

## A LINGUISTIC ANALYSIS OF LEXICAL RESOURCES AND ORALITY AND THEIR EFFECTS IN SELECTED AFRICAN TEXTS (NOVELS)

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### Abstract

A literary piece is both written and oral in form. Oral literature is that which is orally composed, transmitted, and orally realized. It is meant to entertain, build, and perform didactic functions. Many works have been done on oral literature at the aesthetic and/or literary levels of analyses. But very little attention has been paid to its linguistic levels. This paper aims to examine special linguistic features such as African proverbs, simile, metaphor, images and lexical items in selected African novels: *Arrow of God*, *Anthills of the Savannah*, *The Concubine*, *The Last of the Strong Ones* and *The Voice*. These lexical items which are useful materials in African oral literature, are randomly selected from these novels and given a linguistic analysis under the framework of the Use or Operational theory. These works are examined to see the usefulness of linguistic features in the contexts where they are used, in the development of African culture. The findings show that the linguistic items truly reflect African culture and are suitable in the contexts where they are used. It is recommended that those developing African literature should discourage the use of the Eurocentric English.

### 1.0 Introduction

The promotion of African culture has been a major concern to scholars, the academia, and traditional institutions. To achieve this laudable objective, Africans, especially writers, critics and researchers have made several efforts. African writers have tried to show-case African culture by documenting African proverbs, simile, and metaphor as well as deploying materials which are uniquely African in their figures of speech. Some of the writers whose efforts in this direction are worthy of note and commendation include: Isidore Okpewho, Tanure Oyaide, G.G. Darah, Bruce Onobrakpeya, Chinua Achebe, Elechi Amadi, Wole Soyinka, Gabriel Okara, among others.

Through them, the unwritten tradition of Africa has been written for future generation. Oral literature is the primary source from which African written oral tradition draws. On written literature, Finnegan (1970:2) writes that:

a written literature work can be said to have an independent and tangible existence in even one copy, so that question about... the format, number and publicizing of other written copies can... be treated to some extent as secondary; actual creation of a written literary form and its further transmission.

The author further notes that the connection between transmission and the very existence of humans is a much more intimate one, and that question about the means of actual communication are of the first importance – without its oral realization and direct rendition by singer or speaker. It is often said that the death of an elderly man or woman in Africa is synonymous with a well-furnished library gutted down by fire. Therefore, there is a symbiotic

association between the role of the primary custodian of oral literature and that of the writer or researcher. The latter complements the efforts of the former. The above position finds expression in Omoko (2013:21) when he posits that:

A close examination of the early literary outputs by Nigerians... reveals an enormous package of the people's oral tradition. The writers are aware of the significance of oral tradition as an integral part of African culture. By incorporating the oral tradition of Africans into their writings, they have largely succeeded in giving an air of authenticity to their writings and established a consciousness which is characteristically African.

Much works have been done in the area of documenting African oral tradition, as well as an appreciation of its literary and aesthetic levels. The same cannot be said of its linguistic or stylistic level. This present work aims to bridge this gap. An analysis of oral materials at the level of linguistics in selected African novels, will serve as a sign post to a better understanding of the novels. It will also help to showcase African world view to the readers and the development of the African child.

## **2.0 Literature Review**

The content of any literary work is determined by the writer's social environment where the writer lives and interacts. The writer, who is a product of the society within which he writes, is not only influenced by the society, but also influences it culturally, socially, and politically. Language is the key to the heart of people, and consequently, to their knowledge and treasures. Man transmits his thoughts, inner feelings, social experiences and his culture in literature through language. The subject matter of a literary work determines the language a writer uses.

The assertion that literature is meant to generally reflect the culture of the writer, is no longer a novel one. Nevertheless, most African writers have slavishly used in their work a variety of English that does not in any way help in reflecting African sensibility. "The purpose of a true African writer should be to educate the world and raise the awareness on some of the characteristic phenomena of the Africa past, in order to pull down the wall of ignorance that has often led to misjudgement and misevaluation of the African civilization" (Orisaway, 1989, p. 58).

It has often been said that, the writer must desist from using the Eurocentric English. He must be ready to tame English to suit his purpose. Mukherjee (1971) in Jowitt (1991) speaks of English as a "twice-born" language. According to Jowitt, further adopting Mukherjee's metaphor, we might regard Nigerian English as an English that has England as its first mother and Nigeria as its second, and has defied nature by undergoing a gynaecological re-processing. The outcome, is a domesticated, English to serve a useful purpose to the African writer.

In his defence of English, Achebe (1975:25) posits that:

The African writer should use English in a way that brings out the message best without altering the language to the extent that its value as a medium of international exchange will be lost. ... I feel that the English language will be able to carry the weight of my African experiences. But it will have to be a new English still in full

communion with its ancestral home, but altered to suit its new African surroundings.

A committed writer must search for that animal whose blood can match the power of his offering, otherwise his literary work may turn out to be a hybrid. On the need to create local colour by African writers (Amadi, 1987:4) writes that:

an Ikwere proverb says; ‘to set up a shrine, the dibia must have a piece of earth. This means that he must have a strong and stable link with his community in order to practice his art of spiritual and physical healing. For the creative writer, this is equally true. He must have roots somewhere. He must be nurtured and informed by his cultural, social, and political background. Otherwise, he would be a science-fiction writer of the truly escapist kind for whom societal norms do not exist.

This opinion is echoed by Okara (1979:137):

As a writer who believes in the utilization of African ideas, African philosophy, folklore, and imagery to the fullest extent possible, I am of the opinion that the only way to use them effectively is to translate them almost literally from the African language native to the writer into whatever European language he is using as his medium... For, from a word, a group of words, a sentence and even a name in any African language, one can glean the social norms, attitudes, and values of a people.

The African writer is both conscious and unconscious. He carefully selects his “materials” which are “native” to the African soil. The materials are not only native to him but also in them, he functions and philosophizes. As we earlier mentioned, the special “materials” used by African writers in their writing are not mere ornaments. They are “containers” carrying meaning and messages which are essentially African. These materials do not only help in the development of the child, but also make the message of the writer clear to him. The characteristics features of the materials exist in the areas of lexical choice, proverbs, simile, metaphor, idioms, and expressions deeply rooted in Standard English syntax. They reflect very closely not only the lexicon, idioms and expressions of the primary language of the African environment, but also its socio-cultural contents. The general linguistic features of narration in both personal narratives and folk tales fall into four main sections: narrative devices, literary devices, grammatical devices and lexical specificities.

### **3.0 Theoretical Framework**

The Theoretical Framework considered for the analysis of the data selected for this study is the Use and Operation theory of meaning. Wittgenstein (1953) cited in Ndimele (1999) proposed the use theory of meaning and observed that the meaning of any linguistic expression (be it a word, a phrase, or a sentence) is determined by the context in which it is used. The meaning of an expression according to the theory, is the effect or effects that it creates in a particular context

in which it is used. The meaning of an expression can be characterized in terms of its use in the language. Words and expressions are generally used to create meaning and some kinds of effects.

The researchers find this theory useful as it will serve as the basis for the analysis of the data selected for the study. It will also help to account for the effects the linguistic choices create in the novels.

#### 4.0 Methodology and Data Analysis

Data for the study are sourced from Chinua Achebe's "*Anthills of the Savannah*", "*Arrow of God*", Akachi Adimora's "*The Last of the Strong Ones*", Gabriel Okara's "*The Voice*" and Elechi Amadi's "*The Concubine*". The data include African proverbs, simile, metaphor, imagery, African names and words, English words with African referents as well as expressions in African language transliterated to English.

The data are randomly selected and given analysis to enable us see how they help to enhance meaning and reflect African sensibility.

#### 4.1 Proverbs

##### 4.1.1 Chinua Achebe

Proverbs are the palm oil with which words are "eaten". Proverbs are mostly used by people who are perceived to be endowed with wisdom or wit among Africans. In Africa, a feeling for language, imagery, and the expression of abstract ideas through compressed and allusive phraseology, comes out particularly and vividly through proverbs.

From the proverbs made by Nwaka in "*Arrow of God*" (AG) and Elewa's uncle in *Anthills of the savannah* (AS), we see a demonstration of a character's power, authority, and background:

when I got there the first friend I made turned out to be a wizard. I made another.... he was a poisoner... my third friend was a leper. I ogalanya "who cuts kpom and pulls waa". I made friends with a leper from whom even poisoner flees. (AG p. 39) and: when my wife here came to me and said: our daughter has a child and I want you to come and give her name. I said... something is amiss. "We did not hear *kpom* to tell us that the palm branch has been cut before we hear *waa*" when it crashed through the bush. i did not hear of bride price and you are telling me about naming a child. (AS p. 227)

According to Akpojishi (2014 p. 217) this proverb holds clear meaning for people who are familiar with palm fruit or palm wine tapping, an occupation in many communities in Africa.

"Kpom and "Waa" are idiophone which in this context imply the authority to begin and complete a thing. When a tapper strikes a palm branch, we hear a "Kpom" Sound, as the branch falls, we hear a "Waa" sound. Elewa's uncle in *Anthills* chides Elewa for having a child for a man who did not marry her as custom demands.

With this proverb, we can infer that Ogalanya and Elewa's "husband" are men with guts and courage. Another proverb that keeps re-echoing in (AG), is the one which enunciates that a

man is responsible for his actions, and must bear their consequences. The proverb is used by Nwaka to criticize Ezeulu:

did not our elders tell us that as soon as we shake hands with a leper he will want an embrace? ... what I say is this... “A man who brings ant-ridden faggots into his but should expect the visit of lizard”... if Ezeulu is now telling us that he is tired of the white man’s friendship, our advice to him should be: you tied the Knot, you also know how to undo it (AG p. 177-178)

The undoing of the Knot (the Whiteman) is the responsibility Ezeulu must bear. To act appropriately and responsibly, a man must know his limitations. This is echoed in:

no matter how strong or great a man was he should never challenge his chi (AG p. 33) the man who carries a deity is not a king (AG p. 32) a man who knows that his anus is small does not swallow an “udala” seed (AG, p. 87, 282)

Achebe uses proverbs to imply transfer of aggression:

it was a day of annoyance for the chief priest – one of those days when it seemed he had “woken up on the left side” as if they have not born enough vexation already, he was now visited, at sunset by a young man from unumneora (AG, P. 53).

And in *Anthills*

...this is going to be another of those days: meaning a bad day. Days are good or bad for us according to “how his Excellency gets out of bed in the morning (AS, p. 2)

This proverb is anchored on the fact that among Africans, it is believed that the emotional disposition of a man depends on the side of his body he wakes up with in the morning. He will be happy if it is the right side, and sad if it is left. A man who went to be sad or had a nightmare, is likely to wake up on the left side. Such a person is likely to be easily offended by people that come in contact and interact with him that day.

#### **4.1.2 Akachi Adimora’s *The Last of the Strong Ones***

- Our people say that it is the traveler who must make the return journey and not the owner of the land (P.7)

This is repeated in:

- The guest who turns rude and aggressive will surely leave the host’s house with a bruised body (P.7)

These proverbs refer to Kosiri (the whiteman) who has taken possession of Umuga, an Igbo community. The people strategize to resist Kosiri and his strange culture.

- Those who bring home ant-ridden faggots must be prepared for the visit of lizards.
- Our people say that the followers of a masked spirit are its eye (P. 18).

The proverbs refer to Chief Okpara a warrant chief used by Kosiri to implant his culture and oppress the people of Umuga. Chief Okpara and his likes pose as traitors to his people.

The traitors then, should be ready to bear the consequences of the Whiteman's presence in the land.

#### **4.1.3 Elechi Amadi**

- The old men say that death is a bad reaper (*The Concubine*, P. 22)

The proverb refers to Emenike who dies too early, after the fight between him and Madume.

- The hunter who is never satisfied with small game may be obliged to carry home an elephant one day.

Madume is the character described here. He is greedy and is never satisfied with his share of meat after a group hunting expedition.

#### **4.1.4 Gabriel Okara**

- The chicken says when you are in a new town stand with only one foot, for where you stand may be a grave (P. 34)

Tebeowei uses this proverb to advise Okolo who is not comfortable with the new ways of life in the community under the leadership of Chief Izongo. The Chief has asked him to leave the community since he is not ready to adapt. He plans relocating to Sologa, where he thinks "I will find persons whose insides are like mine". Tebeowei thinks differently, but wants him to adjust "stand with only one foot".

### **4.2. Simile and Metaphor**

Simile is a figure of speech which compares two things with the use of "like" and "as". Metaphor is also used to compare two things, although without the use of like or as. The comparison in simile is overtly expressed, while in metaphor it is covertly expressed.

#### **4.2.1 Achebe**

Simile and metaphor are used by African writers to create local colour. Africans use Simile and Metaphor to describe hypocrisy as found in Achebe texts:

his anger was not caused by open hostility such as Nwaka showed in his speech but by the sweet words of people like Nnabeyi. "they looked to him like rats gnawing away at the sole of a sleeper's foot, biting, and then blowing air on the wounds to soothe it and lull the victim back to sleep (AG P. 145)

The proverb implies hypocrisy from a man's enemy who praises him but seeks his failure.

In appreciation of the character of Nwodika's son Ezeulu say:

*Nwodika's son has "a straight mind towards me". I can smell a poisoner as clearly as I can a leper (AG p. 171)*

The metaphor means that Nwodika's son means well for the speaker.

Metaphor and Simile are often used by Africans to juxtapose bravery with cowardice. Bravery is extolled while cowardice is disregarded as shown in *Arrow* and *Anthills*:

this is a man after my heart. "A man who will not piss in his trousers at the first sound of danger (AS p. 10) This proverb implies courage.

And in "*Arrow*"

...I blame Obika for his fiery temper, but how much better is a fiery temper than "this cold ash" (p. 530) "Cold ash" means cowardice

While addressing an audience in "*Anthills*" the old man realizes he is losing his voice. He uses simile to describe his condition:

I don't know why my tongue is cracking away tonight "like a clay-bowl of "Ukwa" seeds toasting over fire", why I feel like a man who has been helped to lower a heavy load from off his head (p.126)

"Ukwa" is a local nut among the Igbos which bursts when toasted over fire, thereby making it lose its substance. The loss of the substance in "Ukwa" seed is what the old man compares with the loss of his voice, after a long speech.

#### **4.2.2 Akachi Adimora**

- Our memory womb-wise, stored the seed for future earthing and sprouting (P.14). This reveals that the characters are custodians of Igbo culture.
- They are victims of the leprosy of greed (P. 19).
- They are the man in the tale who was carrying a huge elephant carcass and at the same time trying to catch a cricket with his leg (P. 19). These proverbs refer to Chief Okwara and other warrant chiefs who betray their people because of greed. The greed started with Chief Okpara, and later others were "infected" by it.
- It is the one whose body stretches and curve like the rainbow (P. 123)

This simile describes Alakuku who is very tall and appears bent when he is walking.

#### **4.2.3 Gabriel Okara**

- The river was flowing, reflecting the finishing sun, like a dying away memory (P. 4)
- It was like an idol's face, no one knowing what is behind (P. 4)

- They were like women with hair hanging down, dancing, possessed (P. 4)
- Egrets, like white flower petals strung slackly across the river, swaying up and down, were returning home (P. 4)

The description here is about evening that is approaching with the attendant fears that herald night (darkness) as no one knows what it (night) holds.

- As the shout shook the town like a cannon blast, fear entered Okolo and he thought of escape through the hole, the sole window at the back (P. 7)

The simile is used to describe the loudness of the sound of the shout Okolo assailant made on thinking that Okolo has been defeated.

### **4.3 African Words/Names, And English Words with African Referents**

African writers selected for this study are versed in their mother tongue, and have a studied understanding of English. As bilinguals they are expected to be “at home” both in their native languages and English.

Important features of the variety of English used by them are the presence of African names of Persons, objects, place and institutions deliberately used in English sentences or structure. There are also English words with African referents.

The choice of these lexical items according to Orisawayi (1989:51):

was to prepare a potent medicine which would by Osmotic pressure, transform and assimilate the English language into the African socio-cultural system without doing damage to its form as universally known and recognize.

The following are illustrative samples of English sentences laced with African words:

#### **4.3.1 Chinua Achebe**

His “obi” was built differently from other men’s hut (*Arrow* p. 1) immediately children’s voices took up the news on all sides “onwa-atuo!”... Onwa-atuo!... onwa-atuo! (*Arrow*, p. 2) what is this story I hear then that you are carving an “alusi” for a man of “Umuaro” (*Arrow*. P. 5) how could a young bride hesitate? over a handsome “Ugochonma” like “Obika” (*Arrow* p. 68)

Names used in “*Arrow*” include “Oduche” (meaning a guided) the role Ezeulu expected him to play in the novel, “Obika” (meaning boldness, courage) which signifies his character and role in the novel.

Oduche is sent by his father to the whiteman’s religion to represent him. In the story Obika is the most courageous son of Ezeulu.

English words with African referents in “*Arrow*” are found in:

are your people saying to Umuaro that if any one brings his “sacrifice” to your “shrine” he will be safe to harvest his yam? (p. 220)



Ezeulu's choice of "sacrifice" and "shrine" instead of "thanksgiving" and "Church" may be due to the fact that he sees the white man's religion as not superior to "Ulu".

"shrine" and "sacrifice" are English words but assume meanings which are African.

in *Anthills*, we have: but if you ask me which of them takes the "eagle-feather" I will say boldly the story (p. 124)

"Eagle-feather" is used instead of "more important". In African cosmology, when a man pins a "feather" on his cap, he is either a title holder, or warrior, and is highly respected. This prominence is what Achebe accords a story teller who he treasured more than a fighter.

#### **4.3.2 Akachi Adimora**

African words and names are found in:

ever since the day that "Kosiri" and his escorts entered "Umuga" from "Akwainedi", and camped in the sacred forest of Agwazi, our "water goddess", the stream has not been the same (*The Last of the Strong Ones* p. 5) I took an "Obejiri" along to stave off possible attacks. I would hide it in the bundle of "Ute" leaves or inside the finished mats I was going to sell in the market (p. 31)

#### **4.3.3 Elechi Amadi**

Snatches in *The Concubine* that contain the lexical items being discussed include:

the floor of the "shrine" was ringed with "earthenware" pots each containing "manilas", "cowries", "alligator pepper" and feathers of animals many years old (p. 17) after the main "rites" "Nwokekoro" built a fire from a glowing "orepe" brand which one old man had brought along (p. 17) please come with some other elders and speak to my husband, otherwise my children and I may not survive another "moon" (p. 72)

#### **4.3.4 Gabriel Okara**

if he turns them up, opens them and show them to the "eye" of the sky (p. 32)

The "eye of the sky" refers to "sun"

i have killed many "moons" many "years" in that hut (p. 37) This means many months and years

### **4.4 Local Expression Transliterated into English**

Another feature of the variety of English used in the novels are local expressions transliterated and transformed into English (not translated).

#### 4.4.1 Chinua Achebe

A starting point for Achebe's use of transform is in "Arrow" where Ezeulu uses the expressions:

"join those people and be my eye. My spirit tells me" (p. 45-46)

In "Anthills" the old man in chapter nine says:

We have Osodi in Bassa If he comes home and tells Us that we should "say yes" We will do so because he is There "as our eye and ear" (*Anthillsp.* 126) Be "eye" and "ear" means to be his representative.

With these expressions Achebe has attempted to endow the English language with the solid reality that characterizes the context of the African language which the English lexical item "representative" does not possess. This reality is extended further by other lexical items in the two novels such as "stand in one place", "bring home my share", "my spirit", "big chief", "strange people", "cunning" and "talk".

The use which Ezeulu and the old man make of "eye and ear" has more 'weight' than the word "representative"

To be someone "eye and ear" implies more than being a mere "representative". As important organs of the body, they have a thorough awareness of what happens around since they are the "windows" of the body. Through them, information and pictures go into a man's mind.

In another context, "eye" could be used for "plan" or "intention". This can be seen in John Nwodika's speech:

I go round every day and see that everything is in its right place but I can tell you that I do not aim to die a servant. My "eye" is on starting as small trade in tobacco as soon as I have collected a little money (*Arrow* p. 170)

In life, we cannot down play the relationship between "eye" and the "mind". We often talk of "mind's eye" in figurative terms. The association between "eye" and "mind" is echoed in Ifeme's speech:

there is no quarrel between Ezeulu and Ifeme. I was thinking all the time that I must visit Ezeulu; "my eyes reached you but my feet lagged behind" (*Arrow*, p. 185)

Another significant part of the body used to create imagery and to make meaning clear is the "hand":

if you choose to fight a man for a piece of farmland that belongs to him, 'I shall have no hand' in it (*Arrow* 15) This means "I shall not participate" In an attack of Ezeulu, Nwaka says: Elders and Ndichie of

Umuaro let everyone return to his house “if we have no heart in the fight” (p.16)

This means “if we have no courage” Other snatches are:

“goat skull” instead of “fool”, “I have no spirit of talking’ instead of “I am not in the mood to talk”, “does not pull a hair from me” instead of “I remain unpersuaded”.

From Elewa’s uncle’s prayer during the naming of her child we can see how Africans propose a toast:

if something pursues us we shall escape but if we pursue something we shall catch it ‘Ise’ as long as what we pursue does not belong to somebody else “Ise” everybody’sLife, “Ise”, the life of Kangan. “Ise” (*Anthills* p. 229)

Other snatches in “*Anthills*” are:

To everyman his own to each his chosen title (p.123)

This is used instead of “ladies and gentlemen” all protocols duely observed.

Every girl knows that from her mother’s breast (p. 88)

This means: “every girl knows that from cradle”

World inside a world inside a world, Without end (p. 85)

This means: “life everlasting”

#### **4.4.2 Elechi Amadi**

Snatches in the concubine which has local color include:

everyman who was a man would go

about his business, head hunters or not (pg 1)

This means: “A brave man would go about his business without fear of warriors”

The above expression is repeated in:

If you think you are a man put down your matchet (p.2) Look at the sun, my child, we must hurry Home before it gets to Chiolu (p. 15)

This means: before the sun sets:

Chima said, “madume’s big eye may cost Him his life eventually (p.16) This means “mandume’s greed” Please come with some other elders and Speak to my husband otherwise my children. And I may not survive “another moon” (p. 72) This means: Another month May the day break (p. 87) This means: Good night. On the evening of the brother of tomorrow (p. 88) This means: on the evening of the day after tomorrow (or text tomorrow)

#### **4.4.3 Akachi Adimora**

From “*The Last of the Strong Ones*”

We have:

For many “moons” I meditated on the nature of change (p. 4)

This means; many months

It is time we got to the head of our talk (p. 17)

This means: the crux of our discussion

The dance of the basket separates grain from

The chaff (p. 19)

This means: Basket is used to filter grain from chaff.

We the watching eyes and the listening

Ears of Umuga (p. 73)

This means: we the representatives of Umuga

Her eyes will see her ears by the time I

Finish with her. (p. 21)

This means: I will beat her mercilessly.

#### **4.4.4 Gabriel Okara**

The task here is not to dabble into the debate of the acceptability and intelligibility of Okara’s English which he experimented in “*The voice*”. Our concern is to explore how orality sparkles in African literature. Amadi (1992) posits that “what matters is not the language in which a work is written but what matters is the skill with which the writer faithfully compels the so called cultural nuances to express his thought through word combinations or rhetoric”.

The expressions in “*The Voice*” are very graphic. The word “inside” which is used several times in the novel, is more pictorial than “thought” and “mind”. Consider the following:

- He was in search of “it” with all *his inside* and with all *his shadow* (P. 1)  
It means he was in search of “it” with all vigour and zeal
- The elders in *their inside*, “turned these spoken words over and over” and looked to see the path they would take to avoid this stinking thing (P. 2)  
This means that the elders: “meditated on the words”
- As he spoke thus in *his inside* and his ears listening to *his inside* he saw a figure slip in at the door (P. 35)  
Meaning as he spoke he reflected deeply and in his mind’s eye, saw a figure sleep in at the door.
- What is the root of this? (P. 35) meaning: what is the meaning of this?

## 5.0 Semantic Extension and Literary/Cultural Relevance

Creative writing in English as a second language in Nigeria illustrates the features of contact literature Akindele and Adegbite (1992:37) define contact literature as the literature in English written by the users of English as a second language to delineate contexts which generally do not form part of the traditions of English literature. They stress that it involves a transfer of discursal patterns from the writer’s other dominant linguistic codes and cultural and literary traditions. Onyema (1998:138) notes that creative writing in English in Nigeria shows a blend of the English and the Nigerian literary traditions, thereby providing the English language with extended usages, as well as swells its lexicon, structure, and discourse.

Based on the cultural background of the writers, most lexical items used in the novels, assume new meaning. Moreso, the local words and expressions used become more suitable than their English equivalents.

A clinical study of the novels, reveals three levels of lexical choice. First, some basic content and function words that help to sustain the syntax to identify the language as English. Second, interplay with words which are English in form but having direct referents in the African soil. For examples of the latter, we have lexical items like mask, wife, kola-nuts, feather, cowries, left side, chief, right side, rats, sacrifice, shrine, alligator pepper, and parts of the body such as hands, ear, eyes, head etc, These items merge with known English words to assume new collocations, such as “head of the talk”, “have no hand in the matter” “be my eyes and ear there” “my eye is on starting a small trade” “my eyes reached you” “have no heart in the fight”, “Okolo’s eyes were not right”, and “Okolo had no chest. Third, we have lexical items superimposed on the seemingly English background, which is the authors’ deliberate use of local names of objects, names and places that might lose their semantic significance and identities if transformed or translated into English. We have items such as Udala, Ukwa seed, Chi, Alusi, Arusi, Ube, Obejiri, Urie, Ndichie, Oluada, Umuada, Ejimnaka, Obika, Okolo.

These expressions merge with wholesale rendition of addresses, songs, and greetings in the local language, juxtaposed and untranslated, which synchronize with the setting of the contact between the English-speaking white man and the Igbo/Ijaw speaking African.

These lexical choices cannot be best perceived or evaluated in isolation: Orisawayi (1989:52) states that “their effectiveness and the freshness they bring into the creative use of language sparkle in their syntactic context, and their context of situation which render their semantic interpretation plausible”.

The untranslated lexical items require no glossing since narrative context clues provide guide post for understanding the sentences in which they occur. Any extraneous explanation would destroy the narrative rhythm, hinder semantic flow, and consequently constitute an apologetic tone for their deliberate use – a project the authors have no room for (Orisawayi, 1989:52).

Consider these snatches from “*The Concubine*”

I ought to trust you Anyika; you are a great dibia. Trust Chineke who is the creator of spirits and men. Without Him my divination are void.

Let me know the various items involved in the sacrifice.

Here they are: seven grains of alligator pepper, seven manillas, an old basket, three cowries, a bunch of unripe palm fruit, two cobs of maze, a small bunch of plantains, some dried fish, two cocks... Seven eggs, some camwood, chalk, a tortoise... and a chameleon (P. 59).

From the context, a non-Igbo speaker will know that “dibia” is a seer and Chineke is God Almighty. Moreso, the reader will attach new meaning to the lexical items such as alligator pepper, chalk, cowries, chameleon, and camwood etc, other than those given them by the native speakers of English. The reader will also know that the interlocutors are talking about items needed for divination.

Generally, in English, lexical items can fall under the paradigmatic and syntagmatic sense relations. In a paradigmatic relation, items are mutually exclusive. The choice of ‘X’ in a particular position in a sentence excludes the choice of ‘Y’ in that same position. Aremo (2004:571) writes that paradigmatic sense relations are meaning relations that obtain between particular lexical items and some other lexical items that can be substituted for them in specific linguistic contexts. In this relation we have synonymy, antonymy and hyponymy. Synonymy, is a relation where items are related in meaning. Antonymy is a relation of oppositeness in meaning. Hyponymy is the relation which obtains between a general lexical item and a specific or less general one which it includes (e.g. Reptile lizard, snake, crocodile). It should be mentioned that items which are same in meaning cannot be interchangeable in every context. Moreso, items that are antonymous do not need to be substituted for each other in all contexts.

In syntagmatic relations, items are mutually inclusive. They are relations that hold between individual items and other items that habitually co-occur with them in a stretch of language (like items on a chain) (Arema, 2004). In this relation, we have collocation, where items collocate.

We shall examine some of the materials displayed earlier to see how the items in them knit together to enhance meaning, aesthetic, and cultural relevance:

- When I got there the first friend  
I made turned to be a wizard.  
I made another... he was a poisoner. My third friend was a leper...
- I made friend with a leper from whom even a poisoner flees (Arrow, 39).

The underlined words enter a paradigmatic sense relations. The umbrella item is “poison”. “Wizard” and “leper” are its co-hyponyms. One is likely to be “poisoned” or “contaminated” when one comes in contact with a “wizard” or “leper”.

This position is made more vivid in:

- Nwodika’s son has “a straight mind towards me”. I can smell A Poisoner as clearly as I can a leper (Arrow, P 171).
- I blame Obika for his fiery temper, But how much better is a fiery temper than “this cold ash” (Arrow, P. 530).

The nominal group “this cold ash” is opposite to the nominal group “a fiery temper”.

- How could a young bride hesitate over a handsome “Ugochonma” like Obika (Arrow, P. 68). The Igbo word “Ugochonma” is a synonymy of “handsome”.
- He would look for special trees like iroko, “ube” and “ukpaka”... he carved doors for shrines and people’s homes. He was also skilled in carving arusi (*Last of the strong ones*, P. 36)

“Iroko”, “Ube” and “Ukpaka” are co-hyponyms of “trees”, “doors” and “arusi” are co-hyponyms of “wood” and collocate with “carved”.

- It was a covered “enamel bowl”. Tuere put the “bucket” of water down, took a “dish” near the “pot” and poured in water (*The voice*, P. 36).

The items “bowl” “bucket”, “dish” and “pot” are co-hyponyms of the word “container” and collocate with “water”. The items: “earthenware”, “pots”, “manilas”, “cowries”, “alligator pepper” (*The Concubine*, P. 17) collocate with the item “sacrifice” and are found in the item “shrine” also used in the same page.

Using componential analysis, the meaning of some of these materials are given below:

|              |                  |                |
|--------------|------------------|----------------|
| <b>Items</b> | <b>Nativized</b> | <b>British</b> |
|              | <b>English</b>   | <b>English</b> |

|             |   |   |
|-------------|---|---|
| i. mask     | +sacred<br>+ Spirit   | +disguise<br>+ fun  |
| ii. Feather | +part of bird<br>+object of flight<br>+title/power                                      | +part of bird<br>+object of flight  |
| iii. Chief  | +leader<br>+high rank (title)   | +leader<br>+highest rank  |
| iv. Cowries | +sea snails<br>+glossy, brightly<br>Patterned shell<br>+divination                      | +sea snails<br>+glossy, brightly<br>patterned shell                             |
| v. Wife     | +female<br>+ Price<br>+conjugal responsibility<br>+multiple ownership/<br>Participation | +female<br>+legal marriage<br>+conjugal responsibility<br>+single participation |
| vi. Moon    | +nature<br>+illumination<br>+calendar   | +nature<br>+illumination  |

## Conclusion

Our concern in this article has been a linguistic analysis of lexical resources and orality and their effects in selected African novels. One sure way to document the African oral tradition, is to use its materials in writing stories.

African writers whose literary works must be truly African, should desist from using materials which are alien to our culture in their works. The beauty of this is multifaceted: firstly, the African child will relate easily with the materials as well as imbibe their moral values. Again, non-African readers will be able to appreciate our culture. It will also help in documenting African oral tradition for future generation.

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