslim population could dominate the South with a large Christian population. After a total of twenty-nine years of military rule, Nigeria returned to democracy in 1999. Up till the present times, strong ethnic agitations still persist among the major ethnic groups as well as between the major and minor ethnic groups.

The return to democracy in 1999 witnessed ethnic demands interrogating the basis for the Nigerian federation amplified by groups like *Afenifere* from the South West, *Ohaneze Ndi Igbo* from the South East. Later, the Arewa Consultative Forum also came up to speak for the North. Ethnic consciousness became more intensive with the rise in ethnic militant groups, which include: the Odua People's Congress (OPC), the Igbo People's Congress (IPC), the Arewa People's Congress (APC), the Egbesu Society of the Niger Delta, and the Movement for the Actualization of the Sovereign State of Biafra (MASSOB) (Akinyele, 2001). Ethno-religious crises were intensified when *Boko Haram*, an Islamic militant group, started in 2002 claiming to fight corruption and injustice in Nigeria, which it blamed on Western influences. The major demand of *Boko Haram* is the imposition of *Shariah*, the Islamic legal system in the country. The group later became violent after the assassination of its leader Mohammad Yusuf in 2009. The group became increasingly aggressive, as it organised suicide bombings of public places and abductions. The *Boko Haram* insurgency was further compounded by the rise in herdsmen attacks on farmers. In the midst of these security challenges, the country started witnessing calls for restructuring mainly from existing groups representing ethnic interests. More militant groups representing ethnic interests started springing up. Of recent in January, 2020, the Western Nigeria Security network, code-named *Operation Amotekun* was formed by the six governors of the southwestern region as a security outfit to combat insecurity in the region. The outfit came in the midst of incessant Fulani-herders and farmers clashes, kidnappings and abductions in the region.

Ethnicity and religion have always underlain the socio-political life in Nigeria. Since independence, there have been several ethnic clashes and everyday mistrust and prejudices in inter-ethnic relations. Such prejudices have further festered in online interactions and it does not take time for discussions on any Nigerian issue to degenerate into struggles among ethnic groups, most especially the major ones. Provocative expressions and labelling of ethnic groups, which often lead to categorisation and polarisation of discussants and ultimately, derailing of topics are often common in discussion boards. Operating from the discursive perspective, this study looks at the underlying socio-cognitive construction of ethnicities and Othering among Nigerians as they engage in interactions online.

3. Discursive Discrimination and Construction of Identities Online

One major focus of online discourse is identity formation and construction, and naming is a primary strategy of constructing identity online. As observed by Raheem and Akande, 2019 in a study of discursive behaviour on *Nairaland*, which also happens to be the data site for this study, naming practices are driven by creativity in the quest for a unique self-presentation of young people, which sometimes constructs an unreal online persona (Gatson, 2011). In constructing identity through naming, young people creatively explore linguistic experimentation by using deviant orthographic forms (Faleye & Adegoju, 2012). Raheem and Akande observe that, pseudonyms and diminutives were preferred as identity markers among members and deployed as strategic means for expressing and linking up global youth culture.

Language mixing is also used to mark identity online, most especially, multilingual identity. Extant studies on language contact have offered numerous insights into the structural and conversational mechanisms for code-switching in computer mediated communication. Code switching is a reflection of a new socio-ideological consciousness among the youth, which helps them to negotiate and navigate between a global identity and local practices (Androutsopoulos, 2007, 2013; Bhatt, 2008, Taiwo, 2010). The use of pidgin is another deliberate choice for constructing identity among young people in online discourse because they all find it easier to relate with it as a binding force for expressing their common identity, and as agents in the social construction of social reality. Heyd & Mair (2014) observe that “the Internet, and particularly the Web, is slowly becoming a place of more linguistic

diversity”, as nonstandard and previously peripheral varieties such as pidgin are becoming more prominently used in online communication (p. 243).

Scholars in social psychology, criminology, communication, cultural and media studies have done extensive studies on exclusionist, racist, ethnic discourses and how they project hate discourses in online communication, mostly in the West and Asia (Gestenfeld, Grant & Chiang, 2013; Wodak & Reisigl, 2015; Asian, 2017; Costellow & Hawdon, 2020). Othering, a major feature of ethnicity discourse has also been studied extensively in literary writings by Nigerians (Okunoye, 2008; Hunsu, 2013; Chukwumezie & Odo, 2014; Nwayanwu, 2017). Discursive perspectives, which are more closely related to this study, have extensively investigated forms of linguistic/metalinguistic forms and strategies as well as social motivations for discriminatory expressions among ethnic groups in Nigeria (Chiluwa, 2018; Ezeifeke, 2019; Alabi & Ayelaja, 2019; Ononye & Nwachukwu, 2019; Chiluwa, Taiwo & Ajiboye, 2020). Such studies have drawn out issues about group perceptions and judgement of others as well as the implications of stereotypes and discriminatory communication for the larger society.

Othering online can take the form of discrimination, harassment, stereotyping, and any form of expressions of hate on the Web and this can be done through flaming, trolling, misogyny, racism, ablesim, homophobia, Islamophobia, as well as expression of discrimination against queer others (Harmer & Lumsden, 2019). These practices are performed online through the means of discourses.

In a number of studies of racial discourse, van Dijk asserts that ethnic and racist prejudices can be analysed in terms of organised social representation shared by members of dominant groups about dominated groups through discursive communication. Prejudices are deeply rooted in the social structure and discursively constructed by social members to reflect the cognitive and social processes (van Dijk, 1988). van Dijk asserts that while prejudices and stereotypes have their roots in group perceptions of the social structure, certain privileged and symbolic social groups, such as the press, elites, writers and politicians manipulate and shape the nature of social representation as well as reproduce such discourses (van Dijk, 1996). Power, text and talk, and social cognition are the major means of discursive enactment and reproduction of racism (van Dijk, 1993).

Perception and representation of other ethnic groups always come from biasness, which van Dijk says “amount to over(generalisation), polarisation, attribution errors, illusory correlations, selective attention and recall, and, in general, strategies that tend to seek and attend to information that confirms existing prejudices (1996, p. 142).

4. Theoretical Framework

This study is anchored on van Dijk’s (1996) perspectives on social representation and group representation in discourse and Boreus’ (2006) discursive discrimination and othering in discourse. According to van Dijk, ethnic prejudices can be traced to certain attitudinal factors which are drawn from general knowledge and opinions about the outgroups such as their origin, appearance, socio-economic goals, socio-cultural norms and personality (van Dijk, 1996). Perception about the *Origin* is relevant for polarisation along the lines of ingroup vs outgroup, and us vs them. *Appearance* distinguishes the look of the other group from ‘ours’ and forms the background for categorisation and differentiation. *Goals* deal with the organisation of socioeconomic information, such as beliefs and opinions about their demographic information and social positions, which engender competition for employment, lands, housing and social benefits. *Sociocultural norms and values* have to do with beliefs and opinions about language, habit and other typical group features. Lastly, *Personality* is about the characteristics typically associated with a group in terms of their behaviour, such as aggressiveness, criminality, which are mostly drawn upon to explain the actions of the group (van Dijk, 1996).

Boreus (2006) identifies different forms of discrimination in discourse as discursive discrimination, manifesting in acts of despising and socially excluding certain group of others through the use of language. Boreus identifies four major types of discursive discrimination: (a) *negative other-presentation*, which includes the use of negative labels, negative descriptions and negative association; (b) *exclusion from discourse*, which could translate into exclusion of voices, exclusion of images and references; (c) *proposals pointing towards unfavourable non-linguistic treatment*, such as explicit discursive proposal and normalisation of unfavourable treatment of Others; and (d) *discriminatory objectification* - treatment of Others as object, tool or thing, thereby denying their subjectivity.

Identification and discussions of the stereotypes and prejudices expressed in the online discussions are hinged on the two perspectives of van Dijk and Boreus presented above. They are considered most appropriate because they reflect the understanding of the typical social cognition and representations expressed through the kind of discourse being examined in this study.

5. Methods

This study is approached through a critical discourse view of 22 postings in interactions on *Nairaland Forum* (<https://www.nairaland.com>), the largest online public discussion board, where Nigerians at home and in the diaspora congregate to discuss Nigerian issues. Postings on *Nairaland Forum* provide authentic data for studying discursive behaviour online because the forum has grown to become a community where members discursively construct group identities in their interactions. Through an extensive ethnographic study of discussions on *Nairaland Forum* postings that manifest participants' expressions of identity through ethnic Othering were purposively tracked and extracted for analysis. It should be noted that discursive stereotyping and construction of ethnicity and belongingness is a recurring feature in the interactions studied and it typically features the three major ethnic groups in the country. The data were extracted in their original forms, which allows a qualitative close reading of the narratives from the critical discourse analysis perspective.

This study is taken from the understanding of the interplay between discourse and social cognition. It rests on the perspective that stereotypes and ethnic prejudices are shared knowledge and they are essentially constructed and reproduced as social representations by members of a social group through texts and talks (van Dijk, 1990:164). The focus therefore is on how ethnic prejudices and biases are represented and manipulated in cognition and expressed in discourse and communication. Inter-group relations are social, relational, cognitive and discursive. The data analysis therefore draws out how discursive construction of prejudices, stereotypes and biases in ethnic discourse among Nigerians can be understood. The kind of understanding expressed above straddles the practices in critical discourse analysis and social psychology as well as discursive psychology (Wiggins and Porter, 2008). For the interpretation of the perceptions and construction of ethnic prejudices, van Dijk's categories of prejudiced attitude schemata were employed. Boreus'

(2006) typology of discursive discrimination earlier discussed, which is rooted in the Frankfurt School Critical Theory and Foucauldian approach to Critical Discourse Analysis also assisted in categorising the forms of prejudices and stereotypes constructed in the data. Its focus on discursive expression of power, which is a prominent feature of discourse of ethnicity makes it relevant for understanding the data for this study. These approaches concentrate on the critical way in which social representation of attitudes is constituted and understood in text, talk and action (Potter and Wetherell, 1999; Goodman, 2017).

6. Data Presentation Analysis and Discussion

In this section of the study the data are presented as well as their analysis and discussion. The data shows that forms of discursive discrimination constructed in the discussions of Nigerians online are a reflection of the struggle for social, economic and political dominance by the ethnicities, most especially the major ones: Hausa, Igbo and Yoruba. Ethnic Others are constructed based on the perceived understanding of the historical, social, cultural, and political relationships among the ethnic groups. Prejudices and stereotypes are premised on experiences and opinions leading to generalisation, group polarisation illusory correlation, and attribution errors. While the three major ethnic groups are prominently represented in the discourses, frequent exchange of abusive and pejorative messages is prominence between people of Igbo and Yoruba ethnicities and their perceived supporters. Negative Other representation, most especially through labelling and negative generalisations is a common strategy for representing other ethnicities. In addition, discursive forms sometimes support proposals pointing towards normalisation of unfavourable treatment of the other. Although categorising stereotypes in the data was a bit challenging as there are overlaps in some of the categories, I am still able to demonstrate a representation of the stereotypes expressed through discursive means in the data. Sections that follow concentrate on the interpretation and discussion of the data.

6.1 Labelling and Negative Description

Labelling is a powerful rhetorical strategy in which a single expression is deployed to stereotype Others. It summarises the opponent in one single word. Labels come in handy to express stereotypes and prejudices in inter-

group discourse in the context of conflicts. Such labels become metaphorically imposed and stereotyped when they have become the major ways of referring to a group.

1. ***Aboki** spoil Nigeria with their born to rule mentality. That is why we are where we are today*
2. *Edo people fight to death they don't chicken out like **afonja** cowards.*
3. *Obi that could not help the future of anambra unborn kids can't help Nigeria... That state is like a **dumping ground infested with ipob terrorist** which Peter Obi Sponsor*
4. *We will never vote for an IBO Man if you like called us **Aboki** and **afonja** from now till eternity.*

As can be seen in the extracts above, Nigerian internet users have adopted labels for the different ethnic groups, especially the major ones, and in the heat of discussions and disagreements, these labels come in handy for expressing otherness. *Aboki* in its denotative use simply means “friend” in Hausa. However, most times, when used by non-Hausas in internet discussion, it is the condescending way of referring to a stereotyped ethnic group. Over the years, the word *aboki* has become a pejorative discursive label by other Nigerians for identifying a Hausa/Fulani person and demean him as a stupid person (Taiwo, *et al.*, 2021). The internet also popularized the word *Afonja* and it is often used as a negative evaluative description of the Yoruba, who are said to typify *Afonja*, a warrior in the Old Oyo Empire based in Ilorin. *Afonja* was the Empire’s Generalissimo, who desired his own Empire, Ilorin Empire, to be carved out of the Oyo Empire. In order to achieve this, he rebelled against the empire by inviting the Fulani jihadists to assist his bid, an invitation that boomeranged. The label has become a derogatory metaphor for the Yoruba people to portray them as treacherous and cowards. Also, the Igbo have come to be described as *IPOB*, which stands for the Indigenous People of Biafra, a separatist group in Eastern part of Nigeria that aims to restore the Igbo Republic of Biafra, which seceded in the late 1960s and later rejoined Nigeria after its defeat by the Nigerian military. People of Igbo extraction are derogatorily labelled on the internet by other Nigerians as *IPOB* and sometimes terrorists as depicted in 4.

Ethnic otherness in the excerpt above is further foregrounded with the choice of lexical items, for instance, *chicken out* to underscore the

conceptualisation of Yoruba people as “cowards”, and “betrayals”, especially in this case when compared with the Edo people. The expression *dumping ground* metaphorically paints the picture of a group of militant Igbo as an infestation. This metaphor of infestation, even though used here as reference to a militant group in Anambra State, is often used also to depict Igbo presence in other parts of the country as would be seen in 11 later.

It is also important to note the collocations of these labels *aboki – spoil*, *Afonja – cowards*, *IPOB – terrorists*. These labels with their collocations project the kind of ethnic otherness daily expressed by Nigerians. Resistance to labelling is seen in Ex.4, which confirms the awareness of the stereotypical labels and insistence on a course of action that constitute discrimination against the Igbo people. Insistence on discriminatory behaviour as a means of resisting discursive discrimination is one of the potential means of widening ethnic differences in Nigeria.

6.2 Environmental-based Prejudices

This kind of prejudice is based on the physical environment of an ethnic group and the perception of this as the premise for expressing ethnic otherness in discourse. For instance, “brown roof” has come to be associated with Ibadan, an ancient city in the southwestern part of Nigeria, the largest city in West Africa and the third largest city in Africa. The brown roof metaphor comes from the view of the heartland of the city, which presents an array of brown roof tops. Internet discourse has come to gradually extend this brown roof metaphor to cover the characterization of the entire space inhabited by Yoruba people, hence the expression “brown roof region”, as seen in 5 depicting the southwestern part of Nigeria.

5. *Just leave your **brown roof region** and go and succeed in other regions of Nigeria if you are a man. Just take up this challenge let's see if you will not respect an IGBO man.*
6. *You called my state a **no man's land**. And expect me to keep quiet. Can a Yoruba try such in your useless **potopoto region**?*

Describing the eastern part of Nigeria as “potopoto region” derives from the soil texture with the attendant ecological challenge of erosion, which characterizes the region. The word “potopoto”, is originally a Yoruba

onomatopoeic word derived from the sounds made when walking in muddy water or muddy ground which is a typical feature of low-lying areas which tends to flood during heavy rains. Although the reference here is the region, the target is to ridicule the ethnic group. Other stereotypes are seen in 7 and they hint at the same ecological feature: erosion and desertification. The choice of the words, *poor*, *ravaged*, *infest* further constructs the ethnic others and stigmatises them as disadvantaged and inferior.

7. *Why? Because the Fulani (resource poor desert people) and Igbo (landlocked erosion-ravaged people) have necessarily evolved survivalist expansionist mindset and cannibalistic culture towards Nigeria. As a people, the fulani and the Igbo do not have a messianic complex about Nigeria nor have they ever entertained taking the moral high ground on saving Nigeria.*
8. *So educated you cannot make your blighted yeast a convergence zone but at every opportunity you flee your red termite mounds to infest other regions.*

The goal of otherness built on environmental superiority versus inferiority, as seen in the discursive constructions above is for (de)legitimization of migrancy and essentialization of accommodating nature of some ethnic groups. These texts are therefore produced to counter existing discourses, such as ethnic migrancy, prosperity of ethnicities in their land of settlement, rights, legitimacy, and so forth.

6.3 Prejudices based on socio-economic goals

Struggle for socio-economic resources among ethnicities, especially in the context of internal migration, can be a major cause for ethnic crises. The growing economic influence of settlers may become a threat to the indigenous groups. Issues, such as this have become discursive ones on the internet and through them prejudices that develop into hate speeches are being expressed daily. The extracts below typify such expressions of prejudices.

9. *So what are you doing in Yorubaland? Yorubas are cowards yet you live all over Yorubaland. Hausas are terrorists yet you inhabit the North like cockroaches. It seems you Igbos love to play the victim card yet you stay EVEYWHERE BUT IGBOLAND. I don't understand you*

people at all. You Igbos seem deadset on being hated by everybody. Why don't you appreciate the ones that take you in instead of hating and talking bad about them?

10. *Can someone tell me how Nigerian economy will be affected when all Afonjas sit at home for one week and what will happen in Nigeria when all Igbos sit at home in one week; I need good answers with details*
11. *As Lagos it's already a **conquered territory**. While Igbos are **enslaving** you economically, the Hausa/Fulani are **taking over** your resources! na for internet una dey get mouth, go out and **take back** your destinies from your aboki **masters** 🇳🇮*

The major concerns in the extracts above is how migrant ethnic groups have contributed the socio-economic goal of their settlements. The Igbo people, for instance, are known for their entrepreneurial activities because they are quick at identifying business opportunities wherever they settle and most times they become the dominant merchants of the basic needs in the communities, such as building materials, wears, foodstuffs and medicines. The essentialization of their presence becomes a major discursive issue, and this is what the discourse in 10 is trying to justify. However, 9 counters it with another interrogative, a face threatening act and challenges the perceived threat of the Igbo to supremacy of the Yoruba ethnic group in Yorubaland. The use of interrogative in.9 is meant to challenge the Igbo and their perceived “victim playing” stance. To further counter this, another interrogative was deployed to maximize the essentiality of the Igbo presence in Yorubaland

The struggle for socio-economic resources is conceptualized as “a war” in which Lagos is described as a “conquered territory” by the other two major ethnicities. The war and slavery lexicon (*conquered, enslaving, taking over, take back, master*) construct the Yoruba as subjugated economically by these two other groups. This is in addition to the delegitimization of Yoruba supremacy in Lagos and constructing the minority ethnic groups’ relevance in the socio-economic life of Lagos.

6.4 Prejudices based on socio-cultural norms and practices

Ethnic cultural differences can constitute the basis for prejudicing other ethnic groups. The tendency, therefore is to construct socio-cultural practices

of the other groups as inferior to “ours” in order to express otherness. Humorizing other ethnicities is a way of constructing ethnic otherness online. This is vividly portrayed in 12, which humorizes Yoruba traditional greeting norms of females kneeling and males prostrating to greet the elderly. Exaggerating these acts to ridicule them is projected in the imaginary ideas of kneeling to receive money at the ATM and prostrating to greet on the mobile phone.

12. *You will know it's a Yorubaman if he kneels down to recive (sic) money from the ATM machine and say thank you to the machine, if he postrate when greeting someone on the phone*

Socio-cultural norms include what is done regularly, such as religious acts, food, culture and other practices. In extracts 13 and 14, specific verbs – *slam* and *gobble* are nominalized and combined with other nouns to form compounds that signify some actors (the other ethnic groups). These resulting words, *ewedu gobblers/gobbling* and *head slammers/slamming* are ridiculing expressions. Praying Islamic devotee typified by the Hausa/Fulani use their forehead to touch the floor in prayers and this is what is ridiculed with the word “slam”, which means “to move against a hard surface with force and usually a loud noise” This exaggeration of the Islamic prayer act is a means of ridiculing the Hausa/Fulani Muslims to present a negative identity of the group in order to express alterity.

13. *fifth class citizen whether u vote in your **poto poto region** or not. a **head slamming** and **ewedu gobling** man will still rule over the odiotic pigs of biafra*
14. *'how did I end up in the same country with these idiots'
'God punish Lugard for merging me with these illiterates'
'Northern people are the most backward'
what's wrong with these **head slammers**'*
15. *U are really a confirmed **gworu chewing alamajiri**.... U are not among the Intellects and responsible northerners that think straight...*
16. *These **akpu munching beasts** are hilarious. Enugu is even better than Anambra. If Nigeria is a shithole, Anambra is the pit latrine of the shit hole 🇳🇮🇳🇮*

The choice of the verbs is also significant because *gobble* for instance connotes “greed” “haste”, “hunger” and “impatience”, mainly negative expressions that point attention to the prejudice and negative stance of others to the Yoruba ethnic group. Likewise, the word *slam* which connotes “force” and “violence”. The images created by these words are clearly negative.

Also, we can see from the 13, 14 and 15 the importance of food as a social identity marker and how it is often deployed to express prejudice and cultural differentiation. *Ewedu* is jute leaves, used to prepare a major soup consumed by Yoruba people; *gworu* is kolanut, known to be loved by the Hausa/Fulani people and *akpu* is a sticky dough made with cassava and a staple food for the Igbo people. The foods associated with each ethnic group: *ewedu*, *gworu* and *akpu* and the verbs expressing prejudices used to depict the manners of eating them – *gobble*, *chew*, *munch* constitute strong bases of discursively expressing judgments of superiority and inferiority and social categorization among major ethnic groups in the Nigerian online discourse.

6.5 Prejudices based on Appearance

Perceptions of people are many times, based on stereotypes that have been formed about their behaviour and appearances. Such stereotypes include the description of body parts and body markings and their qualification with negative descriptive adjectives (*ugly tribal marks*) or other descriptive adjectives that suggest differentiation and otherness, such as *flat head*, *unattractive*.

17. *and what are we going to miss about Yorubas? Your **ugly tribal marks**? 🤢*
18. *You as a **flat head** Igbo refugee claim you pay taxes in Lagos, then tell us are you not also benefiting from the social amenities put in place by the Lagos State government for its people?*
19. *Also according to local sources, fulani and hausa girls quite outnumber all the tribes in terms of prostitution and you in particular know this, it's just that they are **unattractive** and **filthy**.*

Lookism, as this kind of discrimination is called, is discrimination against persons on the basis of their physical attributes. Such attributes may include body weight, height, the color of skin, facial marks, or even birthmarks or

tattoos. In this case, people's looks become one major factor for one's social position. As seen in the extracts above, body marks, especially facial marks, shape of the head, and many other physical appearances perceived to characterise people from the other ethnic groups, are sometimes accentuated to discursively construct them as inferior. Lookism, just like other prejudices, is a generalised attitude expressed discursively through negative evaluation of others.

Despite that most Nigerian cultures have facial marks, this cultural practice is still considered a subject for differentiation, prejudice and stereotype. The Yoruba tribal marks are described as "ugly" in 5 in order to maximise a stance of disfavour towards it and demean the Yoruba and their perceived appearance. The adjectives deployed to mark prejudice and bias - *ugly*, *flat* and *unattractive* deepen the perceived differences in order to ultimately express otherness, which makes a group to feel they are superior in looks to the other.

6.6 Prejudices based on Personality

The kinds of prejudices based on personality focus on characteristics typically associated with a group in terms of their behaviour, such as aggressiveness, criminality, which are mostly drawn upon to explain the actions of the group. The extracts below express stereotypes and negative other representations of the major ethnic groups in the country. Yoruba people are discursively constructed as ritualist, Igbo as criminals and Hausa as violent.

19. *98% of human ritual money in Nigeria is done in the South Wasted Nigeria Every Afonja is a ritual suspect.*

The kind of stereotype expressed in 19 above is not just a hyperbolic picture of the Yoruba people as money ritualist, but also derogatory way of painting the region occupied by them as one that "wastes" humans through money rituals. This emphatic and generalised statement even supported with figure and percentage arises as comments to an online news with the caption: "Ritual killer caught with the remains of his dead victim in Ogun". The news report became the basis for expressing stereotype against the Yoruba people. The comment attracted several counter stereotypes, such as the one in Ex.20 below:

20. *Idiots typing afonja all over the place as if worse crimes are not happening in their region. There are people in this country who don't mind blowing themselves to pieces. There is another tribe that is verry popular for drug smuggling, robbery, kidnapping, cannibalism and some other evil crimes. Ritualists are being caught frequently in SW because yorubas don't condone evil like some people. When a yoruba sees his/her neighbour committing crime, he/she would alert the police immediatly, unlike some people who would cover it up in the name of brotherhood. Ritualism is one of the satanic acts common to all tribes in this country. Igbos are doing it. Hausas are doing it. Edos are doing it and also few yorubas. Crime knows no tribe.*

In this counter discourse, the writer identified other crimes, such as smuggling, suicide bombing, robbery, kidnapping and cannibalism, which can also be used to stereotype other ethnic groups not mentioned. It also provides a justification for the recurring news of ritual killings in the southwest, which indicates that the Yoruba people do not condone the act. This counters the delegitimation of the extreme social categorisation expressed in the earlier post. The use of parallelism at the end of the post makes the discourse more forceful in denouncing the kind of alterity the writer of 21 is trying to construct.

21. *If Biafra is achieved. Biafra will be competing (sic) with Mexico in drug peddling, kidnapping and crimes. Nigeria will kuku build wall across their cocaine, kidnapping and baby factory republic like trump is doing Mexican in USA border.*

The comment in 21 is a reaction to the news story captioned: "The exploits of notorious kidnapper, Evans". Despite that the news focused in the headline is kidnapping, the writer of the post highlighted some other criminal acts such as drug peddling, kidnapping, baby harvesting and illegal child adoption and tagged them with the Igbo in order to stereotype the group. The comment went as far as comparing the Igbo people with Mexicans who are notorious for drug peddling and projecting what Nigeria would do to them if they eventually succeed in getting the Biafra Republic. This is delegitimation by group comparison

22. *keep deceiving yourself, hausa are peace loving yet carries dagger, charms and armlets about, hausa are peace loving yet one beat up a pregnant Yoruba woman and stabbed a peacemaker to death*

The comment above is triggered by a question thrown to the *Nairaland* politics thread, which apparently suggests alterity and expects comments that will advance it. The question is captioned “Why is it only Hausa/Fulani that fight with their host tribes?” Inflammatory questions of this manner are often posted on multicultural online communities by trolls with the goal of deliberately provoking an argument and emotional reactions as well as instigating conflict and hostility among the members. This bait often works as it enhances the negative social potency of the troll to cause mischief and fight.

As observed in this study, commenting behaviour that hint at othering and explicit expression of prejudice are often sparked off by daily news reports about crimes and other undesirable behaviours by trolls who desire to provoke emotional reactions and prejudices against certain ethnicities.

Conclusion

This study has explored the discursive expression of alterity in Nigerian online discourse as portrayed in 22 postings on *Nairaland Forum*. Using van Dijk’s categories of prejudiced attitude schemata and Boreus’ typology of discursive discrimination. The study observes that discourse plays a major role in intergroup relations and social representation of ethnic groups. The findings reveal that prejudices and stereotypes are premised on experience and opinions leading to generalisation, group polarisation, illusory correlation, and attribution errors. Precisely, the study identifies how negative other presentations are achieved through labelling, deployment of environmental-based peculiarities, struggles for socio-economic goals, ethnic socio-cultural peculiarities, behaviour, and appearances as well as perceived personality traits. These issues are accentuated through the deployment of linguistic and discursive forms and strategies, such as the mood system, adjectivisation, metaphorisation, lexicalisation, humorisation, and essentialisation.

While these expressions of alterity are common in online contexts, they have a strong tendency to impact offline intergroup relations in the country. A case in point is the just concluded national elections in Nigeria, which witnessed degeneration of online debates among the supporters of the major contestants to various discursive expressions of prejudices and stereotypes. These online behaviours, also played out in offline contexts with reports of party supporters intimidating and suppressing voters with their statements and actions during the elections, thereby ultimately engendering voter apathy across the country.

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Internet-Induced?: A Re-examination of Sources of Writing Errors in Educated Nigerian English

Juliet Charles Udoudom

University of Uyo, Nigeria

Email: drjulietudoudom@yahoo.com

&

Nkereke Mfon Essien

University of Uyo, Nigeria

Email: nkerekemfon@yahoo.com

DOI: <https://doi.org/10.56907/g9swxb7v>

Abstract

This study examines writing errors in the written discourse of Nigerian university-educated users of English (sophisticated variety). The aim is to determine the extent to which non-standard usages attested in the writing of Educated Nigerians are manifestations of the impact of internet language. The population of this study comprised three hundred (300) respondents who are university educated users of the English language. They were selected by a stratified random sampling technique from six universities in South-South Nigeria. Usage features considered distinctively internet features which occurred in the studied texts were identified and coded using the principles of Content Analysis. The analysis shows that internet language features like Alphanumeric features, initialisms respelling, shortening, and symbols occurred in varying frequencies in the subjects' productions. Moreover, the analysis shows that these internet language features are not necessarily induced by the electronic medium alone, but by other factors like inconsistencies in the linguistic system as well as the inability of English language users to discern the requirements of specific writing contexts.

Keywords: internet-induced, internet language, standard/non-standard usage(s), content analysis electronic medium.

1. Introduction

This study re-examines errors in the writing of university students users with a view to determining the extent to which the non-standard usages attested in their writing are manifestations of the effect/impact of internet language. Internet language features are claimed to be prevalent in the formal writing of educated Nigerian users of English. Awonusi (2004), for instance, observed a high incidence of Deviant Spelling (DS) resulting from non-standard abbreviation and posited the “Law of Energetics” as a basis for space management. In similar vein, Chilwa (2007, p.105) observed that formal writing by Nigerians is replete with internet usage features. The source further reported teachers’ concern about text message spelling conventions and orthography...manifesting in students’ essays, even in important certificate examinations”. Mgbemena (2007), who studied the use of English by students and academic staff in a tertiary institution in Nigeria found that forms like “d4” (therefore), “cos” (because), “sum I (someone), etc. were present in the written discourse of the respondents. Furthermore, Mgbemena (2007, p.113) observes that “[an] analysis of the spelling/graphic representation of words reflects that no principled rule can explain the basis of usage.” Ofulue (2010) investigated writing errors in formal written discourse of educated Nigerian users of the English language and found out in part, that most of the errors identified were usage features peculiar to language use on the internet. Thus, such internet usages as shortened forms, Deviant Spelling (DS), initialism, etc. were identified.

The issues involved in determining writing errors especially in L2 writing contexts are complex. For one, there are inconsistencies in the spelling system of English: the pronunciation of English words is often different from the orthographic conventions used in representing the sounds of which the words comprise. Eka (1994) observes the following: the vowel sound /u:/ is represented differently by different letters of the English alphabet in different words: do /du:/, too /tu:/, and blue /blu:/.

A similar observation is made regarding the consonant sound /f/, represented orthographically in different ways in different English words, viz:

f	in	beef
ff	in	stuff

ph	in	photograph
gh	in	enough (ibid, p.189).

Another aspect of inconsistency in English spelling relates to the differences between American and British spellings. For example, Americans use – “**or**” where the British use – “**our**” as for example color/colour; honor/honour; savior/saviour, etc. The third spelling-related issue has to do with pairs of words which are often confused by writers especially in a second language context such as ours in Nigeria (Eka 1994, Eyo, 2016), for example, advice/advise; cease/seize; hear/here; eminent/imminent, etc.

A fourth issue related to English spelling concerns some English words which are, by nature, difficult to spell. The difficulty arises from the fact that some of such words contain the vowel sound /i:/ but is represented with two sequences of the sound, i.e. or ei. Some examples are *achieve*, *besiege*, etc., but *deceive*, *receive*, *conceive*...and so on. (Ofulue 2010, Metcalf and Astle 1995).

In formal writing, abbreviations, contracted forms, incomplete sentences, etc. are not considered features of good writing; however, some abbreviations described as “standard” are acceptable. Standard abbreviations include, but are not limited to, the following: a.m., Asst., b/c, b4, e.g., i.e., edn. Other standard abbreviations acceptable in formal writing are those referred to in the Internet language discourse as initialisms, viz: ADC, BC, GMT, RSVP, SOS, etc. Informal writing is more open: it permits the use of both standard and non-standard abbreviations, acrostics, contracted forms, use of slangs, coinages, vernacular expressions and so on.

Moreover, punctuation is a major source of writing errors. Errors related to this aspect of writing manifest in one of three ways: abuse, misuse and nonuse (Metcalf and Astle 1995, Ofulue 2010). The ideas of abuse and misuse are related. In the context of this paper a punctuation mark is considered abused or misused when it is used wrongly, that is, at a point in a sentence where it should not occur, or, is not relevant. The sentence below occurred in the Type I Text:

The chairman said; the government will give scholarships to children from poor families.

The semi-colon can be said to have been abused/misused because it is not the appropriate punctuation mark to have been used at that point in the sentence. The comma should have been used, viz:

The chairman said, government will award scholarships to children from poor families.

Regarding nonuse of punctuation mark(s), this situation relates to writers' lack of knowledge about when and where particular punctuation mark(s) should be used. This often results in them not using such punctuation marks at all. As an instance, not very part of a sentence is essential to its meaning. Such a part(s) is referred to as nonessential elements, and are required to be set off with commas. But when such nonessential elements are not marked, the nonuse of the relevant punctuation mark can be said to have occurred. In the sentence following, the nonessential adjectival clause, "which was read in the stadium..." is not separated from the rest of the sentence by commas as should be:

Our President's inaugural speech which was read in the stadium has been published in newspapers.

There are other kinds of writing errors. Some relate to sentence construction. These include errors in determining subject-verb agreement (concord), parallelism, fragmentation, modification, etc.

There are many indicating instances of writing errors which surface in sentence construction like concord, parallelism, modification and fragmentation (e.g. in this study, we identify internet usage feature when respellings/shortening vowel free words, for example, 'pls' for "please", 'u' for "you", occur in the essays. Moreover, we talk about error when forms like LoL – laugh out loud, BRB – be right back or letter deletion/substitution or non-standard abbreviations are found in the essays/written productions of the respondents.

Internet usage features occur not only in written Nigerian English but regular or occasional language features of this domain have been observed in the writing of other users of English, some, L2 users. Earlier studies have shown that Internet usage features occur in Cantonese English (Fung and

Carter 2007), Indian English (Viswanathan, 2008), English and Georgian Languages (Tsinsadze, 2014) and Cameroonian and Nigerian English (Feuba, 2009). Moreover, titles of texts generally considered to belong in the domain of formal writing have been shown to be spelt in part using alphanumeric: David Crystal's (2007) book entitled *How Weird is Texting? Txtng The gr8 deb8* and Humphry's book, *1-h8 txt msgs: How Texting is Wrecking Our Language* published the same year as Crystal's – 2007.

For some writing contexts, orthographic forms like shortening, respelling, contractions, use of symbols, etc., are not only permissible, but are expected to occur. The use of such forms is considered to mark informality, for example, when an informal letter is written. Such writing is characterized by informal language use and a conversational style.

Moreover, other factors like thumbcentericm (Awonusi, 2010), character limitation/space, cost, user creativities (Chiluwa, 2007) and language creativity, which may influence writers /users of English across non-native writing contexts have not yet been explored. The present investigation is an empirical study which sets out to re-examine the source(s) of writing errors in the written production of selected university students of Nigeria. Furthermore, it seeks to determine whether the “internet elements” which occur in the formal writing of the Nigerians studied are due to users' inability to discern writing contexts and adapt appropriately, or, are due in part to the impact of the internet. Formal writing refers to a style of writing suitable for use in official writing situations like school (college or university examinations), letters to persons to higher social eminent than the writer, letters of application/complaints, business letters, etc. formal writing is usually characterized by correct spelling, appropriate register, complete sentences.

2. Methodology

2.1 Sample

The subjects for this study were three hundred undergraduate students purposively selected from six federal universities in South-South Nigeria. Fifty students were selected from the Universities of Benin, Edo State, Calabar, Cross River State, Otueke, Bayelsa State, the University of Petroleum, Delta State, University of Port Harcourt, Rivers State and University of Uyo, Akwa

Ibom State. This is because federal universities in Nigeria operate a state-by-state quota admission system which allows for the admission of students in both the Arts and Science courses from different ethnic nationalities (Hausa, Igbo, Yoruba, Ibibio, Edo, Izon, Tiv, etc), especially from states where a particular university is located. Thus, in every federal university in Nigeria, at least six ethnic nationalities are represented.

A further criterion for the selection of subjects for this study was education. This was based on the assumption that they have had a considerably long period of exposure to the English language – spoken and written – and each is a member of the virtual community and interacts with other members on the internet platforms available for use, thus they are likely to experience occasional “intrusions” of internet language usage features in their formal written productions.

2.2 Elicitation Procedure

Data for this study were elicited using two methods. One was a production task: six essay topics were provided the respondents who were required to choose a topic of interest and write on. The topics were formulated to elicit the four conventional essay types – narrative, descriptive, explanatory/expository and argumentative essays. This was intended to establish the occurrence of internet language features in the respondents’ written production considering the formality of the language use situation. Internet features such as lexical and syntactic shortcuts, alphanumeric features, acronyms, initialisms, respellings, deviant spelling, use of symbols and ellipsis, etc., which are normally not permitted in formal writing were isolated and analyzed. The essays represented respondents’ “off-line” linguistic behaviour and was classified as Type I Text.

The second mode of data collection involved the researcher’s interactions with the respondents, on-line, on E-mail, Facebook and WhatsApp platforms. The transcribed on-line texts represented the respondents’ “on-line” linguistic behaviour and were classified as Type II Texts. Type II Texts served as the control for this study: the frequency of occurrence of its content features which occurred in Type I Text determined the degree of influence of internet language on the formal writing habit of the respondents studied. Fifty text samples from each of the Text Types were used for the study.

2.3 Coding Procedure

To account for non-standard writing conventions described here as errors such as initialisms, Letter/Number Homophones (LNH), Respelling/Shortening, vowel free words, phonetic spelling, contracted forms, affix shedding (Jowitt, 2019), Onomatopoeic spelling, etc., these features found in the conventional essays were coded, classified and analyzed. Also included in the content features coded are graphics and symbols which represent the dynamics of voice (Isa, 2014). Simple percentages were used in calculating the frequency of occurrence of Internet language features in the two text types.

In addition, the researcher's E-mail, Facebook and WhatsApp were used as platforms for interacting with the respondents, and the interactions later retrieved and transcribed for analysis. To satisfy ethical requirements, due permission of the administrators and the respondents was obtained before retrieval and transcription of the online interactions. Both the written productions and the interactions were aimed at eliciting distinctively internet language usages that occur in formal text. Usages peculiar to the Internet were isolated if they occurred in the essays written by the respondents. The essays were considered in the context of this study as respondents' "off-line" linguistic behaviour.

2.4 Analytical Framework

In this investigation, the Content Analysis (CA) research technique is employed. CA is a scientific method for the analysis of communication texts – written or spoken. It serves to determine the presence of certain concepts and linguistic elements in a communication text or sets of text. To this end, the quantification and analysis of the components of the text(s) studied, the meaning and the relations among words and concepts present in particular texts, are possible to be established. Prasad (2011) cited in Mbarachi 2015, p.12) outlines a variety of research objectives which CA enhances thus: a determination of the audience, culture or temporal frame of a text or set of texts, or the determination of the meaning of the linguistic elements which build the structure of the studied text(s). Moreover, the principles of CA can be employed to evoke the intentions and contexts which are embodied in a text.

Content Analysis is objective, systematic and quantitative in its approach to the description of the content apparent (“manifest”) in a communication text(s) (Berelson, 1952, cited in Mbarachi, 2015). It is objective because the categories of analysis are required to be thoroughly specified such that an independent examination of the same content would yield comparable result. CA’s systematic approach entails the use of similar procedure in the analysis of same items in a text or sets of texts. Analysis using the CA format is expected to relate data to relevant research question(s) or hypotheses. The quantitative character of CA relates to the requirement that the number or frequencies of occurrence of categories evolved to be analyzed and their types in the content studied be recorded and coded as they are manifest, devoid of researcher’s prejudice.

The CA technique may be distinguished into two but interrelated aspects: Conceptual and Relational CA. Conceptual CA is employed primarily to establish both occurrence and frequency of certain concepts in text(s). It is chosen when the goal of enquiry is the examination and recording of the number/frequency of occurrence of a concept in the studied text: its focus is not the relationship among the concepts or words that may occur in a studied text. The primary concern of conceptual CA is the quantification of words and concepts and their categorization. Relation CA focuses on the relationship between/among the words and concepts which occur in the text(s) investigated. Relational CA relies a great deal on appropriate coding procedure, ensuring that it is reflective of the content and necessities of the research at hand. This investigation adopts the principles of both the conceptual and relational CA in identifying, classifying, coding and analyzing the content features of internet English writing style manifest in the formal written discourse of university-educated Nigerians studied.

3. Analysis of Data and Discussion of Findings

The following manifest content features were identified, classified and coded: Acronyms and Initialisms (AIs), Alphanumeric Features (AFs), Deviant Spelling (DSs), Respelling and Shortening (RS). Moreover, features of internet language which have tended to make written discourse like speech (ibid) were identified, such as Symbols (Ss) and Ellipsis (E). The data distribution is shown in Table 1:

Table 1: Illustrative Samples of General Internet Content Features.

Internet Content Feature	Illustrative Samples
Acronyms/Initialisms	'OBJ' for Obasanjo, 'OYO' for on your own, 'IJN' for in Jesus name, 'LLNP' for long life and prosperity, 'LOL' for laugh out loud, 'GBU' for God bless you.
Alphanumeric features	'b4' for before, '4' for for/four, '2nite', '2night' for tonight, '2' for too/to, '9t', for night, 'gr8' for great, 'g8' for gate, '4get' for forget, '9ja' for Nigeria, 'c' for see, 'Y' for why.
Deviant Spelling	'cerfificate' for certificate, 'sity' for city, 'present' for present, 'jelo' for yellow, 'fot' for vote.
Ellipses	'f...k' for fuck, 'b...h' for bitch.
Respelling and Shortenings	'beta' for better, 'wht' for what, 'dat' for that, 'dis' for this, 'diz' for these, 'den' for then, 'becos/bc' for because, 'rite' for write, 'shld' for should, 'ppl' for people, 'broda' for brother, etc.
Symbols	God = love, mama not @ home

4. Analysis of Data and Discussion of Findings

4.1 Analysis of Data

The essays (Type I Text) were examined for the presence of usage features considered distinctively internet writing features, and the following manifest content features were identified: Acronyms/Initialisms, Alphanumeric Features (AFs), Respelling/Shortening (RS), Deviant Spelling (DS). Moreover, features of internet language which have tended to make written discourse become more like speech identified in earlier studies like Posteguillo (2003), Shortis (2007) and Baron (2008) cited in Mbarachi (2015, p.93) were also found to be present in the essays studied. The features identified in this regard include symbols and ellipses. Table 2 shows the distribution of the data elicited:

Table 2: Table of Content Feature Frequency Distribution

Feature	Type I Text		Type II Text	
	No. of Occurrence	% of Occurrence	No. of Occurrence	% of Occurrence
Acronyms/ Initialism	24	0.4	196	3.71
Alphanumeric Features	78	1.38	187	3.6
Deviant Spelling and Shortening	45	0.75	186	3.5
Symbols	2	0.03	54	1.2
Emoticons/ Smileys	NIL	NIL	9	0.17
Total Feature				
Frequency Total Word	240	4%	750	14.2%
Tokens	5987		5270	

As indicated in Table 2 above, Deviant Spelling (DS) is the most salient content feature in the Type I Text. Symbols and Ellipses (S/E) recorded the lowest index of occurrence while Alphanumeric Features (AF) also showed a high incidence of occurrence followed by Respelling and Shortening (RS). Acronyms/Initialisms had the fourth highest content feature in the frequency table. The frequency distribution of the content features which occur in Type I Text as indicated in Table 2 is represented graphically in the chart in Fig.1.

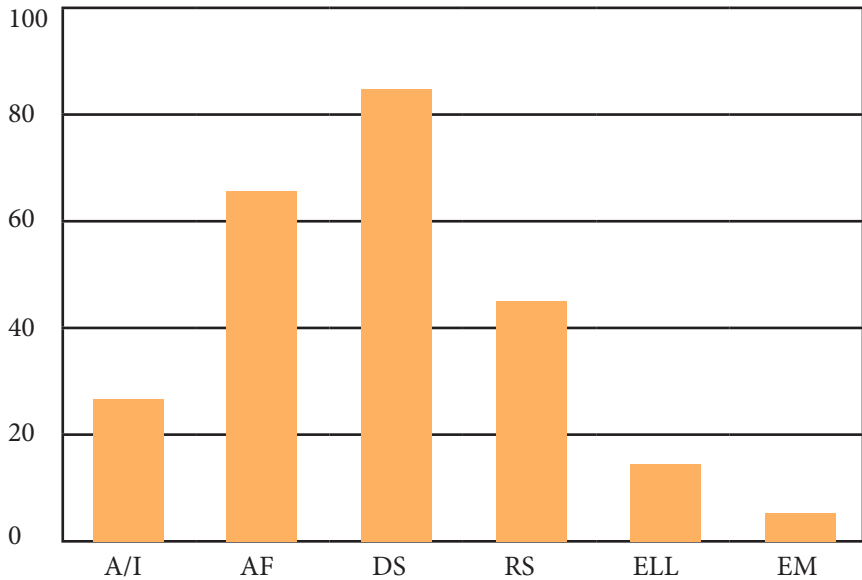


Fig 1: Chart Showing Type I Text: Features Data Frequency in Formal Writing

Legend:

- AI:** Acronym and Initialism
- AF:** Alphanumeric Features
- DS:** Deviant Spelling
- RS:** Respelling and Shortening
- EM:** Emoticons

4.2 Internet Features Results

Results of Internet language/usage features which occurred in the online interactions (Type II Text) are shown in Table 2. The reading for Acronyms/Initialisms is the highest followed by Respelling/Shortenings. The content coded in respect of alphanumeric features is the third highest. Deviant Spelling recorded the fourth highest frequency in the Type II Text analyzed, followed by Symbols and Ellipsis. The frequency of coded content features in the text type analyzed is represented in the chart in Fig.2:

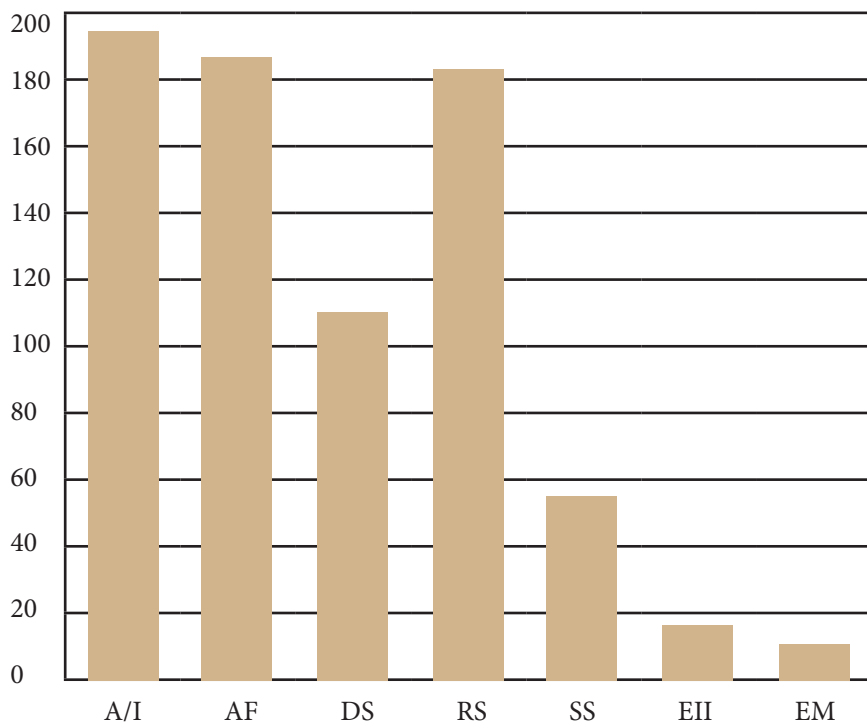


Fig.2: Chart Showing Type II Text: Internet Usage Features Data Frequency

4.3 Discussion of Results and Findings

This study re-examined formal written productions of Nigerian university-educated users of English, seeking to validate the claim that the internet has influenced the writing of educated Nigerians negatively. Findings from large-scale corpus data show that distinctively internet usage features occur in the formal writing of the subjects studied-some in very high frequencies.

Deviant spelling was observed to occur more frequently in the Type I Text than a distinctively internet usage feature such as Alphanumeric feature, which even though is the second highest occurring, recorded a lower incidence of occurrence. The 1.3% frequency occurrence recorded for Deviant spelling in Type I Text can be accounted for partly by factors discussed earlier (Introduction). Deviant spelling has variable error sources: variable orthographic representation of sounds, for example, /ui/ in juice, /o/ in do, /f/

in photograph, enough, etc; /i:/ represented as ie in some words but ei in some others. Variant spellings such as those which result from subjects' adoption of British or American spelling (e.g. -our vs -or) in words like colour vs. color, odour vs. odor, etc. were not coded.

The high incidence (2%) of Deviant spelling in the Type II Text is explicable in terms of space constraint and cost being some of the limitations of hand-held devices; however, this constraint/limitation is not applicable in writing done in long hand such as was the case in eliciting data for this investigation. Deviant spelling may therefore be analyzed as a writing error which occurs commonly in writing—formal or informal – even in native-speaker productions (Jowitt, 2019), perhaps more prominently in L2 English contexts. Studies (e.g. Jowitt, *ibid*, Kolln and Funk, 2009, Oluikpe, 1979, etc.) have shown that deviant spelling occurs in Language Users (LUs) writing even in L1 written productions. The high incidence of Deviant spelling in the two text types demonstrates the subjects' inappropriate handling of issues involved in the spelling system of English. Deviant spelling is not considered in the context of the present investigation an internet usage feature: it has been shown to occur across writing contexts (Metcalf and Astle, 1995; Ofulue, 2010, among others).

Alphanumeric features are shown in Table 2 to occur seventy-eight (78) times (1.38%) – the second highest index occurrence – in the Type I Text. The high incidence of this feature in a formal writing situation is demonstrative of a carry-over of the writing habits of the respondents from one writing situation into another. Appropriate use of a language in speech or writing requires that language users (LUs) make appropriate linguistic choices – in this instance, distinguish between formal and informal contexts and select linguistic items, or forms suitable for the execution of the writing task at hand. As is apparent from the results the norms of writing in specific environments are violated by the subjects studied. This has resulted in the alteration of the spelling system of English words. For instance, numerals have now been incorporated into the composition of the morpheme structure of English words. The following forms illustrate this phenomenon as observed in the data: '2day' for **today**, '2nite' for **tonight**, '2morrow' for tomorrow, '9t' for night, 'gd9t' for goodnight, etc. Alphanumeric features violate the norms of formal writing style and blur the distinction required between formal and informal writing styles.

Table 2 indication for the content internet features respelling and shortening is the third highest, occurring forty-five (45) times (0.75%) in Type I Text. This internet usage feature is akin to the one just discussed in terms of the shortening and reducing which both employ. Some of the respelt and shortened lexical forms which occurred in the studied text are: 'av/hv' for have, 'tnx/thnxu' for thanks, 'gud' for good, 'tot' for thought, 'behd/bhd' for behind, 'natnl' for national, 'wnt' for want, etc. The forms listed above besides being variable in their orthographic representations, would be observed to violate standard morphological ways of lexical reduction in English, such as blending, clipping or hypocorism. The element of lexical reduction is very prominent in clipping, for example. Thus a word having more than one syllable is 'cut' into a shorter form (Yule, 2007, p.55). But a careful look at the orthographic forms listed above which have been shortened/respelt are mostly monosyllabic words.

Moreover, there is a (reduction) morphological process whose products are described as hypocorisms produced by reducing longer words to single syllables, and integrating -y or -ie to the end of the reduced form. Words like *movie* (from moving pictures), *hankie* (from handkerchief), *telly* (from television), etc are products of this process; moreover, the apparent informality of the forms of hypocorisms conferred by the addition of -y or -ie, make them quite suitable to internet language. Chilwa (2007) views them as "creativities" however, it must be pointed out that even though innovations and creativity are established inherent properties of natural language, they are expected to be practised in conformity with the norms and principles of the language in use, given that such adherence to such norms makes for uniformity in usage and cohesiveness among members of a particular speech community (cf. Chomsky 1972, p.12).

By contrast, Ellipsis and symbols recorded the lowest frequent of occurrence in the Type I Text. They occurred eight (8) and two (2) times, respectively. These may be accounted for by the writing context. Type I Text is a formal writing environment and incomplete sentences signaled by ellipsis are normally not permitted to occur, so are symbols which are also shown in the table to have a low occurrence frequency (2). Moreover, the infrequent use of Ellipsis and symbols in Type I Text demonstrates subjects' familiarity with appropriate writing conventions adopted in relevant writing contexts.

Regarding the zero occurrence recorded for the content feature Emoticons and Smileys in the table, this is not to be interpreted as subjects' adaptation to appropriate writing conventions but it is to be seen as a feature of the writing environment. Given that the studied text is a conventional formal essay written in long hand-not typed on any hand-held device like I-pad, phone, etc, the subjects could not have produced Emoticons or Smileys in long hand.

This study has shown a clear influence of Internet language on the subjects' writing habits. The results suggest that writing habits in an electronic environment interfere with the subjects' writing in non-electronic environment such as the conventional formal writing context, with further suggestions that English language users in L2 writing environments do not seem to distinguish between formal and informal contexts and adapt features relevant to specific contexts. The study therefore claims that the presence of internet usage features in formal written productions such as the ones studied is not completely induced by internet language, but is due largely to users' insensitivity to the deployment of appropriate writing features in relevant contexts.

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English Language and Communication in Christian Assemblies

A. V. Jibowo

Email: avjibowo1@gmail.com

&

Segun Omotosho

Email: simplysegun@gmail.com

Olabisi Onabanjo University, Nigeria

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Abstract

Language, the medium through which people communicate their thoughts, feelings and aspirations to one another, is regarded as the most intimate possession of man as well as the most important form of communication and interaction employed by humans. The advent of the English language in Nigeria was championed by the Church Missionary Society and other Christian missions. The need to propagate the gospel to the nook and crannies of Nigeria effectively necessitated the introduction of literary education (ability to read and write), which was conducted in English. The products of these schools served, inter alia, as interpreters in the Churches, facilitating the propagation of the Christian religion in Nigeria which has about 522 local languages. Today, the common practice is for the main preacher to speak in English while another interprets the message into the local language of the Church members. Against this background, this paper examines the use of the English language in Christian assemblies in Nigeria.

Keywords: English Language, Communication, Language, Christianity, Assemblies

1. Introduction

Language is a universal tool used in the communication of thoughts, feelings, and attitudes between and among persons. It is also the most important form of communication employed by human beings. According to Dairo (2014:1), language is observed as the most intimate possession of man since

it is the basis of all creative thoughts. Cruse (1985) calls language a system of conventional signs, all aspects of whose structure – phonology, syntax, – exists ultimately to serve the sovereign function of conveying meaning. Language is defined as a signalling system that operates with symbolic vocal sounds used by a group of people to communicate and for social cooperation.

Harold (1981), sees language as the medium through which thoughts are conveyed from one person to another. Language is one of the chief means by which a person learns to organise his experience and thought, structured sound, gesture or visual emission (Ifetola, 2005:22).

According to Daramola (2003:3), communication is a catchword in contemporary culture; it is applied indiscriminately to an array of activities. It is defined as a dynamic and systemic process in which communicators construct personal meanings through symbolic interaction. Bittner (1989) defines communication as “a system through which people can exchange symbols and thus propagate learning at an accelerated rate. To Murphy (1977), communication is an exchange of meaning by which one mind affects another.

To sum it up, the place of language and communication in disseminating messages, especially in Christian assemblies cannot be over-emphasised as it gives impetus to the propagation of the gospel. This study, therefore, examines the use of the English language in the communication process of Christian assemblies in Nigeria. The study examines the impediments that threaten the communication process and suggests solutions to the identified problems.

2. History of Christianity in Nigeria

The Christian religion was introduced by the European traders. The Roman Catholic priests from Portugal accompanied slave dealers and preached to Nigerians to be converted to Christianity (Omolewa 2005:94). Also, the Abolition Movement championed by Granville Sharp and William Wilberforce equally encouraged the spread of Christianity. The abolitionists, as part of their mission opposed slavery on religious grounds. They saw that the important issue in Christianity was not only to obtain salvation in the world to come, but also to achieve social justice on this earth. They were the humanitarians who believed that slavery was not only wrong but it was also a sin against God. These people argued that you could not love your neighbour and still enslave him (Omolewa 2005:105).

About fifty years after the collapse of the initial attempts to introduce Christianity to Nigeria, a renewed effort was made; to begin with, the abolition of slave trade had made it necessary for Christian missions in Europe to begin to think of planting Christianity in Africa. They also argued that Christianity would expose the vices and ills of the evil traffic in human beings (Omolewa 2005:138). The returnee slaves, otherwise known as 'repatriates' had been resettled in Sierra Leone and Liberia and were eager to return to Nigeria. They had been converted to Christianity and were optimistic at preaching to their fellow countrymen.

Modern education dates back to September 24, 1842 with the arrival of the Rev. Thomas Birch Freeman and Mr and Mrs William de Graft of the Wesleyan Missionary Society (WMS) in 1844. The Church Missionary Society (CMS) which was destined to play a prominent role in the development of education in Nigeria, was narrowly beaten in the race to open up the country to the Christian faith (Taiwo 1980:6). The local committee of the CMS in Sierra Leone had appointed Mr Henry Townsend, who later established the first newspaper in Nigeria in Abeokuta, entitled 'Iwe Irohin fun awon Egba ati Yoruba' in 1867 to go to Abeokuta to get information about the country (Taiwo 1980:6).

According to Fage (1969:129), two CMS missionaries accompanied the ill-fated Niger expedition of 1841, one of whom was an African, the Rev. Samuel Ajayi Crowther, a Yoruba, who had been liberated from a slave-ship and educated in Sierra Leone and England. But the effective beginning of missionary activity in Nigeria dates from 1844.

The influence of the missionaries was of paramount importance as they taught Africans in totality, not only how to read and write, and how to use such skills for their own benefit and that of their fellows, but also such things as how to build better houses, improve their farming, and improve their standard of health. It was in the educational field that the success of the missions was perhaps greatest (Fage, 1969:130).

The missionaries, who were Europeans, introduced English language to Nigerians through interactions and propagation of the gospel. The coming of English and Scottish clergymen like Rev. Thomas Freeman to Badagry, Rev. Hope Waddel of the Church of Scotland to Calabar and Rev. Samuel Ederly

to Duke Town, Calabar in the 19th Century, began the first phase of formal acquisition of English in Nigeria (Chiluwa, 2007:52).

Pennycook (2009:140) says the tradition which ties Christianity to English has its origins in colonial education, though the more recent development is as a result of the changing global configurations. According to Read (1849:48, cited in Bailey 1991:116) English:

the language of the arts and sciences, of trade and commerce, of civilisation and religious liberty' but it was also 'a store house of the varied knowledge which brings a nation within the pale of civilisation and Christianity...

3. Communication in Christian Assemblies

Communication is the transmission and reception of ideas between a speaker and the audience. Another suitable definition of communication appropriate for Christian assemblies was coined by McQuail (2000) which says Communication is the transferring and sharing of information, notions of response and interaction.

The definition proposed by McQuail (2000) is fit for the Christian assemblies as there is the need to share knowledge and interact appropriately between and among Christians in further propagation of the gospel. According to Aluko (2002:60), Christian educators use the rule of logic or given consideration to epistemological implication of a given word in order to bring a definite meaning to what is said or to be said. Aluko(2002:60) further asserts that they communicate the creed of the Church as a community through human speech and language no matter how inadequate this may be to express the mind of the original source – God. Christian assemblies as used in this paper represent preaching sessions only.

3.1 Forms of Communication in Christian Assemblies

Man has the distinctive way of communicating between and among one another. Communication takes various forms but the ones peculiar to Christian assemblies are verbal and non-verbal communication which are discussed below:

- i. Verbal communication: this form of communication is the commonest and oldest means of communication. Talking is a good means of verbal communication and the major means of communication in all spheres of life (Daramola 2003:16). According to Aluko (2002:61), verbal communication is expressed through various languages. Olumayowa (2014:1690) affirms that verbal communication involves the use of words as seen in speech and writing. Language does not exist in a vacuum. Most often it comes out of existing tools or something known to man. The scripture according to Aluko (2002:61), has this to say about the first man – Adam:

So out of the ground the Lord God formed every animal of the field, and every bird of the air, and brought them to the man to see what he could call them; and whatever the man called each living creature, that was its name (Gen. 2:19).

Adam, seeing the creature that looked exactly like him said “This at last is bone of my bones and flesh of my flesh, this one shall be called woman, for out of a man this was taken.” (Gen. 2:23).

The Christian community employs the Christian tradition and theology in developing meaningful communication in the body of Christ. Words like “Trinity”, “Born Again”, “Sonship”, “Christ”, “Redemption”, etc, can only be explained in relation to Christian doctrines and background (Aluko 2002:62).

- ii. Non-verbal communication: this type of communication is without speech or word of mouth. It also means communicating with the whole parts of our body through well-chosen, agreed or universal acceptable signs, gestures and behavioural cues (Daramola 2003:16). Non-verbal communication include: diagrams, numbers, pictures, gestures, paralanguage, pictures, signs and signals (Olumayowa 2014:1689). In order to further understand non-verbal communication, Aluko (2002:62) has a chart depicting a few of the objects used symbolically by Jesus Christ.

Object	Text	Symbolic Use
Cross	Luke 9: 23	Christian Commitment
Bread	John 6: 35	Source of Spiritual life

Barren Fig Tree	Luke 13: 6-9	Non-productiveness
Door	John 10: 7	Salvation in Christ
Light	John 12: 46	Power of faith over evil
Salt	Mathew 5: 13	Influence of Christian living
Sheep	John 10: 14	Followers of Jesus
Shepherd	John 10: 1	Christ's concern for his followers
Stone	Matthew 21: 42	Dangers of false leadership
Vine	John 15: 1	Jesus is the source of life
Salt	Genesis 19:26	Lot's wife's tragedy

The symbols used in the Holy Bible were drawn majorly from Jewish and Greek thought. The objects used have their symbolic use and associated meanings which are peculiar to the objects mentioned by the preacher. It is therefore, the duty of leaders in Christian assemblies to transmit the Jewish culture and language to the contemporary age for the purpose of communicating in concepts peculiar to our modern days and age.

3.2 Impediments to Communication in Christian Assemblies

Since there are two sides to a coin, the use of English language in the communication process in the Christian assemblies has its weaknesses. (Ogunyemi 2003:207). Some of these weaknesses/impediments are explained below:

- i. Weak linkage between preacher's English and interpreter's utterances: it is a common practice in the Christian assemblies to have interpreters translate or interpret messages from the main preacher so as to ensure that the generality of the audience/ Church members fully comprehend the message being passed across to them (Abdul, 2007). Irrespective of how good the intention behind the interpretation or translation may be, the staggering question is how can it adequately be communicated without losing its content? The preacher and the interpreter will be ineffective if both of them cannot effectively speak the two languages used in the communication process. Many a times, interpreters or translators are caught unaware and at other times, they cannot immediately find

words in their lexicon to be used to translate the message the main preacher is passing across. Also, interpreting in the Church has the challenges of vocabulary, speed, register, intensity, specific content, etc. (Koene, 2019). According to Ogundiran and Ajibade (2020:204), the greatest challenge as revealed is the lack of exact words or expressions in other languages to convey what a preacher intends to say. This is more obvious, in the use of idioms, proverbs and figures of speech. More so, it is affirmed that most interpretations do not give details but a summary of what a preacher says.

- ii. Code mixing/code switching: nothing irritates members or congregants as much as having a preacher play the role of the preacher and interpreter/translator at the same time. Code mixing/code switching makes communication in Christian assemblies boring and uninteresting. According to Ogundiran and Ajibade (2020:204), one of the challenges associated with bilingual preaching is boredom when the preacher is code mixing or code switching. For instance, if a preacher in a church in South West, Nigeria decides to communicate with the members/congregants in both English and Yoruba languages concurrently he/she would only succeed in getting the members bored and the essence of the sermon would be unachievable.
- iii. Variants of the Bible: the Holy Bible has various versions with different use of words and sentences. Different translations cannot be far-fetched due to different scriptural authors with their distinct intertextual links between their use of words which is capable of making Christians miss links intended by the authors (O' Collins 2022). Wayne (2018), coins the impediment as textual variants, considering changes in spellings, punctuations, etc... There is the *King James Version*, or *Easy to Read Version*, *New Living Translation*, *New Revised Standard Version*, *Common English Version*, *World English Version*, *The Message*, *Douay-Rheims Bible*, *Amplified Bible*, *New American Bible*, etc. in the *King James Version*, Psalm 91:1-2 reads:

He that dwelleth in the secret place of the most high
shall abide under the shadow of the Almighty.
I will say of the Lord, He is my refuge and my fortress:
my God in him will I trust.

In the *Easy to Read Version*, Psalm 91:1-2 reads:

You can go to God Most-High to hide. You can go to
the God All-Powerful for protection.

I will say to the Lord

“You are my place of safety, my fortress. My God, I
trust you.”

In the *New Living Translation*, Psalm 91:1-2 reads:

Those who live in the shelter of the Most High will
find rest in the shadow of the Almighty.

This I declare about the Lord: He is my refuge and my
place of safety; he is my God, and I trust him.

The different use of words, sentences and interpretations in the variants of the Holy Bible may also pose a threat to communication in churches as evident in the Bible passage cited above.

- iv. Use of Old English: the Holy Bible is replete with Old English. The Old English was associated with the Elizabethan era as used in Shakespearean dramas. According to Wayne (2018), many words that were quite common in 1611 and earlier have become nearly or completely incomprehensible today. Archaic words like thou, hath, thine, thee, thy, shalt, etc., are not relevant to this generation as standard orthographies have since replaced them in usage. The Old English also impede communication in the Christian assemblies.
- v. Lack of feedback: during preaching, preachers deliver sermon to the congregants without eliciting response(s) from the latter. According to Adebayo (2018:19), feedback is not offered in a one-to-group communication model in which emphasis involves the preacher (speaker) who seeks to inform, persuade or motivate an audience or the receiver. Without feedback, communication becomes a linear, one-way flow of information (Daramola 2003:23).
- vi. Vocabulary: the use of vocabularies that can be classified as new words pose as a challenge at a Christ Apostolic Church (hereinafter referred to as CAC) attended in Lagos, Nigeria. Words like juxtaposition,

verisimilitude, etc, proved difficult to be translated to Yoruba language. This is corroborated by Biamah (2013), who found out that Church interpreters encountered several challenges such as unclear vocabulary, speed of preaching, competence in working languages, and an interpreter's experience. Also, Musyoka and Karanja (2014), found out that interpreter's unsuccessful interpretation was caused by challenges such as technical terms, speed of delivery, input problem and others.

- vii. Problems from the interpreters: the interpreters face a number of problems in attempting to interpret into Yoruba language like racking the brain before knowing what would directly mean the preachers' words, undue mannerisms, improper pronunciation and lack of number count knowledge as was evident during the visit to the CAC Parish in Lagos, Nigeria. Mlundi (2021), asserts that Church interpretation is done mainly by the untrained volunteering interpreters who in return, face a number of challenges like lack of enough English language competence, lack of background in Biblical knowledge, difficulties in pronunciation and unpredictable preaching styles, lack of preparation and prior communication, preaching with different paces, etc.

3.3 Suggested Solutions to the Impediments facing Communication in Christian Assemblies

Having identified the challenges to communication in the Christian assemblies in Nigeria, we recommend strategies that, if pragmatically implemented, the impediments will be eradicated or reduced drastically.

- i. Linkage between preacher's English and interpreter's utterances: there is the need for appropriate use of words and sentences by interpreters/translators of English into the local language or the language of the immediate environment. According to Ogundiran and Ajibade (2020:205), an interpreter should be trained either formally or informally in basic communication arts in order to be better equipped and for the purpose of flow with the preacher. Also, both the preacher and interpreter should be able to speak the two adopted languages in bilingual preaching to allow for effective switching between the duo;

and in case the interpreter is not giving a precise interpretation, the preacher can then make corrections for effectiveness in bilingualism. In the same vein, the preacher needs to use simple vocabularies which the interpreter can easily find exact words for, considering the spontaneous action of a sermon.

- ii. Avoidance of code mixing/code switching: the preacher in communicating with the members or congregants should avoid code mixing/code switching in its entirety. In order to salvage the situation as affirmed by Ogundiran and Ajibade (2020:205), the involvement of an interpreter is found to be much more exciting and meaningful to the congregation than the preacher adopting code mixing or code switching.
- iii. Adopting a variant of the Bible: the variant of the Holy Bible adopted by the preacher should be made known to the members during Bible reading sessions, sermonising, and whenever in use. The common Bible is the King James Version but members usually take along various versions to church.
- iv. Use of modern-day English: the preacher(s) in communicating with the members/congregants should make do with modern-day English that are easily understood to them. Wayne (2018) affirms that English has changed tremendously unlike what obtained in about four to five centuries ago. Modern-day words should replace archaic words like thou, hath, thine, thee, thy, shalt, etc, to become you, are, has, you, your, shall, etc. Also, a preacher worth his/her salt should explain Biblical precepts in modern day English in order to achieve communication function.
- v. Encouraging feedback: feedback is a veritable tool in the communication process to elicit response(s) from the members/congregants. Daniel (2016) cited in Fatimayin (2018), has feedback as that which involves the receiver responding to the signal by initiating another circle of meaning exchange, which has to be sent to the sender (source), then the communication process would have gone full circle and become complete. According to Adebayo (2018:19), in preaching a sermon, there should be an experience of spiritual exchange that can be determined by the use of language by the preacher as the message is passed across.

Feedback can also be ascertained during the Sunday school session(s) as the teachers have outlines and ample time is given for the purpose of feedback unlike the sermon which adopts the rigid one-to-group communication model with a fixed or allotted time for sermonising.

- vi. Knowledge of vocabulary: interpreters should as a matter of fact engage in compound reading of literatures and arm themselves with Thesaurus Dictionaries, Common Dictionaries and Dictionaries of their local languages in order to increase their lexicon.
- vii. Overcoming problems associated with interpretation: interpreters need to go through some forms of Church trainings before mounting the altar to interpret, they should also have enough Biblical knowledge, improve in their pronunciations by listening to audio tapes, keeping themselves abreast of preachers' preaching styles, prepare adequately and being prepared for preachers' different paces.

4. Conclusion

The place of the Christian missionaries cannot be separated from the introduction and continuous usage of English language in the Christian assemblies. Communication of religious precepts is however, met with some impediments since communication on its own has some factors inhibiting it, like weak linkage between preacher's English and interpreter's utterances, code mixing/code switching, variants of the Bible, use of Old English, vocabulary, problems from the interpreters amongst others especially, when done in English an ESL context like Nigeria. The onus of the task is that communication should be hitch-free and disseminated from source (preacher) through a medium or media to reach a target or anonymous mass audience (members or congregation).

It is also a common sight to have the main preacher speak in English owing to the multi-ethnic and multilingual nature of our country, Nigeria. This paper did not in any way limit our local languages to the barest minimum as an interpreter who is vast in both English and the local language of the immediate environment is usually on standby to interpret for the sake of the uneducated and those who prefer to communicate with God using their local language(s).

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Oil, the Perennial Ache of the Niger Delta: A Critical Perspective on Two Collections of Poems

Clement Idegwu

Email: idegwucc@yahoo.com

University of Delta, Nigeria

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Abstract

This paper examines the mutuality between human beings and their ecologies and the inevitable role of literature in critiquing these relationships, highlighting the beauty and the errors there in and what needs to be done to better the human world. This paper investigates the current state of the nation, Nigeria, and acquaints the people with the view that ecologies are over exploited by the Nigeria ruling class, in connivance with the multinational oil companies, leaving behind monumental and devastating ecological imprints on the landscape, fauna and flora. It investigates the poets' intervention, the governments nonchalant attitude towards the peoples' predicaments, the geometrical progression of poverty in the land and the way out of the dilemma. Using Ecocriticism, a trans-disciplinary approach, which scrutinises the relationship between biological sciences and literary imaginative works, the paper analyses the Ibiwari Ikiriko's *Oily Tears of the Delta* and Sophia Obi's *Tears in a Basket* which demonstrate the collective silence towards the exploitation of the Niger Delta region of Nigeria. This paper highlights, from the ecological perspective the pains of the Niger Delta region resulting from the environmental degradation, corruption and the criminality of the Nigerian government and the multinational oil companies. It also finds that there is a deliberate debasing of the nations landscape and calls on the government to do the needful. The paper concludes that there is a deliberate attempt to reawakening the peoples to rise up to the challenges of the moment in view of government insensitivity.

Keywords: Ecologies, exploited, ecocriticism, devastating, environmental degradation and Niger Delta.

Introduction

It is a well known fact that Nigerian leaders have developed a pattern of life which daily depletes the earth of its' glory. They are insensitive to the plights of the citizens. They impoverish the people by their greed and exploration of the nations' natural resources. The politicking on the Nigerian's ecology has attracted the attention of many literary artists who are environmentally conscious. These writers give expressions to the social facts of their environment with the intention of putting an end to the degradation of the people's ecosystem and making life meaningful for the people.

Ogaga Okuyade (2013) explicates that "different media across the world continue to capture the turbulence in Nigeria's Niger Delta, especially the face-off between the so-called militants and the government and the environmental disasters that oil exploration and exploitation have triggered in the area ..." (15). H. A. Saliu, Saka Luqman and Ali Arazeem Abdullahi corroborate Okuyade by stating emphatically that "it is no more news to say that the Niger Delta region of Nigeria that bears the bulk of the nation's oil wealth has long been faced with environmental degradation" (275). They further stressed that:

Though the region produces the bulk of the nation's wealth, its people live in abject poverty and squalor. Agitations for a stake in the control of the oil wealth and more developmental projects by the people have elicited little or no favourable response from the elites that control the Nigerian state ... making the state to be insensitive to their plights (275).

The insensitivity of the Federal Government of Nigeria to the plights of the people of Niger Delta has been observed as a deliberate attempt by the ethnic block in power to eternally under develop the sub region in order to create a kind of disparity in socio-political and economic spheres of life among others. This accounts for Mike Omilusi (2018) citing Saliu's et al postulation by arguing that "Nigeria's Niger Delta is endowed with the vast resources of oil and natural gas. Despite these resources, the region is marked by deprivation and under development. The paradox of under development in a resource-rich region has played a role in increasing violence and instability in Niger Delta, particularly since the late 1990's" (410).

The thrust of this paper is that the government and oil multinational companies' insensitivity are waiting for the peoples "corpses to make a community of corpses and see how much of the peoples tears can fill a basket of calamities" (63). It is an attempt to highlight the danger of the Niger Deltans, and Nigeria in general keeping silent over the pains of the Delta region. This is because oil is indeed not a patrimony. It has to do with the identity of the people. This undoubtedly permits a certain dimension of control of the resources and its management and that of the environment they live in. The fact that there is this inter-connectedness between all things that there in that interact the evils done to the environment also affect the human order, exposing it to different maladies and diseases. It is also to enlighten the elites, the leaders of the nation, and oil multinational companies to favourably respond to the agitations of the Niger Deltans by addressing mental crises of poverty and give it the desired attention to avoid a state of anarchy which seems eminent and will do no one any good.

Theoretical Framework

Ecocriticism examines the mutual relationship which exists between literature and the ecology of a particular area which critically explores how literary artists depict the ecosystem in their creative works.

Lomka Iliyakopdiya (2010) states that "ecocriticism as a literary theory explores the relationship between literary imaginative works and the biological sciences with the aim of creating awareness on the devastation of the physical environment and its effects on the people's lives" (15). M. A. Abrams corroborates the positions above by stressing that "ecocriticism or by alternative name, environmental criticism, designates the critical writings which explore the relationship between literature and biological and physical environment, conducted with an acute awareness of the devastation by human activities" (71).

Furthermore, Simon Estok (2001) avers that ecocriticism goes beyond "simply the study of nature or natural things in literature. Rather, it is a theory that is committed to effecting change by analysing the function, thematic, artistic, social, historical, ideological, theoretical or otherwise of the natural environment or aspects it represented in documents – literary or others that contribute to material practices in material worlds" (220). It is expedient to explicate that Simon's definition of ecocriticism explores the functional aspect of the term as a literary concept. It investigates how it anatomises the resemblance

between imaginative or creative texts and ecosystems arguing about the regenerative functions in the cultural system which such literary texts embody.

In addition, it is important to x-ray Harold Fromm Ed Athens' postulation with a view to understudying the Niger Delta sub-region. According to Fromm "ecology in this regard means man's house and the critic is its judge – an arbiter of taste who wants the house kept in good order: no technological tillage, no oil spillage to ruin the original décor," (107).

The idea of wanting the house kept in good order to avert undoing the primal or original décor is very essential to the poets whose main preoccupation is the well being of the society. Hence, Ikiriko and Obi like other advocates of social change, deliberately sensitise their readers to question the federal government and the oil multinational companies' insensitivity to the plights of the Niger Deltans. It is when they are aware of the danger they face daily due to the destruction of their ecosystem and the inevitability of death in piece meal, that they can muster up the desired courage to say no to injustice. The actions or resistance of the oppressed when consistently carried out could make the leaders to change for good.

Literature Review

Nwachukwu Agbada (2009) states that "the Niger Delta has become both a geographical space and social constituent in the Nigerian lexicography of agitation for justice." He further states that the natural environment of the region has "suddenly become an issue as if the people of Niger Delta has just awoken from their sleep."

Mogborukor, JOA and Efe, S. I. talking about the effects of the exploration of oil in Delta region of Nigeria stress that the exploration and flaring of natural gas in the region "increased the level of acidity in most of the water bodies rendering them to be turbid and toxic (217).

Otu, Oyeh O. and Anasi, Obumneme F. (2017) argue that:

the exploitation of the resources and peoples of the Niger Delta is bad, the various forms of violence against Niger Deltans by the combined forces of the Federal Government and oil

companies is worse, but the worst tragedy that has befallen the Niger Delta is that oil politics has turned brothers and sisters against one another and created enemies within, who are strong allies of both the Federal Government and multinational oil companies” (180).

The argument above explains the politics of deceit. The Federal Government and the multi-national oil companies fan the embers of disunity between various communities in the region to make them not to come to terms on how they would benefit from oil exploration. Otu et al (2017) in their argument further explicate this thus: “Oil politics has eroded the value of the communities, broken the communal bonds such that things have fallen apart and brothers and sisters are fighting one another while enemies within and without have taken complete control of the oil resources and the environment is degraded with impunity. And with the degradation of the environment, the lives of the people are inevitably degraded (172).

Nwachunanya C (2011) buttressing the point above states that: Government on its part, often in league with the representatives of the comprador bourgeois class that own the oil companies, has used force of the military to clamp down the militants and muffle the voices of dissents and protest 45 – 46.

Ebegbulem J. C. (2013) contributing to the argument on the politics of the oil in the Niger Delta cites Whittington thus: “the oil region in Nigeria seems to be stuck in time warp, with little real change since oil was discovered 45 years ago. Away from the main towns, there is no real development, no roads, no electricity, no running water and no telephone ... The government and the oil companies have profited by hundreds of billions of dollars since oil was discovered, yet most Nigerians living in the oil producing region are living in dire poverty” (283).

Saliu et al (2007) give credence to the abject poverty which have become a reoccurring decimal in the lives of the people of Niger Delta. According to them:

It is no more news to say that the Niger Delta region of Nigeria that bears the bulk of the nation’s wealth has long faced with environmental degradation. This being the direct results of

oil spillage, gas flaring and other environmental negative practices that have for long characterised the activities of oil multinationals operating in the region and which consistently endangered the lives of the inhabitants of the area. Though, the region produces the bulk of the nation's oil wealth, its people live in abject poverty and squator" (275).

Claude Ake cited by Saliu et al (2007) etal, truly captures the pains of the Niger Deltans thus: "It is well known that our oil wealth has become nightmare for the people of the oil producing areas. Demands for fair treatment and environmental protection have always elicited firm refusal, more repression and state violence. What is not well known is how much the nightmare has recently become" (281).

This has been the fate of the people of the sub-region. The exploration and flaring of the natural gas in the Niger Delta sub-region accounts for the emission of carbon into the atmosphere thereby polluting it.

At this juncture, it will be necessary to emphasise that in recent times, the African poets have fully preoccupied themselves with the narration of manipulation, degradation, and various shades of ecological destruction which have become persistent occurrences to which the Nigerian government and multinational oil companies have played, and still playing very crucial roles in the under development of the people.

Textual Analysis

Ibiwari Ikiriko, a native of Okirika in River State was born 1954 in Kano, Northern Nigeria. He grew up in Okrika, his native land in the Niger Delta. He had his B. A. in English and Education from the University of Ife, an M. A. in English and Literary Studies from the University of Calabar and a PhD in Arts and Commitment in Poetics Creation from the University of Port Harcourt. He was a man of distinct compartment, singer, composer and performer among other things.

It is worth noting that "*Oily Tears of the Delta* was published in 2000. This singular feat of his was made when the evolving petrocultures of the Niger Delta poetry came to the fore. Oyeniyi Okunoye's postulation about Ibiwari

Ikiriko is worth mentioning at this juncture, especially when the vision of how he would have navigated the world of poetry as a colossus had he lived long enough comes to the fore in our imagination. He died not quite long after *Oily Tears of the Delta* his first and only collection of poetry was published in 2000. Okunoye opines that: “in spite of his very short career as a poet, Ibiwari Ikiriko’s work is probably the most representative of contemporary Niger Delta poetry in the sense that it primarily articulates a regional consciousness” (“alterity marginality” 416).

Ikiriko, in his charismatic manner takes great delight in explicating the exploitation of the Niger Delta region of Nigeria by the Nigerian elites, the government and the multinational oil companies with the intention of making the oppressors see the evils of their actions and cause the oppressed to take their destiny in their hands.

In “The Fisherman’s Net” the first poem for this analysis, he talks about how the Nigerian leaders, the multinational oil companies and their allies destroyed the Niger Delta ecosystem or environment making it very difficult for the people to engage in agriculture and fishing, their main occupation.

In this poem of fifteen stanzas of irregular lines, the poet graphically explicates the state of the Niger Delta region, the degradation, grinding poverty and the eternal pains that characterised the life of the people.

It is an old float-net,
Older perhaps than his promanship
Mended and remended in many mashes,
The network is a refractory reticulate

The Government net distribution gestures,
Massive in the media, token in real terms,
Never reached him- He only saw
The fishing-port extension fisheries officers

It is an old net,
Mended and remended in many mashes,
It still sports large holes for high cost of mending
And the net catch, low as ebb tide.

Still it is a net
 Still it serves some purpose
 As tonight when he takes it out
 And lays in wait for collectors' fish
 (27)

The poet in the first three stanzas of the poem explores the dilemma of the fisher man in the region, one whose old fishing net is indeed older than his promanship. He speaks about the mending and remending of the old float-net in many meshes and net-networks that has remained “a refractory reticulate”. This is a lucid presentation of grinding poverty, the one that makes supposed able men sling along the street. The poem is indeed an enactment of grinding futility of life occasioned by man’s wickedness.

In spite of mending and remending of the float-net that has been washed threadbare in endless meshes, it still spots large holes resulting from the vicious cycle of mending. This accounts for a very low level of productivity which the poet sees as “the net cash, low as ebb tide” (27). Anthonia Juhasz (2009) drumbeats eternal pains of the Niger Delta thus:

Communities that live where oil is found – from Ecuador to Nigeria to Iraq- experience the tyranny of daily human rights abuse, violence, and war. The tyranny of environmental pollution, public health risks, and climate destruction is created at every stage of oil use, from exploration to production, from transportation to refining, from consumption to disposal. And the political tyranny exercised by the masters of the oil industry corrupts democracy and destroys our ability to choose how much we will sacrifice in oils name (2).

The Governments’ deception is well captioned by the poet in the second stanza. The poet vividly states that: The Government net distribution gestures, / Massive in the media, token in real terms, / Never reached him

The government deceptively carries out a massive media publicity of its float-net distribution gesture. These well advertised fake gestures of the government “never reached him,” the fisherman. The poet, further, expounds the denial of the fisherman’s fundamental human right and the geometrical

multiplication of his pains by the government making sure that he sees “the fishing-port extension fisheries officers,” whose presence is an endorsement of purported government’s net-distribution gestures. The psychological trauma, the governments’ deception would inflict on the fisherman and his likes are better imagined than experienced.

Hence, Inya Eteng cited by Uzoechi Nwagbara (2010), corroborates Juhasz explication of the fact that the Niger Deltans are bastardised, thus:

What currently prevails in the southern oil enclave is a specific variant of internal colonialism ... The specific, highly exploitative and grossly inequitable endowment/ownership-exchange entitlements relations between the Nigerian state and the oil-bearing communities in particular which explains why the enormous oil wealth generated is scarcely reflected in the living standard and life chances of the peasant inhabitants of the oil-bearing enclave (17).

The expression “scarcely reflected in the living standard of the peasant inhabitants of the oil-bearing enclave” explains it all – How can the goose that lays the golden eggs be starved perpetually? The poet advances his argument by further inundating his readers with the plights of the Niger Delta where the fisherman is caught in “the jumbo drags” (22).

The jumbo’s caught
 In the net
 And the fisherman
 In the huge waves. Like
 A saw-fish
 In a net
 The Jumbo drags

The fisherman
 High-seawards
 Through
 The waves

Hail becomes wail ...

The poet above talks about the fisherman's predicament. His fishing nets worn out and the weather inclement. The poet further shows how the jumbo tanker drags him into the undulating hills of waves, and his hails turn wails. He pleads for help which never come because no one hears or cares to listen. Imagine the anguish of the fisherman as he ponders on what to do. As this unpalatable drama lasts, the poet gives a graphic presentation of how the "juices" or "beauty" of the region is used to beautify the region of the powers that be:

The waves pass
 Bringing back steady sight
 The fisherman stares
 And stares

At the jumbo
 Sailing gaily away with her crude loot
 or liquid gold and the net
 To decorate other lands and lives

The poet in the last two stanzas of the poem, climaxes his exegesis of the rape of the Niger Delta by the Federal Government of Nigeria and her allies. Here, the fisherman stares and stares in total disillusionment as the Jumbo sails gaily away with her crude loot or liquid gold, the birthright of the Niger Deltans. To helplessly watch the Jumbo gaily sailing away with the peoples precious liquid gold, and the net the fisherman's working tool is indeed painful. And that the Jumbo Tanker goes to decorate other lands and lives is enough to provoke even the imbecile to reclaim that which rightly belongs to him. The Jumbo Tanker sailing away with his net, though battered, renders the fisherman and the Niger Deltans eternally incapacitated and improvised.

"The fisherman's net" done with, it is expedient at this juncture to analyse the "*Oily Rivers*" another of Ikiriko's explication of the violation of his people. Ikiriko in "*Oily Rivers*", also x-rays the anguish of the Niger Delta, thus:

I come from
 the bottom of
 the Amalgam,
 The base Delta,

Where things are made base,
 Leased by
 Power policies
 Crude as petroleum

I am of
 The oily Rivers
 Where rivers are
 Oily
 and can
 neither,
 Quench my thirst
 nor
 anoint my head. (20)

The poet in these two stanzas poem presents the debasing of the Delta region by the various governments of Nigeria. He talks about the Niger Delta region as the base, the supposed foundation of Nigeria, a foundation that should be cared for to avoid the collapse of the building call Nigeria. Unfortunately for the Niger Delta region, Nigerian leaders over time deliberately bases her.

Where things are made base
 and beings become base,
 leased by
 Power policies
 Crude as petroleum. (20)

It is disheartening that a region that serves as the mainstay of the nation is reduced to nothing. The people and the region are leased. Chambers 21st Century Dictionary (2007) sees lees as “the sediment that settles at the bottom of liquids and alcoholic drinks, especially wine, the worst part or parts” (778). They are reduced to the dregs that are thrown away after one has had one’s fills. This is an act of injustice especially when they are

Leased by
 Powered policies
 Crude as petroleum.

Here, the poet vividly x-rays the personality of those in government: from the president to the national law makers and all who are in the affairs of managing the nation at all levels. If their policies are “powered policies/crude as petroleum it shows how unrefined they are. The word “crude” talks about something in its unrefined state, rough or undeveloped. So, Nigerian leaders are unrefined as crude petroleum. Ethnicity and selfish desires greatly shaped their personality. Ikiriko critiquing this state of the nation is in tune with the need to right the wrongs done to the people of Niger Delta. Julie Sze says emphatically that:

Literature offers a new way of looking at environmental justice, through visual images and metaphors, not solely through the prism of statistics. This new way of looking references the “real” problems of communities struggling against environmental racism, and is simultaneously liberated from providing a strictly documentary account of the contemporary world. it allows for a more flexible representation of environmental justice, one with a global view and historical loots” (163).

Solomon Adedokun Edebor (2017) breathes Sze’s argument by citing Aghalino, pointing out three major effects of oil exploration on the oil-mineral producing communities: firstly, it leads to environmental pollution, secondly, it destroys the ecosystem and ways of life of the people; and lastly, it further impoverishes the oil-producing communities” (42). Edebor, further argues that “Gas flaring which is a consequence of petroleum producing is another identifiable source of pollution to the Nigerian physical environment as it contributes significantly to the atmosphere level of carbon dioxide... Unfortunately too, the oil producing areas of the Niger Delta are the most hit by gas” (42).

In the last stanza of the poem the poet explicates the degree of the peoples’ calamity.

I am of
the oil Rivers
where rivers are
oily
and can

neither,
 quench my thirst
 nor
 anoint my head

It is expedient to emphasise that there is an interrelatedness between the ecosystem and everything there in. So whatever form of cruelties and mistreatments on the environment definitely flows into the humanity in it, making it vulnerable to all kinds of indispositions and afflictions. An environment like this is harmed and by implication the human beings there are poisoned or contaminated. This Prasmith Aswin avers to the argument above by stating that: “the destruction and depletion of nature is suicidal; it ultimately leads to the destruction of humanities” (62). Due to the fact that nature has been depleted, the poet talks about hailing from the Oil Rivers, where unfortunately the rivers have been made oily by the exploration of the oil by the government and the multinational oil companies. Hence, the people there can neither quench their thirst nor get anointed for progress.

The poet’s disposition in crafting poems whose thematic constructs are based on the depletion of the ecosystem of the Niger Delta is to re-order the society for the better. Kelvin Hutchings (2018) in his wisdom illuminates the beauty of Ikiriko’s testaments and that of literary artists on the ecology of the people thus:

By studying the representation of physical world in literary texts and in social contexts of their production, ecocritics attempt to account for attitudes and practices that have contributed to modern day ecological problems while at the same time investigating alternatives modes of thought and behaviour, including sustainable practices that would respect the perceived rights or values associated with non-human creations and processes.

Ikiriko, in “*To the Niger Delta*” sums up his discourse on the entire collection by asking:

But you, base delta, stay sentenced
 To serve only as source and support.

Brave Delta, hail! But tell all,
 How long will this sentence
 (19)

The above are the last two stanzas of the poem titled “*To the Niger Delta*”. The poem begins by questioning the rationality of the Niger Deltans being docile and unable to question their oppressors the way it should be. He sees them as people who are contented with their sufferings.

In the first three stanzas of the poem, the poet talks about how the people whom he regards as “jungle giant, Iroko tree, China pot and raffia pad could stand several seasons of storm. He questions the rational of their docility. He uses the last stanza of two lines to provoke them to thought.

Brave Delta, hail! But tell all,
 How long will this sentence last?

This question definitely, remains a call for action, an organized action that will set the people free forever.

In “The Palm and the Crude”, the poet attempts to x-ray two eras of the nation’s history. Hence, he talks about the season of “the palm” when Agriculture was the mainstay of the nation economy, the beauty there in, and the era of the crude oil, the beginning of our oily tears which is our current pains.

In the beginning
 Was the palm
 And the palm
 Was of us
 And the palm
 Was by us
 And with us

Then came the crude
 And the crude
 Was of us
 But by them
 And with them

In the beginning
 Was the palm,
 And the palm
 Oiled our palms
 Balmed our joints
 Sweetened our insides
 And anointed our heads.

And the palm
 Propelled the pacification process
 And with us as proud partners
 Merchants and Missions
 Rode triumphant upland
 To let in light
 Bright as palm fruits
 In the sun (31)

The poet in the above lines and stanzas highlights and celebrates the comeliness of the brightness of the palm fruits arrayed on the palm tree in the plantation. It pulchritude ties on the balming of their joints, the sweetening of their insides and the anointing of their heads. He talks about that era when Agriculture was the backbone of the nations' economy. The people, even the down and out were pleased, but the emergence of the crude oil became a separating force that divided the nation.

In the third and fourth stanzas above, the poet takes his readers down memory lane, the history of his people. He celebrates the era when the palm oiled their palms, balmed their joints, sweetened their insides and had their heads anointed for glory and greater heights. It was a season of excellence. The poet's allusion is deliberate and effective. He compared the beauty of Niger Deltans, when they enjoyed the proceeds of palm, God's gift to them, with the excitement of the Christian church on a holy ghost revival service. He also stated that it propelled the pacification process, for during that seasons they, as

Merchants and missions
 Rode triumphant upland
 To let in light
 Bright as palm fruits
 In the sun

The exploration of the crude, which brought an abrupt end to light of partnerships and oneness between the various regions that constitute Nigeria also marked the beginning of the exploitation of the people. Ikiriko in this poem documents the history of his people as a guide. He is in tune with Raji – Oyelade Aderemi (2010) who expounding the relevance of literature to nation building argues that “the writer is the bearer of both personal and collective histories of the people and nation.”

It is important to stress the collective disillusionment of the people of Niger Delta as everything they had cherished turned sour as crude wasted their water, soiled their soils and indeed lacerated their lots. The last two stanzas of the poem sum their pains thus.

And we aborigines
Of the riverside, bereft stoic
Wash our palms
With dry spittle
And legs move up

To lie hand
And Sahehan
Dunes boom with
Maritime doom (32)

Sokari Ekine and Firoze Manji (2011) in talking about Nigerian leaders, the oil multinational companies, the exploration of oil in Niger Delta and the degradation of the region emphasise that:

It is impossible to separate the actions of the oil multinationals operating across the Niger Delta from the actions of Nigerian government. Hence, in exchange for oil removal from the Niger Delta, the oil companies with the support of the Nigerian state, have left behind ecological disaster, reducing the whole towns and villages to rubble causing death by fire and pollution by the guns of the Nigerian military.

Ekine above explain that the exploration of oil in Nigeria accounts for Sahelian dunes booming with maritime, doom the Niger Delta water become

wasted and their soil soiled, to the extent that their lot become lacerated. Orubu, (2002) argues that: “a comparison of concentrations of ambient air pollutants in the region and Lagos State concludes that the pollutant concentrations are highest in the Niger Delta and argues that some of the green house gases (such as methane and carbon dioxide) emitted at flare sites contribute to global warming” (30). They further assert that “The largest proportion of these flare sites are located in the Niger Delta ... gas flare sites around the region generate tremendous heat thereby causing thermal pollution” (30). This is why the peoples’ water is daily wasted, and their soil, soiled.

The poems of Ikiriko analysed in this article highlight the predicaments of the people of Niger Delta, the exploitation of their natural environment, the degradation of the ecology, governments’ indifference to their plights due to her connivance with the oil multinational companies to perpetually keep the people of the region in abject poverty.

This done with, it is necessary to commence the anatomization of Sophia Obi’s poems .

Textual Analysis of Sophia Obi’s poems

Sophia Obi hails from Oloibiri, in Bayelsa state of Nigeria. She has a PGD in Advertising and Public Relations and a Diploma in Journalism. Oloibiri, Sophia’s native land, the forgotten oil heaven, the place where oil was first discovered and exported in 1956 is one of the most underdeveloped in modern society.

Tears in a Basket, her first collection of poem is unique in itself for it sets her apart as a young poet sensitive to the plight of her people. Her other publications include, *Broken Pearls* 2013.

In “*The Wisdom of Poverty*”, Obi ponders on the wisdom of poverty, the poverty of the mind. She tries to explicate the tragic nature of “a world moulded by the firm grip of greed” (15) and tries to caution all who since 1956 when oil was first discovered in commercial quantity and exported to the Western world that:

Nemesis strolls in like an aged man picking the pebbles of regrets
Along the virgin shores of reality and bowels age in sorrow (15).

Here, the poet in her characteristic manner denounces or impugns the various government of Nigeria for the poverty of Niger Delta region, warning them that they will age in regrets for nemesis will certainly catch up with them. According to Clement Chukwuka Idegwu (2017) “The Poet fulminates the way various Nigerian governments have treated the people of this sub-region. The oil wealth of the region has been used by the various Nigerian leaders for the infrastructural development of other sub-regions to the detriment of the money spinning region” (105). He also talks about “the oil, dusty earths, the desert of the Northern Nigeria is turned into mansions while the Niger Deltans peep through their tattered huts to view the developments taking place in their sub-regions.” 105.

Obi, in furtherance of her argument in “*The Wisdom of Poverty*”, stresses that:

Life greets with warning silence
 They wave with pride
 Basking in laurels won on glittering apparels of injustice

They knew it,
 After the tour of men, comes the story of the gods
 Nemesis strolls in like an aged man, picking the pebbles
 of regret
 along the virgin shores of reality and bowels ache in
 sorrow

But how could any gamble with the wisdom of poverty
 When it invents misery, smiles now sprout out of thorns

Can they cope, when they never tasted honesty
 I bet they’ll rather die, than wallow in bondage
 In a world moulded by the firm grip of greed

Right from the first stanza of this poem, the poet, unequivocally queries the rational of ‘Basking in laurels won on glittering apparels of injustice’ (15). They failed to think and act positively towards the people of the region. Victor Ojakorotu (2008) avers to the argument above thus: both the state and the oil multinationals have continued overtly and

covertly, their militarization of the region under the guise of security, thus inflicting more violence on the Niger Delta people. It is as though further militarization will resolve the casual factors that lingered and fed the conflict.

At this juncture, it is important to expounds “*In Tomorrow’s debris*,” where the poets takes her readers to imagine the agonies of tomorrow should Nigerian leaders decide not to do the needful now.

“In Tomorrow’s debris” Obi x-rays the Nigeria of our time where the injustice reigns.

I pop up my head in the midst of wolves
Who wine and dine on the toil
of the week and wasted

From among the battered thatches
I hear the wailing of thirsty souls
Who till and toil
hungry for love

The soil and the river mourn
heavy with the weight of the dead
And orphans bury their agony
In their baffled hearts
Their screams, sharp as the missiles
That torment day and night,
erode their plastic smiles.

The poet, above expounds the agonies of the Niger Deltans, agonies that will definitely serve as “tomorrow’s debris”, which incidentally is the title of the poem. It is only an insane man that deliberately gathers tomorrows debris by his actions and inactions for generations yet unborn. The battered thatches, the wailing of thirsty souls, who till and toil even in their sleepless, restless nights hunger for love that never comes. Imagine the agony of an unrequited love, the pains that follows the display of might by the unrequited lover, telling the unloved how powerless he or she is. S. Ibaba (2001) captures it well through the following posit:

The petrol industry has for long been plagued by operational conflicts which centre around such concerns as widespread environmental degradation, human displacement, inadequate compensation for losses imposed on the oil producing communities and inadequate community land involvement which often leads to alienation between state and the indigenous population (25).

Ibaba above explicates the negative effect of oil exploration in the Niger Delta region of the country. Joseph C. Ebegbulem, Dickson Ekpe and Theophilus Oyime Adejumo (2013) in their analysis of the degree of devastation in the oil producing communities of the country state that:

What is going on in the Niger Delta region is a clear demonstration that after decades of oil exploration in the region, the natives have become poorer and less empowered, contrary to what one would have expected, judging from cases of oil countries like Saudi Arabia and Venezuela, who have learnt how to manage the excess wealth generated by oil. Crude is an essential commodity in this technological age; even though it has empowered many countries that possess it, has ended up impoverishing some countries like Nigeria, who cannot manage the enormous profit it generates as a result of corruption, selfishness and greed. (284)

Due to greed and selfishness as postulated above, the various governments of Nigeria who have been incidentally from other regions of Nigeria refused to develop Niger Delta region. It is very annoying that the oil from Niger Delta region has sustained the nation's economic growth, greatly improved the living standards of the non-oil producing regions of Nigeria at the expense of the host communities whose natural resources, its beauty (the crude oil) are daily being exported abroad.

It is unfortunate and disheartening that in a country where "orphans bury their agonies / in their baffled hearts, their screams, sharp as the missiles / that torment day and nights, erode their plastic smiles" (12), the government of Nigeria heartlessly developed many Nigerian cities in the regions that do not produce oil, with the oil wealth of the Niger Delta, while towns and villages

in the Niger Delta have indeed become the world eyesore today. Ebegbulem et al (2013) avers to the above argument by positing that “the people of Niger Delta are among the poorest in terms of living condition in Nigeria.” (284). They further, support their argument quoting Nwanna thus: “seventy percent of the inhabitants still live in rural subsistent existence characterised by a total absence of such basic facilities as electricity, pipe-borne water, hospitals, proper housing and motorable roads” (284).

The poet in the last two stanzas of the poem shows her anger by stating that:

Helpless
the old and desolate hold tight
to the shovel of hope
and dig into the depths of their minds ...

while orphans
wail their endless agony
among tomorrow (12)

This indeed is a hopeless situation. Helplessly, the people of Niger Delta holds to the shovel of hope. The futility of the exercise lies on the fact no one can explore the depths of any ones’ mind. Hence the pains. This is why the poets are calling for more reawakening of the people consciousness in order to be bold enough to challenge the oppressor and unequivocally say no to injustice and stand their ground no matter whose ox is gored.

Conclusion

In this paper, I have explicated the devastation of the Niger Delta by the Nigerian government and the oil multinational companies through their exploration of crude in the region. The poets’ attempts to sensitise and conscientise the people to unitedly confront the government have also been highlighted in order for them to muster up the desired courage to say no to injustice. This is because it only there and then that their lots will be bettered since it is only organized violence that can take that which is buried in the depths of ones mind in order to avoid gathering tomorrows debris for the unborn generations.

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A Study of Proverbs as Culture Carriers in Chinua Achebe's *Things Fall Apart*

Ojumah Sylvanus Uwamaka

University Of Delta, Nigeria

Email: sylvanus.ojumah@unidel.edu.ng

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Abstract

The paper is a study of selected proverbs as culture carriers in Chinua Achebe's *Things Fall Apart*. It makes a linguistic inquiry into how words were used to perform different functions and reveal the richness of Igbo culture in *Things Fall Apart*. Proverbs are a means of interaction between characters and a reflection of the culture. Based on the principles of pragmatics which comprise making utterance, context of utterance, meaning and effect, proverbs used in the novel as means of communication between diverse characters, were analysed to display the traditions in which the vocabularies epitomized utterance acts or constituted actions. The study is Quantitative based. Eleven randomly selected proverbs from Achebe's *Things Fall Apart* were offered according to the class of speech act. These were analysed and discussed. The analysis was done based on context of utterance, meaning and the speech act. The illocutionary forces or meanings and the perlocutionary acts or possessions of the proverbs were also stated. Findings reveal among others that proverbs in *Things Fall Apart* accomplished diverse roles such as representing utterance acts and constituted actions. The conclusion shows that proverbs constitute an aspect of Igbo discourse, form part of the Igbo language catalogue and express the Igbo culture lucidly. Also, proverbs possess illocutionary characteristics by encompassing meanings.

Keywords: proverbs, culture, communicative skill, speech acts.

Introduction

English language could be said to be foreign to Africa, Africans have tamed the language to suit their milieu. Taylor (2004) discussed that language is an aspect as well as a mirror of culture therefore; the English Language

spoken and written in Africa is tinted and suggestive of the African cultural identity and the Nigerian experience. Achebe opined that English language is unique in such a way that it is efficient and able to carry the weight of its users' experience. Achebe's artistry, in the use of proverbs shows Nigerian peculiarity. Achebe integrates Igbo language, proverbs, metaphors, speech rhythms, and ideas into his texts written in English language thereby presenting "a new voice coming out of Africa" (6).

In addition to taming the English language, Achebe uses proverbs copiously in his writings as a vehicle of communicating his thoughts, worldview and for making inferences. He uses English as the transition through which the experiences of the colonized can be conversed. He uses the terminologies of the characters he made to express meanings. In other words, these characters accomplish actions through the instrumentality of language especially with proverbs. This correlates with the thoughts of Akindele and Adegbite (2015) that language is a medium for conveying ideas, thoughts, experiences and emotions.

Mieder (2014) asserts that proverb is a short illustrious saying in figures of speech or imagery. It seems to have stood the test of ages for their utility in modern society. He further presents that proverbs have been seen to serve people well as a noteworthy rhetoric force in both oral and written communication, from friendly chats, powerful political speeches, and religious sermons to lyrical poetry, best-seller novels, to the influential mass media.

Things Fall Apart, a novel written by Chinua Achebe, comprises lots of proverbs which are originally African so that they are different from the common well-known proverbs. This novel is applauded as the best novel written about life in Nigeria at the end of the nineteenth century Creswell (2009). It was published in 1958 and it is indisputably the world's most widely read African novel, having sold more than eight million copies in English language and has been translated into more than fifty languages. *Things Fall Apart* is composed in English language and it is an illustration of the African/Igbo heritage. The proverbs in the text are a vehicle for social cultural activities. As users of the English language, it is essential to be conscious of the value of proverbs and how to use them well.

A large portion of the novel is set in Umuofia, a collection of nine villages on the lower Niger, occupied by the Igbo people. Umuofia is an influential

clan, trained in war and with a great population, with proud traditions and advanced social institutions. In Umuofia, proverbs are used very often in conversation, and help people understand things better by presenting the truth and can also give them advice. Proverbs have an important impact on the storyline. All proverbs have some kind of unfathomable meaning behind them, and this is part of the Nigerian culture. Proverbs are used by people of all ages and statures to tell others about the significance of something. People in the Igbo tribe use proverbs daily as it is a vital part of their culture and this art of dialogue is observed throughout the clan and their language is orally precise showing “Proverbs are the palm oil with which words are eaten” - Achebe by this quote demonstrates how central proverbs are in daily life as they are spoken of as ‘palm oil’ which is a very essential part of the tribe’s life. This paper therefore, intends to carry out an examination of proverbs as culture carriers in Achebe’s *Things Fall Apart* and to define the way these proverbs epitomize utterance acts.

Achebe emphasized that African writers should aim to use English language to bring out their message without altering the language to the extent that it is unable to carry their peculiar experience. Achebe is an eloquent English language speaker and a great scholar who writes in English language. Achebe’s English which can be understood in the African context is said to be ‘strange’ and ‘unusual’ with its unique features. Linguistic and discourse evaluation reflects peculiarities of his writings in terms of lexical, semantic, and syntactic qualities Akindele and Adegbite (2015).

Lexically, Achebe’s writings are said to be branded by mixtures of languages; language therefore is one of the determining factors of a culture. It is pertinent to recognize that a proverb is a saying existing among the folk. Dundes (2014) states that proverb looks like a traditional propositional statement involving at least one imaginative feature, an imaginative feature involving a topic and a comment. This means that proverbs must have at least two words. Proverbs which contain a single imaginative feature are non-oppositional. Proverbs with two or more imaginative features are maybe either oppositional or non-oppositional. Ibo words are loaned out into English language vocabularies. Examples of these Ibo vocabularies which are drawn from *Things Fall Apart* to elucidate this idea include: *Agbala* — a woman or man without title, *Egwugwu* — a masquerader, connected with ancestral worship, *Ekwe* — a wooden drum, *Ilo* — a village playground,

Obi — male living quarters, *Ogene* — a type of gong, *Osu* — outcasts, *Uli* — dye for skin painting. *Chi* — personal god *Udu* — a drum made from pottery, *Jigida* — waist beads, *White man's horse* – bicycle. These coinages are linguistic innovations in Achebe's works. Fatimayin Foluke Florence (2018) opines that the creations are essential because no terminologies exist for the new ideas in African indigenous languages and they cannot be translated or described.

Similarly, semantic transfer refers to a situation where some items in African English are present in English Language, but the meanings they express are absent in English Language. For example, the word, *wives*. In Achebe's writings, *wives* mean 'two or more women married to a man'. In addition, 'bride price' refers to dowry which is the payment by the groom to his bride's family. Besides, Achebe acclimatizes and tames the English language and idioms smartly giving the language a unique African flavour. Sometimes, they are descriptive sentence; in other occasions; they occur as direct translations from his native language of Igbo to English. These translations have been called discourse transfers Akindele and Adegbite (1999).

Instances of discourse transfer include: '...like a bush-fire in the harmattan....'; '...like a yam tendril in the rainy season....'; '...like a lizard fallen from Iroko tree....'; '...like pouring grains of corn into a bag full of holes....'; 'If a child washed his hands he would eat with kings.'

Achebe's English is distinctive because it is greatly influenced by Igbo culture, mixed with Igbo lexicon and ideas and intertwined with English vocabulary.

Literature Review

Proverbs have become the most vital component of culture as a way of comprehending and illuminating numerous incidents and events around them. Irrespective of the moving trends of the world, they have retained their effectiveness and persistent in playing major roles in varied areas of human lives both in literary and non-literary dialogues. A lot of scholarly works have tried to give a precise definition of proverbs. Donatus Ibe Nwoga and Finnegan, who share related opinions, refer to proverbs as having the features of brevity and figurative expression which is not the same from ordinary speech and point

out a treasure of traditional wisdom germane to a particular circumstance. From this explanation, it is pure that proverbs are not very lengthy accounts and they convey figurative meanings which are associated to some definite situation in which they are used. Again, they expresses that proverbs are not mere or everyday communicative speech but are shielded in “philosophical, indirect and allegorical citations that give credibility to traditional truth and wisdom.” This is what African proverbs, precisely Igbo proverbs are, and in the opinion of Chinua Achebe, “proverbs are the palm oil with which words are eaten”. On the other hand, it can be plainly noted that these definitions are relatively credited to proverbs centered on the writer’s understanding or what one would say as a depiction that appeals to him. This, Alex Roy Omoni (2020), endorses by saying that “determining when an utterance may be understood as a proverb has been vague because organizational deviations flourish in the midst of proverbial utterances”.

In addition, research works on African proverbs, by and large, have scarcely considered pragma-stylistics nature of these proverbs. In Susan Olajoke Akinkulore (2016) article, she discussed ten purposively selected excerpts in Chinua Achebe’s novel *Arrow of God* based on the stylistic structures and scrutinized them for the resolve of elucidating meaning communicated through the engagement of etymological devices in the fictional world of the novel. Again, Saeed Akanbi Alimi looked at some proverbs used in *Things Fall Apart* and *Arrow of God* and their interpretations. He, therefore, settles that Achebe makes it in communicating the romantic vision of Igbo life in realistic form through the use of proverbs and other rhetorical devices.

Furthermore, Osuagwu (2022) brings to the fore the roles, significance and worth of proverbs in written literature. In his work, he established that proverbs were used by the writer whose book he studied to build up his plot; to generate conflict which enriched his anticipation and degree of awareness from actions of his characters; to preserve the culture and tradition of his people, and to project their individual distinctiveness above others; to tell apart his characters and to strengthen his thematic and moral issues. Inversely, these articles above obviously are not the same from what this research focuses on. In Osuagwu’s work, the focus is on critical appraisal of proverbs in *Things Fall Apart* and *Arrow of God*, conversely, this research rather focuses on proverbs as culture carriers in *Things Fall Apart*. Even though Akinkulore’s work is on Pragma-stylistics, it does not give attention on the use of proverbs in the

novel. It rather converses proclamations made in the text. Again, Osuagwu's work which concentrates on proverbs rather discusses the role, significance and worth of proverbs and not in Achebe's novels. The attention of the scholars who write on proverbs governs their definition of the concept. Nevertheless, a number of efforts have been made in defining proverbs. Yisa Yusuf defines a proverb as a terse reiterated astute statement of experience, which is engaged precisely to accomplish a social purpose. Taiwo (2016) also postulates that the concept proverb functions as a morally and philosophically made statement which is abridged into a few words and assists as memory aids. For Alimi, he defines proverbs as wisely engraved belief statements, which are mostly engaged by users to aid in saying unfriendly things in a superior way. The Longman Dictionary of Contemporary English describes proverbs as a short recognized statement that is generally true.

Similarly, Akporobaro contemplates proverb as a widely held concise expression frequently offered as a piece of moral guidance or truth. Agyekum, likewise, arrests the definition of a proverb as a time-tested, belief and witty statement, which regularly epitomizes and shows an expression of truth or accepted beliefs about practical lines. Agyekum further states that proverbs are pass on from generation to generation. From the above mentioned meanings of proverbs, it can be garnered that a proverb is a concise witty statement, which is transferred from generation to generation frequently offered in an enhanced way to express moral advice and truth.

In African context, proverbs have become a resourceful tool that most African writers have appropriated as a means of justifications of the actions and condemnation of immoral brashness of characters and as a means of culture carriers. Proverbs also afford African authors the opening to give an expression to the rich philosophy of their societies. This wealth of philosophical ideologies and wisdom were transferred orally to them by their forefathers and their sustained use of these is a clue of the relationship that exists between the past and the present and its impact on the future. This allows writers to give a peculiar expression to the distinct beliefs and lives of their people. By permeating proverbs in their writings, the African author is able to unveil the 'Africanness' of their works, that is giving it a touch of African aesthetic quality which in effect, permits them to improve the plot of their stories well, give perfect images and identity of their characters, and also give shape to their stories.

In “A Man of the People”, as in Achebe’s other novels; proverbs are recycled to sound and reiterate main themes, to hone characterization, to make clear conflict and to focus on the values of the society Achebe is portraying. By studying the proverbs in the novel, we gain understanding into the moral issues with which the actions of characters can be measured and appraised. Proverbs assist us to understand and interpret Achebe’s novels. It is this talent that allows him to persuade his readers “that African people did not hear of culture for the first time from Europeans; that their societies were not mindless but often had a philosophy of great depth and value, and beauty, that they had poetry, and above all, they had dignity.

In this study, it is clearly shown the manner in which Achebe uses proverbs to inform readers about the cultural identity and values of Igbo society. He further illustrates how these wise sayings function as thematic statements which have been used as reminders for readers concerning the main motifs in Achebe’s works and the way they assist in shaping and achieving an in-depth understanding of his works.

In her study, Ngozi Ohakanma upholds that Achebe through the use of proverbs portrays the communal nature of the Igbo traditional society. This, therefore, shows that Achebe does not only write his works for writing sake but he is geared towards portraying the African culture and values and this he does through the use of proverbs. To be specific, this article, therefore, concentrates on the analysis of some selected proverbs in Achebe’s novel; *Things Fall Apart*. It, however, aims at showing the relationship that is present between the writing and reading of literary works that have been situated in socio-cultural and linguistic contexts.

Theoretical Framework

This research is anchored on John Langshaw Austin’s (1952) speech act theory. The idea that every use of language carries a performative dimension (in the well-known slogan, “to say something is to do something”). Speech act theory has had consequences and import in research fields as diverse as philosophy of language, ethics, and political philosophy, philosophy of law, linguistics, artificial intelligence and feminist philosophy. The theory of speech acts, as presented in the article “How to Do Things with Words” – Austin (1975) reveals that the main function of language as describing reality,

represents states of affairs and makes declarations about the world. For Austin our utterances have a variety of different uses.

Furthermore, Austin draws the distinction between constatives and performatives merely as a preliminary to the presentation of his main thesis, specifically that there is a performative dimension in any use of language. The acknowledged class of performatives seems to disclose only specific verbs (like to promise, to bet, to apologize, to order), all in the first person singular present. Any attempt to describe the class with grammatical or lexical criteria, however, is bound to fail. We may in fact perform the act of, say, ordering by using an explicit performative, as in: - *I order you to close the door but also with - Close the door!* Similarly, there are performative verbs also for acts of stating, asserting, or concluding, as in: I assert that the Earth is flat. The very distinction between utterances assessable along the facet of truth and falsehood (constatives) and utterances assessable along the facet of felicity or infelicity (performatives) is a mere illusion. To show this, Austin categorized speech acts into the following types according to the function performed by specific speech act verbs. These are verdictives (gives verdict), exercitives (exercising power/influence), behabitives (expresses attitude/social behaviour), expositives (fits utterance into argument or conversation). This categorisation was found to be wanting and Searle (2015) modified Austin's categories. Searle had classification of speech acts that describes situations. These include - directives (directing one to do something), commissives (expressing commitment to something), expressive (expressing the feelings of the speaker), and declaratives (acts that bring about a change). The speech act types to be identified in this study include commissive, assertive, directive, declarative and expressive.

Research Methods

Research designs are plans and the procedures for research that pilot the decisions from broad assumptions to detail methods of data collection and analysis Creswell (2019). However, the selection of a research design is actually based on the nature of the research problem or issue being addressed.

This research follows John L. Austin's speech act theory. The idea that every use of Language carries a performative dimension (in the well-known slogan, "to say something is to do something"). Speech act theory is

something expressed by an individual that not only presents information but performs an action as well. It is on this basis that the researcher chooses and makes interpretations of the meaning of the selected proverbs. According to Kent Bach, “almost any speech act is really the performance of several acts at once.” The contemporary use of the term goes back to J.L. Austin’s development of performative utterances and his theory of locutionary, illocutionary and perlocutionary acts. Speech acts serve their function once they are said or communicated. These are commonly taken to include acts such as apologizing, promising, ordering, answering, requesting, complaining, warning, inviting, refusing and congratulating. All these are frost with the analysed proverbs.

The population consists of the twenty-seven proverbs in the novel. All the proverbs were sampled using simple random sampling technique. Eleven was randomly selected, on the basis of the language used as they reveal culture. They were analyzed and discussed. The proverbs were presented in a Table of 3 columns. It consists of the items patterned after a three-point Likert scale of Proverbs, Meaning of Proverbs, and Speech Act. The first column enclosed the selected proverbs. The second column gave the meaning of the proverbs in context of use as they reveal the value and norms of the people, while the third column reflected the speech act accomplished in the use of the proverb. Speech act is something expressed by an individual that not only presents information but performs an action. Examining the selected proverbs, it will be deduced that they not only present information, but perform an action.

Presentation of Data

This section presents an analysis of a selection of eleven proverbs from Chinua Achebe’s *Things Fall Apart* based on the category of speech acts. The keys of identification of a particular proverb speech art are as follows: assertive, cautioning/instructing, affirming, declaratives, encouraging and expressive.

This paper therefore, focuses on the use of proverb as culture carriers in *Things Fall Apart*. Achebe intentionally uses the proverbs not merely to add touches of local colour but to sound and reiterate values, to sharpen custom, to clarify tradition and to focus on the values of the society he is portraying. Let us examine the proverbs below as contained in the novel selected for the study.

s/n	Proverbs	Meaning of Proverb	Speech Act
1.	<p>“...Proverbs are the palm oil with which words are eaten”</p>	<p>This quote shows how important proverbs are in everyday life as they are referred to as ‘palm oil’ which is a very important part of the tribe’s life. It is immensely assertive. One proverb that the Umuofia clan frequently uses is “Proverbs are the palm oil with which words are eaten” The Umuofia clan is an agricultural society whose main crop products are yams, corn, and palm. As such, palm and other agricultural products are particularly ubiquitous. This proverb’s importance is likened to palm, a staple crop in their society. Presented in proverb form, like palm oil, the words can be more easily delivered, received, and remembered. It is portrayed as a means of passing message. In some instance, it might be affirming, and at another instance expressing a fact about the culture of the people.</p>	<p>Assertive, Affirming and Expressive</p>
2.	<p>“The sun will shine on those that stand before it shines on those who kneel under it”</p>	<p>This proverb is used to depict the importance of status and value of achievement. It performs the role of cautioning and it is very instructive. In the traditional setting of Igbo community “When the moon is shining the cripple becomes hungry for a walk.” This proverb reveals the importance of the moon to the rural dwellers. This means that exploit is not for anyone, it is for everyone. Here we have an elusive counsel and warning. The words arrest the core of Unoka’s care free approach to life and his state of indebtedness. He warns Okoye who he owes a little for coming to ask for his money when those he owes large amount of money have not come to disturb him. His philosophy is that bigger debts must be paid first before smaller debts. Those who have given Unoka more are the ones standing; while those who have given little are the ones kneeling. Unoka’s reply comprises some components of scorn which are focused to upset Okoye.</p>	<p>Instructing and softly cautioning.</p>

3.	:’If a child washed his hands, he could eat with kings”	<p>This is showing personal responsibility. Each one builds his fame. Okonkwo is represented to be strikingly different from his father Unoka. Unoka is said to be a failure and debtor. But Okonkwo is a great achiever. Literally translated as, each one builds his own fame. Okonkwo had clearly washed his hands and so he ate with kings and elders. This proverb illuminates one of the Igbo’s highest values – personal responsibility. If a man “washes his hands” or pays off all his debts and is able to position on his own, he may associate with the most appreciated elders. It teaches that we make our own futures and opportunities. According to Charles Larson; Achebe makes frequent use of proverbs in his Novels to explain individual sections of his story and expose the Igbo culture lucidly, to illustrate anthropologically what he can assume the non-Africa reader needs to know. The proverb makes a claim and affirms a certain end/outcome.Exceedingly inspiring. The illocutionary force starts with an affirmation and ends with a definite truth.</p>	Encouraging and Inspiring
4.	“When mother-cow is chewing grass its young ones watch its mouth.”	<p>This proverb could be interpreted in two ways in Igbo culture. It is a dramatic and encouraging proverb. A modeling of the old to the younger one. Beside the fact that it expresses the reward that comes from handwork, it is also interpreted as a way of instructing or inspiring the children to be hard working and diligent. The mother-cow chewing grass refers to diligent and hard working parents. And in the traditional Igbo society, children of such parents are expected to observe and imitates the diligence and industriousness of their parents. This proverb is uttered by the eldest brother of Obierika to acknowledge Maduka for taking after his father. The reward in this proverb comes to the hardworking father when his child observes and imitates him; the credit of the child’s success goes to the child and the father</p>	Dramatic and Encouraging

5.	<p>“He who brings kola brings life”.</p>	<p>whom the society believes is the source of encouragement and inspiration to the child. A wise son brings glory to his father.</p> <p>This proverb carries many aspects of the Igbo culture. It reveals the aspect of Igbo culture that is an incontestable truth and clearly declarative. In the first place, it expresses the act of hospitality and respect for traditional symbol of peace practiced by the Igbos. At any village function, the titled man or a village head is presented with Kola nuts, which play a very important social and ritual role in the Igbo culture.</p> <p>The kola nut is the highest symbol of Igbo hospitality. Whenever a kola nut appeared in a gathering, the matter to be discussed at that particular time was regarded as very vital. The offering of drinks, food and meat are not regarded so important in Igbo culture as the offering of kola nut. When an important guest visits the community, Kola nut is brought out and handed to the eldest person. This symbol of Igbo hospitality has three steps and anyone who fails to follow these steps is penalized by the village elders. The first step is the presentation of the Kola nut, the second is the breaking of the Kola nut and the third is the distribution of the kola nut. According to MacPhee, Josh - (2016) in an article “Shortcomings of Synchronizing Translation” the act of presenting Kola nut to guests highlights the value of interaction and communal life among the Igbo people.</p>	Declarative and incontestable truth
6.	<p>“If one finger brings oil it soils the others”</p>	<p>It speaks of support, cooperation and tolerance. In the Igbo culture is unity, Unity means togetherness. It is expressed in this proverb vividly. It is a proverb that is guaranteeing and assertive of help and support. Achebe shows that it is not only in words but also in deeds that Igbos follow these lessons. That individuals are not</p>	Expressive and assertive.

		<p>above the community is proved when Okonkwo is severely punished for breaking the Week of Peace and is banished from Umuofia for killing a clansman as these activities are believed to put the whole community of Umuofia in peace.</p>	
<p>7.</p>	<p>“A toad does not run in the day time for nothing”</p>	<p>This proverb relating to the toad emphasizes that Obiakó’s death is not natural but caused by some mysterious forces. This proverb aligns with the repetition ‘there must be something wrong with it... there must be a reason for it’ made earlier in the passage by Ogbuefi Idigbo. This is saying that things happen for a reason. It is descriptive revealing a vital aspect of Africa culture. In other words, it means everything happens for a reason. This proverb illustrates a traditional idea and affirms the truth that shapes day-to-day Igbo life.</p>	<p>Descriptive</p>
<p>8.</p>	<p>“A Chick that will grow into a cock can be spotted the very day it hatches”</p>	<p>This proverb expresses the recognition that follows achievement right from childhood. It portends importance and dignity. This aspect of the Igbo culture is demonstrated in “Things Fall Apart”. In chapter one of the novel we see that the village of Umuofia recognizes Okonkwo as a man of great future. This is why Achebe said: “Okonkwo was clearly cut for great things. He was still young but he had won fame as the greatest wrestler in the nine villages.” This proverb is emphatic and stating. The proverb is uttered to show Okonkwo’s condemnation of Nwoye’s effeminate attitude. This proverb expresses the recognition that follows achievement right from childhood. This aspect of the Igbo culture is demonstrated in Things Fall Apart. Okonkwo was born into a tough world that demanded him to be rugged, courageous, fearless, determined and hardworking to survive. He is outstanding by hard work and intelligence. He became much more productive than the other</p>	<p>Emphatic and Expressive</p>

9.	“When you clear the forest you see wealth”	<p>farmers and wrestlers by exhibiting higher degree of intelligence, honesty and craftiness.</p> <p>This proverb shows reward and recognition for working hard. The Igbo people believe so much in the dignity of labour (work) probably.</p> <p>The Igbos believes so much in the dignity of labour (work) probably more than any other ethnic groups in Nigeria. Everywhere in Nigeria you find the Igbos working for their livelihood. Creating wealth is based on hard work and intelligence. In traditional Igbo society, you can't lead without your being an accomplished person, having something doing. We have what is called the British Pride, the American Pride; we also have from time immemorial what is known as the 'Igbo Pride' which some historians refer to as 'Igbo identity'. Precisely, hard work is an important philosophical Igbo idea which is centered on Igbo Pride.</p>	Assertive
10.	“Looking at the king's mouth, one would think he never sucked at his mother's breast”	<p>This proverb portends mockery of one who forgot his beginning.</p> <p>This proverb is talking of Okonkwo who had risen so suddenly from great poverty and misfortune to be one of the lords of the clan; indeed, they respected him for his industry and success. (17). Okonkwo's personal success and handwork has lifted him above his peer and caused him to intermingle with elders and kings. His achievement was so pronounced that it spread throughout the nine villages of Umuofia and beyond. Success and achievement treated in “Things Fall Apart” shows that it is the culture of the Igbo people to reward industriousness. The reward of labour in the culture of the Igbos is prevalent in all Igbo communities. Okonkwo is regarded as king in his land and even in Mbaino. He enjoys the dignity of his success throughout the nine villages of Umuofia and the neighboring villages. In spite of Okonkwo's</p>	Cautioning and Counseling

11.	<p>“You can tell a ripe corn by its look”</p>	<p>beginnings in poverty and misfortune, he has risen as one of the most respected elders of the clan. Yet he deals bleakly with men less successful than himself. The proverb discloses Okonkwo's helplessness to pick up from the past experience. The old man drew Okonkwo's attention to remind him of his humble beginning so that he could be tolerant of others less fortunate. This is to create an attitudinal change.</p> <p>It speaks of trust and acceptance. As our fathers said, you can tell a ripe corn by its look. I shall give you twice Four hundred yams. The proverb gives a twist to the first. While Nwakibie is now selfish with his seed yams, he is, however, ready to give Okonkwo twice the number he has requested for because 'As our fathers said, you can tell a ripe corn from its look.</p> <p>In other words, Nwakibie is saying that from Okonkwo's record of accomplishments, he can trust that Okonkwo is not the kind of man that disappoints. This serves to show the implicit confidence Nwakibie has for Okonkwo. It is an affirming and declarative statement. As our fathers said, you can tell a ripe corn by its look.” This proverb refers to the idea that there is a time for things, a natural order that cannot be rushed or manipulated. This proverb is used before Nwakibie gives Okonkwo a gift, something he trusts Okonkwo will use wisely. Nwakibie could tell that Okonkwo has the right outlook: He professed ‘... I can trust you. I know it as I look at you. As our fathers said, you can tell a ripe corn by its look. I shall give you twice four hundred yams. Go ahead and prepare your farm.’ There is the illocutionary force to affirm Okonkwo's credit earnestness and also declares a definite end by permitting Okonkwo's request.</p>	<p>Affirming and Declarative.</p>
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Each narrative proverb is a vital tributary to the main flow of the narrative, or to use a botanical metaphor, a substantial branch on the main stem of the giant tree. Therefore, proverbs merge with the flow of the language without appearing forceful or imposed.

Thus Chinua Achebe has demonstrated remarkable skill in his strategic use of the eleven selected proverbs in expressing the culture and tradition of the Igbo people. The elaborate use of these proverbs by Achebe is intended not only to portray African culture but also to prove that African oral literature can be the means of enriching novelistic writing. While proverbs in *Things Fall Apart* successfully give expression of the moral, cultural and social divides of the time, proverbs in *No Longer at Ease* point out the sensibilities of a pre-colonial Igbo society. Thus Achebe creatively uses this particular oral cultural elements i.e. proverbs to convey different messages. The eleven analyzed proverbs convey culture in its various forms. His dexterity in the use of oral elements lies in the way he manipulates their application to suit the different social, cultural and political contexts portrayed in the novels.

Through the use of proverbs, Achebe reviews the past, examines the present and assesses the future. This particular linguistic strategy imparts a distinctive characteristic to Achebe's writings. To Igbo, Proverbs are an important means of passing on culture and wisdom through the generations. Proverbs throughout the novel mark or proceed important changes in Okonkwo's life and that of his tribe. They are also words of guidance throughout the difficult decisions Okonkwo must make for himself and his clan.

The selected proverbs analyzed fall within the 5 classes of the speech acts. Assertives in the proverbs capture utterance of affirming, asserting and expressing. Directives in the proverbs capture the acts of subtle advice and admonishment while the instant of commissives comprise of making a pledge and a promise. In addition, the proverb with expressive class of the speech act discloses the state and mood of the moment while declarative feature of speech act in the proverb makes a clear and emphatic view known.

Findings and Conclusion

Findings indicate that proverbs in *Things Fall Apart* accomplished diverse functions such as representing the Igbo culture, its norms and

values. The English man's proverbs are quite different from the African man's proverbs. The Isoko man's proverbs are different from the Igbo man's proverbs. Proverbs vary from one country to another; vary from one geographical zone to another just as culture varies according to a people's geographical zone. The proverbs of a group of people are dictated by the nature of their culture, custom and tradition. This is a clear indication that proverbs and culture are inseparable as a whole. Proverbs are the dominant carriers of culture and explain why proverbs vary from one geographical zone to the other in line with the variation of culture.

Proverbs remain a means of communication between characters that have knowledge of the world they share and the linguistic and socio-cultural conditions of their society. These were used by the characters to deduce the meanings (illocutionary forces) and the effects (perlocutionary acts) of the proverbs. It is also clear that Proverbs in *Things Fall Apart* are Igbo cultural reflections. The proverbs analyzed were suitable. They suit the occasion of use (sociocultural) and the pragmatic ability (knowledge shared) to take a mean and understand the message. Based on the analysis carried out, this paper concludes that proverbs make up a vital facet of Igbo discourse as it forms a large part of Igbo language catalogue and a carrier of their culture. In addition, the proverbs hold illocutionary functions which encompass values and messages. Therefore, in Achebe's Igbo society, as shown in *Things Fall Apart* having a good knowledge of proverbs could enrich or heighten one's communicative prowess as well as add splendor to discourse, instill ethics, reveal culture and tactfully create an opinion. It is through the use of proverbs; that Achebe reviews the past, examines the present and assesses the future. This particular linguistic strategy imparts a distinctive characteristic to Achebe's writings.

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Stylistic Foregrounding of ‘Silence’ in Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie’s *Purple Hibiscus*

Bridget Dahunsi Okunrobo

University of Benin, Benin City.

Email: bridgetdahunsi@gmail.com

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Abstract

This paper explores Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie’s use of repetition to foreground silence, a predominant theme in her debut novel, *Purple Hibiscus*. Since one of the primary concerns of stylistics is to explain the underlying motive of an author’s linguistic choices, the paper discusses Adichie’s choice of the lexical item silence in varied derivative forms (noun, adverb, adjective and verb), the use of its synonym and its incorporation into sentence structures (parallelism). Applying Geoffrey N. Leech’s and Michael H. Short’s notion of foregrounding - deviance from some expected frequency, the paper examines how Adichie strategically repeats her choice of the lexical item without it sounding monotonous. It demonstrates that the choices of these diverse linguistic forms in the presentation of the theme of silence is not accidental but a purposive attempt to bring her message to the forecourt and thereby raise the consciousness of the society to its damaging effect. It also reveals the author’s skilfulness in the manipulation of language.

Keywords: silence, foregrounding, repetition, quantitative, deviation, parallelism

Introduction

As writers make choices from the language resources available, they bring in innovation and creativity. A writer’s choice and use of language reveals his/her style, personality and socio-cultural background. Prassnnata Ramtirtha asserts that every person in the world possesses some kind of style suitable for him/her (3). Similarly, every writer has his or her own style of writing. Stylistics

acknowledges these skills of literary artists by assuming that every decision made in the production of a text is deliberate, despite whether these decisions are made consciously or unconsciously. It is this creative/artistic/skilful use of language and the specific patterns employed by the artist that bring about style and stylistics in language study. Style refers to the distinctive way of using language in writing literary and non-literary texts. It means different things to different people at different times. Geoffrey N. Leech and Michael H. Short attest to the fact that style has multiple definitions. They, however, define it as the way in which language is used in a given context by a given person, for a given purpose (10). M. H. Abrams and Geoffrey Galt Harpham explain that style is the "manner of linguistic expression in writing prose or verse – as how speakers or writers say whatever it is that they say" (349). Other notions of style include, style as 'choice', referring to the different choices of words and expressions made by different authors in their writing. 'Style as the man', meaning that every individual has his/her peculiar way of using language, etc. Of the various views of style, the notion of style as deviation or departure from the norm is of interest to this study. This notion is based on the understanding that there are rules, conventions and regulations guiding the use of language, any use that does not conform to these conventions is regarded as deviation from the norm and therefore becomes a style. This view is important to us as it corroborates the notion of foregrounding, an important theory in stylistic study.

Many scholars have also defined stylistics in various ways but they all agree that it has to do with the style of a writer or speaker. H. G. Widdowson, for instance, views stylistics as the study of literary discourse from a linguistic orientation (3). Mick Short also opines that stylistics has to do with linguistic description of literary texts (1). Their definitions focus on the literary aspect of stylistics. Stylistics is the study of language as used in literary and non-literary texts. Raymond Chapman describes it as "the linguistic study of different styles" (11). Katie Wales is also of the view that stylistics is the study of style. These various perceptions of stylistics show that it is a branch of linguistics that looks at how language has been employed by a writer/speaker to express his/her ideas aesthetically and effectively. One of the major concerns of stylistics is to explain the underlying motive of an author's linguistic choices. It investigates why a writer or speaker chooses a particular way of expression and the effects achieved by those choices. This study looks at how the author makes choices that are stylistically significant and that help her to convey her message effectively.

Theoretical Background

As a dynamically developing science, stylistics has given rise to its own theories. One of its significant theories is foregrounding. Foregrounding started as a theory in literature in the Greek philosophy. It is rooted in the teaching of Greek philosopher. Jan Mukarovsky defines foregrounding as “the intentional violation of the scheme by means of which an item is brought into artistic emphasis and stands out from its background” (42). Mick Short describes it as that part of language that deviates from the expected norm. The norm here refers to that part of language that follows the rules of language use and which the reader expects to see (12). The normal code of a language becomes the background while any use of language that violates the normal code is foregrounded. Paul Simpson also opines that foregrounding involves deviating from linguistic norm in the use of language. In his view, “Foregrounding typically involves a stylistic distortion of some sort, either through an aspect of the text which deviates from a linguistic norm or, alternatively, where an aspect of the text is brought to the fore through repetition or parallelism” (50).

M.A.K. Halliday criticises the idea of foregrounding being a ‘deviation’ from normal linguistic code. He redefines it as “prominence that is motivated” and explains that such prominence contributes to the writer’s total meaning (113). To him, foregrounding is not necessarily a distortion of language, breaking the rules of language use or departure from normal forms of language use as this suggests that normal forms are of no interest in the study of style. However, his description of prominence as “the phenomenon of linguistic highlighting, whereby some features of the language of a text stand out in some way” (113) clearly reveals that foregrounding or prominence, as he calls it, has to do with bringing some aspect of a text to the forecourt and this is usually achieved consciously or unconsciously when special linguistic choices are made to stand out by a writer or a speaker. Geoffrey N. Leech and Michael H. Short identify two kinds of foregrounding - qualitative, i.e deviation from the language code itself – a breach of some rule or convention of English; or quantitative, i.e deviance from some expected frequency (48). This gives an insight into how foregrounding is realised; either through deviation or repetition/parallelism. Against this backdrop, this study investigates the unexpected frequency of the lexical item, **silence** in the novel under study and how this aids the author to realise theme.

Review of Relevant Literature

Purple Hibiscus is Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie's first novel. It is set in the postcolonial Nigeria and told through the eyes of Kambili, a young girl of fifteen years. It is about the emotional turmoil of this adolescent whose family falls apart as a result of the fanatical and tyrannical traits of her father, Eugene Achike (Papa). Papa oppresses and abuses his wife and children to mere reticent humans. The author intertwines the tyrannical and oppressive rule of Papa in his family with that of the then military ruler in Nigeria to bring out their similarities. Prominent among the several themes noticeable in the novel is the theme of silence. Mama and her children, Papa's victims, resort to silence as a strategy for survival. The Head of State (Big Oga), the ruler in the nation, on the other hand silences critics who dare to speak against the corrupt practices prevalent in the nation.

There have been several scholarly studies of stylistic devices used in the novel. Anwuri Chukwukaelo's linguistic-stylistic study of Purple Hibiscus emphasizes how the author employs hypotaxis, interrogative patterns and well developed dialogues to depict real life speech situations and create aesthetic patterns and values in the novel (254-265). Chuka Fred Ononye's stylistic discourse examines some of the structural features of Nigerian English forms in the novel and observes that the instances of nativisation of English in the novel, especially, at the stylistic levels of lexicon-semantics and syntax, are greatly influenced by the Igbo variety of Nigerian English form (81-94). Another study of stylistic appraisal of the novel by Ayodele Allagbe and Akinola Allagbe focuses on the salient linguistic features with which the author realises a writer's style and mind-style (69-86). In connection with Adichie's use of language, Lawal Olusola and Lawal Alabi investigate how special and unique language use assisted Adichie to address ideological configurations of gender and power. They examine the preponderance of exclusive ideological expressions and other literary and linguistic devices used by the author and identify silence as a dominant theme in the novel (8-16). Ebi Yeibo and Comfort Akerele study phonological foregrounding in the novel and reveal the peculiar ways elements such as alliteration, assonance and onomatopoeia are systematically organized in the novel to foreground stylistic meaning and serve aesthetic ends (9-17).

Silence as a predominant theme in the novel has been explored by several scholars too. For instance, J. N. Ifechelobi points out that silence and voicelessness are tools for patriarchal subjugation of women (23). Ogaga Okuyade alludes silence to be a character in the novel and argues that silencing is not only a mechanism or weapon of patriarchal control but of domestic servitude (247). In the same vein, Eva Corneliussen observes that Papa's family is characterised by a "silence that speaks louder than words" (48). Imane Salhi investigates how violence silences the familial space in the novel, and throws light on the crucial role the physical environment plays in the psychological awakening of human beings enabling them to find their individual freedom and voice. The works of these scholars attest to the fact that various aspects of the novel have been explored. The present study elaborates on these ideas and investigates how features of foregrounding and other stylistic devices are used by the author to delineate silence as a destructive tool.

Silence and its damaging effect is actually one of Adichie's strong messages in *Purple Hibiscus*. She depicts it as playing three roles. Firstly, she portrays it as a tool used by Eugene and The Head of State to oppress and subjugate their victims. Secondly, silence is seen as Mama's survival mechanism. Herself and her children remain speechless, speaking with their spirits and enduring all sorts of maltreatment from the husband. Thirdly, and ironically too, the same silence becomes a weapon with which Mama eliminates Eugene, her oppressor, as she silently poisons his daily tea. This paper explores how Adichie successfully foregrounds this theme.

Stylistic Foregrounding

As mentioned above, two ways of realising foregrounding are through deviation and repetition/parallelism. Deviation breaks up rules and expectations of the reader or hearer and thereby attracts attention. Katie Wales opines that deviation is divergence in frequency from a norm or statistical average (103). Parallelism on the other hand is deviation from expected frequency of language occurrence. It could be repetition of similar or contrasted words or whole structure (two or more phrases or clauses) from the same area (paradigm) of association in a text for stylistic effect. Leech defines parallelism as "a type of foregrounding which is in a sense the opposite of deviation" and that "it consists in the introduction of extra regularities, not irregularities, into the language." (62) "Extra regularities" here refers to the

choice of repeating patterns where the writer has the liberty to select from a wider range of available choices in the language code but deliberately restricts himself or herself to the use of the same pattern so as to produce uniformity. How Adichie employs these devices as discursive strategy is the focus of this paper.

The Use of Repetition

Repetition is a rhetorical device where the same word, phrase or whole structure is made to recur over and over again in a text. It is deliberately used as a powerful tool for reinforcing an idea, a concept or thought. Although it is common in oration, for persuasion, in poetry where it is used to produce rhyme, rhythm etc., it is also found in other genres. Apart from being used for emphasis it is catchy in writing, where it foregrounds the repeated element as a pragmatically important aspect of the work.

Repetition is one of the distinctive stylistic devices used by Adichie in *Purple Hibiscus* to foreground themes, as in the case of **silence**. The noun **silence** recurs several times but in varied forms in the narrative. She recasts the word in adjective (**silent**) and adverb (**silently**) forms. She also chooses the synonyms **quiet** and **quietly** as well as incorporates it in parallel structures for aesthetic effect. Interestingly, these choices are creatively presented to avoid redundancy.

The Use of Silence as a Noun

The word **silence** is absence of sound or to refrain self or somebody from speaking. **Silence** could be positive or negative. It is positive when there is no outside pressure to hush a person, but a person deliberately wishes to provide opportunity to reflect. It is however negative when it is imposed on a person through threat in order to suppress the person's voice from telling the truth or criticising. The imposition of silence on individuals applies to this study. As a noun, the lexical item **silence** appears in single morphological form and as noun head in simple and complex noun phrases where it is modified by words from other parts of speech. The following are excerpts:

1. The **silence** was broken only by the whirl of the ceiling fan as it sliced through the still air. (15)

2. **Silence**→ hung over the table ... (40).
3. The **silence** stretched out even longer. (20)
4. The **silence** he left was heavy but comfortable, like a well-worn, prickly cardigan on a bitter morning. (77)
5. We finished dinner in **silence**. (198)
6. Aunty Ifeoma's little garden next to the verandah of her flat in Nsukka began to lift the **silence**. (24)
7. I saw it in his long **silences**, in the set of his lips, in his eyes that seemed focus
... (264)

Above are examples where the lexical item silence recurs and functions as a noun. It stands as a single noun in example 1, while it is presented as the head of simple noun phrase preceded by the definite article 'the' or other adjectives in the other examples. In all these examples, it functions as either the subject, the object, or object complement of the sentences. The stylistic effect of this presentation is that silence is fronted to assume a position of prominence so that attention is focused on it not as an abstract but as an important idea. The abstract concept of silence is also given a concrete attribute by the employment of metaphor, a literary device, in examples 1, 2, and 3. Silence is portrayed as having the concrete entity and capacity to be broken and stretched out. Besides being fronted, silence, an abstract noun is removed from its normal syntactic class and made to function as a count noun. To buttress this, it is inflected (-s) in example 7 to assume a plural form in which case, it functions as the complement of the object 'it' in the sentence. Pluralizing silence enables the author to equate it with 'lips' and 'eyes' (concrete countable nouns) in a parallel structure. Besides, Plurality could connote a large quantity of something or an indefinite amount of something. The author therefore portrays a kind of silence that has become significant.

The first time the word silence enters the narrative, it is used with a definite article (example 1) without prior mention of the item. One of the rules for the use of definite article is that it is used to refer to what the writer/speaker and the reader/listener have shared knowledge of. In the above example the author uses it to delineate the gloomy atmosphere in the house of Papa when he assaults Jaja. This presupposes that the author refers to a particular kind of silence that is a norm in the family. The conspicuous silence of Mama who comes in to clean up the mess without any sign of surprise at the damage of

the *eteregere* confirms this. Adichie exemplifies a typical patriarchal household in an Igbo society and Africa in general where the head of the family employs violence, abuse, and assault to enforce his authority on the wife and children thereby muting their voices. The author, therefore, refers to a kind of silence that Papa, the head of the family has over the years imposed on his wife and children through persistent violence and abuse. J. N. Ifechelobi who examines silence and voicelessness as tools of patriarchy in the novel avers, "In *Purple Hibiscus*, the author showcases how silence is used as a weapon of patriarchy." She explains further, "The members of Eugene Achike's household live in a deafening silence; they are friends of "silence" and practice silence wherever they go" (23). The author therefore advances that patriarchy, as an oppressive system, is perpetuated through the instrumentality of intimidation and violence to deny women of their right to speech.

The author also introduces silence this way as a unique stylistic strategy to create suspense. To corroborate this fact, Kambili, the narrator uses flashback to relate how her father has over the years used violence and abuses to mute their voices until their visit to Nsukka where they (Kambili and Jaja) found their voices then the silence began to be lifted.

Aside using the lexical item *silence* with the definite article, the author uses other phrases (simple and complex) to delineate the kind of silence in Papa's family. Below are examples:

8. an outer **silence** enveloped us all, shrouding us. (68)
9. I had never felt **the comfortable silence** we shared as we cleaned the rice, ... (251)
10. It was only Sisi who had cried in the household, loud sobs that had quickly quieted in the face of **our bewildered silence**. (293)
11. Papa asked every night at dinner, often after **a long stretch of silence**. (208)
12. A Different **Silence** (297)
13. **Silence** hangs over us, but it is **a different kind of silence**, one that lets me breathe. (309)

In these examples, silence is the noun head of the noun phrases. The author varies the recurrence of the lexical item by either pre-modifying or post-modifying it with adjectives and phrases from other word classes. The

stylistic effect of these modifications is that they reveal the extent to which silence pervades the house of the Papa. These descriptions also enable the narrator to give the reader an idea of different kinds of silence experienced by the family. She describes silence as being, 'heavy but comfortable', 'heavy and brooding', 'a long stretch', 'delicate', 'a different kind of', 'one that lets me breathe'.

Of the twenty-nine times the word silence entered the narrative, about twenty-one is used to refer to the family of Papa. The constant recurrence of the term is not accidental but a deliberate attempt to bring the theme to the fore. Interestingly, Adichie juxtaposes the gloomy atmosphere in the house of Papa with the freedom in Auntie Ifeoma's house. Kambili notes that there is always chattering and laughter in her house. This makes Kambili's and Jaja's silence conspicuous to all. The juxtaposition further foregrounds silence:

14. Her **laughter** floated upstairs, into the living room, where I sat reading. (79)
15. Mostly, my cousins did the **talking** and Auntie Ifeoma sat back and watched them, ... (128)
16. I heard her loud **laughter**, and it echoed and went on for a while. (100)
17. I did not realise it was my cousin's **laughter**, the sound reflecting their mother;" (100)
18. **Laughter** always rang out in Auntie Ifeoma's house, and no matter where the **laughter** came from, it bounced around all the walls, all the rooms. (148)

Kambili stresses that Auntie Ifeoma is cheerful, and assertive even when she whispers, it is usually loud.:

19. Auntie Ifeoma was whispering, too, but I heard her well. **Her whisper was like her – tall, exuberant, fearless, loud, larger than life.** (103)
20. Auntie Ifeoma's **whisper was back, fiercer, loud.** (103)

Auntie Ifeoma is the exact opposite of Mama who rarely speaks and when she does, according to Kambili, speaks in whispers. The comparison of these characters is a deliberate attempt by Adichie to project her ideal African woman in Auntie Ifeoma and repudiate stereotype in Mama.

When Kambili and Jaja visit Auntie Ifeoma and her family, she notes that even though they are not wealthy, they are happy. Most importantly, she is fascinated by the fact that the children are allowed to associate with others, freely express their opinion, and make constructive arguments. The author points out that all these are strange to Kambili and Jaja. They eventually find their voices amidst such freedom.

The Use of Silence as an Adjective (Silent)

The functions of adjectives can be classified into attributive, when they appear before the noun, and predicative when they occur as subject or object complements. Adjective is one of the most impressive descriptive strategy for presenting ideas, events, situations, characters' personality and psychological mood. Adichie employs this part of speech, copiously, to delineate her characters and situations. However, the concern of this study is on the derivation of silent, the adjective form of silence to further depict the degree of silence in the household of Papa. It enables a reader to perceive the psychological, emotional and physical turmoil of these characters in the narratives.

21. But after long **silent** minutes, (17)
22. We all stayed **silent** and listened to the "Ave Maria" on the cassette. (39)
23. Our steps on the stairs were as measured and as **silent** as our Sundays: (39)
24. yet I remained **silent**, grateful for Jaja's answers. (143)
25. The rest of us remained **silent** while Mama finished dishing out the food. (204)
26. But Jaja glued his eyes to the window, [...] he was **silent** until we got to Enugu. (257)
27. ... when we were seated, **silent** crying with tears running down my cheeks. (264)
28. Jaja remained **silent** for so long that I realized he was not going to give Kevin an answer, (266)
29. For a long **silent** moment, I could think of nothing. (294)
30. There is so much that is still **silent** between Jaja and me. (309)

Apart from intensifying the despondence in Papa's house, these adjectives reveal the author's creative ability.

The Use of Silence as an Adverb (Silently)

Adverbs are intensifiers and modifiers. Syntactically, they function as modifiers of verbs, adjectives and other adverbs. They constitute a series of overlapping subclasses, depending on their functions. Some adverbs belong to more than one subclass. In whichever way, their meanings are obvious as they provide information about the manner in which an action is performed, the time, place, frequency, purpose, direction etc. Their various functions necessitate their presence in narratives. The interest of this study is on how Adichie recast silence, a noun, into this word class to depict some action and activities among the household of Eugene. Below are examples:

31. We ate **silently**. (20)
32. I said no, and we sat **silently**, our hands clasped for a long time. (23)
33. Jaja and Mama and I waited for him, **silently**. (32)
34. Jaja and I turned and went back upstairs, **silently**. (66)
35. Instead I moved closer to Jaja and we stared at the painting, **silently**, for a very long time. (215)
36. Jaja looked at me **silently** for a while. (263)
37. The TV was off and we were all **silently** absorbed in our cards, ... (290)
38. He stops chewing and stares at me **silently** with those eyes that have hardened a little every month he has spent here; (308)

The inference from the above excerpts is that virtually every activity in the family is carried out in silence for fear of Papa, which informs Ogaga Okudaye's assertion that silence in Eugene's home is so magnified to the extent that it could be heard (247). The derivation of the adverb form of the lexical item silence brings to the fore the fact that silence dominates their activities. Kambili, the narrator points out that often times, they spoke more with their spirits than with their lips until their visit to Nsukka where they found their voices. In fact, one of the subtitles of the narrative is 'Speaking with Our Spirits.'

The Use of Silence as Verb

The word silence has four verb forms: silences, silencing, silenced and to silence and it means to make (someone or something) silent or to suppress criticism. In an informal way, *to silence* someone could also mean to kill. None of the forms is used by the author. However, she depicts several acts of silencing carried out in the novel. Apart from using threat, violence, oppression etc to silence, some characters are permanently silenced (killed). For instance, the fearless, assertive Auntie Ifeoma gets the sack, a way of silencing her for daring to criticise the university authority and government. Ade Coker, the courageous and assertive editor of *Standard*, suffers several arrests from the authority. When all attempts to silence him with the arrests fail, he is permanently silenced (eliminated) with a mail bomb. Through this character Adichie retells the story of Dele Giwa who was silenced with a mail bomb in 1986 by the then military Head of State for daring to criticise the corrupt practices prevalent in the country. Another character, Nwankiti Ogechi is 'wasted' in order to silence him. Ade Coker's daughter is traumatised and loses speech ability after witnessing the father's death. Papa is forever silenced by Mama's poison. Below are examples:

39. They said there is a list circulating, Ifeoma, of lecturers who are disloyal to the university. They said they might be fired. They said your name is on it." (227)
40. When he came back up, he told me soldiers had arrested Ade Coker as he drove out of the editorial offices of the *Standard*. (46)
41. I knew his arrest was because of the big cover story in the last *Standard*, a story about how the Head of State and his wife had paid people. (46)
42. Soldiers shot Nwankiti Ogechi in a bush in Minna. And then they poured acid on his body to melt his flesh off his bones, to kill him even when he was already dead. (207)
43. It rained heavily the day Ade Coker died, ... Ade Coker was blown up when he opened the package—a package everybody would have known was from the Head of State even if his wife Yewande had not said that Ade Coker looked at the envelope and said "It has the State House seal" before he opened it. (212)

These examples of silencing, clearly shows that the verb form of silence is actively deployed in the novel.

The Use of Synonyms of Silence: Quiet and Quietly

To further foreground **silence** in the novel, the author chooses synonyms of silence (quiet), and silently (quietly) to describe the actions and manners of Papa's family:

44. And why was papa drinking his tea **quietly**. (16)
45. Even our family time on Sunday was **quiet** (39)
46. "Jaja, you did not go to communion," Papa said **quietly**, almost a question. (14)
47. "Kambili is intelligent beyond her years, **quiet** and responsible." (46)
48. "They are always so quiet," he said, turning to Papa. "So **quiet**." (65)
49. "Imagine what the Standard would be if we were all **quiet**." (66)
50. He was still smiling as I **quietly** turned and went back to the bedroom. (176)
51. "See how your cousin sits **quiet** and watches?" (180)
52. It was only Sisi who had cried in the household, loud sobs that had quickly **quieted** in the face of our bewildered **silence**. (293)

Like *silence* and *silently*, *quiet* and *quietly* recur twenty (20) times of which eleven occurrences are used to describe Papa's household. Mama, Kambili and Jaja are reduced to mere reticent humans. The reticence of Kambili and Jaja is so noticeable by her teachers, peers, cousins and visitors like Ade Coker and Father Amadi. While Kambili's teacher describes her as quiet and responsible, her peers in school refer to her as "backyard snob". More demeaning is Amaka's opinion that they are 'abnormal' and 'strange'. In examples 48 and 49, Ade Coker, the editor of the Standard newspaper observes that they are extremely quiet and wonders what the newspaper would be like if everyone is quiet. Here, Coker is presented as assertive and bold enough to tell his boss, Eugene, what he thinks of his method of muzzling his children. Coker's assertion exposes the hypocrisy of Eugene, the owner of Standard to whom the "Amnesty World gave human right award" (13) because his editorial speaks the truth against injustice. Through the newspaper, he condemns the brutality and oppression

being meted out by the military rulers on the citizens, yet he muzzles his wife and children from expressing personal opinions.

The Use of Linguistic Parallelism

Kofi Yankson describes parallelism as “the use of pattern repetition in a literary text for a particular stylistic effect” (14). In parallelism an idea is used to balance a similar or contrasted idea. To achieve this, two or more phrases or clauses that have similar rhythm and grammatical structures are used side by side. Some of the words in the first phrase or clause are repeated in the second while others may vary or contrast. Because the parallel structures are put side by side, they invite the reader to search for meaning connections between the structures especially in the parts that varied. According to Short, “parallelism has the power not just to foreground parts of a text for us, but also to make us look for parallel or contrastive meaning links between those parallel parts” (15). One of the stylistic effects of parallelism is that it sets up a relationship of equivalence between linguistic items and urges a connection between them. It has rhetorical effect or emphasis concerning the structures repeated, and of course, it draws attention.

The use of parallel structures as descriptive strategy is a common feature of Adichie’s narratives. Several examples abound in the novel under study:

53. “Have you forgotten that Eugene offered to buy me a car, even before Ifediora died? But first he wanted us to send Amaka to convent school. He even wanted me to stop wearing makeup! I want a new car, nwunye m, and I want to use my gas cooker again and I want a new freezer and I want money so that I will not have to unravel the seams of Chima’s trousers when he outgrows them. But I will not ask my brother to bend over so that I can lick his buttocks to get these things. (103)

he wanted us to send Amaka to convent school He even wanted me to stop wearing make up!

I want +	a new car, nwunye m,
	to use my gas cooker again a new freezer
	money...

But I will not ask my brother to bend over so that I can lick his buttocks to get these things.

In the above example of parallel structure, Adichie depicts Auntie Ifeoma as a woman of strong-will who will not accept subjugation. Although Auntie Ifeoma has several needs, she refuses to be a puppet in the hand of Eugene, her brother, who has all she needs to make her comfortable. Auntie Ifeoma is indeed a woman that commands respect.

54. She cried for a long time. She cried until my hand, clasped in hers, felt stiff. She cried until Auntie Ifeoma finished cooking the rotting meat in a spicy stew. She cried until she fell asleep, her head against the seat of the chair. Jaja laid her on a mattress on the living room floor. (254)

She cried for a long time.

my hand, clasped in hers, felt stiff.

She cried until +

Auntie Ifeoma finished cooking the rotting meat in a spicy stew.

She fell as asleep, her head against the seat of the chair.

Jaja laid her on a mattress on the living room floor.

The excerpt above is another example of a parallel structure used to foreground the theme of domestic violence and abuse. In this scene, Mama narrates how she loses another pregnancy after Papa brutalises her. The narrator is not satisfied with just the first statement 'she cried for a long time' but uses the parallel structure to reinforce the anguish, pain and suffering of Mama. This abuse is the last straw that broke the camel's back as it did not only silence Mama further but results to her resolve to silence (eliminate) Papa, her oppressor.

Parallelism being an effective strategy for foregrounding themes is also employed to foreground silence:

55. Our steps on the stairs were as measured and as silent as our Sundays: the silence of waiting until Papa was done with his siesta so we could have lunch; the silence of reflection time, when Papa gave us a

scripture passage or a book by one of the early church fathers to read and meditate on; the silence of evening rosary; the silence of driving to the church for benediction afterwards. (39)

waiting until Papa was done with his siesta so we could have lunch;

reflection time, when Papa gave us a scripture passage or a book by

the silence of + one of the early church fathers to read and meditate on;

evening rosary;

driving to the church for benediction afterwards.

In the above sentence, Adichie uses parallel structure as a descriptive strategy to describe the kind of silence that hangs over the household of Papa. Leech succinctly states, "Linguistic parallelism is very often connected with rhetorical emphasis and memorability." (67) Here she underscores the fact that silence permeates their entire activities. Yankson notes that parallelism generally invests items in the same paradigm with the same value. As a result, all items that are paradigmatically related to each other on the one hand, and syntagmatically related to the same verb on the other, have a relationship of equivalence (8). In this case, apart from the repetition of the silence of, the four noun phrases that follow are made equal to each other in the sense that they are dimensions of activities which otherwise could have been carried out in different mood but are carried out in the same silent mood. The use of this device enables the author to foreground and reinforce the theme silence.

Conclusion

This study has investigated the repeated use of the word **silence** by Adichie in her novel *Purple Hibiscus*. We have shown that the author skilfully derived varied word classes of the lexical item (silence) chose appropriate synonyms and incorporated them in parallel structures without their being redundant. The study demonstrated that the choice of these varied forms of the word is not accidental but a deliberate attempt to foreground the theme of silence, one of the crucial messages in the novel. It also revealed the author's creative and impressive use of language.

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Application of the schema-theoretic approach in the interpretation of the stream of consciousness in Wole Soyinka's *The Interpreters*

Gerry O. Ayieko

Kenyatta University, Kenya

Email: gerryayieko@gmail.com

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Abstract

Wole Soyinka's novel *The Interpreters* (1965) is arguably one of the most challenging post-colonial novels to read and understand easily. The present paper adopts a pre-test post-test control group experimental treatment design. (Sixty university undergraduate students from three universities were selected and placed in two groups: experimental and control. 60 students from two hundred and thirty, 3 universities eighteen universities. The experimental group was taught using the schema theory and the control group was taught using the conventional method which entails whole class lecture, teacher led instruction. After the experimental treatment a pre-test and a post-test was administered. A *t-test* ruled out pre-experimental differences between the groups. A one-way Analysis of Variance (ANOVA) shows that there were statistically significant difference in comprehension level due to the Schema theory method. A multiple regression analysis established that different selected aspects of the stream-of-consciousness: interior monologue, association, montage, plot structure and myth and archetype contribute to the score. The study established that comprehension of stream of consciousness, as a literary technique can be investigated using schema theory.

Keywords: Schema, stream-of-consciousness, teaching literary comprehension, reading,

1.0 General introduction

1.1 The Novel '*The Interpreters*'

The Interpreters is a 1965 novel written by Wole Soyinka that depicts the life of young professionals in the newly independent Nigeria. The novel consists of a series of events and scenes following the experiences of young Nigerian intellectuals who have returned to the country after independence. Wole Soyinka was the first African to use the stream of consciousness as a narrative technique in the novel *The interpreters*.

John Anthony Bowden Cuddon (1984:660-1) points out that the stream of consciousness is a technique that tries "to depict the multitudinous thoughts and feelings which pass through the mind" It is characterised by haphazard presentation of the characters' thought and perception in an arbitrary manner without paying attention to the logical sequence, usual grammar, or discrepancies in the levels of reality. The technique works by giving a glimpse of the inside workings of the mind, hopping from one perspective to the other, jumping from impression to impression, or moving back and forth from one reflection to the subsequent. The variations of these elements in the character's mind are usually expressed in a flow of words without conventional transitions. A number of novelists such as James Joyce, Virginia Woolf and William Faulkner have used the stream of consciousness technique. There is also a wide array of visual, auditory, physical, tactile and subliminal impressions as the characters' thought are presented to the readers in the novel.

Diasamidze (2014:163) cites Stevenson (1992) who traces the term "Stream of Consciousness" to the philosopher and psychologist William James in *The Principles of Psychology* (James:1890):

"Consciousness, then, does not appear to itself as chopped up in bits ... it is nothing joined; it flows. A 'river' or a 'stream' are the metaphors by which it is most naturally described. In talking of it hereafter, let's call it the stream of thought, consciousness, or subjective life."

Brister (2010:86) points out that Humphrey (1954:4) in his classical work, *Stream of Consciousness in the Modern Novel*, investigated the use of Stream

of Consciousness in the two novels, *A Portrait of the Artist as a Young Man* and *Woolf's Mrs Dalloway*, according to seven patterns: The unities (time, place, character and action), leitmotifs, Symbolic structures, formal scenic arguments, Natural cyclical schemes (seasons, tides, etc) and theoretical cyclical schemes. DiBattista (2009) adds that the stream of consciousness allows Virginia Woolf in the novel *Dalloway* to capture the characters as they are without limiting them by categorization and definition. The narrative gets inside the minds of characters and describes their private experiences without the interruptive presence of a narrator's voice. Stream of consciousness is also referred to as Epiphany and Moment of Being by other writers.

Brister (2010:45) cites Humphrey (1954:4) definition of the "stream-of-consciousness novel" as a genre which is concerned with the "exploration of the pre-speech levels of consciousness for the purpose, primarily, of revealing the psychic being of the characters." This "technique" contrasts the others applied in the representation of consciousness, such as "direct interior monologue, indirect interior monologue, omniscient description, and soliloquy" which indicate various levels of authorial interference. Humphrey (1954:63) concludes that, "the stream-of-consciousness writer has to do two things: (1) the writer has to represent the actual texture of consciousness, and (2) the writer has to distil some meaning from it for the reader"

Hu (2016:16) cites James' 1893 definition that "consciousness as an uninterrupted 'flow': 'a 'river' or a 'stream' is the metaphor by which it is most naturally described. In talking of it hereafter, let us call it the stream of thought, consciousness, or subjective life." The term describes human psychological states as a stream which conceptualises human awareness as something that is in a state of flax or nebulous; it is a continuous current of feelings, impressions, illusions, dreams, half-formed thoughts, and consciousness in general. Consciousness is a continuum like time, and it is independent of time (cited in Stevenson: 1992). At any given point of time, an individual's consciousness is simultaneously focused on both the present as well as other dimensions of time. An individual may be living through a past experience while simultaneously dreaming about the future. There are two clocks in operation in the stream of consciousness novel: the clock of subjective consciousness and the mechanical clock-time. The stream-of-consciousness novelist tries to render the consciousness of his characters in its completeness including the mental processes without the least authorial intervention and

without ordering it into logical, lucid, and even grammatical narrative. Jaafar (2020:20) uses schema theory to show how the interaction between 'discourse world' and 'text world'. How readers can bring their own experience as well as their background knowledge to interact with the text and make interpretive connections.

Liman, Agu, Ofemile and Agu (2018) argue that critics and readers of *The Interpreters* have assessed it as a difficult text in terms of its language especially on the choice of lexical items and syntactic structure. The narrative structure is another aspect that has proved difficult considering that the plot structure of the novel employs the stream of consciousness which results in a broken chronology structure. Obi (1990) adds that *The Interpreters* is loose and plotless.

Soyinka's *The Interpreters* is more complex structurally [...]. The story is about five young Western-educated Nigerian intellectuals who attempt to explore themselves and interpret the homeland to which they have recently returned. The story (which is loose and virtually plotless) occurs in the two major cities of Lagos and Ibadan (403).

James, as cited in Stevenson (1992), distinguishes two levels of consciousness: the speech level and the pre-speech level. The speech level is part of communication orally or in writing while the pre-speech levels of consciousness is not censored, rationally controlled, or logically ordered. In the stream of consciousness fiction, the basic emphasis is placed on exploration of the pre-speech levels of consciousness for the purpose, primarily, of revealing the psychic being of the characters. This apparent plotless nature of the novel *The Interpreters* because of the stream of consciousness technique, which has eluded many critics including Chinweizu, Onwuchekwa and Madubiuke (1980) who claim that the novel is obscure and difficult. The present writer agrees with the view that novel is actually quite readable, however, for non-Nigerian readers of the text they have to activate the relevant schema to allow them process the text.

1.2 Schema theory and text comprehension

The present paper uses the schema theory to analyze the readers' interpretation of the various characters that move the fictional universe of

the novel *The Interpreters*. According to Eysenck and Keane (1990: 275) the central tenet of Schema theory is that comprehension crucially depends on the availability and activation of relevant prior knowledge. In other words, the readers comprehend and interpret the texts on the basis of their experiences. The readers of literary texts relate the current input to existing mental representations of entities and situations that they have experienced in the past. This is what the notion of schema tries to capture: a portion of background knowledge containing generic information about a particular type of object, person, setting or event. Schema theory postulates that all knowledge is organized into units. Within these units of knowledge, or schemata, is stored information. Rumelhart (1980:34) defines schema as "a data structure for representing the genetic concepts stored in memory." Stockwell (2006) cites Fillmore 1985 who states "the scene that a mind sees is far richer than the signals that the eyes see. Objects are foregrounded and backgrounded, common objects are treated conceptually as unitary features, the mind can understand that objects that disappear behind other objects maintain their conceptual integrity and will emerge when the occluding object has passed on. Relationships that are not actually seen are inferred and filled into the 'frame' of visual perception." Anderson (1977: 369) adds that, "every act of comprehension involves one's knowledge of the world as well". Sanford and Garrod (1981) define "scenario" as a schema that is used for situational knowledge. Schank and Abelson (1977) add that a "script" is a temporally ordered schema; it describes a reader's knowledge of stereotypical goal-oriented event sequences. Schank and Abelson add that a restaurant scripts have "slots" that describe roles "(customers, waiters etc.), "props" (menu, table, etc.), "entry conditions" (customer is hungry, restaurant has food, etc.) and "results" (customer is no longer hungry; restaurant has less food, etc.). These are useful models in comprehending the stream of consciousness in a novel.

The style adopted by Wole Soyinka presents the readers with challenges especially the non- West Africans. To understand this novel one needs an eclectic approach that combines two perspectives: stream of consciousness and schema theory which is an explanation of how readers use prior knowledge to comprehend and learn from text (Rumelhart, 1980). The central principle of schema theory is the assumption that a written text does not carry meaning by itself. On the contrary, the text only provides directions for readers as to how they should recover or create meaning from their own hitherto acquired knowledge. This previously knowledge is called the readers' background

knowledge (prior knowledge), and the previously acquired knowledge structures are called schemata (Barrlett, 1932; Adams and Collins, 1979; Rumelhart, 1980). The schemata of a reader are organized in a hierarchical manner, with the most general at the top down to the most specific at the bottom. As Anderson (1977: 369) point out, "every act of comprehension involves one's knowledge of the world as well." Works like Wole Soyinka's *The Interpreters* are indeed revolutionary in the history of English fiction in general and the history of commonwealth literature in particular. In the recent past *The Interpreters* has received a considerable amount of attention from a literary and stylistic point of view. Ufot (1991) conducted a stylistic criticism of the novel alongside three other works by Soyinka and established the novel was not as obscure. Makau (2000) was a critical analysis of the techniques of narrative crafting used by Wole Soyinka in his novel *The Interpreters*. Omolo (2002) examined the role of deictic features in the discourse structure of *The Interpreters*.

The aim of this study is to show that readers apply schema theory in interpreting the narrative technique "stream of consciousness in his novel *The Interpreters*. Soyinka has employed the stream of consciousness to portray the characters' 'consciousness'. Also, this study attempts to introduce Wole Soyinka's contributions to develop the stream of consciousness and gives the character's portrayal into their consciousness. The readers' interpretation of the technique is analysed using the schema theory. The present papers focuses on the broken chronology technique, in particular, it draws upon insights from Stream of consciousness and Schema Theory in order to examine aspects of the semantic potential of the text through an analysis of various transition events in the text.

1.3 The stream of consciousness technique

The Stream of Consciousness is a stylistic device which has been employed by a number of novelists in the twentieth century to depict the thoughts and feelings of characters.

Friedman (1955:3) says "the stream of consciousness novel should be regarded as the one which has as its essential concern the exploitation of a wide area of consciousness, generally the entire area, of one or more characters". There are a number of techniques or devices that a writer can use to represent

the stream of consciousness. These include: interior monologues, association, montage, plot structure, myth, and archetype.

The first techniques is interior monologue, according to Cuddon (1999:422), is "recording the continuum of impressions, thought and impulses either prompted by conscious experience or arising from the well of the subconscious." It is a device of self-revelation where the character recollects about his state, about his situation and surrounding. Virginia Woolf employs this device in her novel *To the Light House* to show the inner life of her characters. *The Interpreters* is set in bars and nightclubs and other social "watering holes" in Ibadan and Lagos and interpret the Nigerian reality. The novel gravitates around the group of intellectuals, all been-tos and close friends. They have returned home from years of study abroad with very high expectations and a vision of their roles as key drivers in the process of building the new nation. No sooner have they embarked on their individual and collective visions than do they realise the rot and corruption that has riddled the new Nigerian nation. On being blatantly victimized by the corrupt forces they metamorphose into a different variety of intellectual and psychological changes occur in them as they 'interpret' the modern African reality. Their long stay abroad has given objectivity to their observations and authenticity to their 'interpretation.' The novel consists of a series of interior monologues around the lives of the different characters.

Stevenson(1992:32) defines free indirect speech as a "technique of presenting a character's voice partly mediated by the voice of the author" (or, reversing the emphasis, "that the character speaks through the voice of the narrator") with the voices effectively merged'. This is achieved through three devices: direct speech, indirect speech and free-indirect speech. Sotirova (2004: 216) defines free indirect discourse as a mode of discourse presentation which mergers "deictic and modal features of two projected discourse, the narrator's and the character's". Fludernik (1993:70) adds that free indirect speech "prominently include automatic gear shifting between narration and characters' minds, usually in the interests of empathy and narratorial inconspicuousness." McHale(2014) points that in indirect speech (ID), the narrator is much more evidently in control. Here the inset is grammatically subordinated to the framing utterance, with person, tense, and deixis adjusted to conform to those of the frame this is in contrast to free indirect speech.

The second device in stream-of-consciousness is association of the sensory impression, which can be combined with both interior monologue and free indirect speech. Cuddon and Habib (1991: 289) point out that in this technique a word, an idea or an image can act as a stimulus to a series or a sequence of other words, ideas, or images which are not necessarily connected in a logical relationship. It represents the stream-of-consciousness technique at its most fluid and fragmented state, as it seeks to convey a character's sensual experience and impressions at the hardly conscious, verbalized level. It strives to verbalise the pre-verbal state of the human psyche. It is often presented as a list of successive impressions. A frequent theme that is often engaged as a scaffolding device is the use of particular images associated in the case of Soyinka these are water images, which prevent the series of impressions and the associations they give rise to from deviating too far outside the boundaries of the narrative.

The third device is the use of montage as a literary term intensely metaphorises formless, free, a chronological, intersecting, and fluid nature of thoughts and feelings contained in the mental landscape of a character in the novel. Humphrey (1968:49) adds that montage is a set of devices to show interrelation association of ideas, such a rapid succession of images or superimposition of the images or the surrounding of a focal image by related ones. Daiches points out that there are two main methods of montage: time and space.

Fried (1955:58) points out that “time montage means the protagonist can think about past, present and future things at the same time. Jones (1973) points out the chronological time covered by the first seven chapters of the novel is twenty-four hours but the psychological time shuttles between the past and the present in the mind and memories the characters. The stream of thoughts that opens the novel *The Interpreters* takes Egbo years back to a time when he had to forfeit the Osa throne this is juxtaposed with Sekoni reveries of his return from overseas and the high expectations that he had as newly qualified engineer. The reader is taken through the mental landscape of the characters in a kaleidoscopic manner in the entire novel. In time montage “the subject remains fixed in space, while time [or consciousness] moves over” and the character montage represents the multiple “discordant qualities” and aspects of human life (Dobie 1971: 413-414).

Fried (1955:58) adds “space montage means the fiction can show different spaces at the same time.” The time is fixed while the spatial elements that keep moving from place to place. Dobie (1971: 413) cites Robert Humphrey “the use of montage suspends ordinary or conventional rules of time, space, or personality, making possible the shifting and intermingling of what are usually conceived to be opposites”

The fourth device is the plot structure stream-of –consciousness that is characterised by the continuous flow of sense-perceptions, thoughts, feelings, and memories in the character’s mind which gives text a forward and backward movement. One of the aspects of *The Interpreters* that has not received attention, however, is that of the different roles fulfilled by the passing of time and awareness of time in the novel. *The Interpreters* is ambitious in both its temporal dimensions and the physical latitude; the events in the novel actually unfold over the course of a four-day period. It is a literary technique of expressing the amalgamation of mental processes in fictional characters as an unpunctuated or fragmented form of interior monologue. The main difference between this technique and the conventional prose narrative is in its structure. The series of sentences have a low level of coherence as there is no explicit link of the logical progression. The sentences may be more molten, adhering less rigorously to proper grammar, often starting and ending abruptly. The order of sentences may be characterised by seemingly haphazard leaps from topic to topic, as the central character is side-tracked by some outside impression or one idea triggers off another. Stream of consciousness narrative thus often requires more work from the reader than conventional prose. In return, the reader gains additional perception into how the character experiences the world from within. Wole Soyinka employs this structure in writing *The Interpreters*.

The fifth device in the stream of consciousness is the use of myths and archetypes. Wole Soyinka draws his creative inspiration from Yoruba mythology and oral literature and the narrative structure of the novel *The Interpreters* has been influenced by his devotion and admiration for the Yoruba god, Ogun. Soyinka (1976) asserts that according to Yoruba mythology, the gods once lived in union here on earth with human beings, and their relationship with mortals was marked by camaraderie and mutual regard for one another. However, either through rebellion or disobedience on the part of mortals, the gods withdrew into the heavens. A long isolation from the world of mortals brought about an “immense chaotic growth which

had sealed off by the reunion between mortals and the gods ". The gods tried unsuccessfully to demolish this impassable barrier, until Ogun, "armed with the first technical instrument which he had forged from the ore of mountain-wombs" triumphantly hacked a passage through the chaotic growth to reunite the gods with humans. He thus earned the appellation

"the first creative energy, the first challenger and conqueror of transition" (J 45???)

The abyss of transition, as Soyinka explains it, is a conceptual aspect of existence, defining the area between and around the worlds of the gods, the ancestors, the living, and the unborn in Yoruban traditional worldview. The pathway Ogun hacked to reopen the road between the gods and mortals, thus establishing his primacy as the god of the road, is the link allowing the contemporaneous experience of, and continuity between, one area of existence and another in Yoruba worldview. Ogun occupies all the four stages simultaneously and traverses freely from one state to the next. The aspect of intertextuality also comes into play in this aspect of the stream-of-consciousness.

(Rumelhart,1980:Carrell and Eisterhold,1988) opine that an oral or written text does not have any meaning in and of itself, instead, a text directs the readers concerning how they should retrieve and construct meaning from their own previously acquired knowledge of the reader is known as his/ her background knowledge. According to schema theory, there needs to be union between the text and the readers' background knowledge in order for comprehension to occur. There are three areas of schema that played a part in the reading comprehension process, which are: linguistic schemata, formal schemata, and content schemata. (1) Linguistic schema refers to linguistic knowledge, which is the knowledge of phoneme, vocabulary, phrase, paragraph, sentence structure, grammar, and cohesive structure, etc, which play a basic role in a comprehensive understanding of the text. Linguistic stage is the first step in the whole listening process, during which the listener mainly focuses on the meaning of words, phoneme, pronunciation and syntax.(2) Formal schemata refers to the knowledge of organizational forms and rhetorical structures of a discourse. (3) Content schema deals with the knowledge relative to the content domain of the text, including systems of factual knowledge, values and cultural conventions. Language is not only the simple combination of vocabulary, grammar points and sentence structures, but also the bearer of different levels of the culture.

Therefore, the content schemata can facilitate the readers' comprehension of a text, enabling them to predict, choose information and remove ambiguities.

2.0 Thesis statement

There is a dearth of information on how schema affects undergraduate students' reading comprehension of texts by non-Kenyan writers. Reading comprehension is a very diverse area that sits at the intersection of literary criticism, text linguistics, psycholinguistics, and language teaching. Schema play a critical role in the process of literary text comprehension by providing a framework that guides the readers in the process of organizing and interpreting the information they are reading. Schemas are actually developed during the process of text comprehension. Good readers are to generate inference and make connections between the different parts of the text that they are reading. Unfortunately, the Kenyan literature syllabus and linguistics syllabus the idea of teaching aspects that activate schemas in text comprehension is overlooked at undergraduate level. The result is that undergraduate students without schema are unable to infer because making inferences involves creating meaning that is not explicitly stated by the author. Good readers use clues in the text plus their personal insights and experiences to make meaning of the text. The process of teaching students with a schema activation paradigm where the term schema is mentioned to facilitate metacognition and helping them focus on specific stimulus will helps the poor students to proceed to the elaboration stage, this is also known as inferencing (Payne, 2015). Therefore, the purpose of this research project is to investigate empirically how Kenyan University undergraduate students build schema following sessions on training on schema activation theory.

3.0 Methodology

This section presents the methods that was used in the collection, analysis and interpretation of the data.

3.1 Research design

A pre-test post-test control group experimental treatment design with random assignment was used employed (Kathuri and Pals 1993; Best and Khan 2006 ; Hatch and Farhady; 1981). The present design had two groups: the

experimental, which was taught the stream of consciousness technique using the schema theory while the control just read the novel in the conventional approach.

3.2 Population

The population was the students studying Bachelor of Arts (literature) in selected public universities in Kenya.

3.3 Sample

A sample of sixty students were selected from three universities: Egerton, Moi and University of Eastern Africa, Baraton in Kenya. This was in the 2001/2002 academic year and for ethical reason the researcher used the intact classes as constituted. At the end of the study, twenty students were picked from each university for further data analysis.

3.4 Location

The research was conducted at Egerton University, Njoro, Nakuru County Kenya, Moi University, Uasin Gishu County, Kenya and University of Eastern Africa, Baraton, Nandi County Kenya.

3.5 Instrumentation

The researcher developed a fifty-item multiple choice paper and pencil test that captured the five main devices of the stream of consciousness that are found in the novel *The Interpreters* mainly: interior monologue: direct speech and indirect speech, association, montage, plot structure and myth and archetype.

3.5.1 Reliability of the instrument

The instrument was initially pilot tested at Lakipia College Campus, Egerton University. Following revision it was administered to the students at both the Njoro and Laikipia campuses of Egerton University. The instrument had a Cronbach's coefficient of +0.93 which the researcher considered to be adequate this is in line with the recommendation of (Koul 1984; Gall,M , Borg,

W and Gall, J 1996) who recommend that a coefficient of +0.80 is adequate for most research purposes.

3.5.2 Validity

Construct validity was established using factor analysis. The scores of the subjects were subjected to confirmatory factor analysis to identify which underlying factors measured the observed variables in the test. The first ten questions dealt with interior monologue had a correlation coefficient of .73. The second set of ten questions dealt with association has a coefficient of .70. The third set of ten questions dealing with montage had a coefficient of .82. The fourth set of ten questions dealt with plot structure had a coefficient of .76 and finally last ten questions dealt with myth and archetypes had a coefficient of .71.

3.6 Data analysis and Interpretation

An independent sample t-test was conducted on the prior to the test in order to establish any pre-existing difference and Analysis of Variance (ANOVA) was conducted to determine the difference between the two groups on the post. A multiple regression was run to test the contribution of each of the devices in the Literary Comprehension Test (LCT).

4.0 Results

The methods that were used for data analysis were t-test, one way ANOVA and multiple regression, which was done using Statistical Package for Social (SPSS) version 20. The

4.1 *t*-test of the pre-test scores

The pre-test scores of the students on LCT shows that there was no statistically significant difference between the two groups prior to the study.

Table 1. Independent samples t-test of the pre-test scores of LCT

Group 1, N = 30; Group 2, N = 30					
Variable	Group	Mean	Standard deviation	t- value	P- value
LCT	1	23.50	2.30	1.65	0.105(ns)
	2	24.20	2.40		

4.2 ANOVA of the LCT post-test scores

Table 2: Regression model summary

Model Summary

Model	R	R Square	Adjusted R Square	Std. Error of the Estimate
1	.914 ^a	.835	.820	1.12294

a. Predictors: (Constant), Interior Monologue, Association, Montage, Plot Structure, Myth and Archetype

The overall model fit was $R^2=0.82$ which shows that it was able to explain 82% of the variance in the study which is quite high and acceptable.

Table 3. Analysis of variance (ANOVA) results of the post-test scores of the LCT.

	Sum of squares	df	Mean square	F	P - value
Between groups	345.56	5	69.11	54.80	0.00 (s)
Within groups	68.09	54	1.26		
Total	413.65	59			

s = significant at $p < 0.05$.

The results, in table 3, indicate that the model was a significant predictor of CLT score

$F(5, 54) = 54.80, p=0.001$.

4.3 Multiple regression analysis of CLT scores

Multiple regression is used to examine how the stream-of-consciousness as literary, which is taught using Schema theory can be predicted, based on the use of interior monologue, association, montage, plot structure and myth and archetypes on readers CLT score.

Table 4. Multiple regression of the variables in the Stream-of Consciousness**Coefficients^a**

Unstandardized coefficients					
	B	Std. Error	Betat		Sig
Constants	8.98	.918		9.78	0.00
1. Interior Monologues	.236	.088	.436	2.68	0.00
2. Association	.262	.101.	.486	2.60	0.00
3. Montage	.128	.088	.151	1.47	0.00
4. Plot structure	-.240	.068	-.487	-3.54	0.01
5. Myth and Archetype	..259	.081	.324	3.21	0.02

a. Dependent Variable: Posttest

A multiple regression, table 4 above, established that interior monologue, association, montage, plot structure, myth, and archetype as devices of the stream-of-consciousness could significantly predict readers' CLT scores. The regression equation for predicting stream-of-consciousness as a literary technique applied by Wole Soyinka in *The Interpreters* as indicated by CLT scores $Y = .24x_1 + .26x_2 + .13x_3 - .24x_4 + .26x_5$.

5.0 Discussion

The results of the regression analysis show that instructional strategies based on the Schema Theory, can be applied to the literary text comprehension in the teaching-learning situations. Its ability to explain how numerous and different types of knowledge is learned and to suggest appropriate instructional strategies also makes the *Schema Theory* an effective and applicable rationale for literary analysis. This is line with the findings Khodadaddy (1997), Ayieko(2003) and Khodadady, Alavi and Khaghaninezhad (2012). Schema theory has a positive impact on the readers' score on CLT. As background to the analysis of the role of schemata in the comprehension and interpretation of *The Interpreters*, a synopsis of the main narrative events is presented, with specific focus on the indicators of shift in time as part of the stream of the consciousness events.

The first device Wole Soyinka uses is the interior monologues: which consists of direct and indirect speech extensively in *The Interpreters* since it

has no central plot. Interior monologues allows the presentation of a sequence of dramatic scenes and lyric descriptions that do not follow achronological line, interrupted by periodic flashbacks and recollections, during the rainy season in Nigeria from May through July. The action shifts from Lagos and the university city of Ibadan to the back country and lagoons outside populated areas. The main characters are university graduates, who have studied and travelled abroad and have just returned to Nigeria because of the country's newly obtained independence. The novel delves into the psyche of the main characters using the stream of consciousness narrative technique to depict their trains of thought as they try to interpret and make sense of the situations they find themselves in and the new Nigerian state as well.

The second device in the CLT is use of association in *The Interpreters* is quite extensive and a signal of major transition in the novel. Adejare (1992:19) points out that the rainstorm in the opening causes commotion in Club Cambana is that if one considers this as even (0) then the following events flow from it: 1) Egbo and his friends visit Osa. 2) Egbo's childhood is Osa. 3) Osa descendants prompt Egbo to accept title. 4) Highlife band stops playing, Opala band takes over. 5) Egbo's childhood in Oshogbo, visit to Osun shrine. 6) Sagoe remembers Sir Derinola, late judge and Chairman of his newspaper board. 7) Kola sketches Owolobi, the positive. 8) Sekoni returns home an engineer. Water imagery and association is a common thread in these incidents that propel the narrative forward and not the chronological link readers would expect: the rain water, river where Egbo's drowned, Oshun is a river deity, the title Egbo turns down is the river deity title, Sekoni returns from Europe in ship and not flying. The other association is visual, there are certain sights that take us to the mind of different characters in *The Interpreters*.

The third device is the use of time montage and space montage to enhance the Stream-of-consciousness in *The Interpreters* which is when the protagonist can think about past, present and future things at the same time. Wole Soyinka employs this when the novel opens at the Club Cambana and that is where the first four chapters of the novel focus on exclusively. The readers who were taught using the schema theory responded with a greater level of accuracy to question that dealt with this aspect of the novel. There is shifting points of view in time and space; the multiplicity of narrative voices; the narrative-within-a-narration; the delayed information that helps the revision of previous judgment so that only at the end with the full assemblage

of evidence, information and points of view, can the reader make full judgment when they are aware of the story schema.

The fourth factor in the stream of consciousness technique that contributes to the textuality of *The Interpreters* is the plot structure. Makau (2000:13) cites the distinction made by the Russian formalist between the *fabula*: the temporal-causal sequence of events (the story stuff) and the *sujet* or the narrative structure. The former is the sum of the motif while the latter is the artistic presentation of the same. The story schema helps the readers to get a clear picture of the two in the novel. The structure of *The Interpreters* is quite simple, part one begins at the night clubs where Soyinka employs the Stream-of-consciousness throughout the entire novel as he narrates incidents, presents a mental landscape of characters abandon it midway, goes ahead to give a different angle of the same and after series of other narrations. He then goes back and picks up either the earlier suspended incident or from another earlier scene or event further back in time from where it is left off. The relationship between Egbo and Simi can serve to illustrate this where Egbo's encounter with Simi is the focus of chapter four. The encounter and the subsequent sexual entanglement is vividly described to the point of Egbo's climax and its satiated aftermath. (59). This love scene is then suspended for further narration alongside that of Sagoe and Dehinwa in Chapter Five. The next four chapters: Chapter five to eight, the narrative revolves round Sagoe, Dehinwa, Chief Winsala, Sir Derinnola, Sekoni, Joe Golder, Mathias, Kola, and Noah the thief. In Chapter nine the narrative returns to Egbo once more, however his first sexual encounter with Simi – the incident left hanging in Chapter four is not dealt with. There is a flashback that take the reader back to Chapter 1 when Egbo is depicted ruminating over his choice to retain his job at the foreign office rather than listen to the call of tradition by becoming the king of Osa. The flashback returns Egbo to think of Simi. There is a transition that is forced when the reader is returned to the story of Egbo's first sexual baptism with Simi continues from where it is jettisoned in Chapter four (124). The scene illustrates the Stream-of consciousness technique that Soyinka adopted in writing *The Interpreters*.

The second part of *The Interpreters* starts at the club just like in the first part where the interpreters are gathered to discuss the death of one of their own, Sekoni. Lazarus who the reader first encountered in chapter eight finds them to the club and tells them the story of his. Chapter twelve chronologically

follows the preceding one in terms of the *fabula*. Prophet Lazarus invites the interpreters to his church where Noah the pick-pocket of chapter eight is installed as an apostle. It also flashback to Sagoe who is presented in chapter five. Chapter thirteen, is a rather disjointed in-terms of its *fabula* and Sagoe is the fulcrum chapter. He meets meets Joe Golder who is introduced in chapter six. Golder, the homosexual, makes sexual advances to Sagoe. Chapter fifteen is related chapter three and ten through the characters: Kola and Bandele who are guests of the Faseyis. The interpreters engage one another in conversations where Oguazor's hypocrisy is contrasted with Monica Faseyi's sincerity. In chapter fifteen, Egbo and Kola flashback to the fight which inspired Sekoni's "The Wrestler", mentioned in chapter six. They later return to Lazarus' church to pick up Noah whom Kola intends to use as model for Esumare, the rainbow, in the Pantheon, but rain has washed away Lazarus' church. Chapter seventeen Egbo and Bandele are the main thread that links the various incidents narrated in the earlier chapters. Bandele rouses Egbo from Simi's place to announce Noah's death. Noah fell from the top floor of a high-rise block because of Joe Golder's sexual advances which frightened him. In the final chapter just like in chapters one and eleven, most of the characters are brought together. It is the climax with the opening of a joint exhibition by late Sekoni and Kola where the Wrestler and the Pantheon are on show. Golder sings during the interlude and the University dons regale each other with the latest scandals on campus.

The fifth device that illustrate stream-of-consciousness in *The Interpreters* is the use of Yoruba myth and archetype in the. Soyinka (1976) points out that he draws own cultural heritage is Yoruba. Drawing from its fascinating and complex mythology, Soyinka concentrates on two central events. One is the disintegration of primal oneness, which he calls Orisa-nla. In the beginning, only Orisa-nla existed, with his servant Akunda; in a moment of revolution or treachery, depending on the point of view, Akunda rolled a boulder down the back of Orisa-nla, shattering him into the fragments that became the human race and the gods of the Yoruba pantheon; god and humanity were thenceforth separated from one another. Among these individuated gods, two stand out, Obatala and Ogun, as aspects of the original oneness. The most important god for Soyinka, however, is Ogun, whose story is central to the plot in *The Interpreters* and whose complex character makes him the most complete symbol of the original oneness. Most simply, he is the god of creation and destruction, and he is incarnate in humankind. Makau (2000:2) points out the extensive use of Biblical allusion with figures and names of people in the Bible

such as Lazarus, Barabbas, and Noah etc. Soyinka also refers to 'Esau cheated of his birth right..' (180)

Conclusion

The stream of consciousness as a style does enhance the communication of the author and the readers have to be aware of it in order for them to get the gist of the message that is being communicated by the text. A multiple regression analysis established that different selected aspects of the stream-of-consciousness: interior monologue, association, montage, plot structure, myth, and archetype all contribute to the score on the TLC. The study established that comprehension of stream of consciousness, as a literary technique can be investigated using schema theory.

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Voicing the Silence of the Stigmatised: Communication with the Landscape in Selected Poems of Thomas Hardy and Gerard Manley Hopkins

Eric Ngea Ntam

The University of Maroua, Cameroon

Email: ngeaeric@yahoo.co.uk

DOI: <https://doi.org/10.56907/goplkurs>

Abstract

Most human beings continue to erroneously claim speech and communication as exclusive attributes of the supposed superior human race, presumably due to humanity's adherence to the dominant anthropocentric teachings of the Great Chain of Being. The voices or articulations of other living beings such as animals, birds, insects and the flora (trees and grass), here considered as the stigmatised are ignored or simply rendered inexistent by humans. This paper investigates the communicative abilities of landscape beings as delineated in selected poems of Thomas Hardy and Gerard Manley Hopkins. It adopts the ecocritical views of Cheryll Glotfelty, Christopher Manes and Michael J. McDowell to argue that the notion speech and communication is not limited to humans. The paper stresses that non-human beings are endowed with the ability to communicate and that it is possible for humans to learn the language of other beings for mutual communication. It further stresses that an understanding of the speech and communication potentials of the non-human neighbours of humankind would trigger a reconsideration of the 'inferior' position human beings have ascribed to other creatures. The paper emphasises that keen observation of the behaviour, facial expressions and postures of non-humans would facilitate the understanding of their language and communication. It equally sees Manes' and McDowell's ecocritical discourses as suitable perspectives to be adopted in order to fill the existing communication gap between humans and other landscape beings. The paper concludes that mutual communication between landscape beings would curb the indifference, negligence and, above all, the cruelty the supposed stigmatised 'inferior' non-human beings endure from human beings.

Keywords: voice, communication, humans, articulation, landscape beings

Introduction

From the emergence of ecocriticism in the 1980s as a literary theory to emphasise the relationship between ‘literature and the environment’ (*Fromm* 1996: x), there has been the need to reconsider the images of nature, or preferably of the landscape, depicted in literary works. It is important to begin by stating that the adoption of ‘landscape’ as an ecocritical terminology in this paper is indebted to Michael J. McDowell’s (1996) distinction between ‘nature’ and ‘landscape’ when the ecocritic observes:

Nature writers have traditionally been marginalized in literary studies as those who ignore humans (and hence probably ignore “the humanities”) and deal instead with wild plants and creatures. Whereas in popular usage *nature* is “out there” somewhere, landscape is unavoidable; it’s all around us and under our feet. The term landscape ... suggests inevitable interaction and mutual influencing of humans and the nonhuman world in ways the term *nature* doesn’t. (387-8)

This holistic standpoint of viewing the landscape is echoed in the catchy opening sentences of Thomas Hardy’s *Under the Greenwood Tree*, when the narrator states, “[T]o dwellers in a wood almost every species of tree has its voice as well as its feature. At the passing of the breeze the fir-trees sob and moan no less distinctly than they rock; the holly whistles as it battles with itself” (Hardy 1930: 1). ‘Dwellers in a wood’ here suggests the mutual relationship between all creatures in the landscape. Hardy’s perception of the sounds produced by the cited creatures equally hints at the objective of this paper. The narrator here insinuates the communicative ability of nonhuman beings as well as the inextricable features humans (dwellers in a wood) share with all other creatures in the ecosystem. Such an understanding necessitates a revision of the indifference, negligence and subjugation the latter endures from some humans (city dwellers); and these flaws could be blamed on human ignorance and the unreceptive attitude to the place of other living beings in the environment that accommodates all beings – human and nonhuman.

The thrust of this paper therefore is to investigate Hardy’s and Hopkins’s poetic perception and depiction of other natural creatures in the [L]andscape (my emphasis) as beings that mutually share in the collective ‘beingness’

of all existence possess expressive and inspirational powers. The paper equally probes into McDowell's ecocritical position to underscore how the communicative skills of the natural beings could be perceived and transcribed as depicted in the poems.

Commenting on Hardy's acquaintance with his environment and the activities of natural creatures in his surroundings, Michael Millgate (2004) reveals that Hardy "knew ... and possessed an extraordinary sensitivity to the sights, the smells, and especially the sounds of the countryside at every hour of the day or night" (33). On her part, Catherine Phillips (2007) observes that Hopkins placed a lot of stress on the beauty of nature as reflected in his poetry. According to Phillips, the "poems are full of that close observation and love of 'wild or natural beauty'" and this wild "had come to have spiritual significance as a channel of communication with God" (186). Both Hardy and Hopkins have thus been described as nature poets who both depict in detail the ecological and inspirational vitality of the natural environment and frowns at humans for neglecting and cruelly destroying the eco-physical landscape with the non-human creatures.

Florence Hardy states that between 1926-28 Hardy "recalled how, crossing the eweleaze when a child, he went on hands and knees and pretended to eat grass in order to see what the sheep would do. Presently he looked up and found them gathered around in a close ring, gazing at him with astonished faces" (Hardy 1970: 444). Like Hardy, Tomalin (2006) portrays Hardy's closeness to natural beings when she points out that Hardy took time to learn "to read the noises of the fields and woods, the bark of the fox, 'its three hollow notes' sounding at precise intervals of a minute, and the sound of game birds rising to their roots at dusk, 'cracked-voiced cock-pheasants' 'cu-uck, cuck', and the wheezy whistle of the hens" (33). It is through the keen observation of his second wife's chickens that Hardy understood their suffering and had to instruct the gardener at Max Gate (his home) "to build a shelter to protect them from the cold," a reaction which became the subject of the poem "An Unkindly May" (Millgate 2004: 568).

Like Hardy, Hopkins draws invaluable inspiration through observing the activities of natural beings, which he visualises and contemplates in his poetry as existing in unity. This unity is identified in his early poetry, that is, the poems written between 1875 to 1877 as "poems of nature and God"

and “poems of God and man” (1877-1883) and finally from 1884 to his death as “poems of desolation and recovery” (Ryan 2004, 9). Poems dealing with nature and God include the poet’s reaction to the existence of communication between God, humans, animals, trees, the sea, birds, waterfalls, the sky, and the landscape as a whole. Kitchen (1989), White (1992), and Mariani (2008) provide an instance when Hopkins came close to understanding both the plight and language of a cat in danger:

A week before Christmas 1871 Hopkins was disturbed around midnight by a cat mewing in the distance. He found the sad cries unbearable and went in search of their source. Stuck on a window-sill over a sink he found a kitten, which he rescued and tried to lead towards the kitchens. It followed him down the stairs, but each time they turned sharply into a new flight it would run back and try to lick him through the banisters. He made a note of the incident in his journal because he was touched by the kitten’s gratitude. In fact it was probably hungry as much as grateful, but it is perhaps significant that its action so impressed Hopkins. (Mariani 2008: 106)

An instance such as this, which demonstrates Hopkins’s concern for nonhuman beings portrays that Hopkins, like Hardy, was sensitive to the plights of non-humans. This altruism influenced both poets to learn the language of nonhumans as well as attempt to communicate with the beings. The poetry could thus be used to underscore two points. Firstly, to buttress McDowell’s criticism of “many recent postmodernist critical theories” for not only sidelining the nonhumans but becoming “so caught up in analyses of language that the physical world, if not denied outright, often is ignored or dismissed as relatively unimportant” (McDowell 1996: 372). Secondly, to revise the awkward and ignorant misconception that nonhuman beings are mute creatures that cannot communicate.

Towards Undermining Imposed Muteness

The invaluable role the landscape and all its constituents play in universal survival calls for an eclectic and global voice to speak out for their recognition and preservation. Cheryll Glotfelty (1996) proposes that it is necessary for literary scholars to get involved in the endeavour to raise awareness about the

welfare of the universe through “the study of the relationship between literature and the physical environment” by fostering “an earth-centred approach to literary studies” (Glotfelty 1996: xviii). Glotfelty draws a distinction between ‘environmental’ and ‘ecological’ studies when she underlines that while on the one hand ‘enviro-’ suggests anthropocentrism and dualism – entailing human superiority over “everything that is not us, the environment,” ‘Eco-’ on the other hand intimates “interdependent communities, integrated systems, and strong connections among constituent parts” (Glotfelty 1996: xx). For her, ecocritical works, regardless of the appellation, have as motivation the desire to call attention to the menace of a devastating catastrophe observable in humans’ ever-increasing extermination of species and destruction of the earth. An understanding of ecocriticism, the ecocritic argues, should proceed from asking questions such as “How is nature represented in this sonnet? What role does the physical setting play in the plot of this novel, are the values expressed in this play consistent with ecological wisdom? How do our metaphors of the land influence the way we treat it? How can we characterize nature writing as a genre?” (Glotfelty 1996: xvii-ix).

The ecocritic implores literary scholars to examine mainstream genres, identify fiction and poetry writers whose work manifests ecological awareness, so that while historians, for example, write ‘environmental histories’ and study “the reciprocal relationships between humans and land,” literary scholars on their part “should, by means of questioning value, meaning, tradition, point of view, and language in novels, plays and poems continue to make ‘a substantial contribution to environmental thinking’” (Glotfelty: xxi-ii). She further considers the interconnectedness between human culture and the physical world; how human culture affects and is affected by the natural world, as well as the relationship between the cultural artefacts of language and literature, and proceeds to explain that ecocriticism as a theoretical discourse is understood in terms of the interplay between human and nonhumans. She insists that it is an interaction; whereby “the notion of ‘the world,’ which ‘most literary theory’ limits to society” should “include the entire ecosphere” since literature is necessarily submerged in a “complex global system” wherein “energy, matter, and ideas interact” (Glotfelty: xix). The idea of literary ecology is based on an eclectic consideration or “cross-fertilization” among literary studies to the point that “work in ecology, and ‘related disciplines such as history, philosophy, psychology, art history, others’” interplay to reveal the reality of existence as well as influence human interaction with the natural world (Dobrin and Kidd 2004: 3).

Christopher Manes argues against the opinion held by such humanist and deep ecologists as John Dryzek and Murray Bookchin who treat nonhuman world as a 'silenced subject' (Manes 1996: 16). Manes qualifies such an approach as 'dubious' because it does not only neglect the roots from where the silence of nature seems to spring, but it also ironically strengthens the vantage point from which, "by its very logocentrism," human beings marginalise, silence, and relegate the natural creatures "into the hazy backdrop against which the rational human subject struts upon the epistemological stage" (16). Manes proposes that instead of focusing on "the desire to rescue reason, the human subject, or some other privilege motif," it is reasonable to take "the silence of nature itself . . . as a cue for recovering a language appropriate to an environmental ethics" for, according to him, "I consider how nature has grown silent in our discourse, shifting from an animistic to a symbolic presence, from a voluble subject to a mute object" (Manes 1996: 17). He suggests the contemplation of "a new language free from the directionalities of humanism, a language that incorporates a decentered, postmodern, post-humanist perspective, alongside the inculcation of a new ethics as means of restoring cordial relationship between human and the nonhuman world.

Manes blames the muteness of nature on the medieval Christian theology (exegesis), The Great Chain of Being, upheld by Renaissance aristocracy, literacy, and "a complex skein of institutional and intellectual developments" within human society (Manes 1996: 21). According to the ecocritic, the prevalent contemporary linguistic idiom is a reflection of "a pastiche of the tendencies of medieval hermeneutics and Renaissance humanism," that is, as he puts it, an idiom conditioned by "its faith in reason, intellect and progress" (Manes 1996: 17). In a nutshell, Manes recommends "a language of ecological humility that deep ecology, however gropingly, is attempting to express" as what can give a "voice" to the natural world. As such, instead of sweepingly dismissing the idea of understanding the speech of natural beings as embracing superstition and irrationality, humanity learn the language of animals and birds for, it is only through this means that the secrets of nature can be grasped (17).

Manes regards 'shamanism' (animistic religion) as an appropriate "description of animism, a sophisticated and long-lived phenomenology of nature characterised by two beliefs. First, that the entire phenomenal world

(humans, cultural artefacts, and the natural environment) is alive in the sense of being spirited, and secondly, that apart from being alive, the nonhuman world comprises articulate subjects capable of communicating with human beings (Manes 1996: 17-18). Animism which is perennial, both historically and universally, permeates all facets of contemporary tribal societies from time immemorial. Animistic reflexes, Manes points out, infiltrate economic and modern technological society in many ways:

Cars and sports teams are named after animals [birds inclusive] (as if to capture sympathetically their power). Children talk to dolls and animals without being considered mentally ill, and are, in fact, read fairy tales [sic], most of which involve talking animals. Respectable people shout at machines that do not operate properly. (18)

The foregoing view corroborates Claire Tomalin's (2006) consideration of Hardy's oneness with landscape beings and adds that Hardy's "voice as a poet is as individual as a fingerprint, ... his curiosity and powers of observation make him at home with a vast range of subjects, ... He will write about the noise of a passing car or about a station waiting room as well as about his perpetual delight in the natural world of plants growing and decaying, of weather, birds, insects, wind, moonlight, sunshine and starlight" (378-9).

Manes concludes that nature is inarticulate as a result of humankind's usurpation of the right to speech. He underscores that human language veils the processes of nature with unmatched motifs that tend to erode "the language of birds, the wind, earthworms, wolves, and waterfalls – a world of autonomous speakers whose intents . . . one ignores at one's peril" (Manes 1996: 15). In Glotfelty's view, Manes draws from Michel Foucault's theories to highlight the extent to which Western literacy and Christian exegesis have rendered nature silent by shifting nature not only from an animistic to a symbolic presence, but also from an articulate subject to a speechless object, "such that in our culture only humans have status as speaking subjects" (Glotfelty 1996: xxvii). This tendency is viewed by Lynn White, Jr. as the Judeo-Christian religious dominating attitude towards natures (Glotfelty 1996: xxvii).

Hardy's poem titled "Compassion: An Ode in Celebration of the Centenary of the Royal Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Animals"

delineates both speaker's recognition for landscape beings and the agony in their looks. As a typically exemplification of Manes view that the silence of nature should constitute a "cue for recovering a language appropriate to an environmental ethics" (Manes 1996: 17), the speaker visualises and understands the communication between animals and perceptible human beings from the gloom in the animal's eyes:

Before incredulous eyes.–
 We read the legend that it lights:
 "Wherefore beholds this land of historied rights
 Mild creatures, deposed, doomed, bewildered, plead
 Their often hunger, thirst, pangs, prisonment,
 In deep dumb gaze more eloquent
 Than tongues of widest hee? (lines 4-10)

The speaker depicts Hardy's ability to understand the language of animals from their gaze and looks, which he 'suffered all his life' (Gibson 1999: 112-13) to observe and learn. The poem also depicts the speaker-cum-poet's attachment to the beings and his ardent desire to fight for their rescue. Florence Hardy (1972) reveals, as later quoted by Tomalin (2006: 18), that this desire to understand animal creatures based on the inner satisfaction Hardy derived from their company, began as early as the poet's childhood.

This identification and attempt to communicate with the beings is further portrayed in the perceptive and inspirational capabilities of insects as vividly and dramatically reflected in "An August Midnight," a poem in which insects visit the speaker during a moment of intense reflection and transcription on a page:

A SHADED lamp and a waving blind,
 And the beat of a clock from a distant floor:
 On this scene enter – winged, horned, and spined –
 A longlegs, a moth, and a Dumbledore;
 While 'mid my page there idly stands
 A sleep fly, that rubs its hands ... (lines 1-6)

These august visitors trigger the poet's imaginative speaker's creativity, reveal the truth about what sees as "a new language free from the directionalities

of humanism” (Manes 1996: 17) as well as unravel their own(the insects’) foresightedness. This evident in the speaker’s acknowledgement and confession of the guests’ imaginative superiority:

Thus meet we five, in this still place
 At this point of time, at this point in space.
 – My guests besmear my new-penned line,
 Or bang at the lamp and fall supine.
 “God’s humblest, they!” I muse. Yet why?
 They know Earth-secrets that know not I. (lines 7-12)

The harmonious relationship between the human/poetic persona and the landscape beings/insects in this poem corroborates Kevin Padian’s association of Hardy with Darwin. Padian interprets Hardy poetic association with landscape beings as an evocation of the third chapter of Darwin’s *Origin of Species* wherein “the ‘tangled bank’ metaphor of species interactions is systematic: the fates of all organisms are interrelated in the ecological web of life. There is nothing coincidental about the presence or absence of these species” (Padian 2010: 232). Tom Paulin on her part describes the poet’s use of ‘humblest’ in the penultimate line above as ‘jokey anthropomorphism.’ She underscores the point that no sooner does the speaker “completely patronise” the insects than “he turns on this attitude and suddenly respects them” (Paulin 1986: 65). Whether the speaker’s turn from humbling the guests to edifying them is deliberate or not, the poem can be read as a warning to the effect that the humble and fragile physical appearance notwithstanding human beings should, seen from ecocritical McDowell’s standpoint, suppress their egos and perceive the insects as possessors of the secret of the earth in a way that human knowledge is ignorant of.

From an ecocritical deconstructive stance, Barbara Hardy (2000) considers the four insects as a source of inspiration that enhances the poet’s creativity. ‘The guests,’ according to the scholar, “arrive to revise the text” when they besmear the ‘new-penned lines.’ She further asserts that though the insects’ arrival seems “so common and slight an event”, it “is the occasion for another unassuming but ambitious poem about itself, another demonstration of writing to the moment” (96). Barbara Hardy concludes that far from being a premeditated art, the poem “is about the unpremeditated moment, and in part improvised from the given and accidental,” whereby:

The poet combines pleasure in the event with a companionable feeling for the creatures, against with the lightest of light touches. Just as he modestly revises his sense that they are God's humblest, so he keeps his writing muted, and the hospitable 'Thus meet we five', offers a quiet welcome to the creatures that complete the poem, and are as necessary to it as the human moving pen and brain and heart. (Hardy 2000: 96)

It is discernible from Hardy's interpretation of the poem that the insects are not only important because they supply the poet with a poetic subject. They also influence and take part in the creative process to ensure the beauty of the production. Therefore, humans should let them exist, if not for their own right to exist, at least for their companionship and inspirational function.

The foregoing argument is further reflected in "The Caged Thrush Freed and Home Again" in which the bird-speakers are similarly and prominently depicted as the guests insects in "An August Midnight." Four out of the six stanzas of the poem are emphatic of the landscape beings' voicing of the view that "Men know but little more than we" (stanza 1:1, stanza 2:3, stanza 4:3, and stanza 6:3). In the fourth stanza, the birds utter the limitation of human knowledge, despite human being's enormous physical stature: 'And want and wailing turned to glee; / Alas, despite their mighty mien / Men know but little more than we! (lines 10-12). The speakers recognise their place within the ontological spectrum and express the futility of human pride, "They cannot change the Frost's decree, / They cannot keep the skies; / How happy days are made to be" (lines 13-15). Through their ability to understand "Earth-secret" the speakers are capable of seeing happiness at moments when human beings see gloom, for the mystery of the earth "Eludes great Man's sagacity" (line 16). The paradox engendered by the diction in this line is very glaring; the words 'great', 'Man's sagacity' with 'man' in the upper case directly contrast with 'Eludes.' The paradox and contrast heighten the speaker's ridicule of humanity as well as emphasises humankind's inability to understand and communicate the mystery of the earth as landscape beings do. This human lack of foresight is what the frail thrush reveals in Hardy's "The Darkling Thrush" and in Hopkins' "The Windhover."

In "The Windhover", Hopkins's speaker sees the kestrel from varied dimensions. The poem is both an acknowledgement of the fluttering skills

of a bird, whose “hurl and gliding / Rebuffed the big wind” (lines 6-7), and a deification of the ‘Falcon’ as the prince of the community of birds. The speaker reveals the bird to be a ‘dauphin’ in his kingdom, in keeping with Glofelty’s (1996) opinion of language and literature as media that “transmit values with profound ecological implications” (xxv). The possessive adjective ‘his’ in the phrase ‘in his riding’ undermines symbolism or personification and highlights the speaker’s perceptive ability to visualise and communicate with the hover-being as his calm heart is eventually stirred, “My heart in hiding / Stirred for a bird, – the achieve of, the mastery of the thing!” (lines 7-8). The use of ‘thing’ here is far from being the speaker’s simplification and belittling of the bird, from an ecocritical standpoint it can be interpreted as a display of the overwhelming reaction to the bird’s skill and valour as he is taken by surprise to the level of abrupt and almost unconscious exclamation. Little wonder that the speaker, after regaining consciousness (so to speak), the speaker hails the falcon with ‘O my chevalier’ (line 11). The ‘O’ in the upper case justifies the sudden return of awareness, which leads to a frank proclamation of respect for the bird-being.

Similar to the reverence for the bird in “The Windhover,” the persona in “The Sea and the Skylark” acknowledges his admiration and metaphysical communication with a skylark. The bird’s sublime ‘voice’ in “The Sea and the Skylark” is declared as unending in all angles of the universe:

Left hand, off land, I hear the lark ascend,
His rash-fresh rewinded new-skeinèd score
In crisps of curl off wild winch whirl, and pour
And pelt music, till none’s to spill nor spend. (lines 5-8)

Notice the use of the possessive adjective ‘His’ as in “The Windhover.” Hopkins certainly coins and uses his strange words here to show the awe inspiring and new strength that the bird’s music, which surpasses any yet produced, not only as an acknowledgement of the bird’s existence but also the bird’s importance as poetic inspiration as well as the bird’s ceaseless productivity.

Based on the analyses above, it is necessary to re-echo Manes’ conclusion that landscape beings do not simply exist but are endowed with communication skills. It is left for humans to recognise this by making an effort to learn “the

language of birds, the wind, earthworms, wolves, and waterfalls – a world of autonomous speakers whose intents . . . one ignores at one's peril" (line 15). Once this practice is inculcated, humankind will cease from the erroneously considering speech and communication as an exclusive human possession.

Perceptive and Expressive Skills of Landscape Beings

The supposed speechlessness of natural creatures is a recurrent issue within debates of ecocriticism, especially in the discourse of "deep ecology" which advocates the forging of a communication link with all beings on earth so as to mitigate the suffusing 'language of humanism' in "texts, institutions, and values" (Manes 1996, 17). McDowell (1996) articulates the possibility for human beings to perceive and understand the messages from the voices of nonhuman creatures by underscoring the point that landscape creatures are endowed with communicative skills that, if studied and acquired, humans would be able to communicate with and also feel the plight of these beings. McDowell is in unison with Harold Fromm (1996) in stressing the argument that "the problem of the environment which many people persist in viewing as a peripheral arabesque drawn around the 'important' concerns of human life, must ultimately be seen as a central philosophical and ontological question about the self-definition of contemporary man" (37-8), especially if humans really want to continue to exist. This propagation is the basis for this paper's attempt to deconstruct the peripheral position humans have ascribed to the language of other living creatures.

Manes' emphasis that humans should give the natural world the expressive chance (17) begs the question: How can nature actually speak in literary texts? McDowell provides a response to this opinion by using Bakhtin's dialogism, which he describes as "the ideal form to represent reality" (372). McDowell argues that there exists no conclusion to texts because "every text ... is a dialogue open for further comments from other points of view" (387). He argues further that since ecology is a science of relationship it matches Bakhtin's theories as it gives allowances for the realisation of interaction between "multiple voices or points of view" (372). This combination of various voices, from Bakhtin's point view, the ecocritic further stresses, result in:

a kind of dialogue among differing points of view, which gives value to a variety of socio-ideological positions. Beginning

with the idea that all entities in the great web of nature deserve recognition and a voice, an ecological literary criticism might explore how authors have represented the interaction of both the human and nonhuman voices in the landscape. (McDowell 1996: 372)

Given that non-human beings (animate and inanimate) constituting “the great web of nature” neither literally speak nor write in response to what humans say about them, considering that “Every literary attempt to listen to voices in the landscape or to ‘read the book of nature’ is necessarily anthropocentric” and also cognisance of the fact that humans use their own language to suit their caprices (McDowell 1996: 372), McDowell argues that landscape writers nevertheless suppress their egos and allow “the element of a landscape to communicate in the text” through “the use of character zones, intertextuality, inserted genres, chronotopes, ‘open-endedness,’ and ‘carnavalization”” (McDowell: 374-86). The later part of this section provides a brief explication of these ego suppression techniques to show how landscape writers permit non-humans to communicate in texts.

‘Character zones’ or ‘speech zones’ in landscape writing, according to McDowell, is achieved when each character or element within text is given an ‘autonomous voice’ distinct from the voice of narrator and any other characters. The analysis of the voices or languages of the different characters or beings in the world of the text, McDowell further states, facilitates the reader’s “understanding of the values associated with the characters and elements and for a sense of how characters and elements of the landscape influence each other” (374). ‘Intertextuality’ as an ego suppression practice is realised when the voices of elements of the landscape become more audible from the exploration of past, present and future texts with contradictory voices. McDowell upholds Bakhtin’s view that “every creature defines itself and in a real sense becomes a ‘self’ mentally, spiritually, and physically by its interaction with other beings and things.” He pushes the argument further by stressing that the infinite character of the various interactions between entities of the landscape “enables a ‘polyphony’ of interacting voices within any given text” (375).

Landscape writers also employ inserted genres to allow nonhumans to communicate in texts. The collective interplay of social forces in genre,

according to McDowell, makes it relevant “in discussing landscape writing because, as a human social construct, a genre dictates to a great extent how reality is perceived in a text, and landscape writing tends to incorporate a variety of genres” (McDowell 1996: 375). With regard to inconclusiveness, McDowell states that landscape writing demonstrates a willingness to leave the dialogue open with no final say or closure. The text is seen to display a degree of ‘open-endedness,’ or ‘incompleteness,’ ‘inconclusiveness,’ ‘noncompletion,’ ‘unfinishedness,’ ‘unfinalizability,’ ‘unfinalized nature,’ and ‘unfinalizedness.’ This, according to the ecocritic, suggests both the writer’s humility and the recognition that no individual and no era have a monopoly on truth (376).

‘Carnavalesque’ or ‘carnivalization’ as an ego suppression technique refers to method by which, through interaction with others, the voices of landscape beings are rendered audible. It is attainable, according to McDowell, when writers:

try to divest themselves as much as possible of human preconceptions and enter the natural world almost as though they were animal participants; the animal participants often have almost equal representation with the narrators. Their hope, it appears, is to allow the landscape to enter them in order to be expressed through their writing. (McDowell 1996: 381)

The ecocritic holds that this technique is realisable when humans recognise the sensory potentials of nonhumans and then “try to imitate ... by confining our sensory perceptions to those of the other beings, and imagining the perceptions of those senses in which we’re deficient” (ibid).

Based on the argument that exploring “dialogic voices in a landscape leads naturally to an analysis of the inherent values a writer recognises in a landscape and not what is imposed on it,” (McDowell 1996: 386), this section of paper employs two – character zones and inserted genres – of the five ego suppression techniques explained above to illustrate how Hardy and Hopkins, landscape poets, perceive as well as give the chance to landscape beings to communicate in their poetry. Whether animate or inanimate, landscape creatures in Hardy’s and Hopkins’s poetry are shown to speakers even in their silent gazes, guests, sources of inspirations, determinants of moods (reasons for speakers’ ecstasy or lamentation), among others.

Hardy's speaker in "The Convergence of the Twain" paints a picture of the mighty adorned ship that sinks into the Atlantic Ocean as an amazing experience to the fish in the sea; "Dim moo-eyed fishes near / Gaze at the gilded gear / And query: "What does this vaingloriousness down here?" (lines 13-15). Similarly, the caged thrushes in "The Caged Thrush Freed and Home Again" satirise human beings' limited foresight when they utter, "MEN know but little more than we / Who count us less of things terrene ..." (lines 1-2). The affirmation of their superior vision reveal both a contrast between human acclaimed superiority and the birds' humble but innate metaphysical abilities.

The voice of the frail thrush in Hardy's "The Darkling Thrush" is an example of the suppression of ego through the use of "character zones." The thrush's voice in "The Darkling Thrush" projects bird as an autonomous character from the hopeless human speaker who questions the reason for the bird's happy melody. The gloom and bleakness evoked by the ominous and dreary winter setting in the opening lines of the poem is dramatically undermined by the hopeful melody of the bird character:

At once a voice arose among
The bleak twigs overhead
In full-hearted evensong
Of joy illimited; (lines 17-20)

Notice the use of 'voice' and not sound and the borrowed French version of 'unlimited' – 'illimité' – coined into the past tense in the first and last lines of the above excerpt, respectively. Hardy learned and endeavoured to understand the sublime messages in the language of birds, and tried to suppress his own ego and that of the speakers to permit other landscape beings to communicate their message, which he took time to transcribe. Tomalin (2006) reveals that during his six-year stay in London (1862-68) when Hardy received training as an architect and "had not heard a nightingale for six years," returned to Dorchester to rediscover the natural world. According to this Tomalin, when the nightingales "congregated yards from the cottage windows in the spring he set about transcribing their songs" (87). "The Darkling Thrush" exemplifies this practice of Hardy's transcription as well as reading of meaning in the voices and songs of birds. The spontaneous and unlimited evening melody of the thrush, artistically transmitted through poet's own coined word 'illimited', undermines the general atmosphere of gloom to one who understands such a 'voice.' The

overwhelming desolation experienced in the first two stanzas impacts on the speaker such that the thrush's blast is neglected and the motive behind such an evening melody is completely ignored, since the speaker does not understand the language of birds he simply doubts the motif for the bird's joy:

So little cause for carolings
Of such ecstatic sound
Was written on terrestrial things
Afar or nigh around,
That I could think there trembled through
His happy good-night air
Some blessed Hope, whereof he knew
And I was unaware (lines 25-32)

As in Wordsworth's in "The Tables Turned" wherein the speaker holds that "There's more of wisdom" in the music of 'woodland linnet' or small finch's song than anything else (Wordsworth 2001, "The Tables Turned" line 12), the bird's ecstatic "carolings" at such a gloomy moment is possibly a message the thrush passes across to the human character regarding the impermanence of every condition. By arguing that there is no evidence written on terrestrial things that necessitates the bird's 'happy good-night' song, the speaker not only gives a deaf ear to the voice but equally dissociates the bird from the very terrestrial things he makes mention of, and to which the bird belongs; and this tantamount to saying that the thrush should leave the scene since he/she [the thrush] is "one shaped awry" ('In Tenebris. II': line 15), which is not the case, for the thrush knows landscape secrets more than the human speaker (see "An August Midnight" line 12). The thrush's happy song can be seen as a contrastive discourse to that of the speaker. While the speaker thinks nature is dry and unproductive, the bird's message suggests that the leaflessness of the trees does not mean the trees have withered. Going by Padian's view that Hardy believed in *fertility*, "the most basic evolutionary level . . . without which no reproduction, no further history of species, can take place" (Padian 2010: 226), the trees, like seeds which must die before they sprout, are recollecting and preparing to rejuvenate and bloom abundantly during spring – when they become 'fertile.' By projecting the confident and interrogating voices of the fishes and birds in the interpreted poems, Hardy permits the readers to perceive the beings as autonomous speakers-cum-characters endowed with communicative powers.

Like Hardy, Hopkins, who regarded himself as a rook or crow (bird) when he used the pseudonym ‘*BrânMaenefa*’ or ‘the crow of Maenefa’ (Mariani 2008: 178, 372-3), equally portrays landscape beings as poetic personae who speak their own language. Hopkins’s “The Woodlark” exemplifies both the use of character zones and inserted genre. The bird-speaker’s articulation, “*Teevocheevocheevochee* / O where, what can that be? / *Weedio-weedio*: there again! (lines 1-3), is illustrative. The ability to project the speech and language of birds reveals the presence of two non-human beings in the poem (the human character and the bird). The ‘*BrânMaenefa*’ or the crow of Maenefa in this poem comes out in his true colour and clearly states, “Well, after all! Ah but hark – / ‘I am the little woodlark” (lines 10-11). By identifying with birds in speech and personality, Hopkins’s speaker projects the ontological relationship that exists between human beings and the winged beings. The inextricable relationship and mutual coexistence of humans and other beings such as birds is enhanced by the rhyming couplets; ‘aa bb cc ddee’ that run through the entire forty-three lines of the poem.

Both Hardy and Hopkins insert the musical genre in their poetry to delineate birds’ ability to communicate as well as lighten the gloom within the entire landscape. Despite the thrush’s “frail, gaunt, and small nature” in “The Darkling Thrush” the melody the bird produces goes far and wide “In blast-beruffled plum.” The positive impact is heightened by the manner in which the thrush “Had chosen thus to fling his soul / Upon the growing gloom” (lines 23-24). The use of ‘his soul’ in the quoted lines suggests the poet’s conscious recognition of the thrush as an independent living being. The melody of the thrush is similarly acclaimed by Hopkins’s persona in “Spring” when he calls on listeners to give an ear to: “Thrush’s eggs look little low heavens, and thrush/Through the echoing timber does so rinse and wring/The ear, it strikes like lightening to hear him sing” (lines 3-5). Hopkins’s inventive imagery and fresh use of language in “Spring” is so startling that Mackenzie (2008) sees Hopkins as breaking new grounds in the depiction of the spring season: “In view of the popularity of spring as a poetic subject in all Western literature, Hopkins is outstandingly successful in striking fresh notes: his selection of weeds for praise rather than flowers, his dazzled simile for the thrush’s song, the exuberance which imagines trees in the ecstasy of May growth having their fling along with the new lamb” (60).

Hopkins, as White (1992) reveals, “worked primarily through engaging the senses with detail, having come to Ruskin’s conclusion about the grand significance implicit in nature’s smallest part. Nature possesses superhuman subtlety, and in comparison man lacked imagination; man should be led by nature to look into the heart of things” (76). Like Hardy, Hopkins makes use of the object pronoun ‘him’ to refer to the thrush. Instead of merely interpreting the use of the pronoun in terms of personification, the usage should rather be viewed as the poet’s awareness of the existence of this natural being whose masculine communicative skill, by means of singing such a thrilling sound, highlights its importance as an autonomous landscape being. The presence of the bird characters and the musically transcribed birds’ melodies in Hardy’s and Hopkins’s poems reveal both the employment of McDowell’s ecocritical character zones and inserted musical genre in the poetry.

Conclusion

It is necessary to point out that this paper has attempted to demonstrate Hardy’s and Hopkins’s concern for the neglected expressive or communicative voices of landscape beings. Adopting the ecocritical perspectives of Cheryl Glotfelty, Harold Fromm, Christopher Manes, and Michael J. McDowell it establishes that the poets perceive landscape beings and the environment or the entire landscape to be influential to poets’ poetic imagination. As such they are emphatic that animals, birds, insects, trees, streams and all elements of nature be preserved for, as Hopkins’s speaker asks: “What will the world be, once bereft / Of wet and wildness? (“Inversnaid”: lines 13-14).

The thrust of the paper thus lies in the argument that an understanding of the speech and communication potentials of landscape beings would trigger a reconsideration of the stigmatised ‘inferior’ position human beings have ascribed to other creatures. It underscores that the numerous speakers and voices perceivable in Hardy’s and Hopkins’ poetry reveal the poets’ ability to suppress human ego and allow other landscape beings to articulate or communicate. This goes in keeping with McDowell’s view that despite their self-projection in order to avoid invisibility, landscape writers strive as much as possible to allow “the element of a landscape to communicate in the text” (McDowell 1996: 374). As landscape poets therefore, Hardy and Hopkins not

only permit insects, birds, cows, and trees to speak, they also join the beings in their communication by means of character zones and inserted genre, imitation and transcriptions.

The paper equally emphasises that keen observation of the behaviours as well as studying and understanding the various techniques of grasping the expressive faces and postures of these beings as well as the application of tenets of dialogism, as advanced by Manes and McDowell, respectively would not only facilitate the understanding of language of landscape beings but would equally curb the indifference, negligence and, above all, the cruelty the supposed stigmatised 'inferior' beings of the landscape endure from human beings.

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The Mask Diction/Sensitivity: An Analysis of Selected Poems from *The Outcast*

Ben-Fred Ohia

Rivers State University, Port Harcourt.

Email: benfredohia911@gmail.com

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Abstract

The mask is a covering for the face and/or making a replica of it. It is a pristine human phenomenon, the product of human's spirit and artistry. It was at the core of the "early man's" apprehension of life and its imponderable that is still used in the present. Its use is also in the mind and this has been subjected to writing especially in the diction of poetry, and is still intrinsic to modern humanity's expression of day to day realities and impulses. This paper examines and explains Osaro et al's sensitivity to the mask. It analyses the ways in which the poets exploit in a volcano of voices, the image of the mask to make social, cultural, political, artistic, oil exploration and exploitation statements in their entire poetic oeuvre. They aptly condemn and vehemently query the predators of the Niger Delta.

Keywords: Mask, Diction, Sensitivity, Analysis, Outcast

Introduction

It is a truism that for many renowned poets and playwrights, there is usually a unique imagery that predominates their poetry. These imageries are their voices to an extent-their idea becomes a defining feature that is noted in the idea of unity. Examples suffice in works of Derek Walcott especially in the tortured image of the Caribbean landscape in *Dream on Monkey Mountain*, Wole Soyinka's imagery of grayness in *Mandela's Earth and Other Poems* Tanure Ojaide's imagery of tortured ego or a disruptive genius in *Children of Iroko and other poems*, and Christopher Okigbo's image of sunbird in *Heavensgate*. All these imageries readily come to mind. The image of masks in its essence is a potent fusion. It fuses idioms, narrative, mime, music, poetry and others. It appeals to the artist especially African artist. The mask image is sometimes

used as a metaphor. Exploiting the image of the mask, African writers exploit in a collection the socio-aesthetic liberties that the African mask offers. In some instances the image of the mask is a protective cover for the head and identity of the persons behind the mask. The egoistic resonance in the above mentioned use of the masks confirms Enekwe's (1987) observation of the use of mask amongst the Bakwile of Western Equatorial Africa. Aside the use of the mask for masquerade performances, Africans use the mask for personality contests, the display of affluence and prestige, which are ultimately related to the quest for power. The use of the mask portrays a consciousness that is rooted in that collective African mind.

The use of the mask motif to navigate socio-political spheres abounds in Osaro et al's *The Outcast*. The mask in this poetry is idiomatic and ironic way of ordering, re/ordering and displacing identities through disguise and concealment. Therefore, the mask in the poetry is used as cultural empowerment ranging from the temporal to the surreal. In this regard, we have political, psychological, historical and mythical/mystical implication in the use of masks as diction in this poetry.

For Osaro, G., H. Ekwuazi and I. Ikiriko and others in *The Outcast*, with the imposing image of the outcast, the landscape of the Niger Delta, the image of the mask is a peculiar one in their poetry which emphasizes misnomer in the Niger Delta. Only a few scholars such as Tanure Ojaide, Akachi Adimora Ezeigbo and Hyginus Ekwuazi could identify this intriguing imagery. The familiar refrain in *The Outcast* is exploitation (experiences of the Niger Delta).

According to Akpan in the Foreword to the collection:

The story of the Niger Delta, home of Nigeria's black gold is ironically a story of deprivation, dislocation, disequilibrium, dismemberment, disenfranchisement, disillusionment, restitution and death. It is the pathetic story of a people who have in a well planned, but macabre surgery, had their being body battered and bloodied and left to exsanguinate in a complex network of criss-crossing drains – (Akpan 2002, p vii).

This paper examines the image of the mask in the poetry as a sort of sensitivity aroused by the poets. For instance, the image of surgery in the poetry

is both 'curious' and 'strange', was performed on a hitherto healthy body by 'surgeons' who had ulterior motive. Thus, it is pertinent to look at it as a multi-layered and multidimensional image that pervades the poets' sensibility. The poetry speaks volumes of the intimidation, marginalisation, corruption and high handedness by the government and international oil companies (IOCs) in the affairs of the Niger Delta region. In this regard the paper highlights and analyzes its varied occurrences and implications on the poets' poetic output. The poets in their various poems have launched a 'salvage operation' to avert the killing of the goose that lays the golden eggs.

The actions of various personae in the poetry explain the misgivings in the Niger Delta region. Ifeanyi ponders over the myths of wealthy paupers and paradise of penury, Okafor frowns at this war without end, Nwafor wails for 'lootocracy', Oluka urges us to awake and cry out, Archibong prescribes resource control as a prerequisite for lasting peace in the region, Uduka dismisses our leaders as bad managers who lack both the moral courage and political will to carry out this prescription. And for Osaro, Ekwuazi and Ikiriko the recurring question that yawns for an answer is: "When will this unwarranted battering of the outcast end?"

The Significance of the Mask

The mask motif is a powerful phenomenon in Nigeria and Africa in general from the 19th century till this modern time. The mask is very significant and relevant to the corporate existence of African societies.

Masks generally are African people's representation of spirits known or believed to influence the affairs of the local communities. Masks are worn by masquerades and some masquerades are named after animals and fishes, to portray African local communities as agrarian societies in which fishing and hunting are major occupations. Masks are carved representation of the various animals and fishes. According to Ogba viewpoint of mask sensitivity, an author avers: "In Ogba we have masks of the following masquerades: Atnu (Buffalo), Mkpi (He-goat), Eyni (Elephant), Owaha-nnunu (Bird) and Nklobi (Bird) which are representations (Ohia, 2021, p.77).

Masks and masquerades are sacred in Africa and can only be worn during masquerade festivals or ceremonies. The wearing of masks is largely

an exclusively a male activity with little or no female participation. Most Africans believe that blessings of long life, child-bearing, peace and prosperity can only be achieved through communion with masquerades and ancestors. Africans have respect for masks hence ownership and control of masks are usually vested in the community and not on individuals. Ossie Ewekwe (1987) in his study of Igbo mask has underscored the psychosocial and ethno aesthetic significance of the mask. According to Eneke, the mask “possesses”, ‘transforms’ and ‘transmogrifies’ its bearer. The instruction of identities is at the centre of the mask philosophy. Similarly, emphasis is placed on the idea of disguise and role playing in masking and significantly relates the mask to “power” and corporate authority (Amankulor, 1986: p53).

As an archetypal human representation, the mask is an iconic signification of spiritual presences and divine as well as ancestral potencies. The mask involves morality out of the African worldview; showcasing the tragic consciousness and moral ethos.

This is analogous to Inegbe’s (2004) assertion that “the awareness of morality, like tragedy may be universal but its manifestation is culture-based” (P. 94). It is also an idiom for the expression of imponderable phenomenon. In this sense, the mask also becomes a totem, a memorial image because human memory is limited. Thus, humans attempts to recreate that which may outlive them.

Masking as an important phenomenon in Africa general and Nigeria in particular is relevant to Africans especially poets who make use of it. Therefore, the idea of masking becomes relevant to the people and society. People create masks on their faces and entire body to counter the vicissitudes of life. In the same vein, the poets Osaro, Ekwuazi, Ikiriko and Ezeigbo are sensible in the use of images in their message about the situation in the Niger Delta. In many cases the mask (image) becomes a natural strategy for defense, attack and survival. This is noticeable in *The Outcast*.

With hyper sensitive response to the words and images of torture, destruction and degradation of environment which already express the emotional experience of the Niger Delta Region of Nigeria, the poets craft these words and images into their works for greater expression of their full evocative power. In this way they attain for themselves various visions and possessions of the experience empowered between their (poets’) own souls and the life around them; the poets communicate these experiences (individual

and collective) to others, provided the audience can respond adequately to the words and images they (the poets) use. In his words, Ngumoha (2004) discusses the use of words and images thus:

Such words and images are archetypes to the extent that they act as universal symbols in human experience. They may be ideas, characters, actions, objects, institutions, events or settings containing basic characteristic patterns which are primitive, general and universal rather than unique or particular. (P. 63).

The idea of masking transcends poetic diction and thus becomes a natural strategy for defense, attack and survival in the poetics.

The veritable use of the mask diction in *The Outcast*

The mask diction pervades the entire world of *The Outcast* and it is in its essence as a potent fusion of idioms, narrative, mime, music, and poetry. It explores the Nigerian poetry tradition and locates Niger Delta poetry using minority discuss and environmentalism as analytical tools. Other poems that explore the same tradition are: Tanure Ojaide's *Delta Blues* and *Home songs*, Ikiriko Ibiwari's *Oily Tears of Delta*, Akachi Adimora Ezeigbo's *Heart Songs* and Hyginus Ekwuazi's *That other Country*. Thus, Nigerian poems regardless of their region, have positions their poetic imaginations to the service of a region that has witnessed one of the uncanny environmental destructions in the history of Nigeria. These expressions are made through the use of the mask diction in their poems.

In the words of Niyi Osundare in "Black Muk", "Lost is the breathing soul, metaphor of His kind a fool..." Here where owners are baboons and the houses are haunted... none are green. Disillusionment of Ten (P. 48). The image of the mask appeals to African artists that use it to send a message across to their audience especially poets. They have also exploited in a collection the socio-aesthetic liberties that the traditional African masquerade offers. One makes bold to claim that the mask dictions is a protective cover for the identity of the poet-persona in the poems. This becomes apt in view of the fact that the people of the Niger Delta are faced with unbridled destitution, generational poverty, oil spillage, pipeline fire disasters, ecological degradation of human habitat and illiteracy but with no equitable remedy.

This is in line with the poem *The King and the Delta*: where the poet, Tanure Ojaide through the persona speaks:

“Among brothers, death counts tolls,
The king’s device
He sits on the golden stool
Dishing out order
Delta, he plunders” (p.21)

It is suggestive that the Niger Delta people are deprived of control over their own resources for development in the Nigerian nation due to the promulgation of the following exploitative decrees and shadow legislation: The Petroleum Act of 1969 and 1991, The Land Use Act of 1978, 1993 and The National Waterways Decree of 1997 (NNPC Bulletin, 2016). In this paper, there is the tendency to interpret political consciousness in *The Outcast*. Although, the poems are politically conscious, awareness is necessary. In the poems, the relationship and the import as well as those of Tanure Ojaide and J. P. Clark can properly be understood in the context of inter/textual and, psychoanalytic reading. The use of the mask sensitivity to navigate socio-political themes abounds in *The Outcast*. Most often, political leaders in Nigeria mislead the people, particularly tyrannous leaders in the polity are depicted as tricksters who wear deceitful faces to “beguile” the citizens. In *Wealthy Paupers*, the leaders are the oppressors who are personified as baboon.

Patience promises abundance
But we chant,
How long shall the monkey continue to crack the kernel
For the baboon to eat? (p.37).

The image of the “leaking roof” in “The Oil-Soaked Land” and “deserted old woman” in *The Outcast* fits in thematically in the politics of oil in the Niger Delta in which the leaders are portrayed as conmen, concealing their ravenous identities. The images of “mother-earth”, “foreign beasts”, bones in the fashion parade in the poem “Sharks Thirsty for Water” are important for they configure the platform of power. In fact, the political space in Nigeria has been reduced to a stage where giants perform plays oscillating at both extremes that are farcical and melodramatic.

“The Prince and the Pauper” points out the subtle nature and sensitivity of mask in the society. In this poem, the poet shows that deception lurks behind the disguised faces of leaders and that the same deceit has been elevated to the level of statecraft for governance:

Magnanimous
Is the master
Benovently,
He left drops of vinegar
Inside the patched throat
Of the thirsty servant (Wealthy Pauper, p.6).

Deceit is not only a political “sophisticraft” It is also a psychological strategy to face the challenges of inter/personal relationship. The tone of this poem is interpretably that of wonderment over the intrigues of men and women.

Fortune
Pudding on the dawn
Calls on the servant
The master perceives the aroma
And sprouts in
We are kindred!
Brothers! He announces. (Wealthy Pauper, p.79).

To read “our land” in *The Outcast* is to steep one’s own sensibilities in a mystical/mythical world. The poets use the mask diction to earth that which is surreal.

The land is ours
The sea is ours

Is it not ours to eat our fruit? (*The Outcast*, p.59). The message of this poem is that the foregrounding of the importance of land to the wealthy is the persona’s affirmation and priding of himself as the owner of the land where the resources of the nation are harnessed. This creates around him the aura of warmth that enables him believe that “the land... favoured by the benevolence of nature” The images of the land and oil are predominant in this collection

in different ways. For instance, they are a metaphor of human freedom and wealth in *The juicy plots* (pp.33-34) and *The oil-soaked land* (pp.31-32). It is the victim of leaders' tyranny in *The King and the Delta*" (pp.21-24) and *Black Muk* (pp.18-19), the cure of ecological degradation in *Awake* (pp.64-65), *The Doomed* (p.66), *Tyrannical exploitation* (pp.67-68) and *Misery* (pp.69-70). The fundamental message is that there is hope for the poor masses of the Niger Delta Region as Niger Deltans (Africans) dig deep into the reservoir of their cultural heritage to produce an authentic African image. Mask should showcase a unique African cultural identity.

Conclusion

The study of the mask diction/sensibility in this paper is paramount. It is necessary for the readers of the selected poems: "The Kings and The Delta", "Black Muk", "The Oil-Soaked Land" and others in *The Outcast* to be exposed to the subtle patterns and metaphors that form the diction of the poets and how they use them to express the African worldview. The poets have explored the reservoirs of the cultural heritage to produce an authentic ethnic minority voice. However, this voice of the poetry remains universal, and its ambience knows no bounds. The editors of this collection in their editorial note emphasise that: *The Outcast* therefore emerged as a child of necessity at a time in Nigeria's political history when anarchy and chaos threaten to inherit the land due to lack of justice, and suppression of the truth by governments especially as it relates to resource control. "The title of the collection and the poems in it has been carefully selected to depict the experiences and the horrible condition of a typical Niger Delta" (*The Outcast*, p.ix). This paper has therefore explored the different perspectives from which Osaro et' al have applied the mask diction. Hence, it has shown that the diction has been used to explore themes ranging from the temporal to surreal. In this regard, we have political, psychological, historical and mythical/mystical applications by the poets. They use the mask diction/sensibility to inform the public of destruction of the environment in the Niger Delta.

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The Floating Bottle

Alexandra Esimaje

Benson Idahosa University

Email: alexandra.esimaje@live.com

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I

She yawned all over again, opened her eyes and rubbed them as if trying to punish them for refusing to close in the sleep her tired body needed like a famished man needs food. Nwanta stared steadily into the heavy darkness that drenched the small room. The same hazy figures that seem to find their way into her room filed in again. One by one they began to take and change shapes, move round the room in a circle and mutter and chant sounds she cannot comprehend. As their chants and mutterings got louder, Nwanta felt her head grow as big as the drinking water pot in her mother's room. She sat up like one stung by an *agbusi*, grabbed the torchlight beside her sleeping mat with shivering hands, and immediately, the room was bathed in light. Her eyes flew to the bare hard floor and to the almost lifeless bodies of her children, Chukwuebuka and Chinonso. She sighed and smiled weakly. Then she turned the torch and her gaze to the yellow clock hanging above the only window in the room. 2.00 am! She muttered and sighed again. It was a good time to enjoy a sweet sleep but how could she with the heavy rock of worry in her heart. Last night she had taken to bed '21st April,' marked in red, on the calendar her church distributed after the Last Sunday of the Year Service. Every year she marked the same date in red and kept one calendar after the other in the wooden box that accompanied her and her children to Lagos, from the village. Neatly tucked inside the box were sixteen old calendars, each bearing one marked date: April 21st. On Saturday 21st April 2005, seventeen years ago, Albert took that journey.

"Albert! Albert! She murmured, her mind going back to that day he left her and the children in search of a better life, after only three years of their marriage. Her marriage always reminded her of her mother because it all started with her mother. Nwanta could still hear her mother's weary and pleading voice coming to her as if her life depended on Nwanta's action.

“Nwanta! Nwanta!”, she called amid groans that tore Nwanta’s heart into pieces. “Mama!” She responded running into her father’s *obi* from the kitchen where she was roasting small pieces of coconut for breakfast. “I don’t know what is happening to me ooo! “I don’t know what is happening to me!” Her mother whispered, holding her head in between her palms and shaking her feet violently. “My body is on fire, my head is going *gbim gbim gbim*. It is about to break. *Bia nwam!* Run to the chemist man and buy me medicine. No! Call the chemist man. Bring him here. Go and call Ejiofor for me. Mmhhh! Ejiofor my brother. *Ewoo! Ewooo! Ewooooo!*”

Pursued by her mother’s teary and drowsy voice, Nwanta dashed out of the *obi* where her mother laid on a mat and in less than a minute was in her mother’s room. She grabbed her mother’s *oja*, tore it open and poured the miserable content on the floor. She began to pick and count “one, two, three ...”. Then she stopped and sighed. Her mother’s *oja* held nothing but few pennies. Nwanta stared at the money in her palm wondering what to do. Her mother’s scream told her what to do. She began to search. Nwanta searched and searched. She searched her mother’s box. She searched the cupboard. She searched her father’s *jumpa*. She saw nothing. There was no money for medicine. “Mother”, she called from within. “Tell me where I can find money.” Gasping and groaning, her mother responded, “No-no-no money, my my my child.” Nwanta flew out to the room and there in the *obi* was her mother in a pool of her own blood. “Maama!” Nwanta yelled. “Go *nwam*, go!” Her mother said as she slowly turned and looked at her. Nwanta’s body quivered as if she had *akwukwu*. In her mother’s eyes she saw something she could not give a name to; something that sent cold chills down her spine and drew her to her mother’s side with a force she could not say ‘no’ to. Shivering, Nwanta dragged herself to her mother’s side, bent down and touched her face. Her mother’s hand grabbed her fingers in a vice-like grip, large drops of tears dancing down her face. “*Nwam*, you will be fine, *I nugo*. You will be fine,” she muttered in a faint voice. She left her daughter’s hand and said to her “*Ngwa*, go and buy me medicine. Go and call my brother. Go!”

Nwanta rose from the floor and looked at her mother’s face again. A smile appeared on the face. It was so beautiful but she could not smile back. Her mother slowly waved at her and turned her face to the wall. Nwanta stood there for a moment. Then she ran. She ran out of the house. She ran towards Ejiofor’s house at the end of the next village. Half way, she turned and made

straight to Good Life chemist shop located at the farthest part of her village between Umuda Village and its neighbor, Abotu.

With the dying figure of her mother etched deep in her mind, Nwanta ran to Emma, the village chemist everyone called *dokita*. Her feet crushed dry leaves on the deserted foot paths she took to avoid the crowds that trooped to the market square every *nkwo* day. As soon as the medicine store came into her sight, Nwanta screamed breathlessly as she dashed into the store, “dokita, dokita my mother is dying!” There was no dokita. Instead, a young lad of about her age, only slightly older, stood looking at her. The boy calmly explained to her that his father had travelled out of the village and was due back in three days. Nwanta put her hands on her head and shrieked “No! No! No!” She opened her two palms before the boy and asked “what will I do? My mother is dying, she is vomiting blood. There is blood everywhere.” “What medicine do you want to buy?” The boy asked, pity walking all over his face. His question reminded Nwanta that she had no money, and could not buy any drug. Dokita was not in town, so she was wasting time with this youngster. Without answering him, Nwanta sprang to her feet and dashed into the opposite direction. She must get to her mother’s brother, Ejiofor, as soon as possible.

II

Back at Nwanta’s house, people sat in twos and threes. While some had their hands clasped around their chests, others held their chins with their palms. Feet of the elderly ones tapped in response to some inaudible drum beats. Once in a while, fingers snapped noisily. “Eh! This world is indeed a market place,” a man said in a low tone. “So Mgbechi has finished her own market and is now home?” an elderly woman sitting beside him on the wooden bench in the *obi* looked at him and asked, as if expecting the man to bring out an answer from the folds of his loosely-tied wrapper. “Who will Mgbechi join in that world when her father, Okeke and his wife, Nwanyife are still alive?” Another asked. Are you talking of her father and mother?” Someone cut in. “You know that her grandfather and grandmother are still living with us here. Death has not even shown any sign of remembering them. Hei! *onwu ojoo*, bad death.” Was it not Mgbechi that was born in the year that night fell two times in our land? To date, our parents narrate the story of that strange event. All the children born on that day were named *Mgbechijiriabuo*”, another said.

More questions tumbled out of mouths driven out by grief, but many were left unanswered. None of them knew what snatched life out of Mgbechi and why she left when her life was just beginning. At twenty-seven!

Ejiofor and Nwanta hurried back to the house, followed by a doctor. They saw the whole compound filled with people sitting in groups of threes, fours and fives. The obi was brimming with people. They all wore grim, long faces. Ejiofor looked at some faces around as if searching for something very important. He saw Mgbechi's children firmly strapped to the backs of two elderly women. No soothsayer was needed. Nwanta let out a loud long and blood-cuddling scream "*Mama onuzo ka inoooziooo!*", Where are you? I told you I will come back with Dokita and Ejiofor. Come and see them here oo! Ejiofor turned and gathered Nwanta in his long hands and drew her close to his broad chest as he shut his eyes tightly and began to breathe loudly. Nwanta clung to Ejiofor for a moment, shaking her head aggressively. Then possessed by a force no one knew where it came from, she escaped from Ejiofor's hold and with the speed of light dashed into her father's *obi* where she had left her mother. Her mother was not there. The pool of blood was no longer there. The mat has been removed. The floor looked clean. She dashed out and two young men followed her and grabbed her as she tried to run out of the compound. She pushed, fought and clawed, like a wild cat, but they would not let her go.

Nwanta sat between two buxom women and wept and wept and wept, as she asked after her mother. The women, with tears in their eyes, kept telling Nwanta to calm down and to consider her younger ones. They told her that it was God's will which she must accept, as a good girl. They assured her that they were there for her. As they talked, Ejiofor wondered how many of them would remember their promises tomorrow. "God knows the best. God is good in spite of whatever happens. God is near and would see her through," sympathisers said, trying to console Nwanta. Finally, Nwanta's sobs subsided. She nodded to all the words even when she could not understand all. She also could not understand how God would take her mother who worshipped him day and night and told her stories of his goodness, including how he healed a woman with the issue of blood. She wondered why such a good God did not stop her mother from vomiting blood. She wondered what she did to God to make Him take her mother and leave her motherless at ten, and with two younger siblings, Chinelo and Ifeanyi

Three days after, Emma the chemist came back from his journey and his son related the incident of the *nkwo* day. His mind had clung to the face of the young girl who ran in looking for his father, in utter distress.

“Did she come back?” His father inquired.

“No”, Albert said.

“Whose child is she?” He asked further. The son said she was Ejiofor’s sister’s daughter because Ejiofor came with a doctor to buy drugs from them soon after she left.

“Oh! that must be Nwanta, Mgbechi’s first child”, his father said. “I will visit them later in the day to see how she is doing.”

“Can I go with you father?” Albert quickly asked.

“Yes, my son, it is good to show concern for people.”

The next day, *nkwo*, Albert and his father went to Nwanta’s house to ask after her mother. As they approached the homestead, they saw a man coming out wearing a long face. He stopped, looked at the Dokita, released a long moan and said “Oh! dokita my friend, are you back? Without waiting for a response, he turned to the young boy and said, “my son, we were told they bought the medicine from you. Well, the medicine came too late. God said her time was finished and who are we to question Him?”

On hearing that sad news, they both hurried into the compound. The mound of fresh red soil in the corner of the compound confirmed it. Emma consoled his fellow man. Albert greeted Nwanta “*gbonu*, sorry, hold your heart. I will come to see you again.” Little did anyone know that the visit was only the beginning of a lifelong relationship between both families.

III

Seven years later, Albert visited Nwanta’s family to formally seek her hand in marriage. Their friendship had grown so much and both were convinced that they were destined to be together for life. So, getting Nwanta’s consent was not difficult. By the next harvest season, Albert and Nwanta became husband and wife. Nwanta’s father was overjoyed because his daughter married a responsible young man with a bright future. “At least,” he reasoned, “my

burden is greatly reduced and Nwanta will assist with the upbringing of her younger ones.”

Soon after the marriage, Nwanta became pregnant and in nine months was delivered of a baby boy. The two families were elated. A baby boy is a thing of joy especially as a first child, among the people. Things were going on just well. Albert was managing his father's first chemist store. His father had opened several others. In the third year of their marriage, Nwanta gave birth to another boy child to the delight of many in the village. “*Ukwuoma*,” they said. “Her leg is good. She will sustain her husband's lineage with these sons. Many more will come”, some prayed for her as the second son was being named.

Eight market days after her son, Chinonso was named, her husband's father sent for her. As she went to see him, she wondered what story he would tell her this time around. He was full of rib-cracking stories and she lapped each like a hungry dog. “Nne, sit down here,” he said to her pointing at a seat beside him in his large sitting room. He cleared his throat and started. “Nwanta my daughter, the world we live in is changing very quickly and we should be wise and careful not to allow ourselves to be left behind.” He paused. “Yes papa,” Nwanta said knowing that something very weighty was coming. Her husband's father went on, “no one lives forever and if God gives one the chance one should plan his future and the future of his children.” Although Nwanta did not understand all that he said, he was making some sense to her. If her mother had the chance, she would have planned and prepared for their future.

At last, her father-in-law turned and faced her, took her left hand in his right hand and said, “I want my son, your husband, to go to the Whiteman's land to learn how to make medicines.” He paused again and gently rubbed her hands as one would a child that needs to be pacified. “Someone from the city told me that very soon those who did not go to school will not be allowed to sell medicine. As you know we will all be doomed because that is all I know and your husband has done nothing else since he was born.” In an excited voice, he continued, “the man from the city says that when Albert comes back, he will be a real doctor, the type they call ‘famacit.’” The son came in at that point and said, “Papa, it is called ‘pharmacist.’”

Albert turned to Nwanta, bent down and gently dragged her up from her seat beside his father. He held her close to himself, and whispered; “my father insisted on telling you first because he believed that convincing you would be very difficult seeing how much we love each other. In fact, I am yet to accept that proposition. I cannot imagine leaving you and my two sons to travel so far away from home.” Nwanta held her husband and remained silent for a long time, trying to understand the meaning of it all. Albert could feel her heart beating faster than normal against his chest. He held her even closer and whispered “If you say ‘no’ I will not give it a second thought. Dokita watched them from his sitting position. Nwanta lifted her head and looked into her husband’s eyes as if searching for an answer to give him. She turned and looked briefly at her father-in-law. The old man’s face was expressionless. She stepped out of Albert’s embrace and said, “if it is as good as papa says, then we must give it a serious thought”. Her father-in-law stood up, and with a broad smile on his face, embraced her. “This is a very reasonable wife,” he said to himself.

IV

Not long after this meeting, Albert took his journey to a far-away oversea country to commence his studies. He found both the people and place very strange. Everyone minded his business. There was no neighbourliness at all. “Strange. Very strange these people”, Albert thought. But he was not there to look for neighbours. He was there to study and so he set himself to accomplishing his aim. He pursued his course with vigour and purpose and so was able to surmount problems as he encountered them. Buried in his studies, Albert made sparse contact with his family at home, especially his wife. Nwanta did not worry at first but later anxiety and worry became visible on her face and in her tone.

One day she asked her father-in-law, “Is the white man’s land so far away that a letter takes many *nkwo*s to reach here?” “No, my child”, Albert’s father responded. “Albert your husband has a difficult task ahead of him. I am sure he thinks of us always. We must allow him time to settle properly in that country.” The truth however, was that Albert’s father was also worried.

Then one day, Albert sent his friend, who visited Nigeria, to his father and Nwanta. “Life in the Whiteman’s land is not easy”, he wrote in his letter.

“You must bear with me. Meanwhile, I want my wife and children to leave the village for Lagos where my friend has rented an apartment for them. I want them, especially my children, to have a good life and education. I will constantly be in touch with them from now on,” he promised.

The letter doused all their fears and ushered a new lease of happiness into their lives. Nwanta and her children quickly packed their things for the journey to Lagos. After one week, Nwanta and her two children left the village. Albert's father had tears in his eyes as he waved them goodbye. He held his grandsons for a long time as he prayed blessings on them and asked them to take care of their mother. In Lagos, Nwanta moved into the one-bedroom apartment Albert had paid for, through his friend. The large size of the city made her feel so small and timid but she was excited. She was surprised that even inside Lagos, one still needed to travel from one part to the other, sometimes for hours. There seem to be people and cars everywhere. And at times the cars stood at a place for hours or moved at a snail's speed. Then the twin faces of beauty and squalor reminded her of heaven and hell. The city is a mystery she spent so much time trying to fathom. Her children were thrilled by the noise, colours and flavours of the city but they obviously missed the serenity and love of the village. Soon, Nwanta's excitement and sense of freedom began to wane as the reality of her life as a single mother in the city began to dawn on her. Her enthusiasm dropped as she came face to face with the cruelty and selfishness of Lagos and Lagosians.

Nwanta started selling fruits in a small market near her house to supplement what Albert sent to them, and her father-in-law's support. She found the city so expensive and regularly grumbled that the city swallowed the money it puts in someone's pockets. She knew she would make sacrifices to make Albert's dream come to fulfilment but she didn't know that life in Lagos, as a single mother of two, came with a lot of thorns and thistles. She often consoled herself and her children by saying that “when Albert returns, things will be alright. Then we will have our own car and house. For now, we must manage.”

V

The more she sang to herself and her children “things will be all right”, the more things got worse. Nwanta wondered why life was playing this type of

rough game on her. She wondered why Albert had to go so far away to a land she did not know while she was imprisoned in a *cell* of an Ajegunle house with their two children. Nwanta had become semi-widowed and her two children semi-fatherless.

Nwanta remembered how she had approached her pastor about six months ago. When she could not take it any longer, she poured her heart out to her pastor amidst tears. Her pastor listened keenly with a faint smile playing around his lips. He said to her “daughter, it is a test of faith. Remember Job! Have you forgotten Sarah? Don’t forget the Shunamite woman! What of the woman with the issue of blood?” As he spoke, Nwanta’s eyes travelled from his glossy skin shoe to his carved suit. They lingered on his stone-studded wrist watch and well-manicured fingers. Then she shut her eyes and imagined how each of those could provide good food for her family for several days. Then his voice floated into her ears again, “God does not come late. Hold on a little while more my daughter and you will testify here,” he ended, pointing at the altar.” The thought of that encounter made Nwanta’s blood boil in anger. Her spirit was terribly vexed. Clenching her right fist as if she was about to throw a punch at an invisible enemy, she bellowed “Liars! All of them! Liars! Only good at preaching with other people’s *wahala*.” She hissed like the dreaded king cobra and stretched her exhausted body on the mat in the middle of her room.

Kukurukoo..., the cock crowed cutting off her thoughts and the barrage of questions about the existence of God. Another day has dawned, she hissed. She raised her voice and said “ndiuwa, wake up to join me, your day has dawned but my night continues.” Rousing her children, she called, “Chukwuebuka! Chinonso! Get up. It is morning, Nonso, go and sweep the backyard, it is our turn. Ebuka go and look for water. Go before many people get there.”

As her children went about their chores, Nwanta sat on the mat, her head in her hands. Thinking and murmuring were becoming her primary occupation as days turned into months and months into years and she heard nothing from Albert. “When will life change for the better for me and my children? When will I become a married woman again? Does it mean Albert has forgotten that he left a wife and two children back home in Nigeria to go to *obodo-oyibo* seventeen years ago?” The questions kept coming and going

inside her mind and her head. “When will God remember us and turn our captivity as Pastor Joshua prophesied?” The tears began to gather in her eyes again like a dark cloud. “No!” I say, No! Not again! Enough! Nwanta muttered and stood up like a soldier. “I have cried long enough. Yes, there must be a way out and I will find it.”

As she made to leave the room, her children returned, one with a broom and the other carrying a big bucket of water on a cloth pad placed on his head. Nwanta got them ready for school, after feeding them with foo-foo and a watery soup that looked like a sacrifice reluctantly offered to a lazy deity. “Oya, take your school bag. Today is Monday and you cannot go to school late.” As they left, Nwanta sat down on a low wooden stool, leaned against the wall and closed her eyes to catch some rest.

She was back in the village. Her father-in-law saw her and shouted “nwa muooo!” As she ran into his *obi* to embrace him, she woke up. “It was a dream,” she sighed and rubbed her eyes. “But how is Papa?” She mused. I must endeavour to send a message home to enquire about his health and to know if Albert has written to him lately. But first, I must get ready for the market.”

Nwanta was at the market displaying oranges, paw-paw and water melon in a large plastic tray for prospective customers when she felt a tap on her shoulder. She turned. It was Ojega, her village woman who often came to Lagos to sell foodstuff. Ojega was usually a very cheerful woman. But Nwanta did not see any smile on her face that morning. “O *gini*?” She asked, after they exchanged the usual pleasantries. “It is your father-in-law,” she replied. Nwanta’s hands flew to her mouth, fear written all over her face. “If you want to see him alive you must visit the village as soon as you can.” Ojega told Nwanta. He had been sick for months and is worried about you and the children.

The news of her father-in-law’s condition made her very sad. She resolved to go home as soon as her children went on holidays. But that was never to be because the very next day, the news of Emma’s death got to Nwanta in Lagos. Nwanta was heart-broken and wept uncontrollably. Her husband, Albert could not come for his father’s burial. All the messages sent to him were left unanswered. When his people could not wait any longer, they buried Dokita. The villagers had no reason to doubt that something evil had happened to Albert in the Whiteman’s land.

Nwanta's questions and anxiety rose to an unprecedented level. "Where is Albert? Is he alive or dead? Why has he severed ties with everyone, including his father even at his death?" Nwanta asked time and time again. Five grueling years after the death of her father-in-law, she neither heard from Albert nor saw someone who heard from him. He had left her and their children to suffer years of want and deprivation. Nwanta's meager income from her fruit business could no longer meet the growing needs of her family.

Before long both children were thrown out of school on a day they should be writing their promotion exams. That day Nwanta cried as if there was no tomorrow while her children, each, sat beside her on the bare floor looking confused. She could no longer hide her tears from them. "Mummy, its ok! Don't go and fall sick you hear! That was Chukwuebuka. "Yes! I told all those children saying we don't have daddy that our daddy will soon come back with ple-e-enty money and take us to obodo oyibo." Chinonso quipped drying Nwanta's tears with an old towel hanging on the blue cloth line that held their clothes. Even food became a luxury. Her friends, from the church and market, and neighbours assisted them sometimes with food. Pastor Joshua regularly prayed with her, counselled and encouraged her to keep kneeling before God in prayer until the desired answers arrived. However, the more he encouraged her to have faith, the more difficult things became. Nwanta and her children lived in untold hardship not fit for any human being.

VI

One Saturday morning, after a sleepless night spent in anxious thoughts, Nwanta decided to take some fresh air. She stepped out of her airless one room into the narrow corridor that led into the dirty crowded street. She turned right and for about five minutes walked as if the cluttered street was also paved with burning charcoals. Then she suddenly stopped, took ten deep breaths, turned left and walked in the opposite direction and at a more leisurely pace. Even though the long street was full of people and chaotic noise that morning, she saw nobody and heard nothing. She was buried in her own thoughts and lived alone in her world of pain and anguish where the dark incidents of her life were her companions.

Nwanta's mind went back to her mother's sickness and death which took her ten-year old legs to Emma's drug store where she met the boy, Albert for

the first time. She remembered how Emma's condolence visit brought Albert into her home and life and fate eventually made the boy her man. Nwanta's face broke into a smile as she relished her short stay with him when he bathed her in love and care and made her the envy of most married women in their village. That was a long time ago, before his trip overseas. She breathed heavily and sighed as a frown replaced the smile on her face. "Why did I say 'yes' to that trip? Why did I let Albert go?" She mused all over again. Nwanta continued her monologue. "O God! If I had known that things will be like this, I would have said a capital NO! But I had hoped for the best. Oooh Albert! Albert! Albert! What happened? If only I could see you now!"

With unshed tears dancing in her eyes and unseen pain possessing her heart, she kept walking until she bumped into something. "*Chineke muo!*" She exclaimed and smiling mirthlessly asked, "where am I?" She looked around her and a large ancient-looking tree without a single leaf on its branches blocked her way. As she stepped aside, she felt something on her left leg and an offensive stench surrounded her. "Aaaah!" She screamed as she looked at her leg closely. She has stepped into a mound of excrement. She looked around and the ground was littered with all kinds of waste. There were broken bottles everywhere. She wondered why she didn't step on any and for a moment was grateful. She did not know when she walked into an abandoned park at the end of the second Street on the left-hand side of her own street. She heard that the park was built by the Jakande administration. At the moment, it had been taken over by some street urchins and people avoided it, especially at night. Nwanta saw some grass at the other side of the compound beside a small hall with an attached security room. She walked to that place and began to wipe her slippers and feet on the sand and grass. As she did, some whispering voices floated into her ears. She raised her head and very close to where she stood were two lovers seated on a mat made out of a carton talking in low tones and sipping a bottle of Coke. The woman was in her Middle Ages and sat with outstretched legs and while her back rested on the wall. The man was younger and lay across the mat with his head on the woman's laps. She caressed his head and chest as one would stroke a baby to sleep. Beholding them, she recalled the sweet moments she shared with her husband. She stared at them for a long time but they were so engrossed in each other's affection to notice any intrusion. As the man took the woman into a long, warm and breathtaking embrace, Nwanta slowly and reluctantly went on her way.

“Love is a sweet experience,” she murmured as she walked out of the park pondering over the thing called love. “It cuts through barriers. It knows no age, colour, creed,” she thought. Her relationship with Albert had taught her that life is sweet when love is shared and nurtured. But without Albert, life had left her with untold pain and constant sorrow. Albert was her light and without him, she was in darkness. “Albert my love, how I miss you!” she muttered to herself.

Back in the house, she washed her legs with a tiny piece of soap she had picked in the public bathroom that morning and a packet of pure water as her stomach churned with revulsion. She stepped into her room and the reality of her situation hit her once again. Her children lay on the mat. She knew they were hungry. She sat beside them. Nonso looked pale. She placed the back of her palm on his forehead and it was so hot. Nwanta did not know what to do. She took a long look at her children. “This must end!” She murmured. “I will not watch my children die.” Suddenly, an idea sprang up in her head, Nwanta urged her children to sit up. She held them close to her chest and said a prayer, handing them over to God. Then, she told them to be strong because she must undertake a long journey immediately but that on her return, all their worries would end. They only nodded their heads, too weak to talk. Nwanta stood on her feet and walked out of the door. She then began to run as if the devil was after her.

VII

Dr Jane King sat on her balcony overlooking her flower garden with its array of beautiful flowers. She had been there for several hours. She was not there inhaling the fresh air of her spotless and luxurious Victoria Island mansion planted few steps from the Bar Beach. Mrs King was only there in flesh while her mind travelled back to the history of her long journey in Nigeria which started decades ago.

Forty years ago, Dr. Jane King and Ben, her husband, also a medical doctor, arrived Nigeria from Spain on a missionary medical assignment. In their home country, Spain they had heard the news of the ravaging effect of malaria in Nigeria and joined the war against malaria on voluntary basis. Delighted by their selflessness and commitment to the health project, the Nigerian government donated a wide expanse of land to them on McPherson

Street on Victoria Island and on that piece of land they built a big hospital as well as their home.

The then young couple, Ben and Jane embraced their work like one would a loved spouse. They gave all their time and energy to fighting malaria and postponed child bearing. Consequently, their mission grew in leaps and bounds. Their commitment attracted fame and the attention of huge funds from local and international donor agencies, as well as governments, in support of the free medical services they rendered to the society. As time went by, Jane and Ben became richer than they ever imagined.

Having attained their professional goal, Jane and Ben King got ready to bear and raise the two-boys-two-girls, four children, they had planned to have in quick succession. However, the children refused to come as planned. The couple started hospital visits, professional counselling and special prayers but no child came. After ten years and series of surgeries and other medical procedures, the Kings accepted their fate. As adoption did not appeal to them, they remained childless but injected greater zeal into their work and earned greater admiration. As their fortune grew like well-tended yam tendrils, they ventured into the importation and sale of medical equipment. The hunger for children never left them but they refused to let that introduce bitterness into their lives and spousal relationship. The Kings loved each other so much until Ben took his last breath two years ago.

After her husband's burial in Spain, Mrs. King travelled to Britain to recuperate from the shock as well as the arthritis which she had lived with for the past ten years. Their investments in Nigeria were secure under the boards carefully selected to manage them when they became too numerous and big for a single proprietorship. At the end of her eighteen months stay in the UK, Mrs. King returned to Nigeria.

As she sat at the balcony, she saw two options before her. The first was to continue living in Nigeria. The second was to pack her things and go back to her home country, Spain to spend what was left of her life in the company of her family and people she left forty years ago. After a couple of minutes, Dr. King murmured "I have come to the end of my stay in Nigeria." She would surely miss Nigeria where she had learnt the culture and value of neighbourliness,

hardly present in her original home; but she could feel it down in her bones: it was time to go home.

Two days later, Mrs. King was locked up for hours with her two lawyers in her study. Different parts of the will were retouched as demanded by the several changes in the couple's original plans. Apart from the percentage of wealth apportioned to missions, charity and immediate relations, the will welcomed a new twist. Reworking the will, Mrs. King, like Solomon, saw the futility of life and worldly acquisitions. The real meaning of the popular saying that everybody will leave the world as naked as he/she came into it hit her on the face with the force of a bullet hitting its target frontally. At the end of the exercise, Mrs. King thanked her lawyers and rewarded them handsomely for the job. Although they did not understand the reason for certain parts of the will, they were satisfied with the work they did. The lawyers took their leave and wished her a blissful sojourn in her home country. As she sat there after they had both left, Mrs. King raised her eyes and prayed that the poor, who had always attracted her attention and sympathy, would be the beneficiaries of her will. She then decided to take her last prayer walks at the Bar Beach from the next day.

Stepping out of her sitting room doors, on her third and last evening of her prayer at the beach and two days before her final departure from Nigeria, Mrs. King's mind raced to the two bottles of anointing oil on the table of her large bedroom. The bottles of oil were the only two left in the last carton of twelve she purchased before she travelled for her husband's burial. As a medical doctor, Mrs. King believed in the power of medicine but as a Christian minister, she believed more in the healing power of God. Both are the potent Siamese twins that carried her successful medical practice. For reasons she could not explain, Mrs. King walked back to her room, opened the carton and took one of the bottles. For a couple of minutes, she studied the uniquely-shaped bottle as if she was seeing it for the first time. Then clutching in her left palm, she left her house for the beach.

At the sea shore, Mrs. King walked up and down muttering prayers of thanksgiving under her breath. Then she stopped and watched the grumbling and tumbling waters rise into a mountain from the bowels of the sea and bow before Mother Nature. No matter how many times she saw that, it never ceased to amaze her. The waves always had a way of pumping her heart with awe and wonder that draw unplanned praises out of her lips. Without

thinking, she raised the bottle of anointing oil over her head and the praises tumbled out of her mouth as the waves rose and fell before her eye. “Through this oil you have healed many using our hands and medical skills. I therefore stand here before nature in its power and beauty and return all the glory to You, through this bottle of anointing oil.” Her tongue seemed like a different being, outside her body and control. “This oil,” she continued, raising the bottle even a bit higher, “remains a sign of Your healing presence at The Hope Hospital.” As I leave, I hand over Your hospital back to You. It is Yours! So, soothe the broken hearted, heal the sick, give hope to the hopeless, give joy to the sorrowful, feed the poor, and break every stronghold, as You have always done.” Then she flung the bottle into the waves. “The other bottle is the testimony I will carry with me to Spain,” she mumbled as she closed her eyes in prayer. She felt something hard hit her right leg and opened her eyes. It was the bottle of anointing oil she just cast into the restless sea. It came back. She picked it and her eyes ran over the bottle trying to understand how such a small bottle could say ‘no’ to the forceful waves. “Is God trying to say something?” She asked. As she cast it back into the sea the hanging issue of an administrator of her multimillion Naira investments and charity organisation jumped into her mind. As the bottle hit the waters the second time the waves calmed down. She saw the bottle floating on the slowly moving water as if it were an ordinary leaf. Her eyes followed the bottle as it moved up and down, driven by the waters. She laughed softly and said to herself, “the floating bottle.” Her hospital, investments, NGO and house came into her mind’s eye. It was two days to go and God was yet to reveal who will do the job and inherit fifty-percent of her wealth. She smiled. She had learnt over the ages to trust God even to the last minute, especially when she was sure of what she heard.

VIII

Like one possessed with the seven spirits of the evil forest, Nwanta ran down the road to the bus stop. In her madness, she had acquired the strength of a tiger. At the bus stop, she screamed, “mainland, mainland”, as the conductor of a rickety *molue* shouted, “Lagos main one *nyash*, one *nyash*.” Nwanta dashed into the bus pushing a man who already had one leg inside the bus out of her way. Shocked beyond words, the poor man could only mutter to himself “*abi were ni*.” As soon as Nwanta took the remaining one seat, her mind left the bus.

“Woman!” Shouted the conductor in a drunken voice. “Abeg comot, comot, carry your madness go. No be you run into this bus like say dem dey chase you? Now you sidon like say you dey your house.” Nwanta shuddered and looked around to realise she was alone, with the driver and conductor in the bus. The scowl on the face of the conductor sent the fear of God into her already beating heart. The bus had gotten to the last bus stop after two hours. In the two hours, her racing mind was forced to halt and think again. “What will become of my children if I drown myself in the sea? What if Albert returns this minute to me and the kids? Is it true that God does not come late, as Pastor Joshua says?” The questions divested her decision of its power and motivation, like one would peel off some dirty cloth.

Nwanta quickly alighted from the bus avoiding the conductor’s fire-spitting eyes. She walked towards the Bar Beach. In front of the Bar Beach, Nwanta stood completely drained of energy and the force that pushed her to the sea. She stood in front of the raging waves and as they growled and doused her with cold waters the fear of death descended upon her and her leg danced to the sound of a music only both could hear. Nwanta dropped on her knees and buried her head in the dripping wet sand. After a while, she sat down and drawing her knees to her chin, she let the tears flow.

Nwanta’s tears came in torrents. The loud sobs racked her entire body. She cried until her tears mingled with the salty waters of the sea and her body shivered in pain and cold. Her eyes and mind were closed against the captivating dancing blue sea. The white sand in its luscious softness and divine purity was not her concern. Sitting there before nature in its richness and colourfulness, Nwanta could only see the wretchedness and smell the hopelessness of her colourless life.

As her body quivered, Nwanta bit her lips until she tasted blood. She dug her fingers into the soft sand as if trying to deposit some of the crushing agony in her heart into the sand. “Tears may last for the night but joy surely comes in the morning.” That was Pastor Joshua’s voice floating into her ears as if coming from the noisy waves and dripping into her heart. Her fingers dug deeper into the sand just deposited at her feet by the latest wave. She touched something hard. She thought it was a sea shell but as she rubbed it, she felt a certain smoothness she knew cannot be found in the rough seashell. Nwanta dragged it out and it was a full bottle of oil. She had seen a lot of anointing oil but

none like what she held in her hands. The bottle is shaped like a cone. Pasted on the two sides of the brownish bottle were green labels written Jerusalem Anointing Oil.

She caressed the bottle as more tears flowed. She was convinced that the poor bottle was forgotten by one of the several Bar Beach prophets that do their job at nights. Suddenly, she felt as if someone was watching her closely. She tried to dry her tears and turned. Standing behind her was a beautiful white woman with very compassionate eyes. Remembering the village folktales, she thought that the Bar Beach mermaid had appeared to collect her bottle of oil. She was almost sure that the woman was standing on a fish tail but when she looked down, she saw two human legs. As she raised her head, she found the white woman watching the bottle with a visible glint Nwanta could not understand in her eyes. The woman bent down, placed a cold soft palm on Nwanta's cheek and said "My child." At once a clear picture of her mother appeared and left as quickly as it came. "It is well!" The white woman added. Nwanta shook her head. She could not count the number of times she had heard the same words. They no longer held any meaning to her. But those same words from the lips of a stranger at the Bar Beach poured cold water on her burning heart and her tears stopped at once. It was like magic.

The white woman dragged Nwanta up and held her in a long hug as she struggled to calm down. She then led her to a shelter, as if she was a lost child, and both of them sat down. She opened her bag, brought out a bottle of water, opened it and gave Nwanta. Nwanta took it with shaky hands and gulped the contents down as if her life depended on it. "Wash your face," the woman said to her in a very gentle voice. Nwanta did and by the time she finished she saw a face towel waiting for her in the outstretched hands of the white woman. "I am Jane King," she said. "I am a widow and a medical doctor from Spain but have lived in Nigeria for forty years," the doctor added. She then drew closer to Nwanta, took the bottle of oil from her and placed it on the ground. The doctor then held both her palms in her own as she looked at her bloated face and red eyes for a long time with a consoling smile pasted on her face. As she held those palms, Dr. King heard the familiar voice within her "This is your last assignment in Nigeria and the answer to your prayer." Dr. King looked at the woman again, took the bottle of oil, opened it and few drops hit Nwanta's palms. Mrs. King rubbed Nwanta's palms with her slender fingers as she prayed silently. "Can we talk about it now?" Dr. Kings asked after a while.

As Nwanta stepped out of the *uber* in front of their Ajegunle home, still trying to come to terms with what just happened at the beach, some of her neighbours sitting outside asked “where have you been?” “O God, my children!” Nwanta bellowed, the sick and hungry children she left since morning possessing her thoughts. “Your children are ok,” one of the neighbours responded. “You have an august visitor,” another added smiling from ear to ear. Nwanta looked from one to the other and slowly walked towards her room. As she stood at the door, she heard her two sons laughing excitedly. She opened the door. “Albe-e-ert? Nwanta let out one long piercing scream and ran out in confusion.

Albert held her and tried to calm her down as her heart pounded as if it will jump out of her chest. “I will tell you everything, it is a long sad story, my love.” He went on as Nwanta shook like a leaf under the harmattan wind. “My love, *biko* forgive me. I was in prison for years for trying to help a fellow Nigerian in another man’s land. I will tell you more but for now, how are you and where have you been? He asked, cupping her face in his big strong palms.

“That was what happened o, my husband,” Nwanta ended her story as she handed over to Albert the bottle of anointing oil, a complimentary card with two clearly written GSM numbers on its back and twenty pieces of one thousand Naira notes. As she looked at all those, she shouted in a loud voice, “chai! There is God ooo! There is God ooo!” She rubbed her eyes and looked at Albert from head to toe. “Dr. King said the time of suffering is over and now I believe it with my full chest,” Nwanta chanted in a very excited tone as she touched Albert as if trying to make sure he was there in their room in flesh and blood. “She said I must come to see her tomorrow and you will go with me,” Nwanta said to Albert as the children laughed and jumped all over the small room basking in the joy of the long-awaited reunion.

