

LANGUAGE USE IN LITERARY COMMUNICATION: A STUDY OF CHINUA ACHEBE'S LANGUAGE ARTISTRY IN *THINGS FALL APART* AND *ARROW OF GOD*

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Abstract

This paper focuses on the use of language in literature to communicate ideas, cultural values, belief system and ideologies about African people and their communities ways of life, problems and prospects. It also portrays the aesthetics in creative writings in style and diction as a means of communication. It buttresses this with the use of language by a Nigerian foremost writer Chinua Achebe. His effective translation of Igbo language syntax to English language without grammatical errors is also highlighted.

Introduction

Language in every human society refers to the use of speech, sounds and symbols for the purpose of communication. Every language has its own system of communication as such it is said to be arbitrary. This implies that what is expressed in one language to signify a specific idea or something cannot be said to be the same in another language. The structural patterns of word ordering vary from one language to another, but in all, the essence is any natural language is specifically for interaction and communication within a particular speech community. The language situation in Nigeria is that of a foreign language called English used in official transactions, government administration, business, politics, religion and social gatherings to the detriment of indigenous languages numbering over two hundred.

English Language came with the colonization of the country by the British, the original owners of the language many years ago. Since western education is done in English everybody in the country determines to know and speak the language in any form possible. That is why we have varieties like pidgin and Nigeria English. In an attempt to make people to know much of the English Language most of the books written in Nigeria in almost all subjects are written in English. However there are some that are written in our various dialects such as Igbo, Yoruba, Hausa, Efik, etc. Literature as one of the subjects in Nigeria school system is virtually written in English but with a touch of local color as a result of the use of indigenous cultural values as the themes in such literary works.

Language in Literature

Language is a very vital tool for the expression of ideas, thought, values and concepts in literary works whether it is prose, poetry or drama. The value of language to literature is in the ability of the author to create language in a manner that can describe the things which the writer intends appropriately. Literary, language is never so straight forward. It is sometimes figurative and sometimes connotative. This accounts for the peculiar expressions found in the literary texts with meanings different from the denotative ones known in the dictionaries and normal daily expressions. That is why we find a lot of idioms, proverbs and oral cultural expressions peculiar to the Africans writing about their cultures and experiences in English. Such cultural speech habits are found in literary works written by Achebe, Soyinka, Clarke, Amadi and a lot of other Nigerian and African writers.

Literary language conies with new syntactic creation hi order to add beauty to what is written. Much of what is written in literature reflects on the emotions that affect the people in the human society. Such emotions include love, pleasure, oppression, frustration, depression and happiness among others. All these are usually reflected in the actions and dialogue of the characters. What is important here is that the writer uses the characters to communicate to the readers the problem and prospects of the individuals as well as the societies.

Language and Culture in Literary Communication

Every writer in literature first of all writes about the culture that he comes from. Right from the English writers from the time of Shakespeare, Marlow, Dryden and Sheridan, they ail wrote about the society of their time as \\cell as the cultural values of their societies. In Africa, many African writers like Achebe. Soyinka and Amadi write about the issues in their culture which they feel are important and which do affect the psychology of the individual, the problems and progress of the society. For instance, Achebe (1958) in *Things Fall Apart* writes about the cultural values in Igbo society and how they affect the individuals and the society at large. Here Okonkwo is projected as an individual who rose from a poor background to become a leading figure in his society, through his hard work and determination. The text also exposes the role of the gods and personal chi and communal oracles in Igbo society. Soyinka uses the knowledge of the Yoruba god Ogun, in *The Road* to expose the manner in which the people fear the god of Iron as being destructive. This is seen when Samson begs Kokonu to kill a dog as a sacrifice to

the god for using the road before the god kills them by accident. Amadi in *The Concubine* writes about the people's belief in the super-natural being making Ihuoma the most beautiful lady to be the wife of the Sea King and preventing her from marriage to any man in the world.

In terms of language usage as a means of communication in their works, Taiwo (1976:14) postulates that a writer's language is a mirror held up to his personality and his particular circumstance. It is through his usage of language that he reflects his individual awareness of a given situation. It has therefore been necessary in all cases to examine closely each novelist's usage of language and try to assess how effectively the artist has communicated with his readers. Historical and cultural influence on the Nigerian writer are as a result of the influence of the tradition on the writers. This is the cause of their differences in style and narrative techniques.

Another aspect of effective communication is seen in how each writer represents the link between indigenous culture and modern experience in his own particular way. Themes vary a great deal from one writer to another. Achebe's interest is in communication at various levels as reflected on the relationships between people of different cultures and religious beliefs, between people of the same race and political inclination, between different sections of the same community, between the government and the people and between the town and country in most of his books such as *Arrow of God*, *Things Fall Apart*, *A Man of the People* and *No Longer at Ease*. Generally, each Nigerian writer portrays the attitude of the writer towards his culture and seeks to solve the problem of communication in some interesting ways through the use of proverbs, idioms and traditional speech pattern like in *Things Fall Apart* and *Arrow of God* by Achebe and also in *The Road*, *Kongl's Harvest* and *A Dance of The Forest* by Soyinka.

Literature according to Rosenblait (1970:18) embraces matters that are related and special to history, economics, politics, religion and social affairs of the people in a particular community. These themes are common in Nigerian literature as they are evident in the works of Nigerian authors in different genres of prose, drama and poetry.

Achebe's Language Competence

Achebe's language communication competence lies in his ability to transfer the Igbo syntactic structure into English. He deliberately avoids the word 'European' and used an Igbo expression for it which is 'white man'. This adds some element of beauty and new vocabulary to the expression about the colour of the European. In his peculiar way of expression and lamentation about the way Whiteman hates African culture as being barbaric, primitive and wicked Obierika says: Does the white man understand our custom. I low can he when he does not even speak our tongue. He says that our customs are bad and our brothers who have taken up his religion also say that our customs are bad. The white man is clever. He came quietly and peaceable with his religion. We were amused at his foolishness and allowed him to stay. How he has won our brothers and our clan can no longer act like one. He has put a knife on the things that held us together and we have fallen apart (Achebe, 1958:124).

Achebe's choice of words is very simple here. His use of simple English makes his communication effective since it reflects the Igbo grammar version. He has succeeded in communicating the problems facing his society as a result of the coming of the white man into the community. His power of description throughout the text is exceptionally brilliant as the incidents and events are methodically analyzed to bring out a dramatic picture of the changes that occurred with the coming of the white man. Rosenblait (1970:27) refers to this as facts about the social, economic and intellectual history of the age in which literary works are written.

The uniqueness of Achebe in terms of communication can be appreciated by the readers in terms of social origin and social effects especially when reading the aspect of Okonkwo's humble beginning and his rise to fame, his exile and return to end in suicide. All these communicate the good and bad culture of the Igbo's to the readers and therefore evokes sympathy on the tragic end of the famous man.

In Achebe's use of English language as a medium of expression and communication we find a basic ground work of Igbo syntax and ideas in words which are English. Nwoga (1979:26) says: "we find tonal modulations and proverbial nuances", a reference to the structural patterning of words peculiar to Achebe in his novels. New patterns of words and expressions at various levels and classes are revealed through his use of English words and combinations in sentences. Nwoga further explicates that:

Literary language connotes bilingualism. It enhances the transmission of ideas, the discovery of new expressiveness and new modes. It does not simplify things, it does tell us that a welding together of English and vernacular be it Ijaw, Igbo or Yoruba which can make sense to at least a secondary school leaver has emerged (Nwoga, 1978: 27).

This points to the general acceptability of the kind of English written by Achebe, Okara and Soyinka as they communicate to their readers effectively.

One of Achebe's literary power is the remarkable competence with which he handles the English language. He gives most thought on how to express his views to accommodate his cultural values in English and succeeds in creating his English version of Igbo syntax. In confirmation of his words transfer from Igbo to English Palmer (1979:75) concludes that:

Achebe has produced something new and valuable to the English language as well as to the material he is trying to put over. His narratives style using African thought patterns in idiomatic expressions radiates to become a dazzling beauty. He can also capture the nuances of the native speaker's pattern.

The speeches of the white people like Captain Winterbotton and Mr. Clark are sophisticated and can be

distinguished from these of [the uneducated African Igbos like Okonkwo, Obierika and Ezeudu since theirs is from the Igbo language stock to English.

In both *Things Fall Apart* and *Arrow of God*, Achebe's rural characters who would normally use Igbo language in actual situation are made to speak in English to reflect African rural community with the thought and speech pattern of native Igbo speakers. The reasonable thing is that the English is correct grammatically. Another great impression created by Achebe's use of language to communicate to the readers is in his use of images and similes drawn from African environment in *Things Fall Apart* as he says: Okonkwo did not taste any food for two days after the death of Ikemefuna. He drank palm wine from morning till night, and his eyes were red and fierce like the eyes of a rat when it was caught by the tail and dashed against the floor (Achebe, 1958:57).

Here, Achebe uses the image of rat and palm wine to illustrate Okonkwo's mood after killing Ikemefuna. His use of proverbs as seen in the speech of the elders makes his novels interesting. For instance, Eneke the bird says: "Since men have learnt to shoot without missing, I learn to fly without perching". Also, "A child who washes his hands well dines with the elders". Another one is "A chick that will grow into a cock can be spotted the very first day it hatches". These are some of the proverbs that make Achebe popular.

Conclusion

Literature generally deals with and ministers to human life and needs through the artistic work of literary craftsmanship in the denotative, figurative and connotative diction. These create a high

aesthetic appeal to the readers. The language of literature is derived from the inventory of linguistics but combined to describe situations, events and incidents in a manner that sets prose, drama and poetry apart from other subjects and general language usages.

The truth of the matter is that literary texts embody verbal stimuli toward a special kind of intense and ordered experience which may be sensuous, intellectual, emotional, educative and entertaining as it communicates experiences to the readers thereby making them new individuals in terms of intelligence and knowledge. Therefore, the role of language as a major tool for literary writing cannot be over-emphasized since it helps to communicate ideas, beliefs, philosophies and diverse cultures from all over the world to the readers. That is why we read Shakespeare, Marlow, Orwell, Shaw and many others from Europe and countless African writers too.

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