

# The Social Use of Language: An Ethnography of Communication in Chinua Achebe's *Arrow of God*

**Bawa Kammampool**

Laboratory of Literature, Language and Sustainable Development (LaLD), Faculty of Letters and the Humanities, University of Kara, Kara, Togo

**Email address:**

kammampoolbawa@yahoo.fr, kambawa555@gmail.com, bawa\_kammampool@yahoo.fr

**To cite this article:**

Bawa Kammampool. The Social Use of Language: An Ethnography of Communication in Chinua Achebe's *Arrow of God*. *International Journal of Literature and Arts*. Vol. 10, No. 1, 2022, pp. 28-37. doi: 10.11648/j.ijla.20221001.14

**Received:** December 14, 2021; **Accepted:** January 15, 2022; **Published:** January 24, 2022

---

**Abstract:** During colonization, the English language was not only the primary language of government and administration but it was also used in the education of colonized subjects. Consequently, English became a national language in the colonies and had since then complicated its own status as a significant medium of communication because of the colonized conflicting attitudes towards it. Since a writer brings his personality, experience and the totality of his personhood to bear on his work of art, postcolonial writers and critics felt that the use of English from its standard form as well as the cultural values it carried cannot give genuine artistic shape and form to their creative impulses. While some advocate for the return to writing in indigenous African languages others are of the opinion that the use of a foreign language is pointless. In this sense, Chinua Achebe's quest for a postcolonial literary aesthetic is delineated in *Arrow of God*, where, with an unparalleled dexterity, he adapts the English language to suit the cultural norms, social interactions, ideas and ideals of his traditional Igbo society. The study was conducted by applying a postcolonial approach to literature which suggests that post-colonial writing seize the English language and replace it in a discourse fully adapted to the colonised place. The primary material used for arguments in this study is *Arrow of God* where data were purposely collected. Much more data informed by Igbo's indigenous tradition and culture were abstracted from internet sources and many critical works. The result of the analysis shows that language and culture intertwine to subvert the colonial perspective on the colonized.

**Keywords:** Colonization, Social Use, Language, Culture, Discourse, Communication, *Arrow of God*, Postcolonial

---

## 1. Introduction

"Every language", writes Ngugi wa Thiong'o, "has two aspects. One aspect is its role as an agent that enables us to communicate with one another in our struggle to find the means for survival. The other is its role as a carrier of the history and culture built in the process of that communication over time" [1]. In *Decolonizing the Mind*, he has reiterated this opinion when he writes that the two aspects of language are inseparable; they form a dialectical unity [2]. Edward Sapir has validated the theoretical observation that, "language does not exist apart from culture; that is from the socially inherited assemblage of practices and beliefs that determines the texture of our lives" [3]. In his argument, he convincingly emphasised that there is really interplay between language and the culture it reflects. In this sense, language and culture are inseparably linked. In the same line

of thought, Dennis Baron writes that, "Language becomes both a primary vehicle for the transmission of group culture and a badge of...identification" [4].

Thus, Chinua Achebe's use of language in *Arrow of God* reflects the socio-cultural setting and the cultural patterns of his Igbo community. Arguably, he competently uses the English language to describe ideas, circumstances, and issues pertaining to beliefs and attitudes as well as the thought patterns that are peculiar to his people. In so doing, the novelist believes that, language as a tool, belongs to a particular society and must be used in such a way that it reflects the cultural patterns of that society. So, the interplay between language and culture involves the way in which his Igbo people view the world. It has been argued that "the integrity of language is safeguarded by the fact that what goes on in the community can easily be ascertained, understood, and evaluated by all" [5]. In this perspective,

there is an urgent need to adapt the Colonial language to suit the communicative use, or better, the social use of language.

Commenting on the use of language in Achebe's fictional works, Palmer observes that Achebe's rural characters who would normally use Igbo in actual situations are made to speak in English but that the English has been modified to reflect an African rural community and the thought patterns of native Igbo speakers.[6] In this sense, we may say that Achebe's novels "are among the works that tried to rehabilitate the identity and history of the African character, to assert the validity of African culture, and to expose the violence which colonial domination had brought to bear on African societies." [7]. Thus, in *Arrow of God*, the interplay of language and Igbo's cultural patterns and thought process appropriately highlights Achebe's adaptive use of the English language. In carving his traditional characters, Achebe is able to enter imaginatively into the lives of his traditional characters and "to explore the strains to which they are exposed as a result of the disruptive effect on a foreign culture on the relatively stable and self-sufficient culture they grew up in" [8] as seen in the life of two essentially traditional characters namely Ezeulu and his rival, Nwaka. As a matter of fact, Achebe readily, readjusts and modifies the English language to suit the cultural norms, social interactions, ideas and ideals of the traditional Igbo society in the novel. For Palmer, Achebe's use of rhythms, speech patterns, idioms delineate other nuances of the Ibo language. According to him, the "English language used by Achebe is grammatically correct but modified rhythmically and idiomatically" [6].

The focus of this study is to identify and analyze some of the strategies Chinua Achebe has used in his effort to adapt the received language to suit socio-cultural contexts. It also shows how the novelist uses this 'new language' to revalorize the Igbo's traditional cosmology in his effort to debunk the colonial perspective on the colonized. This study reveals that language is not only a significant vehicle for the transmission of group culture but it is also an important badge of authentication and identification of the culture of its originating society.

## 2. Theoretical and Conceptual Frameworks

Today among the tasks formerly colonized peoples face is the rejection of colonialist ideology, which defined them as inferior, and the reclamation of their precolonial past. In fact, both tasks involve many complex problems of interest to postcolonial critics. For example, in order to reject colonialist ideology and embrace their precolonial cultures, some native authors, such as Kenyan writer Ngugi wa Thiong'o, write in their own local languages. But since the use of native languages often requires native writers to put forth the double effort of writing in their indigenous languages and then translating their work into English or having it translated, Nigerian writer Chinua Achebe, has decided to demonstrate

most clearly that the political and cultural agency achieved by writers is to appropriate the dominant language, transform it, and use it to reveal a cultural reality to a world audience. One major purpose of his writing the novel is writing back to the colonizers who have long misrepresented Africa and Africans through their fabricated stories about Africa's long-practiced traditions and cultures. In other words, Chinua Achebe's goals in writing was to challenge the story of misrepresentations of his people and country in western hegemonic discourse.

Roscoe A. [9] demonstrated the view that,

*The problem a second language raises for authors is acute. They face the task of giving artistic shape and form to their creative impulses in a language not originally their own, a language whose very essence bears the marks of a culture and history which they have not been able to fully share. In circumstances such as these, how can an African writer give completely satisfying expression to his innermost vision and response to experience? In other words, how can an African, writing in English, convey his authentic voice and spirit? How, indeed, can he remain African?*

Kammampool [10] states that,

*The price a world language must be prepared to pay is submission to many different kinds of use. The African writer should aim to use English in a way that brings out his message best without altering the language to the extent that its value as a medium of international exchange will be lost. He should aim at fashioning out an English which at once, universal and be able to carry his peculiar experience. I have in mind here the writer who has something new, something different to say. The non-descript writer who has little to tell us, anyway, so he might as well tell in a conventional language and get it over with.*

Thus, Achebe's endeavour in refashioning the received language or the language of the center shows the influence of indigenous Igbo folklore on his narrative strategies and as well impact the thematic conceptualization of his novels. As a matter of fact, his novels reflect to a great extent how folkloristic material is used to interrogate and communicate the limitations of the traditional realistic novel in an attempt to create something new; that is, something new that offers to show how orality plays a significant role in the African literary creation and conception as well. In fact, in this study the specific language employed by the novelist seem to mirror a particular cultural view since the content of what has been said will certainly vary with the language being used to carry a message across. Trudgill [11] points out that society's kinship system is revealed in its kinship vocabulary; distinctions that are important in a culture are reflected in the lexicon of the language of that society. This is supportive in that it provides a telling example of the effects the social or cultural on environment language. While this campaign clarifies the fact that people who speak different languages may view the world differently, speakers of various languages conceptualize reality in different ways. Gumperz [12] opines that the more we know about a particular society, the more effectively we know we can communicate in it. For

instance, Chinua Achebe's initial admiration of the efficiency of orality gave way to disgust about European canonical literature, methods and tradition. Simon Gikandi [13] testifies this when he writes that Achebe's decision to become a writer was propelled by the nationalist desire to negate the colonial episteme and replace it by a new African narrative and by extension, order of knowledge. Kwame Anthony Appiah [14] opines that the gesture of writing about the colonized generates a counter-hegemonic discourse which not only debunks the dominant mythologies of empire, but also helps constitute the modern community of the nation. Through a close reading of Achebe's early as well as recent novels and his theoretical reflections on the nature and function of Igbo writing in particular and African writing in general, I endeavour to show using *Arrow of God* [15] the referent text, that the novel, though a western artefact, provides a new way of reorganizing African cultures which have been harassed, disorganized, disorientated and distorted by the Empire and which tries eventually to meet the challenge of anti-imperialist struggles in its effort to gear toward the formulation of a viable African poetics. Post-colonial literary theorists, namely Ashcroft et al. [10], claim that the refashioning of the language of the center should be done through various strategies by writers of once colonized nations by "inserting untranslatable words into their texts, by glossing seemingly obscure terms, by refusing to follow standard English syntax and using structures derived from other languages, of incorporating many different creolised versions of English in their texts".

Particularly, this theory is relevant to the present study because Achebe's use of language in *Arrow of God* is to indicate his communicative intention and skills. One of his major aim in 'indegenising' the English language is to capture obvious peculiarities in the Igbo traditional society. He therefore resorts to the use of many traditional literary devices such as proverbs, translation, and imageries to achieve his intentions in his effort to explain Igbo ideals, cultural norms and beliefs. In the process, he captures and recaptures the Igbo traditional setting or environment. His use of pidgin blended with the use of plain, simple and everyday English is striking. At this point, it is worth recalling or reminding ourselves that "the true function of art and culture is to interpret us to ourselves, and to relate us to the country and the society in which we live" [16]. Nowadays, the theoretical and critical issues that have affected African literature and its interpretation have their roots in the art of "reworking of English under new conditions, forcing it to change from its standard version into something new and more suited to the new surroundings" [17]. Achebe [18] posits that,

*The turning point came in 1958 when I found myself wanting to know myself better, and I had to turn and look at myself from inside ... And when I talk of looking inward to myself, I mean turning inward to examine myself. This, of course, takes an account of ancestors ... because I do not exist apart from my ancestors.*

Writing about the notion of language and the potency of

words in small closely-knit society such as the Umuofia Achebe describes and which is often called primitive society, Igwe [19] succinctly addresses this issue in a pristine clarity: "*a speaker who could use language effectively and had a good command of idioms and proverbs was respected by his fellows and was often the leader in the community*".

In *Black Skins White Masks*, Frantz Fanon [20] writes that "[a] man who has a language consequently possesses the world expressed and implied by that language. It has been recently claimed that, "language is a body of words, and set of methods of combining them, understood by community and used as a form of communication, hence, the expression of thought in a specified way; that which communicates something" [21]. It is obvious that language has a setting and the people who speak it belong to a race or a number of races; that is to say, to a group which is set off by physical characteristics from other groups. Achebe's (1930-2013) style and choice of language are very paramount to the accedence of his literary works because it affirms the educational function of literature and as well establishes a human context for understanding modern African history. Style is the manner in which an author presents the theme or the subject matter in a piece of literary work or a particular manner of creating, doing, or presenting something. Achebe is bilingual and he wittingly uses both languages, i.e., Igbo and English to create a new language. Moreover, he uses the art of oration in his novels in a greater extent than is normal. In this sense, orality functions first and foremost as the matrix of an African mode of discourse. Oral literature, therefore, represents the basic intertext of the African creative imagination. Through his style Chinua Achebe challenges any display of an imposed reality as he masterfully renews historical past and culture of Africa and Africans. Style is a distinct linguistic trait of a writer intended for a purpose. Hence every writer has his own particular style. Most of Chinua Achebe's works revolve around issues touching directly or indirectly on the traditions and culture of the Igbo people. To make his work interesting and appealing to his readers, he resorts to oral literature, idioms, metaphors and similes derived from the Igbo ethnic group from which he originates. In this latter case, his work, then, tries to identify itself as a new and peculiar literary style employed for the purpose of showcasing the Igbo tradition and culture to the rest of the world. The identification of expressions, proverbs, idioms and their English equivalents enable readers to grasp the pragmatic content portrayed in Achebe's novels. Style is an important element of every literary art and is also considered in every piece of writing that makes the writing completely distinctive. Iyasere [22] states that, "... the modern African writer is to his indigenous oral tradition as a snail to its shell. Even in a foreign habit, a snail never leaves its shell behind." It is the reflection of the author's taste, habits, attitudes as well as its emotions. For instance, it is through the style that the author of a novel describes his characters and unravels his plot and theme. As a matter of fact, a good style is language well-used: "style is the author". In this paper, talking of Achebe's style involves

the discussion of the use of language, figures of speech, the various sentence patterns as well as the general construction of the novel. It is ultimately concerned with how successful the author has used these elements of style with his characters and plot to treat his subject. In the case of Achebe, it is the subject matter that dictates the style because different subjects require different styles. In fact, writers from once colonised spaces face the initial problem of language because the language of the coloniser given him is usually his second, third or even fourth tongue acquired during formal education after a myriad of vernaculars. Consequently, he has to use it and yet retain the peculiar hallmarks of his own cultural values. Thus, he uses many literary devices such as proverbs, lexical borrowing, adjusted expressions, imageries, parallel constructions, sentential code-mixing and switching, transliteration, flashbacks, irony, sarcasm, rhetorical questions, symbolism, folktales as well as short stories to enhance the reader's understanding of a literature; a literature that is largely shaped by forces ranging from a solid socio-political background such as history, culture, philosophy and religion prevailing in its originating society and which completely hinges on the translation activity. Hymes [23] is of the view that "within a social matrix in which it acquires a system of grammar, [a writer] as a child acquires also a system of its use regarding persons, places, purposes, other modes of communication, etc., all the components of communicative events, together with attitudes and beliefs regarding them". Dadzie [24] explains that... novelists, in their attempt to record African sensibilities resort to translations in grammatically acceptable English structure but with meanings understood only by those who can conceptualize in the relevant language. In his article, "English and the African writer", Chinua Achebe urges his fellow African writers to use the English language, the language of the centre, in a way that brings out the writer's message of best without altering the language to the extent that its value as a medium of international exchange will be lost. He advocates that the real African creative writer must 'alter the English language to suit African surroundings. The English that emerges must be 'new' in the sense that it can 'carry the weight of African writer's experience'. In other words, to use a "language spoken by Africans on African soil, a language in which African writes, justifies itself" [25]. Achebe's fiction arises basically out of Igbo life and language. In reporting experiences in Igbo life, therefore, Achebe has had constantly to alter the English language so as to include Igbo similes, sayings, proverbs, riddles, songs, folktales, and witticisms drawn from Igbo language. Achebe has been so successful in "amalgamating the European novel form with traditional Igbo narrative formulas to the extent that the style of Achebe's language has come to be a major distinguishing characteristic of his literary art" [26]. Critics like G. D. Killam, Emmanuel Ngara, Obiechina, Bernth Lindfors, Abiola Irele, David Carrol, David Cook, and G-C. M. Mutiso, Peter Nazareth, Benedict Chiaka Njoku, Eustace Palmer, and Shatto Gakwandi have also discussed the need for an ethnography of communication which includes in the

act of communication a consideration of setting, participants, topic, purpose as well as form.

### 3. Achebe's Use of an Adaptive Language in *Arrow of God*

To portray the Igbo cultural setting and ideals, Palmer [6] observes that "Achebe's rural characters who would normally use Igbo in actual situations are made to speak in English but that the English has been modified to reflect an African rural community and the thought patterns of native Igbo speaks". It is obvious, in this sense that language and the society entwine. In *Arrow of God*, the interplay of language and the Igbo's cultural patterns depict Achebe's appropriate adaptive use of the English language. Achebe, carefully readjusts and modifies the English language to suit the cultural norms, social interactions, ideas and ideals of the traditional Igbo society in *Arrow of God*.

On the whole, the aesthetics of Achebe's novels draw on the use of a re-fashioned language or a "new language" which he handles successfully in a sophisticated way to re-read canonical English literature and its medium of expression by examining if past representations perpetuated or questioned the latent assumption of colonial discourses. One of the markers of these basic stylistic features is characterization through which he typifies his characters by giving them different styles of expressing themselves. This has been intrinsically discussed by Obiechina [8] in a nice comparative approach devoted to the different use of language; between a native speaker and a speaker from once colonised space by the British; in other words, between Joyce Cary and Chinua Achebe both using the same setting, characterisation, plots, themes.... Thus in praising Achebe's brilliance as a stylist, he writes:

"If we compare Joyce Cary's Nigerian villagers and Chinua Achebe's [Nigerian] villagers, we notice that Cary's peasants speak in straightforward English prose – with the exception of Mr. Johnson, who speaks and writes "babu" english. Cary's Nigerian peasants, he continues, speak like Cary himself [a native english speaker], whereas Nigerian villagers, as depicted by Achebe, weave into the fabric of their everyday conversations allusions from folktales, legends, myths, and back their opinions and attitudes with appropriately chosen proverbs, traditional maxims and cryptic anecdotes. In other words, whereas the nationality of Cary's peasants cannot be guessed at from the way they speak, Achebe's villagers' speech shows them unmistakably people who are closer to an oral than a literary tradition. From the foregoing discussion, it makes sense to say that by incorporating the oral tradition as an integral part of... African into their writing they have largely succeeded in giving an air of authenticity to their writing and thereafter established a consciousness which is characteristically... African" [8].

Thus, the survival of the proverb in contemporary Igbo literature as a literary device is credit to Chinua Achebe. The

specialized way in which Achebe and other Igbo writers have used proverbs in the pages of their works makes it possible to suggest that the proverb is the Igbo contribution to the art of dialogue in modern literature in English [8]. Proverbs abound in the novels of Chinua Achebe. There is an extensive use of proverbs with which to depict the cultural milieu the narrative is set in. The novel *Arrow of God* [15] is a narrative which is full of issues pertaining to leadership and its corollaries of conflicts and power. Thus, there is the conflict between the Igbo traditional religion and Euro Christian religion, the conflict between the "new order" and the "old one", i.e. the white administration and the Igbo traditional authority, the conflict between Umuaro and Okperi, the conflict between Ezeulu and his Chief rival Nwaka and the internal conflict within the protagonist "Ezeulu" and even within his family. When the conflicts were at their peak, Achebe makes his characters use proverbs to outwit one another and thereby display their traditional wisdom. An instance of this is the conflict and rivalry between Ezeulu and Nwaka. In this situation, the use of proverbs becomes a powerful weapon or tool and an effective device as well in an effort to outwit each other. When the fetish priest Ezeulu summons the elders of Umuaro to tell them of his invitation to Okperi by the white man, Nwaka, a long-standing enemy of the priest uses a proverb to sustain his position. Thus, he says,

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

Ezeulu mincingly answers using another proverb:

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

In fact, these proverbs show maturity and wisdom among their speakers. All the proverbs used by Achebe in this novel and many others, are crystallizations of wisdom. Proverbs, sayings, riddles, and songs have been effective tools for the traditional oral performer, the village spokesman or the community orator. For Emenyonu, "an effective and persuasive speaker among the Igbo is usually one who can smoothly and effortlessly integrate proverbs, sayings and witticisms within the mainstream of his speech [10]. These are highly revered figures of speech and the proverb is the most important" [28]. Thus, the Igbo refers to it as 'the palm oil with which words are eaten' and it as well serves to emphasise and to deepen the force of what is said. Just as folktales are used to illustrate lessons and reinforce content, so too the proverb allows intent to emerge without having to resort to bare and blunt words. This, for instance, is comparable to the Greek concept of *philotimo* and the desire for oratorical power. In guarding against offending the image of self, the Greek had to cloak his/her criticism in flowery prose and delicately phrased arguments. In the Igbo community, it is believed that while the wise man catches the point of a proverb, the uninformed makes blunders. Talking in proverbs, enables the reader to display his wit, wisdom,

and his distinctive ability to manipulate the language he uses. Adolescence learn the skill of handling proverbs and often this pays off in debates and similar oral contexts. From the ancient roots of Igbo literature, the proverb was an indispensable element of instruction, illustration and description [26]. For instance, there is a popular Igbo saying that, "proverbs are the palm with which words are eaten". Another saying has it that, "When Suffering knocks at your door and you say there is no seat left for him, he tells you not to worry because he has brought his own stool" (p. 84). This clearly shows that there is no escape from the white man because he has the wherewithal to stay among them.

Achebe uses transliteration or direct translation to imitate the speaking voices of his people. These translations are the novelist's attempts to adapt and localize English to achieve special effects. Transliteration helps him to present a situation or saying unadulterated to the reader who then gets a cleaner mental picture or a deeper understanding of the customs and practices of the people he is reading about. This goes as far as to lift actual Igbo words which the novelists think cannot be given appropriate English equivalent. In an instance, Achebe portrays the protagonist and the internal conflict from which he suffers through transliteration:

*"His power was no more than the power of a child over a goat that was said to be his. As long as the goat was alive-it could be his; he would find it food and take care of it. But the day it was slaughtered, he would know soon enough who the real owner is"* (p. 3).

In these cases of transliteration, Achebe is obliged to impose a special lexico-syntactic structure of Igbo on English to get his peculiar message across:

*"Umuaro abodenesi kwenu!"* Nwaka roared.

*"Hem!"* replied the men of Umuaro.

*"Kwenu!"*

*"Hem!"*

*"Kwezuenu!"*

*Hem! (pp. 15-16).*

This is an oration through the mouth of Nwaka, one of the three people who had taken the highest title in the land in *Arrow of God*.

Oduche's moving box causes an uproar in Ezeulu's compound. The entire household reacts in different ways. When Oduche's moving box is opened, it is discovered that Oduche had imprisoned a royal python in it to suffocate it as a mark of commitment to the new religion which advocates that there is no harm in killing a sacred python because it is just a snake. Achebe uses transliteration to express desolation in Ezeulu's compound. Thus, Matefi reacts: "if it is medicine, may it lose its potency" (p. 44). In the process, Ezeulu, further on, remarks that whether it is bad medicine or good one, he shall see it today and promises to "kill the boy with his own hands" (p. 45). The author varies his syntax in the narration interspersed with dialogue and speeches. He uses the simple sentences as well as the compound sentence structure to "show how english is adapted in new contexts" [17].

*"He beats his ogene GOME GOME GOME GOME"*. (p. 2)

Like these dialectal words used in the novel to present his

ideas, the following Igbo words have no equivalent English words and cannot be explained or translated and the meaning could be lost. These lexical items are Ikenga, Ofo, alusi, Ora-obodo, ugoli, Ogulul-aro, Obi, Ai-nmo, jigioa, asa, chi, iru-ezi, Okeapka, ozo, anwansi, Ulu Omesike Mgba Agbogho, Akwu nro, ilo, okwolo, Ogere, aru nmo, ugani, ekwe ilo, and Ndichie. Thus, the lexical items portray the socio-cultural Igbo setting. Some of the Igbo expressions have no equivalent in British English. By purposely spicing the text with these items, Chinua Achebe blends local African flavour with the borrowed English language. In so doing, he succeeds in embellishing a foreign language with local idioms. This sits well with Achebe's commitment to the post-colonial struggle over the appropriateness of received European languages in defining and voicing non-local identities. This is in line with Ashcroft et al. [16], theory which states that the refashioning of the language of the center should be done through various strategies by writers of once colonised nations by "inserting untranslatable words into their texts". Another literary device used by the novelist is an adulterated English language called the pidgin language. Achebe uses this to depict the social status or background of some of the characters when engaged in dialogue. The below quotation shows that John, a native boy, is an illiterate who tries to communicate with his white master, Captain Winterbottom. The exchange between both characters is illustrative. This is the discussion between John and Winterbottom:

"What are they saying?" Winterbottom asked John.

"Dem talk say make rain come quick".

"Are all these your pickin, John?" (p. 31).

In *Arrow of God*, Pidgin English is used by Mr. Winterbottom's household workers to commune with him. For example, in reply to his queries about the native children in his compound, his steward says, "My pickin na dat two wey de run yonder and dat yellow gal. Di oder two na Cook im pickin"....

"Di order one yonder na Gardener him brodder pickin" (p. 31).

This exchange clearly shows how the uneducated natives who have been privileged to pick one or two English words from their white masters use the received language. In an instance, we see the use of Igbo words like "oge", "afo", "nkwo", "omou", "ikenga", "ndichi" and "dibia" untranslated.

As he waited for it to roast he planned the coming event in his mind. It was Oye. Tomorrow would be Afo and the next day Nkwo, the day of the great market. The festival of the Pumpkin leaves would fall on the third Nkwo from that day. Tomorrow he would send for his assistants and tell them to announce the day to the villages of Umuaro (p. 3).

This is very impressive because it is used in such way that a non-igbo native reading can easily understand the supposed meaning or even the meaning. Throughout the novel, the way the word "dibia", used untranslated delineate in the process, a herbalist or a medicine man and his office as well. In the novel, we have a lot of symbolism, similes and metaphors used by the novelist to make account of events unfolding. For instance, items like "white chalk", "palm leaves", and "clay"

have significant meanings. These were the items which Akukalia carried in his goatskin bag on his trip to Okperi as a final statement of terms or conditions made by his people as an expression of threat of reprisal or war. While the lump of white chalk symbolizes peace in the African context, newly cut palm fronds from the summit of the tree stands for war.

The problem of accurate translation is highlighted when the people of Umuaro manifestes their frustration as far as wages are concerned. Moses Unachukwu serves both as a translator and an intermediary between the British officer and the frustrated age group who works on the road construction project. He is believed to be the only person who can carry the message of their frustration to the white man. Negotiation lies in his hands. This makes the young men of Umuaro very perplexed by the ways of the white man but are unable to articulate their grievances directly to him. The exchange between Moses Unachukwu, the group and the officer for construction brings about tumult.

"Shut up you black monkeys and get down to work!"

Mr Wright had a grating voice but one that carried far. Truce was immediately established. He turned to Unachukwu and said: "Tell them I shall not tolerate any more slackness."

Unachukwu translates:

"Tell them this bloody work must be finished by June."

"The white man says that unless you finish this work in time you will know the kind of man he is."

"No more lateness."

"Pardin?"

"Pardon what? Can't you understand plain, simple English? I said there will be no more late-coming."

"Oho. He says everybody must work hard and stop all this shit-ating." (p. 82)

Achebe is able to give a vivid description of situations and events in such a way that the reader is able to imagine clearly such event or situation. An instance of this is when he describes the dry season: "*Throughout the day the sun had breathed fire as usual and the world had lain prostrate with shock. The birds which sang in the morning were silenced. They stood in one spot vibrating with heat of the trees hung limb....*" (p. 30).

In *Arrow of God*, another important element of the story used by the novelist is the flashback. Achebe takes us back into what happened in the past before a present situation and weaves his way beautifully into the present action to enhance the unfolding of the narrative. This helps the reader in the right conception of the trench of affairs in the novel, so that we do not get only a partial information on the issue. Another instance of flashback used to make a point is Oduche's abomination. This is used to tell us something about the abomination that Oduche, the son of Ezeulu, had committed by locking up a sacred python in a box. The novelist gives us a flashback into how this boy came to the act of catching and locking the python. "It was five years since Ezeulu promised the Whiteman that he will send his sons to church". Structurally, *Arrow of God* itself begins *en medias res* with a flashback to explain a longstanding disagreement between Ezeulu, the chief priest of Ulu and Nwaka, a prosperous man

and supporter of Ezidemili, the chief priest of the god, Idemili, some five years ago. With this in mind, the reader is in a better position to understand that this may surely lead to a disgrace. The initial conflict between the two men is over a land dispute between the villages of Umuaro and Okperi, a nearby village. Nwaka leads a group of villagers who want to go to war against Okperi; but Ezeulu opposes them. In fact, all the six villages of Umuaro take side with Nwaka and override Ezeulu in the process. Thus, Akukalia an emissary from Umuaro, is sent to Okperi to announce war. In a fit of anger because he feels the people are not respondent in the ultimatum proceedings, he unfortunately commits an abomination by breaking the personal gods of one of the villagers. This abomination sparks off the people of Okperi to kill Akukalia and thereafter prompts an open conflict. Captain T. K. Winterbottom, the District Officer, ends the war abruptly, seizes all the guns in both Okperi and Umuaro and breaks them. Ezeulu later testifies at Government Hill that the people of Umuaro had no claim to Okperi land. The Captain gets impressed by his lack of bias. Ezeulu, on his part, was also impressed with Captain Winterbottom's decision. All these conflicts and incidents are told in a flashback and foreshadows the eventual conflict and misunderstandings between Ezeulu and his people what led to the forming of fissures in the community; a community which "once thought like one, spoke like one, shared common awareness and acted like one".

Achebe's goals cannot be realized by a return to the precolonial period. He chooses to write in English and to use western forms of literary expression coupled with some adjusted Igbo as well as English expressions to put his message across. In the novel, some English words and expressions are readjusted to give them traditional flavour. Some of these words are:

"senior wife", "Young wife", "to placate the resentful spirits of kinsmen killed in war", "Sweet mouth", "The mystery of ancestral spirits", etc.

According to Ogbuefi [27], the "meaning of these words or expressions are sometimes meaningless in the received language; they are experiences which for cultural and environmental reasons are not found in Britain and therefore cannot be expressed in standard English"; but are used by the novelist to describe ideas, circumstances as well as issues which are peculiar to the Igbo society and which portray to some extent the socio-cultural setting. In an attempt to get his message across, Achebe uses the English language and the Igbo language in the construction of sentences. Within a sentence, linguistic elements from English and the local language are mixed up to form a new language.

Code switching as used by the novelist, occurs mostly in bilingual or once colonised communities. Speakers of more than one language are known for their ability to code switch or mix their language during their communication. As Aranoff and Miller [28] indicate, many linguists have stressed the point that switching between languages is a communicative option available to a bilingual member of a speech community, just as switching between styles or

dialects is an option for the monolingual speaker. Since its inception, the term "code switching" has expanded to encapsulate any situation in which speakers find themselves switching from one accepted vocabulary, cadence, style, or set of rules to another. A speaker who may not be able to express him/herself in one language might switch to another to compensate for the deficiency. As a result, the speaker may be triggered into speaking in the other language for a while. This type of code switching tends to occur when the speaker is upset, tired, or distracted in some manner, or when they are less fluent in one language. Code-mixing is similar to the use or creation of *pidgins*; but while a pidgin is created across groups that do not share a common language, code-mixing may occur within a multilingual setting where speakers share more than one language. Some linguists use the terms code-mixing and code-switching more or less interchangeably. Especially in formal studies of syntax, morphology, etc., both terms are used to refer to utterances that draw from elements of two or more grammatical systems. These studies are often interested in the alignment of elements from distinct systems, or on constraints that limit switching. Some work defines code-mixing as the placing or mixing of various linguistic units (affixes, words, phrases, clauses) from two different grammatical systems within the same sentence and speech context, while code-switching is the placing or mixing of units (words, phrases, sentences) from two codes within the same speech context. The structural difference between code-switching and code-mixing is the position of the altered elements—for code-switching, the modification of the codes occurs intersententially, while for code-mixing, it occurs intrasententially. In other works, the term code-switching emphasizes a multilingual speaker's movement from one grammatical system to another, while the term code-mixing suggests a hybrid form, drawing from distinct grammars. In other words, code-mixing emphasizes the formal aspects of language structures or linguistic competence, while code-switching emphasizes linguistic performance [28]. While many linguists have worked to describe the difference between code-switching and borrowing of words or phrases, the term code-mixing may be used to encompass both types of language behaviour. Code switching is when a speaker alternates between two or more languages in one conversation. This phenomenon can be observed in the following examples in Achebe's *Arrow of God*. These sentential code-mixing are used with peculiar words to impress and persuade the reader on a certain topic and cannot be fully captured in the English language. Achebe uses them to portray words whose meanings would be lost in interpretation for they have no equivalents in the English language. The following song is sung by Obigeli's tiny voice to sooth or pet Amoge's sick child to sleep (p. 124):

"Tell the mother her child is crying....

"Tell the mother her child is crying....

.... And then prepare a stew of uziza...

And also a stew of uziza....

Ja-ja. Ja kulo kulo!

Traveller Hawk

Ja-ja. Ja kulo kulo!.....

"The girls sang a song called Ifeoma..."

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

Chinua Achebe's prowess in exploiting orality can be found in the following adjustments of the English language. The rendition gives one the taste of real oral performance or exchange. This oral expression interprets as an expanding symbol over the entire novel:

*"I have spoken it with my mouth"*

*"I have heard it with my ears"*

*"I want one of my sons to join these people and be my eye there"* (p. 45).

The author goes to depth of describing, giving accounts of events and narration with minute details. In the process, he illustrates his points and ideas with folktales and short stories. As an example of a short story, one can read, "one day six brothers of Umuama killed the python and asked one of their number, Iweka, to cook yam potage ...". (p. 48). This embedded story catches our attention and gives weighty realism to the story. Achebe's choice of oral narratives is an embedded style, which mirrors to some extent, the story-within-a story stylistic choice in literary studies. This device is not only digressive from the mainstream plot, but also illuminates, illustrates and comments on the main story. In his effort to adapt the novel, which is a western artefact, Achebe has used many oral narratives that effectively blend adequately into the main plot.

Very effectively, Achebe uses literary devices to convey his subject matter. For instance, he uses irony; quite a doze of it, when Ezeulu, the fetish priest, who is supposed to uphold orthodox norms and practices of the traditional society, hands over his son, Oduche, to the Whiteman. The fact of the matter is that, Ezeulu was expected as a traditional religious leader, to train his son in the customs and practices of the tribe though. Ezeulu has four sons namely Edogo, Obika, Oduche, and Nwafo. Ezeulu sends Oduche to join the white missionaries led by Goodcountry and to be his "eyes there" (p. 189). In the eyes of the novelist, Mr Goodcountry symbolizes the machinery of exploitation, deprivation, and suppression of the natives. For him, Oduche might learn the wisdom of the white men. Ezeulu's initial motive is that if the white men take over the country, it will be safer to have one of his own sons there. Ezeulu's old friend, Akuebue challenges Ezeulu's decision to send Oduche to the white men. "When you spoke against the war with Okperi you were not alone... But if you send your son to join strangers in desecrating the land you will be alone" (p. 134). Nevertheless, Ezeulu sends his son, Oduche. In the complex plot which Achebe constructs the clash of cultures, he models Ezeulu the chief priest of the traditional deity. Pitted against the Euro-Christian culture, Ezeulu, is carved to stand solidly for African culture and to defend it through against an alien self-imposed colonial administrator Captain Winterbottom who makes myrmidons of the owners of the land. It is worth of mention that Achebe's masterly use of language in all its ramifications, its creation and its adherence to his peculiar

style is not a matter of failing to use it as does a native speaker but delineates his adherence to postcolonial theory which states that:

*"The technique of selective lexical fidelity which leaves some words untranslated in the text is a more widely used device for conveying the sense of cultural distinctiveness. Such a device not only acts to signify the difference between cultures, but also illustrates the importance of discourse in interpreting cultural concepts"* [30].

To some extent, one may add that [The] "intolerable wrestle with words and meanings" has as its aim to subdue the experience to the language, the exotic life to the imported tongue [6]. Achebe wants to write a story for Africans using the English language and as such the English he will use has "to be a new English, still in full communion with ancestral home but altered to suit its new African surroundings. In other words, *"to use English in a way that brings out his message best without altering the language...and to aim at fashioning out an English which at once, universal and be able to carry his peculiar experience"* [10]. This falls in line with the assertion of Ike et al [31] that,

*"a deeper understanding of the African culture and its people will ultimately breed a profound respect for, and embrace of, African traditional values, which, when properly understood reveal to the discerning mind a wisdom of the ages capable of providing some solutions to our contemporary search for sustainable development and a peaceful, equitable society."*

There is the need to harness the innovative potentials in Igbo traditional societies and cultures, in particular and African ones in general, with a view to affecting a sustainable and self-reliant development of modern communities. The interaction of English writing with the older traditions of orature or literature in post-colonial societies, and the emergence of a writing which has as a major aim the assertion of social and cultural difference, have radically questioned easy assumptions about the characteristics of the genres we usually employ as structuring and categorizing definitives such as the novel, lyric, epic, and the play. Aloo [32] posits that "language, as a dynamic phenomenon, is readily adaptable to encode new experiences and cultural development". *Arrow of God*, offers a powerful insight portrayal of the societal and religious life of the Igbo people in the throes of upheavals. The novel bears the imprint of contact with an incentive foreign religion; but does not condemn it to the fullest because its malignant infiltration into the social fabric has been facilitated by internal conflicts. With the combination of all these elements of style and language discussed with reference to the referent text, *Arrow of God*, Achebe is able to present the story to the reader in his detached attitude. Detached because for most parts, he does not put his fingers on any issues or pass judgment or even express opinion, the authorial comments, but takes a middle line and leaves the reader to his own value judgment or deductions from events unfolding.



## 4. Conclusion

African writers have argued that Eurocentric criticism of African fiction was based on the perception of the African writer as an apprentice European with no canons other than western ones to emulate [33]. Such criticism, they claimed, refused to concede the autonomy of African literature or to grant it the right to have its own rules and standards based on African cultures and aesthetics. Following Achebe, writers from once colonised spaces have rejected 'universal' values as masking provincial European preferences with no validity for African peoples and attempted, instead, to 'define the proper constituency of African literature', recover the tradition into which it should insert itself, and identify some of the norms which could be transferred from traditional African orature to contemporary literature. For them, it is not only of that which ought to enter the canon, but also of what could be given the name 'literature', has been successfully altered by them incorporating and adapting traditional forms of imaginative expression to the exigencies of an inherited English language as a result of their interface with traditional oral narratives which, have offered a number of alter/native ways of conceiving narrative structure. These paradigms have influenced both the structure and features of 'novels' produced in English and has for that matter insisted on the inclusion of many forms of performance art in any effective cross-cultural discussion concerning structure and form of narratives. The perspective of cross-cultural literatures has given explicit confirmation to the perception that genres cannot be described by essential characteristics, but by an interweaving of features, a 'family resemblance' which denies the possibility of either essentialism or limitation. This theoretical framework is relevant to the present study because Achebe's use of language in the novel portrays his communicative intention. His major goal for 'nativising' the English language is to capture obvious peculiarities in the Igbo traditional society. He resorts to the use of proverbs, translation imageries to achieve his intentions, to explain Igbo ideals' cultural norm/beliefs and to capture the Igbo traditional setting or environment. Achebe has shown that language is, indeed, a repository of culture and is much more influenced by one's linguistic and cultural environments. He employs Igbo lexico-syntactic structures to translate his ideas into the English language. This reflects the extent to which his language is nativised and domesticated to capture Igbo cultural norms, ideas and ideals and his characters are meant to speak the nativised English. Achebe has, indeed, succeeded in fashioning out the domesticated English which is able to capture his peculiar experience.

Given that African literature is hinged on the translation activity and is largely shaped by the forces that prevail in its originating society namely socio-political background-history, culture, philosophy and religion-on which *Arrow of God* stands and justifies itself, Chinua Achebe's novel *God* relates the disintegration of the society as being caused by a process of social degeneration; an ineluctable crisis of a society unable to die or renew itself.

## References

- [1] Ngũgĩ wa Thiong'o (1993). *Moving the Centre: the Struggle for Cultural Freedoms*. London: James Currey.
- [2] Ngũgĩ wa Thiong'o (1981). *Decolonising the Mind: the Politics of Language in African Literature*. London: Heinemann.
- [3] Sapir, E. (1929). "The Status of Linguistics as a Science". *Language*. 5 (205-214).
- [4] Kammampol, Bawa (2010). "Orature in Modern Creative African Writing: Linguistic and Literary Power in Achebe's *Things Fall Apart*", *CAMES, Sciences sociales et humaines*, nouvelle série, B, (013) 11. 267-278.
- [5] Achebe, C. (1965). "English and the African writer". *Transition*. 18, 29-30.
- [6] Palmer, E. (1979). *The growth of the African novel*. London: Heinemann Educational Books Ltd.
- [7] Gikandi, S. (1991). Literature in Africa 1960-90. *Africa Today*. London: Africa Book.
- [8] Obiechina, E. N. (1975). *Culture, tradition, and society in the West African novel*. African studies series. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- [9] Roscoe, A. (1971). *Mother is Gold*. Cambridge: C. U. P.
- [10] Kammampol, B. (2021). Literacy and Orality: Between Abrogation and Appropriation in Ngugi wa Thiong'o's *The River Between*. *European Journal of Literature, Language and Linguistics Studies*. (4) 4. 64-86.
- [11] Trudgill, P. (1974) *Sociolinguistics: An Introduction*. New York: Penguin Books.
- [12] Gumperz, J. J. (1964). "Linguistics and Social Interaction in Two Communities". *American Anthropologist*. 66, 6 (part 2).
- [13] Gikandi, S. (1991) "Chinua Achebe and the Post-colonial Esthetic: Writing, Identity, and National Formation," *Studies in 20th Century Literature*: Vol. 15: Iss. 1, Article 4. <https://doi.org/10.4148/2334-4415.1263>.
- [14] Appiah, A. K. (1988). "Out of African: Topologies of Nativism". *The Yale Journal of Criticism*. 2. 153-178.
- [15] Achebe, C. (1964). *Arrow of God*. London: Heinemann Educational books.
- [16] Wright, J. (1965). *Preoccupations in Australian Poetry*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- [17] Mcleod, J. (2000). *Beginning Postcolonialism*. New York: Manchester University Press.
- [18] Achebe, C. (1975). *Morning yet on Creation Day*. London: Heinemann Educational Books.
- [19] Igwe, G. E. & Green M. M. (1967). *Igbo Language Course*. Nigeria: O. U. P.
- [20] Fanon, F. (1970). *Black Skins White Masks*. Sidmouth, EX10 9QG, England: Chase Publishing Services Ltd.
- [21] Achebe, C. (1988). *Hopes and Impediment: Selected Essays*. London: Heinemann.

- [22] Iyasere, S. O. (1975). "Oral Tradition in the Criticism of African Literature." *The Journal of Modern African Studies*. 13.1 107.
- [23] Hymes, D. (1974). *Foundations of Sociolinguistics: An ethnographic Approach*. Philadelphia, PA: University of Pennsylvania Press.
- [24] Dadzie, A. B. K (2004). "Nigeria English: Influences and characteristics". In A. B. K. Dalzie. & S. Awonusi (Eds). *The concept of Nigeria English*. Lagos: Concept publications Ltd.
- [25] Saunders, G. (1988). *Bilingual Children: From Birth to Teens*. Multilingual Matters Ltd: Clevedon.
- [26] Emenyonu, E. (1978). *The Rise of the Igbo Novel*. Nigeria: Oxford University Press.
- [27] Ogbuehi, C. (2001). English as a second language in Nigeria: An introductory Text. Enugu: Magnet Computer Services.
- [28] Aranoff, M. and Rees – Miller, J. (2003). *The Handbook of Linguistics*. Blackwell Publishers: Oxford.
- [29] Skiba, R. (1997). Code switching as a Countenance of Language Interference. *The Internet TESL Journal*. Vol. 3 (10). See Wikipedia (2021). "Code-mixing" and "switching". Available at: "<http://wikipedia.org/w/functional-discourse-grammar>".
- [30] Ashcroft, B, Gareth G. and Helen Tiffin (1989). *The Empire Writes Back: Theory and Practice in Post-colonial Literatures*. London: Routledge.
- [31] Ike, O., & Edozien, N. (2001). *Understanding Africa*. Enugu: CIDJAP Press.
- [32] Aloo, M. A (2005). Revisitng issues in English use and usage in Nigeria: Implications for the ESL classroom. *Journal of the Nigeria English Studies Association*. 11 (1), 144-146.
- [33] Chiwenzu et al (1980). *Towards the Decolonization of African Literature*. Enugu: Fourth Dimension Publishing Co.