

Achebe's Glory Lies in His Style of Writing Especially in the Use of Proverbs of Oral Culture in *Things Fall Apart*

Tahir Saleem

PhD (Scholar) English Linguistics & Literature, Air University, Islamabad

Abstract

The literary artist's tool is language. He uses language to explain his character's performances, activities, routines, inner emotions and ideas. It is apropos to say completely that techniques of writing decide the credibility and acceptability of any literature works. It has also been noticed that efficient adjustment of language in writing decides the expertise of the authors. Achebe uses proverbs as a device for delineating his characters in the selected novel 'Things Fall Apart'. This paper therefore, thoroughly investigates some proverbs used in the literary texts and their understanding.

Keywords: language, writing techniques, proverbs, expertise, literary texts

1. Introduction

The glory of Achebe's novels is his use of the language and adages of oral culture. What sets him apart from other African writers is the fact that he is, by far, more successful than others in flawlessly translating his working of African terms from one medium to another, from an oral tradition to an alien form of European origin without obliterating the freshness and vigour of the former, and despite the vast difference separating the two cultures.

Nevertheless, the artistic interplay of form and content in his novels also contributes to our understanding of Ibo cultural ethics and aesthetics, creating delight. Achebe thus fulfills the writer's responsibility, which according to Samuel Johnson, is to instruct by pleasing. Achebe's novels provide an accurate picture of the African past and present of life with all its pains, pleasures, and puzzles. As he affirmed, Achebe wanted to convey through his novels that African people did not hear of culture for the first time from Europeans, that their societies were not mindless but frequently had a philosophy of great depth and value and beauty, that they had poetry and above all they had dignity.

Besides trying to instill pride and self-respect among his fellow Africans, Achebe's novels also provide the world a way of perceiving Black Aesthetics. The wisdom and philosophy, the poetry and beauty, of traditional Africa are impressively subsumed in his fiction. For example, according to Ibo culture a good speaker is he who uses traditional proverbs, with skill and wisdom. Indeed, for the Ibos the core of conversation is the appropriate use of proverbs, and they believe "Proverbs are the palm oil with which words are eaten." In all his novels Achebe makes prolific use of proverbs and popular adage. They reflect the good and the bad times through which their societies pass. The society of Umuofia holds achievement and success in high regard. This attitude is well expressed in many passages in *Things Fall Apart*, such as those that tell the reader. "You can tell a ripe corn by it look", and "If a child washed his hands, he could eat with kings."

2. Development of Arguments

Things Fall Apart represents disintegration, collapse of traditions and values, disorderliness and interruption. The appearance of the white men with their religious beliefs, different public principles and different mind-set in the conventional Igbo community triggers disintegrating effects on the unbroken community of the Igbos. The text analysis of Achebe's Novel exhibited who beautifully he utilized the use of proverbs in his Novel. Let's begin with some of the definitions of proverbs.

Proverbs according to Akporobaro (2008) is a brief well-known saying usually by means of an ethical guidance or fact indicated in a small type. He goes further to explain it as a mean by which concepts could be strongly indicated and shown.

Yisa (1998) opines that proverb is a brief recurring witty declaration of experience which is used to further a public end.

Longman Vocabulary of modern English (2008) describes proverb as brief well-known declaration that is usually true.

Yisa (2004) is of the viewpoint that brief, smartly designed belief statements which are used to execute different features in community. One of such features is to help users to say unpleasant thing in an ameliorated way. They are able to do this because proverbs are often associated with typical or conventional (i.e. longstanding) knowledge or mind-set.

Crystal David (1995:184) comments on the nature of the proverbs:

The effectiveness of a proverb lies largely in its brevity and directness. The syntax is simple, the images vivid, and thus easy to understand. Memorability is aided through the use of

alliteration, rhyme, and rhythm.

Proverbs could be described as brief, well-known witty phrases with suggestion or caution. Proverbs could also be considered as source of native intelligent, code of ethical rules and viewpoint of both lifestyle and public rights. We can infer from the explanations of proverbs cited above that; they are kernel which contains knowledge of the conventional individuals and they are also philosophical. They are ethical expositions reduced to a few terms because it is didactic. Proverbs are also used to match every scenario and event. This is because every important statement conventional value or perception can be increased and reinforced with the use of appropriate proverbs. Social issues and individual complications can also be resolved by an appeal to the sanctioning proverbs.

2.1 Proverbs as a Literary Device

Achebe (1958) states on the significance of the use of proverbs among his individuals hence, he says “among the Ibo the art of discussion is considered very highly, and proverbs are the palm oil with which terms are eaten”. Furthermore, the use of proverbs is unavoidable because they are extremely valued in the conventional Africa community and are used to represent certain activities or activities in attractive way.

2.2 The Ideas of Style and Literary Device

Abrams (1981) posits that style is the way of linguistics expression in prose or verse. It is how a speaker or author says whatever it is that he says.

He also opines that the characteristic style of a work of a writer may be analyzed in terms of its diction or choice of words; its sentence structure and syntax; the density and types of its figurative language, the patterns of its rhythm, component sounds, and other formal features, and its rhetorical aims and devices.

The definition above simply represents the way the language is used by an individual author. It also indicates the devices or strategies applied by an author to use language in a particular perspective.

Ndudim (1999) leaving comments on the gadgets of literary development opines that:

One of the primary variations between creative literature works and other types of expression in print is the language and the way expressions are designed or patterned to attract our attention to the experiences authors present.

He goes further to explain that Achebe represents a high feeling of literature capability by using other gadgets which have done great credit to the novel, *Things Fall Apart*. He recognizes flash back technique, acute use of language, transliteration or actual interpretation, quality in the option of enunciation, proverbs, etc. as literary gadgets used in the novel.

The focus of this paper therefore, is the use of proverb as literary gadgets in the *Things Fall Apart*. Achebe deliberately uses the proverbs not merely to add hits of local color but to sound and reiterate styles, to improve depiction, to explain disputes and to pay attention to the values of the community he is representing.

Let us analyze the proverbs below as in the books chosen for the research.

We have the following proverbs, among others “The lizard that jumped from the high iroko tree to the ground said he would praise himself if no one else did.” The proverb is used to recognize Okonkwo’s persistence, especially as a younger cultivator. Let us analyze the passage below as shown in the novel.

“I have come to you for help’, he said ‘Perhaps you can already guess what it is. I have cleared a farm but have no yams to sow. I know what it is to ask a man to trust another with his yams, especially these days when young men are afraid of hardwork. I am not afraid of hardwork.

“The lizard that jumped from the high iroko tree to the ground said he would praise himself if no one else did.” I began to fend for myself at an age when most people still stuck at their mothers’ breast. If you give me some yam seeds I shall not fail you (pp. 15-16).

The above passage shows how Okonkwo goes to Nwakibie to search for help after cleaning his plantation in planning for growing yam. Nwakibie reacts favorably to his demand.

Proverbs are used at vital moments in the lives of the characters in the novel, *Things Fall Apart*. For example, at the last conference of the Umuofia group, Okika punctuates his conversation with many proverbs; one of the proverbs is “wherever you see a toad jumping in broad daylight, then know that something is after its life.” This proverb is used to enlighten the reader on the purpose of the meeting, the burning issue for which they have summoned the meeting.

Let us examine the excerpt below:

“You all know why we are here my father used to say to me, wherever you see a toad jumping in broad daylight, then know that something is after its life”.

Another proverb in the novel, uttered by Okonkwo is “I cannot live on the bank of river and wash my hand with spittle.” This proverb connotes Okonkwo’s protest against Ekwefi for her frugality in the preparation of the feast intended to mark his departure from Mbanta. The following illustrates Okonkwo’s speech.

“I am calling a feast because I have the wherewithal.
“I cannot live on the bank of river and wash my hand
with spittle.” (p.148)

The proverb,

“The sun will shine on those who stand before it shines on those who
kneel down’

is used to depict the importance of status and value of achievement, in the traditional setting of Ibo community.
Other proverbs in the novel and their interpretations are discussed below:

“When the moon is shining the cripple becomes hungry for a walk.”

This proverb reveals the importance of the moon to the rural dwellers.

“You can tell a ripe corn by its look”.

Nwakibie offers this proverb when Okonkwo goes to him for help during the planting season of yam. The
proverb simply means that Okonkwo deserves Nwakibie’s help.

“Let the kite perch and let the eagle perch too. If one says no to the other let his wing
beak”.

Nwakibie uses this proverb while performing traditional rite to show his appreciation for Okonkwo’s visit and
also to show that men need to be accommodating to one another.

“An old woman is always uneasy when dry bones are mentioned in proverbs.”

This proverb reflects the uneasiness caused by his father’s indolence hence Okonkwo laughed uneasily while
other laughed heartily during a discussion that borders on the subject of laziness.

“Eneke the bird was asked why he was on its wing and he replied men have learnt to shoot without
missing their mark and I have learnt to fly without perching on a twig.”

This proverb is uttered during the meeting of the elders when deliberating on how to exterminate Christianity.
The proverb connotes the intention of the elders to root out Christianity and their brothers who are party to this
new religion. “Those whose palm kernels were cracked for them by a benevolent spirit should not forget to be
humble.” This proverb is uttered by when Okonkwo shows one of his major weaknesses by grossly insulting a
less successful kinsman; the people present show their disapproval through this proverb. “When mother cow is
chewing grass, its young ones watch its mouth.” This proverb is uttered by the eldest brother of Obierika to
acknowledge Maduka for taking after his father. “A chick that will grow into a cock can be spotted the very day
it hatches.” The proverb is uttered to show Okonkwo’s condemnation of Nwoye’s effeminate attitude.

Anyhow, Achebe’s characteristic mode of writing, in other words, fulfills his own idea that the "English
of the African will have to be a new English, still in communion with its ancestral home but altered to suit its
new African surroundings." In his own fiction, he succeeds in creating an English that is not only, as critics have
pointed out, "detached", "stately", and "impassive", but also singular in its ability to bring a whole range of
human experience before our mind's eye by his consummate use of imagery drawn from both native and alien
sources. He makes use of devices like proverbs, folktales, and religious tenets conveyed through prayer,
speeches and song sequences.

3. Conclusion and Recommendations

It is apparent that pithiness and economy of words are inherent in proverbs. Therefore, the effectiveness of
proverbs lies on the aptness of their usage in a particular context. Much of the vividness with which the setting of
each of the novel is conveyed comes from Achebe’s use of proverb. He has succeeded in expressing the romantic
vision of Ibo life in realistic form through the use of proverbs and other rhetorical devices. Achebe’s choice of
diction is relatively simple and lucid; hence it makes his message clearer to the reader. Generally, proverbs add
poetic quality to the literary works and also reflect the culture and world culture of people to which literary
experiences refer to. It is therefore, pertinent to say that his peculiar use of proverbs lends credibility to his works
which invariably leads to general acceptability of his literary works. In this paper, I have tried to discuss the use
of proverbs as a literary device in Achebe’s *Things Fall Apart*. A list of proverbs selected is by no means
exhaustive and therefore leaves room for further study of this kind.

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