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“ACHEBEISM”: VERBAL ARTISTRY AND STYLE IN CHINUA ACHEBE’S WRITINGS

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Abstract

This article revisits the African novel by focusing on the writings of Chinua Achebe as a case study. This famous Nigerian writer who passed on in late March, 2013 is regarded as one of the pioneers of African literature who has left the younger generation of writers with particular literary aesthetics of which he is the founding father. He coined and developed the concept of “Africanisation” of the novel and the English language as well. The most telling appraisal of his arts is Phanuel Egejuru’s calling his style “Achebeism”. This article is written through a stylistics approach and it addresses the use of language with evocations of some controversies and criticisms over the language of the African novel. It brings to conclusions that Achebe has significantly contributed to the promotion and

development of African literature as he belongs to the first generation of writers whose early literary productions have been harshly criticised, but have regained consideration over the years. Achebe's literary adventure is acclaimed as a revalorisation of African folklore and the redefinition of the literariness of African arts.

Key words: *Achebeism* - novel - oratory - style - verbal artistry-

Introduction

The issue of language in the African novel is very interesting. It has engendered controversial debates in African literature in general regarding the way European languages should be used. Further in that debate, some scholars like Ngugi Wa Thiong'o argue that African literature should be written in African languages rather European ones as its means of expression. Thus, such a debate renders the issue of language more interesting as the controversies grow and writers become more and more aware of it in their literary productions. However, many of them like Chinua Achebe undertake to use the European language – English – by adapting it to African realities and using it as a strategic linguistic tool to build the aesthetics of their writings.

This paper shows how the controversial debate over the language of expression has finally turned into an interesting field of research as far as stylistics in African literature is concerned. Then, stylisticians and critics engage more and more into investigations on the way the language is used by writers like Achebe who have significantly contributed to the growth of African literature and have addressed its main concerns.

This paper is based on a stylistic approach and proposes to study one of these issues which have given birth to aesthetics that are specific to Achebe as his attribute in the development of arts in Africa. As the title of the paper shows, I mean by *Achebeism* – a term coined by Phaniel Egeruju which I borrowed to back up my arguments – the particular style that Achebe, an icon in African literature has created.

This accounts for his contribution to the building of the African novel, which remains both a literary and cultural legacy to the present generations of writers. Second to that, verbal artistry accounts for verbal performance or more relevantly the art of oratory which is called rhetoric in the African oral tradition. Achebe himself characterises it artistically and literarily as "verbal craftsmanship", which is called in his mother tongue – Igbo – and tradition *Oka Okwu*. All this way of writing and characterising with innovations and methods of putting things together makes literary critics like Phanuel Egeruju denote it stylistically as "Achebeism".

This paper has then a particular context. It is inspired and motivated, on one hand, by the death of this famous writer considered to be a literary icon, a pioneer and one of the most prominent writers that Africa has had ever since. On the other hand, it studies the contribution of Achebe to African literature after more than half a century of existence of his first and most famous novel – *Things Fall Apart* – albeit controversial in terms of literary criticism. However, it celebrates Achebe as a special artist in Africa and above all the literariness of his arts.

For this purpose, one can remark that narrative techniques are of paramount significance in the understanding of Chinua Achebe's writings. They are the literary strategies that he uses to make his novels powerful works of art. In this sense, they can be exploited in many dimensions. Of these techniques, one can mention characterisation and the style strongly based on a mixture of English and Nigerian indigenous languages through the use of figures. Cora Agatucci supports this idea in the following quotation (cf. <http://ueb.cocc.edu/cagatucci/afirstory/html> (accessed on 05/ 08/) :

One cannot study African literatures without studying the particular cultures and orature on which African writers draw for their themes, values, for their narrative structures and plot, for their rhythms and

styles, for their images and metaphors, for their artistic and ethnical principles.

The corpus of the paper includes *Things Fall Apart*, ([1958, 1965] hereafter *TFA*) and *Anthills of the Savannah* (1987, hereafter *AOS*): his first and last novels. The relevance of this choice is that Achebe's style is striking in these two novels in which his literary talent, his cultural background, and his "verbal craftsmanship" are unravelled through the use of language by means of narrative techniques, which urges Phanuel Egeruju (1998) to postulate it as *Achebeism*. This is what inspires me as a key word of the paper. Egejuru comments on this phenomenon:

It is Achebe's exploration and application of Igbo patterns of speeches that have created a distinctive feature which can be appropriately called Achebeism in literature. The most outstanding Igbo oral aesthetics in his novel is what Achebe identifies as oratory, a word which passes for the Igbo term "oka okwu." (p. 23).

Characterisation

Characterization is one of the stylistic features of Achebe's novels. It is mostly through this aspect of narrative techniques that he shows the talent of his characters. As such, two types of characters are found in his narrative techniques: some are great orators and the others are artists.

As far as the art of oratory is concerned, it is in studying characterisation in Achebe's novels that the reader becomes more familiar and acquainted with his characters. The "who is who" is well-discerned in this technique through the distinction made between a literate and an illiterate character, a rural from an urban one; and above all the distinction between the talented and the ordinary ones. Indeed, oratory is called in other words "verbal artistry" or in Achebe's mother tongue *Oka Okwu* – speech artistry. In both novels

under study, verbal craftsmanship is well-illustrated; hence characters reveal themselves as "verbal craftsmen". For instance, in *TFA*, Agatucci (*op. cit.*) puts that Okonkwo's friend, Obierika "voices the most impassioned oratory, crystallising the events and their significance for the village." Next to this one, there are other great orators namely Okoye who is referred to as a talker and as well as Ogbuefi Ezeugo. The narrator emphasises this fact:

Having spoken plainly so far, Okoye said the next half a dozen of sentences in proverbs. [...] Okoye was a great talker and he spoke for a long time, skirting round the subject and hitting it finally (*TFA*, 5).

In *TFA*, Achebe highlights that Ogbuefi Ezeugo too has an attribute in the clan. He is one of the great orators and even among the most powerful ones as the narrator tells: "Then there was perfect silence. Ogbuefi Ezeugo was a powerful orator and was always chosen to speak on such occasions" (*TFA*, 8).

In *AOS*, it is the Abazonian old man, a highly distinguished wise man, who exhibits the mastery of the verb through oratory, which is very symbolic of the African oral tradition as he recounts folktales to argue and illustrate in his speeches. He also uses proverbs abundantly as a rhetoric means of eloquence. This is why one observes easily that the art of oratory or in other words "speech artistry" is well shown in *TFA* and *AOS*. In fact, Achebe uses in both novels circumstances in which he gives sophisticated roles to ordinary people. All the characters I have mentioned, hitherto, are from the rural area and are mostly illiterate ones. However, this specificity is no less important for the characters because what is fascinating in them is found in the depth of their thoughts and speeches, which is of great significance and quality. Indrasena K. Reddy (1994) raises this point by mentioning what is symbolically striking in the character of the old abazonian in *AOS*:

The unlettered and anonymous leader of the delegation addresses the crowd. His talk is subtly couched in riddles, myths, legends and parables – the

very essence of age-old wisdom as embodied in the oral-lore of the land. He begins his talk by saying: ‘It is proper that a beggar should visit a king’ (p. 17).

These speakers play extraordinary roles although they are ordinary characters. Parallel to this, there is another one who is represented through a double role. It is Ikem Osodi in *AOS*, who is an intellectual. He can be compared to the old man even if they are of different social classes since Ikem is educated and he is both an urban and westernised character whereas the old man is a rural and illiterate one. Nevertheless, Ikem observes the old man as a source of inspiration and admiration. He finds the old man as a role model in speech artistry thanks to this one’s gift in oratory and rhetoric. This is the reason why Ikem patterns his speech/lecture at the University of Bassa under the label of the old man’s speech during the Abazonian revolution.

In the practice of oratory, another dimension of speech appears through the use of figures and imagery blended with an abundant use of proverbs and sayings. In *TFA*, the main instance is shown through Okika who is first introduced to the reader by the narrator who focuses on his talent:

The first man to speak in Umuofia that morning was Okika, one of the six who had been imprisoned. Okika was a great orator. [...] Okika sprang to his feet and saluted his clansmen four times. Then he began to speak:

‘You all know why we are here, when we ought to be building our barns or mending our huts, when we should be putting our compounds in order. My father used to say to me: “Whenever you see a toad jumping in broad daylight, then know that something is after its life [...]’ (*TFA*, 143).

On such occasions, Okika is regarded as one of the greatest speakers that his clan has ever had in the history of the village. This is the reason why everyone relies on him to be the first speaker in order to win the battle they are fighting for. The parable of this battle through verbal artistry in which Okika is involved has a double meaning. It embodies the power of the verb in oratory as an art of eloquence, but more symbolically it spotlights power relationship between the white coloniser/oppressor and the traditional Igbo society trying its best to survive and preserve its cultural values in the heyday of colonial rule. Okika is convened to an advocacy in which he has to defend his kinsmen and denounce the oppression they are undergoing. In the same regard, Okika has the status and privilege that the Abazonians have given to their leader (the old man in *AOS*) whose speech they too rely on to foreground their thoughts and claims to the government which looks them down. They both perform mostly in assemblies in which people need the truth to be revealed and justice to be set. In either novel under study, Achebe makes these gifted characters speak in chapters in which justice and truth are claimed. In *TFA*, it is when some leaders of Umuofia are arrested. They all relied on Okika to release them through the truth he discloses. In *AOS* too, it is in the chapter that is dedicated to revolution entitled *Views of Struggle* that the writer shows the old man's rhetoric. He, like Okika, uses a figurative language full of proverbs and enigmas. These cultural elements are sophisticated means to persuade in an advocacy. Achebe evokes it through this statement: "Among the Igbo art of conversation is regarded very highly, and proverbs are the palm-oil with which words are eaten" (*TFA*, 3).

One of the old Abazonian man's most fascinating speeches is on the occasion of their claim to the government. This one makes a particular speech thanks to his verbal artistry which he manages to blend with a powerful use of proverbs and folktales. He argues:

But leave this young man alone to do what he is doing
for Abazon and for the whole of Kangan; the cock
that crows in the morning belongs to one household

but his voice is the property of the neighbourhood. You should be proud that this bright cockerel that wakes the whole village comes from your compound (AOS, 122).

Through Okika, the old man and Ikem, Achebe proves that the speeches of characters differ from one character to the other in many ways; a literate and westernised or urban character does not speak the same way as the illiterate and rural ones do. Bernth Lindfords (1978) states in this regard that:

In a dialogue, for example a westernised African character will never speak exactly like a European character nor will he speak like an illiterate village elder. Achebe a gifted ventriloquist is able to individualise his characters by differing their speech (p. 4).

This is, indeed, what Achebe exposes as both the innermost and the external part of his characters who speak to different audiences and in different circumstances. These characteristic features of oratory are mostly and respectively shown in *AOS* and *TFA* through the old man and Okika whom Achebe depicts as orators and eloquent truth revealers. They are also references supposed to always speak wisdom and to put things in light because they undertake to be the voice of their communities. The character of the old man in *AOS* is emblematic of this caricature:

So we said, if we will not come, let us go and visit him instead in his house. It is proper that a beggar should visit a king. When a rich man is sick a beggar goes to visit him and say sorry. When the beggar is sick, he waits to recover and then goes to tell the rich man that he has been sick. It is the place of the poor man to make a visit to the man who holds the yam and the knife (AOS, 127).

Through this caricature, one can also remark a mastery of the verb by speakers like Okika, Obierika in *TFA*, and the Old man in *AOS*, who are all "verbal craftsmen." They are emblematic of the traditional African school. In analyzing their speeches the reader is introduced to talented people whose social status does not reflect to some extent but only their moral appearance can show it thanks to the sense of wisdom they embody. The old Abazonian is a telling example:

But age gives to a man some things with the right hand even as it takes away others with the left. The torrent of an old man's water may no longer smash into the bowl of the roadside tree a full stride away as it once did but fall around his feet like a woman's, but in return the eye of his mind is given wing to fly away beyond the familiar sights of the homestead (*AOS*, 124).

Many of these characteristics of oratory are exhibited by the narrator through the idiosyncratic features of the speaking characters, which has an effect on their listeners and readers whom they entertain passionately. The narrators emphasises it on Ogbuefi Ezeugo's speech which draws the attention of the audience by means of his idiosyncrasies:

He moved his hand over his head and stroked his white beard. He then adjusted his cloth; which was passed under his right arm-pit and tied above his left shoulder (*TFA*,8).

Another characteristic appears through the ordinariness of the old Abazonian's character in *AOS*. He is an unnamed character but very symbolic in the story. The narrator describes his features among which the white beard and his age – he is above all an old man. Indeed, this is a portrayal of an ordinary person but of extraordinary skills in speech. As is the case of Ogbuefi Ezeugo in *TFA*, this description of the idiosyncratic features of the speaker is a way of showing the style of the individual through a combination of the

elegancy of gestures and the eloquence of the verb. This stylistic item in the writing of Achebe is called the perlucutionary effect of characters' speech on their readers. Here, lies the essence of discourse analysis in Achebe's works mainly in *TFA* and *AOS*. It is from this perspective that Agatucci (*op. cit.*) puts forward that some aspects of the African folklore are instrumental in the eloquence of orators:

For Achebe, however, proverbs and folk stories are not only the sum total of the oral Igbo tradition. In combining philosophical thought and public performance into the use of oratory "oka Okwu" "speech artistry" (in the Igbo Phrase), his characters exhibit what he called "a matter of individual excellence" [...] part of the Igbo culture.

The other type of character that Achebe epitomises is those regarded as artists. In this regard, he shows through them his sense of creativity. In other words, it is the category of characters that are endowed with imagination and who are artistically skilled. It is the case of Ikem in *AOS*. He is a good orator like his rural counterparts, but of great talent and even more sophisticated thanks to his high education and his sober thinking.

However, there are still relations between them; hence the influence of the old man's character on Ikem. After admiring the speeches and the stories of the old man, Ikem labels his lecture at the University of Bassa as the "*Tortoise and the Leopard*", a tale that was recounted by the old man. Despite all this, Ikem too has his attribute as an orator. He is the one who carries the codes and the key messages of the novel (*AOS*) conveyed through the use of language and imagery. A relevant example of this point is his performance at the university. He delivers a speech that has an illocutionary effect and which, like the speech of his predecessor – the old man – impresses almost every listener to him. The narrator tells:

And he told, to remarkable dramatic and emotional effect, the story of the Tortoise who was about to die.

That story was told to me by an old man. As I stand before you now that old man who told me that incredible story is being held in solitary confinement at the Bassa Maximum security Prison (AOS, 153).

This aspect of Ikem's speech is reminiscent of the traditional verbal sparring in African oral traditions. This is particularly the art of the griot in front of a public on the occasion of solemn ceremonies. This representation is a pretext to transcend the literariness of Achebe's writings in the context of building a typical African novel. What is more striking in Ikem is his powerful imagination and speech, which gives him a double role as a poet and an orator. His talent is focussed by the narrator:

It was a brief presentation, twenty-five minutes long, that was all; but it was **so well crafted and so powerfully spoken**. It was serious but not solemn; sometimes witty without falling into the familiarity of banter (my emphasis, AOS, 153).

Such a representation is not fortuitous; Ikem epitomises the writer, Achebe himself whose culture is very fond of the *Oka Okwu*. Indeed, speech artistry is renowned in many African traditions like the Mandinka tradition of Mali whose griots have a sophisticated way of speaking to their people. Djibril Tamsir Niane (1960) evokes it in his *L'Épopée mandingue*:

I am a griot. I am Djeli Mamadou Kouyaté, son of Bintou Kouyaté and Djeli Kedian Kouyaté, Master in the art of oratory [...] we are the bags with words, and we are the bags which contain secrets that are most of the time secular. The Art of oratory does not have any secret for us. But for us the names of the kings would have fallen into the lapse of memory, we are the memory of people; through the word we give life to the actions of the kings in front of the younger generations (p. 9, my translation).

Indeed, one can say that Ikem is a poet who resembles the Mbari artist: “But what I want to say really is that he is an even finer poet, in my opinion one of the finest in the entire English language.” (AOS,62). Omar Sougou (1998) underlines this similarity between both Ikem and Achebe as alter egos:

Significantly, Ikem Osodi, who is very likely Achebe’s lalter-ego, hammers the point home in his lecture at the University of Bassa, this time in a new speech mode, an alloy of traditional imagery and modern phraseology. It is worth noting that Ikem is inspired by the metaphoric discourse of the elder of Abazon, whose story he uses a preamble to his task. It is not so much the lecture, only the gist of which we are given, that is important as the extensively narrated ensuing debate. (p. 44).

Here is a set of qualities which the Mbari artist also identifies with. One relevant instance is when Ikem dies. On this occasion, his people pay tribute to him not only as an ordinary person or a politician, but also as a “talented artist” whose society owes such a tribute. The narrator evokes this aspect of his character:

By the third morning the BBC which had already broadcast news of Ikem’s death carried an interview between their Bassa correspondent and Chris who was described as a key member of the Kangan government and friend of **the highly admired and talented poet, Ikem Osodi** [...] (my emphasis) (AOS, 172).

Ikem is an admirable poet and orator as well; hence he can be regarded as the epitome of the Mbari artist and the alter-ego of Achebe because it is through his poetry that part of the creativity of the novel is perceived. He is also the one who decodes the title of AOS as a key word for a stylistic analysis. As a tradition observed herein the above passage after the departure of Ikem, any reader may

wonder in his turn, while reading *AOS* after the death of Achebe, what Ikem's death can prefigure in that of Achebe now lost as Africa's greatest and talented literary artist. This is a parenthesis that any reader can open about the *departure* of this prominent African writer to recall what he deserves as a tribute in Africa to celebrate his memory.

In a word, Achebe has a sophisticated way of typifying and differentiating his characters from one status to another or from one talent to another.

The Style of the Novels

Style in Achebe's novels is marked by the use of the English language mixed with Igbo idioms and other Nigerian local languages. Indrasena K. Reddy (1994) defends that Achebe uses English with reference to his innovation in narratology. Achebe aims at fashioning out English with an unmistakable African flavour (p.12). Indeed, this is a hallmark in the style of the author owing to the mixture of formal and colloquial English which is done on purpose. Sometimes the structures of sentences are typically influenced by the oral form of language. There are many instances in *TFA* in which characters use some words loosely but to mean simply what is intended for their use. For instance, the word "moon" is used several times in *TFA* to mean "month". This is indeed; a typical and literal translation of the reality of language issue in the African societies that have been in touch with European languages: "Three moons ago" said Obierika," on an Eke market-day a little band of fugitives came into the town" (*TFA*, 97).

This phenomenon appears mostly in what Achebe calls "village novels" such as *TFA* and *Arrow of God*. Keith Booker (1998) underscores this point in *TFA* by showing how this craftsmanship is handled in such circumstances:

Readers and critics of Achebe's novel must play close and careful attention not only to the style and the content of the book, but also to the intricate

relationship between them. The content of the first part of the book [*Things Fall Apart*] is striking for its depiction of traditional Igbo society; the style and the structure of the entire book are striking for the way in which they incorporated elements of Igbo oral tradition. Many critics have remarked on the sophistication with which Achebe wove traditional oral forms into his written text (pp. 66-7).

In this sense, another hallmark is apparent. It is the abundant use of proverbs craftily handled with a poetic language through prose also full of literary figures: metaphors, similes, and animal imagery. In some instances, the language form is broken but with an aesthetic refinement of the style. This typical use of the English language called “Africanisation of English” is another way of refining the author’s style even though it is considered to some extent to be a deviation from the norms. However, it is rather style as a choice for cultural aesthetics. Agatucci (*op. Cit.*) argues for this purpose:

The style of Achebe’s fiction draws heavily on the oral traditional of the Ibo people; he weaves folktales into the fabric of stories, illuminating values in both the content and the form of storytelling. [...] Achebe’s novels are laid in a formidable groundwork for this process. By altering syntax, usage and idiom, he transforms the language into a distinctly African style.

The use of language is one of the aesthetic aspects on which the beauty of Achebe’s novels are built. As a matter of fact, there is constant use of short sentences whose structures and syntax are not correct in form but whose contents are meaningful. This structure refers, on the one hand, to the portrayal of the rural people’s artistic skills; on the other hand, it is what Aigboje Higo (Introduction to *Things Fall Apart. Op. Cit.*, ([1958, 1965]) (the edition I used in the

paper) calls "economy of words". This critic who has written the introductory notes of *TFA* pinpoints this form of writing:

Another characteristic of *Things Fall Apart* is economy; not only in the use of words and phrases but also of narrative. If you look carefully you will see the stitches where Achebe has been sewing the different bits of his narrative together. These apparent stitches do not jar but they serve as it were, to bring the colours together (p. ix).

The "economy of words" is done through a symbiosis of English and Nigerian indigenous languages particularly with Igbo borrowings. In fact, the core of such style is for Achebe to write a postcolonial work of art that is imbued with African cultural aspects as a result of the colonial heritage after years of domination and cultural interaction. This hallmark is sustained by Ernest Emenyonu (2004) who analyses it in the following lines:

It [narrative style] consists of ingenious indigenization and skilful manipulations of the English language to enable it convey essential and intricate traditional African speech patterns and sensibilities (p. xvii).

In *AOS*, it is the use of poetic language that is dominant prior to the informal use of English even if it is also shown that educated people use colloquial English. What accounts for such a distinction is the narrator himself. In this novel, the beauty of language is emphasised both in form and content by Ikem the poet. The abundant use of figures through a poetic language composed of spuns and riddles is done through Ikem's narration, whereas in *TFA*, it is a villager who tells the story. The most striking fact is in the passage below in which Ikem gives the significance of the title of the novel and which also shows that Ikem's own style implies that of Achebe:

The trees had become hydra-headed bronze statute so ancient that only residual features remained on their faces like anthills surviving to tell the new grass of the savannah about last year's bush fires (AOS, 31).

The image of anthills of the savannah unravels the code the novel. It is a symbol of resistance to the hard and unbearable conditions that people live in the country of Kangan under the dictatorship of Sam Okoli. The anthills are symbolic of survival and prefigure Beatrice the only major character who survives as also an eye-witness of the injustices and the hard experiences of the past. She will be part of those who will recount the lesson to the future generations as Ikem puts it in this sentence like a riddle: "their faces like anthills surviving to tell the new grass of the savannah about last year's bush fires" (AOS, 31). The role that Ikem plays in the novel is significant. In terms of style, he is the one who renders the novel poetic. Achebe uses Ikem craftily to give his novels different styles by differentiating the types of narrators and characters. Omar Sougou (1998) explains this aspect of Achebe's arts as a "singular hallmark":

Achebe digs deep down into the culture of the world which he describes to sustain his aesthetics. He is fully aware of the "usefulness of myths, of metaphors, of figures of language and of thought, of analogies and irony, humour and sense of drama" and the fact that Nigerian/ African mind is attuned the powerful suggestions of rhetorically organised language'. Thus in the tradition of the Mbari artists and the griot he moulds his pieces with the tools and materials that the culture and history of the land provides: proverbs, and myths. Both the fiction and expository writing of Achebe bear a singular hallmark (p. 78).

As to *TFA*, what is dominant as a stylistic and linguistic marker is the mixture of Igbo idioms with English. There is another one that is more

striking in AOS in which the linguistic symbiosis concerns other Nigerian local languages like Yoruba, Pidgin and Igbo. To better illustrate this, one can point out these borrowed words: *oga*(boss), *Oyibo* from Yoruba (white man), and "*sojaman*" from Pidgin (soldier). The use of such a mixture of languages for the writer in his style is what Achebe himself calls the "Africanisation" of English. He, like his characters, uses an "Africanised English" to give his works another dimension of art which is referred to as a "Negro-African aesthetics".

From this perspective, a relevant point is worth raising. It is that of the style of the writer, which sometimes renders the question of language very complex. Indeed, this form of writing is sometimes ranked among the class of writers whose styles have been criticised and referred to as a deviation from the norms. This aspect is a fundamental case study which a stylistician can focus on. However, I have to specify the perspective herein. Achebe's style is different. Indeed, it can be considered as style as a choice given that the writer's purpose is to add a certain dose of aesthetics for cultural purposes. Achebe's purpose for such a style is not to show a total ignorance of English grammatical rules but rather to mark a work of art that reconstructs African culture and folklore. Simon Gikandi (1991) proffers the same interpretation of the issue by focussing on the "ordinariness of the language" as a particular stylistic item:

Thus, the ordinariness of the language [...] represents a strategic decision, on Achebe's part, to move his novel away from the phantasmal images of Africa in colonialist fiction and rhetoric. Achebe also needs to contest such colonialist writing because what it represents in the African – subjectivity, history and representation – are the key ingredients in the reconstruction of African cultures (p. 27).

In addition to this aspect, this style is a way of showing the society and the *milieu* he depicts. This is what Bernth Lindforde (1978) tries

to highlight: “Not one prose style but several and in each novel, he is careful to select the style or the styles that will best suit his subject” (p. 4). This is also related to the type of characterisation through which he differentiates his characters from one another. Lindfords (1978) specifies:

Achebe a gifted ventriloquist is able to individualise his characters by differentiating their speech [...] to represent in English the utterances of a character who is speaking another language. To resolve this problem? Achebe has devised an African vernacular style, which stimulates the idiom of Igbo his native tongue (pp. 4-5).

These characteristics illustrated by the recurrent use of terms taken from indigenous languages— either from Pidgin, Yoruba or Igbo – are in fact very illustrative of what Lindfords call “vernacular style”. This aspect draws the attention of the reader to idiolects particularly in the speech of rural or illiterate characters that have been given the competence to perform in the western language that is English. Omar Sougou (1998) delineates this linguistic ideology of the novels:

As a writer truly aware of the power of language, Achebe impressively monitors it here. The pervasive use of Pidgin as idiolect for character identification, are with half-literate Elewa and Taxi –drivers [...] are illustrative of the author’s concern for linguistic mimetism (p. 42).

Conclusion

On the whole, the aesthetics of Achebe’s novels draw upon the use of language which he handles in a sophisticated way that is specific to him. One of the markers of these basic stylistic features is characterisation through which he typifies his characters by giving them different styles. Another hallmark is the blend of English and Nigerian local languages mostly composed of Igbo borrowings. This

is why Chinua Achebe is a prominent African writer who goes beyond the western literary tradition and canons by working out a model of art/novel that is specific to him and to the African writer in general. And this is definitely enabled by his hybrid cultural heritage.

At the outcome, the paper offers a range of clarifications on the understanding of the form and content of Achebe's novels whose style has influenced many writers of the present generations. He has exploited his double cultural heritage from colonisation – the language of expression – and the African oral tradition – the art of oratory. This form of writing gives him the attribute of the Mbari artist which Phanuel Egejuru calls *Achebeism* while Sougou (1998) confirms and infers the following:

Thus, it may be worth discussing Achebe's artistic achievement in the light of the two concepts: the Griot and the Mbari artist. They are central to his theory and practice of creativity and reflect his vision of didacticism and commitment. This implies a look into the effects of his work on readers (p. 77).

These hallmarks of his style lie also in the significant use of proverbs and Igbo saying as a marker of local colour writing performed by his characters. Definitely, his style builds upon these cultural elements of the African folklore in addition to the mixture of English and the Nigerian indigenous language.

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