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THE LITERARY HISTORY OF THE IGBO NOVEL

AFRICAN LITERATURE IN AFRICAN LANGUAGES

Ernest N. Emenyonu



The Literary History of the Igbo Novel

This book looks at the trends in the development of the Igbo novel from its antecedents in oral performance, through the emergence of the first published novel, *Omenuko*, in 1933 by Pita Nwana, to the contemporary Igbo novel.

Defining “Igbo literature” as literature in Igbo language, and “Igbo novel” as a novel written in Igbo language, the author argues that oral and written literature in African indigenous languages hold an important foundational position in the history of African literature. Focusing on the contributions of Igbo writers to the development of African literature in African languages, the book examines the evolution, themes, and distinctive features of the Igbo novel, the historical circumstances of the rise of the African novel in the pre-colonial era, and their impact on the contemporary Igbo novel.

This book will be of interest to scholars of African literature, literary history, and Igbo studies.

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- 33 **Misrepresenting Black Africa in U.S. Museums**
Black Skin, Black Masks
P.A. Mullins
- 34 **The Literary History of the Igbo Novel**
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In Memory of:

**Mazi F.C. Ogbalu (July 20, 1927–October 21, 1990), the
“lone ranger” who paved the way for Studies in Igbo
Language, Literature, and Culture.**

“You dreamed Big...and Right!”



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Contents

<i>Acknowledgements</i>	ix
Introduction	1
1 The need for a literary history	6
2 Igbo literary origins	13
3 Minstrelsy in traditional Igbo society: remembering a pioneer legend—Israel Nwaṅba Njemanze (alias Israel Nwaṅba)	25
4 From voice to text: missionary influence on the development of Igbo orthography and written Igbo literature	38
5 Early fiction in Igbo—the pioneers	52
6 The crisis of standardization of written (literary) Igbo language: Pioneer efforts of F.C. Ogbalu: Founder and architect, Society for Promoting Igbo Language and Culture (SPILC)	77
7 On the threshold of another blackout: a new controversy over the standardization of written (literary) Igbo	81
8 Chinua Achebe and the problematics of writing in indigenous Nigerian languages: towards a resolution of the Igbo language predicament	89

viii *Contents*

9	The female voice—rebuttal and response to patriarchy: Julie Onwuchekwa's <i>Chinaagorom</i> (1983)	104
10	Tony Uchenna Ubesie: the quintessential Igbo novelist	115
11	Interviews with two major Igbo novelists: J.U.T. Nzeako and Chinedu Ofomata	125
	<i>Appendix Igbo language novels 1933–2015 (by decade)</i>	139
	<i>Index</i>	147

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Introduction

In the book entitled *The Rise of the Igbo Novel* (1978), I defined the Igbo novel as any novel written in English or the Igbo language by people of Igbo origin or ancestry. The book was frowned upon by some Nigerian literary scholars for what I considered to be the wrong reasons. Coming eight short years after the Nigerian Civil War (blamed mostly on Igbo intrigue and drive), it was not 'politically correct' in the minds of those scholars to bring the Igbo people or their culture in any arena to the limelight so soon. What's more, having fought a war to prevent the secession of one or more ethnic groups from the country, it was far better to espouse the whole rather than the part.

However, I had no political intention or motive in writing this book. I was instead trying to deal with a thorny theoretical issue at the time, namely: *What defines an ethnic novel in a multicultural situation like Nigeria? What is the place or relevance of ethnic literature in the context of national literature in a country with vast ethnicities bent on highlighting the virtuous attributes of diversity? Should we talk about a national literature as all encompassing?* This was the time when a precise definition of African literature was as thorny as it was controversial. Was it its language, the ethnic origin of the novelist, or the worldview sensitively depicted in the novel that should determine its classification? This went on until Chinua Achebe 'quelled' the fury and distraction by proffering a working (?) definition, namely: 'African Literature is the aggregate of all the national and ethnic literatures of Africa' (Chinua Achebe: 'The African Writer and the English Language').¹ The full text of Achebe's historic statement is noteworthy:

You cannot cram African literature into a small, neat definition. I do not see African literature as one unit but as a group of associated units – in fact the sum total of all the national and ethnic literatures of Africa...An attempt to define African literature in terms which overlook the complexities of the African scene and the material of time is doomed to failure. After the elimination of white rule shall have been completed, the single most important fact in Africa, in the second half of the twentieth century will appear to be the rise of individual

2 Introduction

nation states. I believe that African literature will follow the same pattern...Of course, you may group them together on the basis of anything you choose—the colour of their hair, for instance. Or you may group them on the basis of the language they will speak or the religion of their fathers. Those would all be valid distractions; but they could not begin to account fully for each individual person carrying, as it were, his own little lodestar of gene.²

Decades later, I began an intensive series of inquiries and studies into Igbo (ethnic) literature—its foundation and roots, structure, artistic/narrative techniques, and the role of language in its construction. The outcome of those studies (after presentations at various literary forums, seminars, and conferences on African literature) was an affirmation that the language of expression was central to a valid and authentic definition of any literature or its genre.

In a paper, ‘The Present State of Igbo Literature,’ presented at the 2003 African Studies Association (ASA) annual conference held in Boston, Massachusetts, I reversed my 1978 position (in *The Rise of the Igbo Novel*) and redefined Igbo novel as a novel written first and foremost in Igbo language, depicting Igbo worldview (a race with a population of more than 25 million), wholly or in part, and written by an Igbo person. This new definition drew a flurry of protests and dissension from not a few Igbo scholars in the audience notwithstanding the fact that many of them were from disciplines outside literature. For most of them, it was a sentimental and sensitive issue, and their approach to it was more political than literary. The young literary scholars present who objected to my new definition apparently did so for some purely personal concerns. Having adopted my original definition, they had in the course of their undergraduate and graduate studies published term papers, theses, dissertations, articles, and other works in which they had classified and analyzed novels written in English by such writers as Chinua Achebe, Cyprian Ekwensi, Chukwuemeka Ike, John Munonye, Elechi Amadi, E.C. Uzodimma, Buchi Emecheta, and Ifeoma Okoye, as Igbo novels. Their reputations (if not intellectual integrity) were at stake! Therefore, they ‘vowed’ to continue to define the Igbo novel to include any novel in English written by a person of Igbo origin.

I understood very well the sentiments and emotions evoked in their reactions. I, myself, had in 212 pages in the book under reference, advanced the position that the young Igbo literary scholars seemed now to doggedly, as it were, cling to. But after collecting and reading (during the intervening period) most of seventy novels written in Igbo language, studying and analyzing their trends and characteristics, there was compelling empirical evidence for me to conclude that novels written in English by people of Igbo origin could be defined in general as Nigerian novels in English by writers who have used their respective cultural heritage and worldview to depict events and actions in their stories. In contrast, novels that organically grew

out of Igbo oral tradition, depicting wholly and entirely Igbo worldview narrated in the skilled manner of Igbo orators—lacing speeches, dialogues, or arguments with Igbo idioms, proverbs, wit, and wisdom which entertained as they instructed—are Igbo novels. They not only entertain, instruct, and liven the mind and intellect, but they also preserve a cultural and linguistic heritage/legacy. The ‘word’ is their artistic tool. Chinua Achebe cryptically summed up its efficacy in the proverb which he labeled, ‘the palm oil with which words are eaten.’ And an Igbo saying has it thus: *‘Ilu ka nd’Igbo ji ekwu okwu. Ilu ka nd’Igbo ji awa oji. Ilu ka nd’Igbo ji ama ibe. Mba juru onwe ha, uwa aju ha. Mba tufuru asusu ha, uwa echefue ha’* (‘With proverb the Igbo speak/converse. With proverb the Igbo break kola nut. With proverb the Igbo acquire and distil wisdom. People who reject themselves get rejected by other people. People who throw away (neglect) their language, are soon forgotten by the world’).³

To date, I have collected (and continuing) over 120 novels⁴ written in Igbo, more than 50 plays written in Igbo, over two dozen collections of Igbo short stories, scores of collections of Igbo poetry, several biographies/memoirs written in Igbo, several books on Igbo customs and festivals, a handful of Igbo dictionaries and Igbo grammar books, and countless eloquent speeches, songs, folktales, music video/disc, films, etc. all in Igbo. These are more than enough justifications to state without fear of contradiction that ‘Ethnic Literatures’ are real and valid. If the data I have now were in existence in the early 1970s when *The Rise of the Igbo Novel* was written (and published by Oxford University Press in 1978), there would have been no reason or basis to define the Igbo novel as anything other than a novel written in Igbo language. Evidently, in the early 1970s, there were in circulation fewer than six novels published in Igbo language and just as fewer well-known Igbo novelists. But names of Igbo writers dominated the list of the authors of about eighty novels published in English by West Africans at the end of the first decade of Nigerian Independence (1960s). Of this number, about fifty were by Nigerians, and significantly, about thirty of the Nigerian titles were by Igbo writers.⁵ This prompted some critics to ask: ‘Why are they (leading Nigerian novelists) predominantly Igbo?’ Joseph D. Right’s observation on this issue is worth quoting in full:

A question which I have often heard asked is: Why are Nigerian leading novelists Ibo? Some have even narrowed it down to why do they come from the same district? Achebe, Ekwensi and Nzekwu come from Ogidi, Nkwele and Onitsha respectively – all within a radius of seven miles.

Recently some students of African Literature in the University of Ibadan gave as an answer to this question the presence of a great many printing presses in Onitsha. To my mind this is too cheap an answer, for printing presses do not produce authors. The suggestion becomes even

4 Introduction

more ridiculous when one takes into consideration the background of the various authors. Cyprian Ekwensi was born and bred in Jos and did not go home to Nkwele until he was about thirty-five. Onuora Nzekwu spent his first eleven years at Kafanchan and except for the four years he spent at St. Charles' College Onitsha, was either away in the North or Lagos. Chinua Achebe is perhaps the only one who spent all his formative years in Ogidi and Umuahia.

One would have thought that these students should have investigated these authors' backgrounds before hazarding the guess that printing presses constituted a formative influence in their lives.⁶

The Igbo novel (as now defined) is so phenomenal in growth and impact that there is a compelling need for a book that traces the evolution and trends of this accomplishment. Accordingly, this study looks at the trends in the development of the Igbo novel from its antecedents (diverse oral performances) to the emergence of the first published novel, *Omenuko*,⁷ in 1933 by Pita Nwana, the indisputable 'father' of the Igbo novel.

In sum, Igbo literature is literature in Igbo language. Igbo novel is a novel written in Igbo language. The Igbo novelist is an Igbo person who writes a novel in Igbo language. Once these definitions are clear in our minds, we can see our way in defining appropriately the contributions of Igbo writers to the development of African literature in African languages.

Elsewhere I have argued that 'an investigation of an essential aspect of an ethnic literary tradition and its continuity may provide one useful approach to the study of African literature characterized as it is now by its diffusion and cultural diversity.'⁸ In his splendid seminal work, *African Language Literatures* (1981),⁹ Albert S. Gerard points out that creative writing in African languages predates the arrival of Europeans in Africa (and, therefore, the introduction of the Western art of the novel in Africa). Ethiopian writers, he states, had produced works in African languages long 'before the earliest literatures in Western Europe in Celtic and Germanic languages.' Furthermore, he indicates that 'there are more than fifty different African languages in which creative works are produced' (xi). In general, these languages possess common forms of origin and development (the same processes at the advent of colonial/missionary agencies), differing only in historic and linguistic particularities. Therefore, a successful production of a literary history of the novel in one language would open the door for studies in other languages. In East Africa, Ghirmai Negash's excellent work, *A History of Tigrinya Literature*,¹⁰ it is hoped, would encourage similar studies in other East African countries/languages. My hope and desire is that *A Literary History of the Novel in African Languages: The Evolution and Development of the Igbo Novel (1857–2015)* would inspire similar studies not only on other Nigerian languages but elsewhere in Africa where literature is actively produced in indigenous languages.

Notes

- 1 Ernest Emenyonu, *The Rise of the Igbo Novel*, New York: Oxford University Press, 1978.
- 2 Chinua Achebe, "The African Writer and the English Language" in *Morning yet on Creation Day: Essays*, London: Heinemann, 1975.
- 3 Culled from Anezi N. Okoro, "OTU MBULI ASUSU IGBO NA ODIDE YA", D.M.G.S. (Dennis Memorial Grammar School) Old Boys' Association, Enugu Branch: Annual Lecture, August 11, 1998 (unpublished).
- 4 See the Appendix showing the number of published novels grouped decade by decade from 1933 to 2015, confirming an impressive progressive growth.
- 5 Based on entries in Hans Zell and Helen Silver, *A Reader's Guide to African Literature*, London: Heinemann, 1972.
- 6 Joseph D. Right, "Why they are Igbo," *Nigeria Magazine*, 81 (June 1964).
- 7 Pita Nwana, *Omenuko*, London: Longman, 1933.
- 8 *The Rise of the Igbo Novel*, p. xi.
- 9 Albert S. Gerard, *African Language Literatures: An Introduction to the Literary History of Sub-Saharan Africa*, Washington, DC: Three Continents Press, 1981, p. xi.
- 10 Ghirmai Negash, *A History of Tigrinya Literature in Eritrea: The Oral and the Written 1890–1991*, Trenton, NJ: Africa World Press, 2010.

1 The need for a literary history

This study aims at investigating the trends in the evolution and development of literature written in African indigenous languages, from its antecedents (oral performances—folklore, epics, legends, myths, etc.) to the emergence of the novel. The book's focus is placed on the historic emergence of one of the first of the continent's novels, *Omenuko*, which was written in the Igbo language, in Nigeria, and published in London, England, in 1933. This study investigates the circumstances that led to the rise of *Omenuko* in the pre-colonial era and traces its trends, development, and impact on the contemporary Igbo novel.

How did the novel in African languages evolve?

How was it different from novels elsewhere?

What historical factors led to its emergence?

What were the trends of its development?

What factors helped or impeded its development?

What were the thematic concerns addressed by the authors?

How were the characters portrayed?

Did it possess any unique linguistic or stylistic features?

These are some of the major questions addressed in this book. The African novel written in European languages, mainly English and French, emerged in the middle of the twentieth century, forced into existence by the commitment of emerging African writers to repudiate the distortions of African realities in fiction and memoirs by European colonizers. It was a literature of political protest. However, the novel in African languages, which was older and closer to its socio-cultural environment, customs, and traditions, yielded a literature of cultural identity and affirmation. The values portrayed and narrative techniques employed were different from the portraits in novels about Africa by European authors.

In *African Language Literatures* (1981), Albert S. Gérard points out that creative writing in African languages predated European presence in Africa (and, therefore, the introduction of the Western art of the novel set

in Africa). Ethiopian writers were producing works in African languages long before “the earliest literatures in western Europe in Celtic and Germanic languages” (xi). Yet the learning and teaching of literature in African languages take a distant back seat to African Literature in European languages because of a dearth of sourcebooks, student guides, and authentic teacher’s handbooks. There are more than 50 different African languages in which creative works are produced. In general, however, they possess common forms of origin and development, differing only in historic and linguistic particularities. Therefore, a successful production of a literary history of the novel in one language would open the door for studies into those in other languages.

Creative writings in African languages were largely inspired by the early European missionary educators at the turn of the twentieth century, who took an interest in the development of African languages for the purposes of evangelism and proselytization. They encouraged the first products of Mission schools to write down folktales, songs, epics, myths, legends, etc., which, up until this point, had been disseminated by word-of-mouth from generation to generation. Building on these, they began to write prose fiction—full novels and memoirs. The number of these volumes grew because the missionaries motivated the budding writers by organizing national, regional, and continent-wide contests, and publishing winning entries. *Omenuko* won the continent-wide contest and was published in 1933, making it possibly the first African-language novel in West Africa. These creative pieces and historical records have been preserved in London at the British Museum, CMS (Church Missionary Society) Archives, School of Oriental and African Studies (SOAS), Oxford Archives, and Birmingham University Archives. All of these libraries, archives, and museums were visited a number of times over the course of the research and data collection carried out for this study. Samples of the rare artifacts and validating documents collected have been indicated in the textual analysis and attached in the Appendix.

From 1933, when *Omenuko* was published, to 2015, more than 100 novels have been published in the Igbo language. These are grouped together based on the decade of their publication in order to establish the stages of growth and factors that have enhanced or impeded the development of the Igbo novel since its inception. From the early twentieth century onwards, the development of the Igbo novel has faced enormous challenges, which will be discussed in the following chapters. These challenges are not peculiar to the Igbo novel. They are factors that have also hindered the development of literature in indigenous languages elsewhere in Africa.

In the middle of the twentieth century, there was an upsurge of countries seeking and obtaining political independence from their European colonizers. In 1957, Ghana, formerly known as the Gold Coast, obtained

her independence from Britain and thereby opened the doors for other African nations to do so. Guinea followed suit and won her independence from France in 1958. In 1960 (referred to as “Africa’s Freedom year”), 17 other nations won their freedom from their imperial overlords, including Cameroon, Senegal, Togo, Mali, Madagascar, Congo (Kinshasa), Somalia, Benin, Niger, Burkina Faso, Ivory Coast, Chad, Central African Republic, Congo (Brazzaville), Gabon, Nigeria, and Mauritania. By the end of the 1960s, 16 other nations had obtained their independence, making this decade a politically remarkable one in Africa. There were jubilations and celebrations. Sadly, however, half a century later, most of these nations are, in more than metaphorical connotations, still “colonized.” Nowhere is this more pronounced than in the educational systems and language policies in these countries.

A strong, progressive national policy on language unequivocally articulated and incorporated into each African country’s national policy on education was needed at independence to draw attention not only to the importance of indigenous languages but also to their central place in the curriculum at all levels of the educational system. Sadly, this policy was missing, and the impact of its absence is evident today in the way it has undermined the development of literature in indigenous African languages. In many cases, there were no national policies of education to begin with, and where they did exist, foreign languages were disproportionately preferred to local, indigenous languages. Nigeria is a case in point.

For almost two decades after achieving independence in 1960, Nigeria remained without an unequivocal and explicit language policy. It was not until 1977 that the then-Federal Military Government made the first bold bid to formulate a language for the country, through the publication of a document titled *Federal Republic of Nigeria National Policy on Education*. This policy was to be further enshrined in *The Constitution of the Federal Republic of Nigeria 1979*, which stipulates under Sections 51 and 91 that¹:

The business of the National Assembly shall be conducted in English, and in Hausa, Ibo and Yoruba when adequate arrangements have been made therefrom. [Section 51]

And

The business of a House of Assembly shall be conducted in English, but the House may in addition to English conduct the business of the House in one or more other languages spoken in the State as the House may by resolution approve. [Section 91].

This was followed by the language policy.

Nigeria's national language policy

The national language policy is stated in five sections (1, 2, 3, 7, and 10) of the *National Policy on Education*, as follows:

1. Section 1. Philosophy of Nigerian education

Paragraph 8: The importance of language

In addition to appreciating the importance of language in the educational process, and as a means of preserving the people's culture, the Government considers it to be in the interest of national unity that each child should be encouraged to learn one of the three major languages other than his own mother tongue. In this connection, the Government considers the three major languages in Nigeria to be Hausa, Ibo and Yoruba. [p. 5]

2. Section 2. Pre-primary education

Paragraph 11: To achieve the above objectives, Government will:

(3) Ensure that the medium of instruction will be principally the mother-tongue or the language of the immediate community; and to this end will (a) develop the orthography for many more Nigerian languages, and (b) produce textbooks in Nigerian languages. Some of these developments are already being pursued in the university departments of linguistics and under the auspices of some state Ministries of Education. The Federal Government has also set up a language center as part of the educational services complex under the Federal Ministry of Education. This language center will be expanded so as to have a wider scope. [p. 6]

3. Section 3. Primary education

Paragraph 15(4):

Government will see to it that the medium of instruction in the primary school is initially the mother-tongue or the language of the immediate community and, at a later stage, English [p. 8].

4. Section 7. Adult and non-formal education

Paragraph 52:

The objectives of adult and continuing education should be:

- 1 To provide functional literary education for adults who have never had the advantage of any formal education;
- 2 To provide functional and remedial education for those young people who prematurely dropped out of the formal school systems; (p. 21)
- (5) ...The recognition of approved training courses outside the formal system of education will be a continuous process, implemented by

10 *The need for a literary history*

the National Commission, together with the Federal and State Ministries of Education.

- (6) A new, nationwide emphasis will be placed on the study of Nigerian arts and culture.

The National Commission will work out the overall strategy for inclusion of Nigerian arts, culture and languages in adult education programs (p. 22)

3. Section 10. Educational services

Paragraph 84(6):

Language Centers are being set up at Federal and State levels for enhancing the study of Languages especially Nigerian Languages [p. 29].

In summary, the Nigerian national language policy advocates the use of the local language as the medium of instruction for the first three years of primary schooling and English as the medium of instruction in the last three years. During the period when the local language is in use, English is taught as a school subject. This means that the Nigerian child begins formally learning two languages from the age of six. The policy further requires "each child to learn one of the three major languages other than his own mother tongue." In practice, therefore, the Nigerian child is expected to learn three languages over the course of his or her school career, and, of these, two (including English) are foreign. By implication, therefore, the policy encourages, and seeks to enhance, enlightened multi-lingualism in Nigerian society.

Implementation of the Language Policy

More than five years after its promulgation, the impact of the language policy had yet to be felt in Nigeria's educational system and in social and cultural environments. The greatest impediment to the implementation of the policy was the government's failure to formulate a language policy and the lack of any program intended to enforce the policy. There were workshops on some indigenous languages and on the production of textbooks on such languages, but the most fundamental issues were disregarded.

There was no known federal machinery for monitoring the implementation, or otherwise, of the policy throughout the Federation. The bulk of the policy dealt with language education at the primary level. Yet education is also a subject on the concurrent legislative list. This means that each state can legislate on its system of primary education, including the language policy. Some state governments sponsored work on curriculum reviews and the production of English textbooks and readers in their individual local languages. No state government followed the official policy

of introducing a Nigerian language that was not indigenous to it in its local primary schools. Nor did the federal government enforce the stipulation of “each child learning one of the three major languages other than his own mother tongue” in the government that owned and controlled secondary schools.

Two decades into the twenty-first century, the situation has not improved in any significant way in the country as a whole. Recently, the Lagos State Government made history with a clear-cut language policy by passing into law a mandatory teaching and learning of the Yoruba language in all the schools in the State including private schools not established by government:

Tribune newspaper, Friday October 20, 2017

“Lagos House of Assembly Passes Yoruba language Bill into Law”

The Lagos State House of Assembly on Thursday, October 20, passed the bill which makes the teaching of Yoruba language compulsory in schools in the State into law.

The bill among others, makes the teaching of Yoruba language compulsory in all schools in the State, both in private and public schools, by including it as a core subject at all levels. State owned tertiary institutions are also mandated by it to incorporate the use of the language as a course unit into their General Nigerian Studies (GNS). The bill indicates a fine of N500, 000 for a corporate offender while any school in the State which fails to comply with the law faces closure and a fine of N250, 000.

The bill was finally passed on Thursday with the speaker of the House, Rt. Hon. Mudashiru Obasa, ordering the clerk of the House, Mr Azeez Sanni, to send a clean draft copy of the bill to the State Governor, Mr Akinwumi Ambode for his assent.

To ensure that literature in Nigerian languages survives and is sustained for generations to come, there must be nothing short of a radical incorporation of indigenous languages into the school curriculum. In the Nigerian educational system, primary and secondary schools must require and teach linguistic subjects such as Hausa literature/language, Igbo literature/language, Yoruba literature/language, Efik literature/language, Ibibio literature/language, and so on. Even more teachers would be needed to teach literature in other African languages across the continent. In this regard, what is currently happening in South Africa should be treated as a model throughout Africa: the country has 11 official languages, and seems to have devised a way for literature in all of these languages to reach the speakers and readers of the others through translations of children’s storybooks. Sindiwe Magona, one of the leading writers of children’s books in South Africa, explained the mechanism that is in use. Asked what roles government or private sector organizations could play in increasing the awareness,

importance, and significance of children's literature in Africa, Magona answered:

If it is something that we care enough about, we need to begin a concerted effort. One of the things that saddens me is that, take South Africa for instance, children who grow up with the folktales of the Xhosa have no access to the folktales of other ethnic groups within the country, and vice versa. I don't have the folktales, but I am friends with South Africa's premiere storyteller whose stories are in Zulu language. Now I have access to her stories. In fact, she paid me the huge honor of asking her publisher, she has published two volumes of folktales, to ask me to translate them into Xhosa. She writes in Zulu and her books are in English. I don't know whether she did the English editions herself or with other translators, but she now has her stories in Zulu, Xhosa, and English. I did the Xhosa version of those stories. Then I got to know more of the Zulu. There are folktales in all the eleven languages of South Africa, but the children will only know those of their mother tongue, if they're exposed to them... It is ridiculous that I know more of English literature, American literature, than I know of literature within the African continent. Ridiculous. So we could begin by translating African children's stories into various African languages on the continent.²

Notes

- 1 For a detailed discussion on this issue, see Ernest Emenyonu, "National Language Policy in Nigeria: Implications for English Teaching" in Chris Kennedy (ed.) *Language Planning and English Language Teaching*, New York: Prentice Hall, 1988, pp. 82–91.
- 2 *African Literature Today 33: Children's Literature and Story-telling*, in Ernest N. Emenyonu (ed.) Rochester, NY: Boydell and Brewer Inc., 2015, pp. 168–179.

2 Igbo literary origins*

Literature had existed in Africa even before the arrival of Europeans to the continent. Initially, all of African literature was in the oral form; in other words, it comprised stories told orally. Europeans colonized Africa, brought Christianity, and introduced Western education, but they did not bring story-telling to the continent. Story-telling has been as old as human-kind on the continent. It was an integral (perhaps, the most useful) part of the people's culture. Each of these stories had its own unique structure, form, technique, features, message, function, and purpose. Story-telling was not just an "art for art's sake," but it was both a communal and individual affair. It belonged to an individual; it belonged to all the people of a society. The stories outlived the story-tellers. The story was "the word," and the word was the story. The word was in the proverbs, riddles, songs, and the sayings of the elders. The creative manipulation of the word belonged to the raconteurs, the seers, the orators, and the poets. It all began with *the word* that existed in every African community and culture. Story-telling is an oral tradition that consists of contents, wits, and wisdom transmitted either through word of mouth or by custom and practice. This tradition had a definite purpose: to instruct the young in the principles of right and wrong. It was directed at the young and at all those who were instrumental in molding the opinions and character of the youth. The imagery in the stories was often drawn from the non-human world; however, the values were drawn from humans.

Folktales are an integral part of various African communities. These tales feature as central characters some non-human entities endowed with human traits. These entities could be *anasi* the spider, *mbe* the tortoise, the hare, the rabbit, or the praying mantis. Handicapped by their physical limitations, these non-human creatures are able to deal with difficult situations by resorting to a number of tactics including cunning, the ability to outwit adversaries, and shrewdness. In African folktales, good always triumphs over evil, truth over falsehood, honesty over dishonesty.

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Folktales reveal the qualities highly valued in African communities such as the parent's responsibility for the safety, care, and upbringing of their children; respect to the elderly people; hard work; grace and beauty in women; strength and virility in men; social justice; and the spirit of daring, which is especially evident in the characters of the spiritual world.

Children in the African communities grow up under the tutelage of their mothers, and through these kinds of tales, especially the animal stories, they can easily learn about the good and evil of their society. Thus, the real significance of a folktale is that it demonstrates the logic of a behavior, and its vital implications and consequences for life in general. There is a story prevalent among the Igbo people about a chicken that did not have time to attend a meeting called by the king in the animal kingdom, but would accept any decisions reached at the meeting. It happened that the meeting was called to decide which animal to offer to humans for ritual sacrifices. By popular acclamation, the chicken became the sacrificial victim, and thus has remained so ever since. The story illustrates the danger of abdicating one's responsibilities to others. In a democratic system, everyone must play his/her role in the community, and every individual must be concerned enough to voice his/her opinion in matters affecting the welfare and destiny of the society.

The foundation of all Igbo literature is in its oral tradition, sometimes known as folklore, but more often called oral performance. Igbo literature embodies the literary aspects of oral performances such as folksongs, folktales, riddles, proverbs, prayers including incantations, histories, legends, myths, dramas, oratories (forensic and otherwise), and festivals. All these form the basis of Igbo life, its culture, and its worldview. The best way to relate this structure to African literature in general is to think of a tree with taproots deep inside the soil (**oral literature**), which sprout, grow into a stem (**literature written in indigenous languages**), and develop/wax into branches (**literature written in European/other non-African languages**).

Contemporary Igbo novel, poetry, or drama is the extension of its oral literature. For a modern Igbo writer, the Igbo traditional artist who was both a technician and a visionary is a major source of inspiration, as, with his/her legacies from the past, he/she cannot be oblivious of the deep sense of inviolability and commitment which characterized his/her predecessor, regardless of whether he/she was a narrator, carver, sculptor, spokesman, orator, chief priest, or drummer. Such individuals thought of themselves as dedicated to their crafts and duties, and therefore each was bound to utilize his/her medium to express an inside restless sensibility in the best possible manner that his/her personal skills and energy would permit. The artist knew his/her society—its pace, its pulse, its dreams, and its realities—and therefore, through his/her art sought to provide some fulfillment for the audience.

The traditional Igbo narrator was, for the audience, an educator, entertainer, philosopher, and counselor. He/she entertained as well as instructed, and endeavored to make the values and beliefs portrayed in the tales come alive. The traditional artist was a carrier of tradition, and his/her role was like that of the village priest who must make himself respectable to ensure loyalty, devotion, and the high regard of his society. However, the traditional African society was not a "literate" one. The African people did not derive their entertainment from books, but oral narratives developed their imagination. Logic was inculcated through proverbs and riddles. The young learned these skills from experienced practitioners who embellished their language with imagery, folk idiom, humor, irony, and witticism. Equally the young had to learn to use these traits to appreciate the basic ideas of life, their people's fundamental values, their systems of personal relationships, and their sense of humor.

The traditional artist had a clear conception of the immediate society, and its problems and needs. Therefore, when he/she performed for the audience, he/she reflected these needs and addressed himself/herself to specific human problems, projecting a direction for the society and the individuals caught in the dilemmas of humanity through the ethical formulas in the tale.

The Igbo people have a huge stock of legends and fairy-tales, which are constantly exploited by the oral performer to add life and excitement to a performance. The oral performer can use animals and birds as illustrations, but they are used in such a way that they seem to be endowed with human powers. The artist can also effectively imitate the sounds of the animals that are featured in the story. The function of the folktale is primarily to entertain. This is most fully appreciated when we recall that during the period when the folktale tradition was most important in the history of the Igbo people, such things as radio, television, newspapers, cinemas, and various other forms of modern entertainment were either nonexistent or not easily accessible to most people. Igbo folktales, therefore, provided a form of relaxation at the end of the day's work.

The bond of affection between the mother and child in the Igbo culture is a very strong one, especially when the child is a son. When the dishes of the evening meal have been done, and there is no moonlight (and consequently no moonlight plays), the child sits around the fireside to be entertained by the mother till bedtime. Usually other children also join, and when the mother retires, the children continue their stories. The stories are told spontaneously, and when the children tell them, they usually do so in turns, ensuring that no one repeats a story that has already been told. These stories told by adults or the children themselves need not always be folktales. They can be stories of actual events that are considered humorous or delightful. They can be stories of events which the narrator simply feels his/her friends would like to hear. These stories usually allow the audience to draw some conclusions based on moral or ethical considerations.

A narrator with some experience may use many stylistic devices in telling a folktale, which could take the form of proverbs and sayings. These are incorporated into the body of the tale itself. They could constitute a summary of the vital issues in the story. When proverbs, imagery, or symbolisms are included in the story, they make the story more challenging, and the process of understanding the full impact of the story is a further exercise for the faculties of the child—an exercise which, if successfully completed, adds to the entertainment and fun which the story can bring. An example can be seen in this short allegorical Igbo tale:

Uchemadu na Onyechi na-eme enyi na-akpakowa uri. Onyechi gaa n'ulo Uchemadu o rie ihe, taa anu, nuokwa manya. Mgbe o na-aga ila nwunye Uchemadu enye ya ihe o ga-eke umu ya. Ma o buru na Uchemadu agaa n'ulo Onyechi o dighi ihe o ga-eri. Nwunye Onyechi agaghi enye ya miri ka o nuo ma o dighi rio ya.

Otu ubochi nwunye Uchemadu ajuo di ya uru enyi ya na Onyechi bara. “Kwa ubochi o bia rie, nuo. A gaa n'ulo ya, o dighi ihe o ga ewwputa. O budi nani ya na-azu umu?” Ihe a juru Uchemadu anya, meekwa ka o eche echiche banyere ya. Uchemadu mesia, si nwunye ya na o di ebe ya na Onyechi na-aga taa. O tugharia, si nwa ya no ya n'akuku, “Gaa kaara Ori nga iragha iragha e righi nga ya, bia ka anyi gawa.” Nwanta ahu agbara oso gaa n'ulo Onyechi, si ya na nna ya siri ya ka o gwa ya “Ori nga iragha iragha e righi nga ya, gi bia ka ha gawa.” Onyechi asi ya, “O di mma nwa m. Ga gwa nna gi, Onye a na-echere na amaghi na a na-echere ya, na mu abiawala.”

Reason and Future were friends, and used to go about together. Whenever Future went to Reason's house he would eat meat and drink palm-wine; when he was about to go home Reason's wife would give him food for his children. But whenever Reason went to Future's house there was nothing for him to eat. Future's wife would not even give him a drink of water unless he asked for it.

One day, Reason's wife asked her husband what advantage there was in his friendship with Future. “Every day he comes here and eats and drinks. If you go to his house, he brings out nothing. Is he the only one with children to bring up?” This took Reason aback, and made him think about it. After a while, Reason told his wife that he was going out with Future that day. He turned around and said to his son who was by his side, “Go and tell Mr. Eats-at-his-friend's-house-but-his-friend-never-eats-at-his-house, to come on and let's go!” The boy ran to Future's house and told Future that his father said: “Mr. Eats-at-his-friend's-house-but-his-friend-never-eats-at-his-house, come let's go!” Future answered, “Very good my boy. Go and tell your father, ‘Mr. He-who-never-gets-it’, I am on my way.”

Several lessons could be drawn from this story. In terms of the culture, it could be a rebuke for thoughtless and wasteful generosity. It could also be a way of frowning at cheating the other fellow. It could equally be a commentary on false friendship. All these themes are clearly implied in the story, requiring no further explanation. Listeners are challenged to come up with their answers. Note the virtues implied in the personification of “Reason” and “Future.”

The title or the subject matter alone does not make a story acceptable. The responsibility of making the story interesting and delightful lies squarely with the narrator. By using individual techniques and devices, the narrator persuades the audience to accept the wit and wisdom embedded in the story and participates fully in the telling of it.

The oral performer selects either a long or short story taking into consideration the age, attention span, and the body language of the targeted audience. Whether the story is long or short, the main attributes, message, and moral of the story must not be compromised. The following are examples:

1. THE FOX AND THE HEN

Once upon a time, the hen fell ill. She was so sick she could not even go outside the house. The fox heard about the hen’s sickness and went to visit her to tell her ‘sorry’. When the hen saw the fox coming, her sickness got worse. When the fox came nearer to the house, he saw that the hen was getting worse every minute. He told the hen how sorry he was about her sickness. “Is there anything I can do to help you get better quickly?” asked the fox. “It is very kind of you to come to see me. But if you really want to help me get better quickly, the best thing will be for you to go away please and not come back. I am sure that I will feel better when you go away.” The fox went away. Not long after, the hen got well and went away from the forest. Since then the fox has been looking for the hen and the hen has been hiding from the fox.

This tale shows how the physically or otherwise challenged individuals can devise subtle strategies for survival. Under normal circumstances, the fox would have killed and devoured the hen at first sight. However, the sick hen “felt/pretended to be worse” when she saw the fox approaching in order to ensure her own safety. Her strategy worked! She was able to buy time, and as soon as the fox was out of sight, the hen escaped. It is the triumph of wit and intellect over brute force and devilish intent. There is no love lost between the fox and the hen then (and now).

2. THE LION AND THE BUSH RATS

One day the lion lay down to sleep in a forest. Soon he woke up because of the noise of some bush rats that were playing and jumping all over the forest. He quickly caught one of them. He pressed it hard and

wanted to kill it. The rat begged the lion to let him go. "I am only a very small rat, not even big enough or nice enough for a lion's meal. If you kill me, you will only make your hands dirty with a small rat's blood." He cried as he begged the lion. The lion left him. The rat ran away, far, far into the forest. Later that day the lion went deep into the forest to look for food; he did not know when he walked into a hunter's trap and was caught there. He tried and tried to free himself but could not. He knew that his life was in danger. If he must live, he must free himself from the trap. He tried again but the trap was big and strong. It caught him on the right leg. The pain was too much. Blood was coming out. The lion began to cry. His cries shook the whole forest. The trees shook in their roots. Soon he saw a small bush rat coming to him. The small rat began to talk to the lion. He told the lion to stop crying because he was coming to help him. It was the same bush rat that the lion had set free not long ago. The bush rat had heard the cries of the lion and had come to help him. Little by little, with its small teeth, the rat began to cut the trap. It took a long time but in the end the lion was free. The lion took the rat in his hands and thanked him over and over again. The rat smiled and said "one good turn deserves another." And with that the lion and the bush rat went away. The big lion had helped the small rat and the small rat had saved the life of the big lion.

This is a tale that clearly emphasizes that "one good turn deserves another." The lion was able to ensure survival by showing leniency and mercy to a small rat that had gone astray. The lesson is as relevant to the rat as it is to the lion. The "mighty" lion was, after all, saved by a mere rat, because the lion had once been kind and merciful to the rat.

3. THE TIGER AND THE LION

One day a small tiger went into a shepherd's farm and killed a lamb. As he was taking it home, he saw a very big lion coming behind him. He was very afraid of the lion. Quickly he dropped the dead lamb and ran into a bush. He hid on top of a small hill and watched from there. When the lion got to the place where the dead lamb was, he picked it up and went away. The tiger shouted from the hill: "It is a shame for you to steal my food." The lion looked at him and said, "So you want me to believe that this lamb was a gift from your friend the shepherd to you!" And with that he sat down and ate the dead lamb.

This tale affirms the need to pay heed to and practice the saying, "do unto others as you would want them to do to you." The story conveys that you should be careful of how you treat people who come your way because you may sooner than later be in their shoes. It advises people not to steal, because someone else could steal from you too, and then you too will feel the pain.

4. THE ANT AND THE LAZY DOG

Once there lived an ant and a dog. They were good friends. The ant was very hard working. During the planting season, he planted a lot of yams, cassava and vegetables. The dog was very lazy and planted only a few crops. The ant warned his friend time and time again to plant more crops but the dog did not listen. All through the planting season the dog played in the sun and rolled on the sand. Nothing and nobody could stop the dog from playing always. He laughed at other animals when he saw them in their farms working very hard.

Some months later, it was time for harvest. After harvest there was always plenty to eat in every house. Little by little the dog's food began to finish until there was nothing left for him to eat. He then went to his friend the ant to ask him for some yams. The ant refused saying: "My friend, I am sorry I cannot help you. I have only enough to feed my family and me till the next harvest season. We worked hard during the planting season so that we can have enough food at this time. You did not work hard. That is why your food has finished so soon." So the dog went away hungry and some days later he died alone in his house. And so ended the life of a lazy dog.

This tale is a rebuke for laziness, inertia, and irresponsibility. The culture venerates bravery as much as it derides idleness. The dog paid the ultimate price for living for the moment and not thinking about the future.

5. TORTOISE AND THE MAGIC DRUM

Once upon a time, there was a famine in the animal world. The animals died of hunger every day. The animals went everywhere to look for food. There was no food anywhere. On his way looking for food, tortoise saw a palm tree with a lot of ripe palm nuts. He climbed the tree at once and plucked some nuts. The first nut he cut fell from his hand into a big hole at the foot of the palm tree. Tortoise was very angry. He climbed down and went after the palm nut inside the hole. As tortoise climbed into the hole, the hole became wider and wider, deeper and deeper. Tortoise continued climbing down. At last he reached the bottom of the hole. It was like a big market place. The place was filled with spirits. The spirits had shared the palm nut and were eating it. Tortoise was very angry. He wanted his palm nut back. Since they had already eaten parts of it, the spirits could not give him back the palm nut. Instead they gave him a magic drum. They told him that if he beats it food will come out. But they warned him that he must beat the drum only once a day. Tortoise climbed out of the hole and went home with his magic drum. At home, he called the animals to his house. The animals came and sat down. Tortoise beat the magic drum. Immediately all kinds of food began to come out. The whole place was filled with food. The animals ate, and ate, and ate. They were very happy.

They called tortoise their king. Then tortoise began to boast to them how he went to the land of the spirits and took away their magic drum. All the animals praised him. To them he was like a god. While still boasting, tortoise beat the magic drum again. But this time, instead of food coming out, the drum broke into pieces. All the animals began to cry. They will die of hunger again. However, tortoise told them that he would go to the land of the spirits again and get another magic drum. This made the animals happy.

Tortoise went back to the palm tree. He climbed it and cut one ripe nut. He dropped the nut and made sure it fell into the hole. Then he climbed down and went into the hole. As soon as he saw the spirits, he told them that he had come to get his palm nut which the spirits stole. The spirits had not touched the nut yet so they asked the tortoise to take it back. Tortoise refused. He wanted them to give him another magic drum. The spirits talked quietly among themselves. Then they agreed to give him another magic drum. Tortoise carried his new drum home.

When tortoise reached home, he called again all the animals. They were all happy to go to his house. They all sat down and waited for him to beat the drum so that food will come out. Tortoise showed them the new drum. Tortoise beat the drum but instead of food, bees came out from the drum. The animals began to run away. Their faces were swollen. Tortoise dropped the drum and ran too. Some of the animals saw him running. They ran after him. They wanted to kill him. He was the same tortoise whom they called King the day before.

This tale encourages industrious and resourceful abilities in a person, but these traits should not be misused. It is evident from the story that the culture favors luck and “walking” into unexpected fortune. But it also frowns at falsehood, hypocrisy, and deception. The tortoise showed lack of civility and decency in his second journey to the land of the spirits, but he could not fool the spirits. He met more than his match in the spirits in terms of cunning, and suffered the consequences both in the spirit land and among his people in the physical environment.

The poetic justice found in the folktales is consonant with one of their basic uses—to reform and instruct the society. Each tale has a hero, a hero-helper, and a villain. There is no real character development as in a novel or a play; the character who starts off as good ends as good, and the wicked character always remains the foil to the hero. The hero often starts off the adventure in a miserable situation—oppressed by his step-mother, poor and hungry, or perhaps an orphan who is dispatched on an impossible mission or errand. But the hero survives through courage and sometimes through supernatural intervention. When the fate of the hero hangs in the balance, a god or a spirit is likely to appear from out of nowhere and set everything right. This creature

is usually the spirit of the late grandmother, parents, or a guardian spirit. In the story, it is essential that the wicked character should always end up disgraced and defeated and that the righteous should always win; the forces of good and of the good spirits must triumph over evil. Often tales of this nature are not narrated verbally all through. When it gets to the point where the tormented child (nearly always a maltreated orphan) recounts his/her fate, it is rendered in the form of a song—in a moving anguish and sorrow-laden tone. An example is a story titled *Ngele Agun'egbu*—named after a carnivorous monster along the lonely path to the target destination. In the tale that follows, the vicious monster resides at the stream, and the helpless little girl is commanded to go and fetch water from this stream at a very late hour when the path leading to the stream is deserted.

Once upon a time, there was a man who had two wives. The older wife had no children while the younger one had a daughter and a son. One day the two wives went to the market leaving the young girl to babysit her small brother. The baby cried all afternoon. He was thirsty and hungry. There was nothing in her mother's house for the young girl to give to the baby to quieten him down, not even water. So in desperation she went over to the house of her father's older wife and used up a little water in the water pot.

Meanwhile, the older woman returned from the market first. She had only herself to shop for. It didn't take her long to notice that her little water had been used up. In fact, it was a careful trap. She yelled and howled at the little girl and insisted on her going to the river to fetch water to replace the depleted quantity. The girl pleaded that it was too late in the evening but when her mother came back, she could arrange for the replacement. The woman turned deaf ears to the pleading of the innocent child. Not only did she insist on the girl going but she also stressed that the water used up by the child was fetched from Ngele River. Ngele was dreaded in the vicinity because it was the abode of a monstrous creature which devoured anyone that came close to its precincts. Not even habitual criminals or notorious thieves were sent at late hours to Ngele because no one who set foot on its banks ever came back alive. But this wicked woman sent the terrified girl to Ngele so she could be killed by the monster. Her ultimate goal was to render the other woman childless as well. She has for long looked at her as a vicious rival who should be gotten rid of. But the younger wife had always been kind and loyal to her. These acts the older wife repaid with more and more cruelty and hatred. She was jealous to a fault.

The little girl carried on her head the gourd imposed on her and started off on the lonely road weeping. It was near dusk. She felt rejected, cast off, mistreated and about to die. She trembled as she walked and every noise made her more terrified. The little girl kept walking as if

to her death. She missed her steps several times but managed to continue. Her eye sockets were now almost blistered from crying. Twice or thrice she ran forward when she thought someone was behind her and screamed for help. It was still dark, she was alone but there was now no going back. She heard the sea birds and owls hoot and howl. Ngele stood ten yards in front. She only had to pass a thicket and then the journey was over. Her heart-beat increased. She was now a few paces away from the thicket. She knew like every other person in the village that the thicket was nothing but the dwelling place of the monster. In a moment or so it would come out and she would be dead. She closed her eyes and began pacing in silence. It would be better not to see the monster in all its fury. Three steps...a fourth...perhaps one more, the monster would grab her...

Meanwhile, her mother had returned from the market. She was terrified to find her baby crawling on the floor all by himself. She called her daughter several times and had no response. She frantically ran over to the first wife's house to ask if she knew anything about her daughter. But of course she denied any knowledge and rather suggested that she might have been kidnapped or carried away by an evil spirit. (Any explanation could pass since she was sure the girl could in no way escape death at the hands of the monster). The woman broke down and sobbed and the elderly wife made moves to console her although inside she was satisfied and overjoyed.

The girl was shivering from head to toe as the huge monster stood in front of her ready to pounce and tear her to pieces. No one had confronted the monster before and lived so she wasn't hoping for a miracle but she appealed to the monster to listen first. She wanted to tell her story before dying and she did tell it. She sang out:

Ngeleagunegbu chere m kaara gi	<i>I yere o**</i>	Great monster, please hear my story <i>I yere o</i>
Ejere m be nwunye nna m o	<i>I yere o</i>	I took a little water from my father's wife's pot
Jee kuru mmiri, mmiri m nyere nwa	<i>I yere o</i>	To give to my crying thirsty little baby brother
Q si mu jebe iyi Ngeleagunegbu o	<i>I yere o</i>	Father's wife came back furious and yelling
O gbuo m o o ha m o	<i>I yere o</i>	Ordered me to fetch water to replace her own
		From Ngele, the river that kills like lightning
Ka m jebe ala ozo je biri	<i>I yere o</i>	She doesn't care if I live or die
		As long as I don't come back home

And to her great surprise the monster sang tenderly in reply:

O, obele nwa ndo *I yere o* Oh little child, sorry! *I yere o*

** *I yere - o* is a refrain in a tone that emphasizes the desperate and pitiful situation of the little girl.

Instead of tearing her to pieces, the monster filled her gourd with water and flew her home by a gentle wind and gave her a good luck charm which brought fortune and wealth to her and her mother.

The older wife in her envy set out the same night for the river and when confronted by the monster, she demanded a good luck charm which would bring her good fortune and sons and daughters. She was given a charm of ill-fortune and flown home by a fierce tornado which dashed her to pieces in front of her house.

Kindness to children, especially orphans, is not only admired in the Igbo culture but greatly advocated. Rivalry among wives in polygamous situations is real. It is a familiar theme in folktales. The child is rescued from ordeals and torture at the hands of wicked step-mothers or envious co-wives. In this particular situation, both the second wife and her daughter mean no harm to the jealous older wife. The older woman's barrenness is not their fault. Even the carnivorous monster understood and became humane, and spared the life of the innocent child. The tale encourages children to always tell their story, and tell it truthfully. The little girl, despite the impending risks, still obeyed the vicious older wife. It did not cross her mind to disobey the older woman's evil commands or escape once she was out of her sight. She survived because of her innocence and uprightness. The death of the vicious older wife is meant to be a deterrent for child abuse and domestic violence.

The interaction between folktales and cultural patterns and changes is very remarkable, especially as society becomes increasingly sophisticated. Most references to the mode of life or mores of the people and animals in the stories are still accurate reflections of what is prevalent in the larger society. It is this capacity for adaptation according to changing times that makes folktales elastic and progressive. Changes in the modes of behavior and values are continually filtering into age-old tales. These days, it is common for people to adopt the folktale ballad form as a way of expressing opinions on important contemporary issues.

A further expansion in the folktale is seen in the vocabulary used by today's narrators. Like other arts, folktale has been affected by innovations in science and technology. In some tales that originated in the days before Afro-European contact, the major characters are mentioned in the contemporary versions as wearing shirts, shoes, and watches. Stories about oppressed orphans now often mention the added injustice of the orphans not being sent to school.

However, the impact of folktales is rapidly diminishing with the increasing awareness of modern inventions. Printing presses have cheapened and have largely increased book production. Story-telling as a way of passing time is fast disappearing because of other preoccupations such as watching television, listening to radio, and playing video games and musical

instruments. Children have now various other ways of having fun besides sitting around outside in the moonlight or by the fire listening to folktales. In many homes, electricity and gas stoves have rendered traditional fires nonexistent. Earlier, it used to be common for children from various families to assemble to form the folktale audience. These days, however, people are moving to the towns and cities in large numbers, and very few families can afford living rooms large enough to accommodate the children. Often parents do not allow the children to go outside in the evening; rather, they are sent to bed early.

The schools seem to be taking over the primary purpose of the didactic folktales. Children are given moral instruction in the school, and, in most cases, there are formal religious studies. There are counselors who advise children about their behavior. Some parents also talk to their children directly, punishing or rewarding them as the occasion demands, instead of having them learn through the morals of animal tales. Although modern African writing has borrowed a great deal from the folktale tradition, it has also been instrumental in diminishing the role of the folktale as a cultural phenomenon. Many people would rather relax over a novel than listen to folktales, especially when the novels contain a lot of the elements found in the folktale, as seen in some contemporary African novels. A teenager who reads Chinua Achebe's *Things Fall Apart* has a fair chance of learning from its many proverbs, riddles, and cultural traditions as he would if he listened to folktales. Moreover, the emphasis on examinations, especially in a foreign language (as opposed to the vernacular in which folktales are told), has helped to reduce the attention which students of literature might have given to folktales.

In spite of all these forces working against them, folktales are not an extinct feature of the Igbo culture. Folktales are meant to be narrated, and attempts to write them down can capture only a little of the imaginative and dramatic essence on which their ultimate appeal depends. The audience participates by responding to certain phrases and commenting on the character and situations, thus imparting a new freshness to each telling. When songs occur in the tales, they are usually refrains for the audience. Because of this corporate response and involvement, the standards of performance are continually improved as the tales pass from one generation to another. With ever-increasing literacy, emphasis on written literature, and the phenomenal breakdown of the old communal ways of life, opportunities for gathering together to share these tales will continue to diminish. But folktales are an authentic heritage, and literary artists will continue to use elements of them to embellish their works.

3 Minstrelsy in traditional Igbo society

Remembering a pioneer legend—Israel Nwaḡba Njemanze (alias Israel Nwaḡba)

Minstrelsy is one of the oldest expressive oral arts of Africa. It is the most audience-captivating performance among the Igbo from time immemorial. Pioneer Igbo minstrels are highly skilled in the use of local *lingo*, imagery, and sensational delivery, and they entertained audiences with songs that served the purpose of socialization, acculturation, and censure. The popularity of the minstrels rested on the degree of sharpness and acidity of censure conveyed via songs. The messages embedded in the songs were cryptic and pungent commentaries (often narrated in “tongues”) on various dubious clandestine and scandalous activities, such as unwed pregnancies, salacious sexual escapades, endemic corruption, crimes of incest, and aberrant behavior, which people in the immediate community talked about in whispers but dared not discuss them openly. Understandably, therefore, minstrels were loved and hated to a fault.

The song in its fullest ramifications was not only an important tool in minstrelsy, but also the critical force that drove the performance and gave essence to its form and structure. Since time immemorial, songs have played an important role in the field of entertainment and acculturation in African societies. They are used to celebrate various victories and achievements as a result of human endeavors, as well as to express emotions of sorrow, defeat, failure, and disappointment. Songs were tools that were used to immortalize heroic deeds or solidify indoctrinations. In the Igbo world, minstrels were the harbingers of unique songs that were designed for purposes of socialization, targeted acculturation, and censure. Minstrelsy was known for its dexterous word manipulation, configuration of messages of a sublime order, and captivatingly magical charm in performance, and it was therefore a reflection of the quintessence of Igbo oral art and cultural aesthetics. The songs described various aspects of life in the community and provided critical checks and balances on moral behavior and discipline.

The community used to gather to listen to lampoons and satires of behind-the-scene escapades and of salacious scandals and crimes that had rocked the immediate society and its environs during the course of the year, and no one, until then, had known the identities of the perpetrators. In recent times, minstrels have shelved a lot of their disguises and instead expanded

their image of vigilant “watch-dogs” beyond the scope of their immediate community to censure the corrupt practices prevalent in the society/nation at large. They compose and perform on songs that described incidents related to volatile issues such as rampant endemic corruption in public life, ineptitude in political leadership, and blatant abuse of power in high places. In one particular song, ironically titled “*Democracy*,” the so-called advantages of democracy in Africa were copiously ridiculed.

What do contemporary writers of Igbo origin who write in English or in the Igbo language have in common with the Igbo oral performers such as minstrels, vocalists, raconteurs, and community orators or spokespersons? First, the value systems and perceptions of life reflected in their various art forms of both the Igbo oral performers and the writers of Igbo origin are rooted in the Igbo worldview, and, second, they draw the “essential element” of their narrative techniques, which is word manipulation, from a common literary tradition. Both the writer and the oral performer draw their legacies from their predecessor—the traditional story-teller.

In the traditional Igbo society, the story-teller was, for the audience, an educator, entertainer, philosopher, and counselor. He entertained as well as instructed, and endeavored to make the values and beliefs portrayed in the tales come alive. He was a carrier of tradition, a tradition which must be passed on from generation to generation through the spoken word. The society was not a *literate* society in the Western sense of the word. Entertainment was not derived from books. Imagination was developed through oral narratives. Logic was inculcated through proverbs and riddles. Good oratory skills were learned from experienced practitioners who embellished their language (spoken word) with imagery, folk idiom, and witticism. By watching the minstrels, the young learned to appreciate the basic ideas about life, the community’s fundamental values and systems of personal relationships, and sense of humor. The traditional artist had a clear conception of his immediate society—its problems and needs—and when he performed for his audience, these problems and needs were reflected in his performance. With the use of ethical formulas in his tales, the traditional artist addressed specific human problems and projected a direction to his society and to individuals caught in the dilemmas of humanity. The traditional artist, regardless of the category or designation (raconteur, carver, sculptor, orator, chief priest, or drummer), saw his art as an inviolable commitment for relevance and acceptance. He was, in a metaphorical sense, the *conscience* of his immediate community. This was the familiar world of the minstrel, and through his engaged performance in that world, he endeared himself to the community in his highly esteemed roles of a social critic and a reformer. Through the ages, the Igbo minstrel has evolved from a solo-artist setting, to a cultural group or community orchestra where he played multiple roles such as that of an orchestra leader, composer, vocalist, and director. The minstrel performed to the accompaniment of a variety of musical instruments including drum, gong, *ekwe*, *udu*, *osha*, *oja*, bell, and cymbals; however, the pivot/central element in

the performance remained the song. The masculine pronoun is used in identifying the minstrel because in virtually all social situations, the Igbo traditional minstrel was invariably male.

Features of traditional minstrelsy

- 1 Each song was a story.
- 2 Within each story was woven a series of cryptic anecdotes.
- 3 Humor, irony, and sarcasm were used profusely as narrative techniques.
- 4 There was artistic freedom which enabled the minstrel to improvise as he performed, incorporating sayings and making free use of local *lingo*, newly created slangs, and aphorisms which allowed the targeted “scandal” of the moment to be seen in its proper social context, amidst dangled sufficient “sign posts” that make crime and criminal identifiable, short of using real names of people and places.
- 5 As a sequel to the preceding techniques, some classic linguistic imagery rooted in the immediate social environment and understood by the immediate community was incorporated for humorous effect; for example, an illiterate was characterized as “a person who never broke a slate” (slate was a small breakable writing board made of clay used by preschool children to practice writing with chalk. Some kids broke theirs several times in the school year. It was expected!).
- 6 The more salacious scandals were expressed in esoteric idioms and witticisms; for example, “when a prostitute gets pregnant, her legendary immunity (not getting pregnant no matter her promiscuity) crumbles”; and a school headmaster who impregnated a female student in his school was likened to “a he-goat with unbridled appetite.”
- 7 The most often lampooned characters in sexual scandals were invariably female (akin to the popular pattern in the Onitsha Market Literature of the same era), although as the watch-dogs of the community, there was no limit to what the minstrels could attack, ridicule, mock, or vilify in their songs; they coated their castigations in veiled or disguised imagery while identifying characters by pseudonyms.
- 8 Usually a soloist performed to the accompaniment of musical instrument, with one or two other voices who chanted refrains for maximum impact and effect.

Some popular traditional minstrels/groups

Historically speaking, traditional Igbo minstrels invariably were men; there may be some exceptions today, but, in general, minstrelsy was a predominantly male-dominated performance. Female membership, where it exists, is a recent phenomenon. Few groups may have had women in ceremonial roles and as female patrons/matrons. The reason for male dominance in minstrelsy was the secret and daring nature of the activities of minstrels, and the fact that the subjects of attack in the songs have been mostly teenagers and women.

One of the oldest groups, *Nkwa Love*, founded in the early decades of the twentieth century, had made progress in recent times in diversifying its membership to include women who performed as lead singers and drummers. Unfortunately, in November 2011, its lead vocalist and creative genius, Michael Ukazu (aka Okasi), was assassinated under bizarre circumstances. His death brought an end to the existence of one of the oldest, popular minstrel groups in Nigeria. Founded in 1931, the group had performed for eighty years. Nothing has been heard of the group again since the murder of their leader.

The Abigbo Group: Abigbo is a style of dance music associated with the Mbaise people in the present Imo State of Nigeria. According to Nze Iheanyichukwu Nwaebo of Lorji Nweke Ukwu, Abigbo cultural dance was founded in 1951 at Amaumara, a town now in the Ezinihitte Local Government Area of Mbaise. Today, there are several Abigbo cultural dance groups in various parts of Mbaise. Each goes by the generic name, Abigbo Dance Group. One group identifies itself as Modern Abigbo Dance Group, while another as Abigbo Mbaise Wu Otu (Abigbo Mbaise United). Nwaebo described members of Abigbo Dance Group “as a group of conscientious men with a sense of mission.” It is an exclusively male dance group, consisting of eighteen members—seven drummers and eleven dancers including the vocalist. Their mission is to preempt evil and evildoing in the civil society. The song is their weapon, and the members compose songs to expose and fight the wrongdoings and to encourage good and upright behavior in the people in their community. They introduce themselves collectively as the unrestrained mouthpiece of the community, and the signature tune with which they begin any performance is their rhetorical question, “Is there anyone who claims not to recognize our voice?” They are identified by their uniform attire—traditional *George* wrapper and white shirt. Their instruments comprise one big drum (locally known as *Esuruesu*), one medium drum (*Nkwa Etiti*), one small drum (*Nkwa ekere*), one wooden gong (*ekwe*), one bell (*Mgbirigba*), and *osha and Igbugbo* (metal gongs).

Abigbo Dance Group is best known for the song that launched them into stardom—*Umu Kolejí*.

Umu Kolejí (*college students*)

Umu Kolejí is a song that has satire in abundance (not subtle by any stretch of imagination) targeted at male students in general, but college students (undergraduates) in particular, who have come home from their various institutions of higher learning during their vacation. They are referred to as vicious kites about to prey on young, innocent chicks. Just as a mother-hen protects her young ones by hiding them under her wings, thereby frustrating the rapacious kite that swoops without warning, parents are urged via this particular song to protect their daughters from predators with uncanny tactics (seemingly harmless dance parties) that are designed to allure unsuspecting female teenagers (preys).

As the song unfolds in cryptic anecdotes, the minstrel introduces other subjects of lampoon, ridicule, and censure through rhythmic successions. The song includes names of individuals (fictitious names no doubt, but the misdeeds are real and identifiable by the local community) as their repulsive actions are narrated with unabashed phallic imagery. “*When a prostitute gets pregnant, her legendary immunity crumbles.*” The rendition soon becomes a volatile satire of immorality, social aberrations, crimes, and felonies which are unacceptable to the community. Everyone, therefore, is asked to be vigilant and expose the miscreants, because “if you shield a thief, you have yourself become a thief.”

The solo performer, *Seven-Seven*

“*Seven-Seven*” hails from Anambra State and remains one of the most popular and sought-after Igbo minstrels in recent times. He is best known for his song, “A Musical Competition between my Mother and Me.” The song is a son’s account of a musical contest with his mother, his ego bursting at the seams! The tone is one of condescension, for how could a woman (even if one’s mother) dare to compete with a man even if he happens to be her son? A preamble to the song asserts,

If women had the role of providing or fending for men in this world, human suffering would know no end; every haggard-looking and long-suffering man has a story to tell about a terrible wife... A man does not set out to bully his wife for no just cause; Every cruelty a woman suffers and complains of has its root cause in some unconscionable act and behavior from a woman.

After setting the stage with these chauvinistic assertions, the singer then proceeds to tell the story of how his mother, *a woman*, challenged him, *a man*, to a musical competition, more like a duel. Still on an ego trip, he digresses to cast aspersion on a certain white man who had insulted him in Onitsha. He repudiated the white man *and let him have it*; after all, “when will the white man ever see me in London to retaliate?” Coming back to his original story, he reveals that the contest with his mother took place in 1947, on the day of solar eclipse (a significant imagery since that eclipse of the sun was viewed by many rural communities as a sign that the world was about to end!). The singer adds gratuitously that he could not say for sure if the contest with his mother was what had interfered with the heavenly bodies. He had pleaded with his mother, in vain, to call off the competition because being a man he was, *ipso facto*, the more accomplished musician. He compared the musical contest between him (male) and his mother (female) with the healing powers of a medicine man and a medicine woman, and then asked the audience who is better, the medicine man or the medicine woman. Wasn’t the answer obvious—a medicine man? Again, after the digression,

the singer continues with the story of the musical contest, providing more details of the setting and the process. The competition took place during an *Ozo* initiation ceremony of a traditional medicine man, famous in the community. After the contest, symbolic prizes were awarded. His mother received a huge cow because, as you know, “women love meat to a fault.” The singer’s prize was a canoe. Since they had to cross a river to get back to their homes after the contest, his mother approached him and begged for a ride for her cow and herself. If he had refused, his mother would have been stranded at the venue indefinitely. So, since his mother depended on him to convey her and her cow safely home, it was, he asserts, evident to everyone around that he was the winner of the musical competition. His mother, a woman, was, all said and done, at his (man’s) mercy. He obliged his mother as a loving son should. The song ends with another reminder that “when-ever a man treats a woman badly, the remote cause can only be found in the woman’s recalcitrance!” This rendition is one of the most blatant attacks on feminism and feminist ideals in modern-day Nigeria.

The solo performer, *Eleven-Eleven*

“*Eleven-Eleven*,” an equally popular and famous minstrel, is also from Anambra State of Nigeria. His masterpiece, *Caroline*, is stylistically and thematically his most evocative and far-reaching song. It narrates the tragic episode of a school headmaster, Mr. Okoye, and a teenage girl, Caroline, a pupil in the school. Caroline arrives at school by 9 AM, an hour after classes had begun. When she is quizzed by the headmaster, Caroline laughs in his face and nonchalantly informs him that she was helping her mother with early-morning kitchen chores. Infuriated (and to save face), the headmaster announces that she would be severely punished. He orders Caroline to go to his house (the headmaster’s official residence is located in the school compound) and mop the floor. He tells her to remain there until he comes home and inspects and certifies that the job is done to his satisfaction. The headmaster goes to his house during recess and cajoles Caroline into a sex act that predictably results in pregnancy. Frightened, he seeks the advice of his close friend, Okafor, about his next line of action. Okafor advises him to go to the market, buy a big hammer, and, with it, silence Caroline forever, to avoid imminent scandal. After murdering Caroline, the headmaster carries her body at dusk, puts a rope around her neck, and dangles her body on a mango tree to make the incident look like suicide. An elderly woman discovers the crime and alerts the police. The police catch up with the headmaster sooner than later; he and his friend are arraigned in court. His friend is sentenced to a jail term as a murder accomplice, but the headmaster is executed. The gory details are woven in powerful imagery—Okoye is a “he-goat with an unbridled sexual appetite”; the old woman who reported the crime to the police has “a tongue as sharp as lethal mortar.” There is also ironic humor in the midst of the tragedy. Okoye is depicted as “an honorable man who professes the

Christian faith at the same time that he practices the traditional religion—ancestor reverence”—a kind of Dr. Jekyll and Mr. Hyde. The former (Christian status), the minstrel declares, is to ensure a safe place for him in heaven, while the latter (ancestor reverence) is to guarantee for him the enjoyment of sumptuous delicious chicken meals served at rituals and sacrifices associated with the traditional religion. In what seems like an anticlimax, the song, “*Caroline*,” ends with a bizarre admonition to bachelors looking for girls to marry—

whenever you decide to marry, avoid short women. If you marry a short woman she will make life miserable for you. If you marry a tall woman you will enjoy peace, harmony and tranquility in your marriage. If you offend a tall woman, she cries and it’s over. A tall woman will never betray you in life.

However odd this ending might look or sound, it is the kind of ending (epilogue) that has endeared “*Eleven-Eleven*” and his performances to countless admirers and teeming audiences when and wherever he has performed.

The minstrels and their songs, discussed earlier, have met the audience’s expectations regarding their commitment as engaged artists to play enduring and inviolable roles for the welfare and development of their societies and, at the same time, provide entertainment of a highly distinguished and aesthetic quality. The minstrels are unrelenting in their efforts to empower their communities, rid their social environments of conducts unbecoming, and entrench moral standards that their communities can be proud of, while at the same time, ridding the larger society of social injustice, corruption, and criminal and other activities that hinder progress, as these create instability in the lives of the people and project unfavorable images of Africa to the outside world. But the minstrels remain unbending in their incessant attacks on aberrant behavior, especially in teenage girls. Many of the minstrels now perform on stage, albeit in traditional attires and costumes, accompanied by scantily clad female dancers displaying suggestive and exotic gyrations—all for commercial purposes, as the performances are now recorded on CDs and DVDs for sale nationally and internationally. Some songs are rendered in the Igbo language with subtitles in English, some are directly in English, while some are in pidgin English. The focus shifts from the local to the global, as modern technology advancements have now become a part of our daily lives the world over, including Africa.

Israel Nwaọba Njemanze

Israel Nwaọba Njemanze was truly the founding father of the twentieth-century Igbo minstrelsy. He was also its first martyr. In the two decades before the Nigerian independence in 1960, he had captured the attention of music lovers in Nigeria as a whole, partly because his songs had enjoyable rhythmic patterns and bewitching melody, and because he advocated Nigerian unity by using different Nigerian languages in his songs. He promoted positive

relationships between different ethnic groups and encouraged interethnic marriages at a time when the reverse was the norm, especially in politics. He was unafraid of people in power and was daring and unrestrained in what or who he satirized or lampooned in his songs. He captivated young and old audiences from far and near with his unrivaled verbal dexterity, pungent humor, and vibrant gyrations on stage. An extraordinary solo performer, his band of three was mysteriously titled “The Three Night Wizards.” He was a master of satire and sarcasm, and the skill and expertise with which he did it had never been experienced in Nigerian music before. He dreamed big for Nigeria, stepped on the toes of the high and the lowly, and was a darling of the masses; at the age of 33, he was the first musician—one who reached the height of popularity—to be assassinated in Nigerian history.

Israel Nwaṣba Njemanze was born on December 25 (Christmas day), 1922, in Amaawom village in Owerri, capital of the present Imo State. I should perhaps add immediately that born on a Christmas day, he also died on a Good Friday, betrayed at the age of 33 by an intimate member of his orchestra. The Njemanze family historically is the royal family of Owerri. So Israel was born into royalty, and at the height of his career as a band leader, he added “Nwaṣba” to his name during a visit to the Oba of Benin at the time. When he was introducing himself to the *Oba*, Israel humbly wanted the *Oba* to know that based on where he came from, he was a son of an *Oba* (King), and so he had added the word “Nwaṣba” (son of a king) after Israel. It drew laughter from the *Oba*, and for a while after that event, his comrades (orchestra members) continued to call him Nwaṣba just for fun, but soon Israel Nwaṣba became his professional name by which he was known for the rest of his life. It was not a name given to him by his birth parents.

I interviewed some members of the Njemanze royal family in Owerri on December 21, 2018, particularly the current head of the Njemanze dynasty, a retired chief judge of Imo State, Hon. Justice B.A. Njemanze. I wanted information about Israel Nwaṣba. I wanted information about Israel Nwaṣba, the man—his nuclear and extended family, his friends, his interests, and his legacies. And I wanted to know why the family has not been celebrating Israel Nwaṣba Njemanze, a musician many would identify as “the founding father of Nigerian country music.” Justice Njemanze smiled, and cryptically told me that “the life story of Israel Nwaṣba is all embedded in his songs”...including why the family had not been celebrating him, their iconic idol. An unpublished biography, a final-year project, by a group of music students at the University of Nigeria, Nsukka (1991)¹, affirmed Justice Njemanze’s statements thus:

Nwaṣba was a mover of people, a historian, patriot and an effective organ of mass mobilization. With his music (songs) he mobilized his countrymen and women in the fight for (Nigerian) independence. From his music, one would have insight into his whole life. Nwaṣba told (in his songs) the story of himself, his community, (and immortalized in his

renditions the Owerri type of Highlife music called 'Abiriwa'). He also sang about his wives, lovers, and his children.... He was one of the first (pioneer) Nigerian musicians who ever lived.

Nwaḡba's contemporaries in Nigerian music included Obiligbo, Okonkwo Adibe, Victor Olaiya, Eddy Okonta, Bobby Benson, Erasmus Jenewari, Raphael Anusiem, Rex Jim Lawson, and so forth. These pioneers, against all odds, were able to lay the foundation of Nigerian music deeply rooted in oral performances which were passed on from generation to generation as spoken word. If his contemporaries were his equals, Israel Nwaḡba Njemanze was, without doubt, the first among equals. His activism tilted the scale in his favor. He "was not a politician but had interest in political events of (his) time." He praised and criticized high-profile politicians of his era such as Dr. Nnamdi Azikiwe, Chief Obafemi Awolowo, Samuel Akintola, Mbonu Ojike, and Amanze Njoku. He sang about political parties of the time—N.C.N.C (National Council of Nigerian Citizens) and its rivals (identifying them by their party symbols), who were fierce rivals for the leadership of the country in the decade prior to independence. He challenged all the politicians to uphold national unity, regardless of which party won in the historic elections prior to independence.

His message, in essence, was that the unity of Nigeria as a nation should, under no circumstances, be toyed with or compromised. In his songs, he raised issues such as social justice, greed, endemic corruption, envy, and jealousy in human relationships. And when it came to Nigerian women, he was clear about his choices and why. He cautioned men looking for girlfriends or lovers to beware of Igbo ladies, because they would drain their pocket, contrary to a Yoruba lady, who would extract money under false pretenses from her father and give it to her boyfriend or lover. However, if they were keen to have a steady and caring wife, they should take their pick from Urhobo women, because an Urhobo woman would not abandon them if they, at some point, lose their jobs; she would instead stick with them through thick and thin. However, Nwaḡba took digs at himself too, jeering at his unflattering diminutive stature and not sparing his escapades with multiple wives and additional lovers, all who had one thing in common—they were like him and the guitar he played, "short, short, very short women!" Even as a young teenage student in his late primary and lower secondary school years, he composed songs to disparage and spite classmates that offended him, teachers that were unfair to him, and headmasters that punished him. A few of his songs will serve for illustration.

"All around me short"

Ah Ah Ah Ah Ah Ah Ah (repeatedly)
You want to know why I am very short?
Lend me your ears and hear why I am short.
My father is very short, my mum too very short.
My sisters, all are short.

34 *Minstrelsy in traditional Igbo society*

All my children, I suppose they will be short.
Another story, in my life
Beside my mother, sisters and my wives.
I love another lady o, by name Cecelia, Cecelia
Cecelia, too is very short o
All my life, shortness, shortness
Everywhere around Nwaọba
Shortness, oh shortness, oh shortness,
Mr. Aradan you mustn't shout at me,
Why because I'm very short.
Mr. Aradan don't laugh at me
O my master, I'm very short.
Measuring me with the guitar I play,
I'm short, guitar is short, I'm very short
I'm only four feet eleven inches
All around me short, very short o
I'm very short
All-all- around me, too short,
Shortness too, shortness too, shortness ah

"NCNC"

My father told me
I should be loyal to NCNC,
I never knew I was a bad follower
If some people should be killed,
I should be crucified
Oh a fool at forty daddy, is a fool forever
When a man is a fool at forty daddy
He will die of foolishness
A fool at forty daddy, is a fool forever
I should be loyal to NCNC,
I never knew I was a bad follower
If some people should be killed,
I should be crucified
Oh a fool at forty, is a fool forever
When a man is a fool at forty, he may die of foolishness
A fool at forty, a fool at forty, is a fool forever
Forever daddy
I never knew I was a bad follower

"Two parties"

Alleluia Alleluia
Two ladies were fighting over a child
They went to King Solomon to decide their case

The one who owned the child shouted to King Solomon
Don't divide the child I better go without a child o
O don't divide the child o – o, don't divide the child ee, don't divide
the child,
I better go without a child
Two parties in Nigeria, the Cock and Palm Tree
They had a close battle in the Federal election
The Palm Tree won the battle in the East and West
The Cock won the battle in the Federal election
The East believe in God; West believe in God
Don't divide the child ee, don't divide the child ee, don't divide the
child ee
Don't divide the child ee, don't divide the child ee, don't divide the
child ee
Don't divide the child ee, don't divide the child ee, don't divide the
child ee

“Many days are for the thief”

A certain man married a wife
He never knew his own friend is a lover to his wife
One Saturday evening, he told his wife, “I am going to Ibadan,
And will be back tomorrow evening
They were bogging, drinking, chatting, drinking
Round about 2.00 in the night,
Oga went back to his house
When he rang the bell the wife opened the door. The man entered the
house,
Going near his curtain, Oga opened his curtain. He saw his friend on
his bed
The room had only one window with wire around the window, daddy
No way for his friend to escape
Many days are for the thief,
One day for the owner of the house
Friend today, enemy tomorrow daddy?
Many days are for the thief,
One day is for the owner of the house
Anwa, anwa, anwa, anwa.

“Money Money”

Mm Mm Mm.....
If you want to make a lover
Never make with an Igbo lady
If you make with an Igbo lady
Tomorrow money, money, money

Ah money, money, money, money
 Ah money, money palava.
 Money, money, money, money
 Ha ha.....Another story, it is interesting
 A certain woman delivered a child
 And the child died, she parceled it with a paper
 And then entered a bus.
 The bus reaching at Ebutte Meta, the woman went away
 The bus reaching at Idioro everybody went away
 The collector picked up the parcel,
 And showed the parcel to his leader
 When he showed it to his own wife
 The wife dancing around the kitchen.
 When the man opened the parcel daddy,
 It was a dead child!
 Nwa nkwọ nkwọ ogbule – o
 Abi wetin we go do, abi wetin we go do
 When you buy a bicycle it doesn't mean you are very rich.
 You buy the bicycle to help yourself
 You are even tired of walking
 Owerri bara m ihi nwa nkwọ ogbul o – o
 Owerri nwa nkwọ nkwọ, nkwọ nwamoo

“Owerri Baram Ihi” (Owerri Pity Me)

Mm Mm Mm
 Owerri baram ihi, oh baram ihi
 A-shi ha na Edina awuona
 Owerri baram ihi, efuelam ohia
 Aturu muru ebula, gba aka nwaa
 A shim efuelam o hia
 Owerri baram ihi o – o
 When you see any harlot, never you call'm a dirty harlot
 Some women became harlot because their husbands are dead,
 Some come to try their luck
 Efuelanum ohia Owere bara m ihi – o
 Owerri bara m ihi, nwa nkwọ nkwọ Ogbulo – o!
 Owerri bara m ihi Israel ebemela – o
 Owerri bara m ihi – o – o!

The tragic end

When Israel Nwaọba made news again nationwide, it was the announcement of his sudden death on April 8, 1955, which stunned the whole country. He had been assassinated the previous night under highly mysterious circumstances—circumstances, which six decades later, were yet to be fully

unraveled. The plot implicated members of his orchestra—“**The Three Night Wizards**”—and some former associates from a previous music company who had sworn revenge for a crime they were alleged to have committed, but all except Israel Nwaṅba went to jail for it. They accused him of some sort of duplicity and betrayal. But there was also another version of the tragic plot according to which his death was a ritual murder connected with a high-profile politician who, it was alleged, needed his tongue and vocal organs that produced the sonorous voice and songs that drew massive audiences to his performances. The politician, it was said, wanted to speak to the masses and the electorate with the mesmeric tongue that thrilled and captured the big audiences countrywide, whose votes would be needed to incontrovertibly win the presidential election at the exit of the British colonizers in 1960.

Whichever version one leaned to, the facts in court records showed that eight people stood trial for the murder, including the two members of “**The Three Night Wizards**.” The hearings closed on September 26, 1955, and on October 12, Mr. Justice Bennett of the Crown Court sitting in Lagos, delivered the following judgment:

Six of the eight accused men were convicted and sentenced to death by hanging. The remaining two were discharged and acquitted for want of sufficient evidence. The condemned men included Samuel Jegede (band leader), Michael Adeyemo (another member of **Three Night Wizards**), Dede (sic) Onolabi, Cyril Anikwe, Peter Nwangwu, and Lawal Dada. They were hanged at the Broad street Prison, Lagos.... The two discharged men died, one after the other, under mysterious circumstances within a few months after the judgement.²

Israel Nwaṅba Njemanze had described himself in a song as equal to eight men despite his diminutive stature. Significantly, at his death, he took eight men with him! He was not just murdered; his body was cut into eighteen pieces, packed in a bag, taken to a railway station, and laid along the tracks to fake a train accident presumably with a drunk musician. Ironically, this inimical plot backfired because the train ran late that morning. Before it finally arrived at the station, the dismembered body had been discovered. It was not possible to take his decomposing remains to Owerri, his town, for burial. So Israel Nwaṅba Njemanze was buried in an unmarked grave in Lagos. He remains an unsung hero in Nigerian music and a martyr in the cause of nationalist struggles for Nigerian independence. Any history of Nigerian music would be incomplete without according a prominent place to the pioneer contributions of Israel Nwaṅba Njemanze.

Notes

1 A thesis presented in fulfillment of BA.ED, Music Department, UNN, 1991 (unpublished) by Ninikanwa, L., Duru, N., Nwokolo, U., Akano, C.

2 *Ibid.*, p. 23.

4 From voice to text

Missionary influence on the development of Igbo orthography and written Igbo literature*

Britain played a pivotal role in the abolition of the slave trade in the nineteenth century. The abolitionists and humanitarians were both convinced that the only way of atoning for the slave trade—a crime against humanity—was to educate and Christianize the Africans. In 1787, the humanitarians founded the colony of Sierra Leone for the liberated slaves in England to settle. Liberia was accordingly established by North America in 1821.

Founding settlements was only one aspect of humanitarian activities in West Africa. A greater part of their resources was devoted to the spreading of Christianity and the European culture. Beginning in 1792, several missionaries established societies. The Wesleyan Missionary Society began its activities in Sierra Leone in 1795, which were then extended to the Gambia (1821), Ghana (1834), and Yorubaland (1841). The Church Missionary Society began its activities in Sierra Leone in 1806. By 1860, there were several others working in various parts of the West Coast.

In addition to preaching the gospel, the missionaries worked toward the development of agriculture and legitimate commerce, and generally to raising the standard of living of the Africans. They introduced new crops, set up plantations and model farms, and taught Africans new methods of agriculture and preparing commodities for export. It is to their credit that they largely succeeded in getting African chiefs to put an end to some social malpractices such as the Igbo killing of twin babies and human sacrifice. Their greatest contribution, however, was in the field of education. The missionaries established elementary and secondary schools as well as teacher training colleges such as Fourah Bay College, the first modern university in black Africa which was established in 1827.

There can be no doubt that the missionary activities also interfered with the development of indigenous African cultures since the missionaries were openly antagonistic to many aspects of African life and custom. They were ethnocentric and inclined to deride the unfamiliar, and they looked down

* An earlier version of this chapter was published in *The Rise of the Igbo Novel*, OUP, 1978.

upon African art, music, dances, marriage systems, and names. Moreover, they tended to concentrate on the liberal arts to the detriment of vocational and technical training. However, Africans do owe the missionaries a debt of gratitude, for they formed the first link in the process of cultural contact through which Western European techniques reached the Africans in a way which made sense and in an atmosphere of mutual trust.

The first missionaries (from the Church Missionary Society) settled among the Igbo in Onitsha in 1857,¹ but they had arrived almost two decades before, under the auspices of the Niger Expedition, equipped by the British government for trade. The expedition was commissioned in London in 1840, and two missionaries who were working with the freed slaves in Sierra Leone were selected to join the expedition. The German Rev. J.F. Schon and an ex-Yoruba slave-turned-missionary, Rev. S.A. Crowther, were both required to study those African languages that would be relevant to the work of evangelism on the Niger. They chose Hausa and Igbo. Schon began to study Igbo language seriously with the help of the slaves of Igbo origin in Sierra Leone who had been freed.

But no sooner had Schon learned “1600 words and a few prayers,” than he abandoned Igbo in favor of Hausa. It was later explained that “he found the latter [Hausa] to possess greater advantages at that time than the former [Igbo], and as it was more extensively spoken in the upper countries, it was more attended to than Ibo.”²

When the Niger expedition stopped in Onitsha in August 1841, Schon attempted to communicate in Igbo, but he was mostly incomprehensible to his audience. Later at Aboh, when he persisted in delivering the official address in Igbo, it resulted in an undisguisedly cold attitude from the Chief, who interrupted the address several times. This unhappy experience forced Schon to drop his new-found interest in Igbo language for a period of 20 years. The greatest difficulty Schon and others faced was that they studied one dialect of the Igbo, but possibly met audiences that spoke widely different dialects. This created much difficulty for the linguists, and it later led to controversies over orthography which greatly hampered the growth of Igbo written language and literature.

Although Schon did publish later *A Grammar of the Ibo Language*, consisting of his glossary and a few prayers, much of the early work on the Igbo language was the result of the efforts of Rev. Crowther. It must be stressed that the early missionaries were not interested in Igbo or other African languages for the sake of the languages. Their primary mission was evangelism and Westernization. In order to carry out their mission effectively among speakers of other languages, they had to either teach them the English language or learn the people's native language. The missionaries chose the latter. These African languages, at the time, were unwritten, and owing largely to the efforts of the missionaries, they were later made into written languages. Thus, most of the early publications by the missionaries on any

of the African languages included dictionaries, phrase books, vocabulary books, elements of grammar, and other linguistic matters. To facilitate learning of languages, a recommendation was made to:

Appoint in every new Mission, one European and one Native, to be devoted exclusively to linguistic labors, for at least some years; furnish them with all the means they may require; give them every opportunity to make themselves familiar with languages in general; and then the difficulties of mastering an unwritten language, will gradually vanish from their eyes.³

This recommendation was followed, which is evident from the number of linguistic publications that were produced. In 1848, eight years after the publication of Schon's Igbo vocabulary, a Baptist missionary, Clark, in collaboration with an Afro-American, Merrick, published a second collection of Igbo vocabulary, consisting of "numerals and about 250 words, ten of them in twenty-seven versions,"⁴ This was followed by S.W. Koelle's *Polyglotta*, published in 1854, in which there were 300 Igbo words in five different dialects. When Dr. William Baikie published his personal account of the Niger expedition in the same year, he attached a linguistic appendix consisting of a short Igbo vocabulary⁵ (See Appendix for samples).

Three years later, in 1857, the first work of real importance was published by the Rev. S.A. Crowther.⁶ This was the *Primer* which included a translation of the first chapters of the Gospel according to St. Matthew. It also consisted the Igbo alphabet, words, phrases, some sentence patterns, the Ten Commandments, and the Lord's Prayer (Figure 4.1) (see Appendix for samples).

The *Primer* was more than a linguistic text. It also formed the basis of Igbo written literature. It contained extracts that were the first literary creations in the Igbo language. With the publication of the *Primer*, schools began under shady trees, in private dwellings, and in other improvised "school rooms." It served the purpose of introducing reading and writing to the Igbo people and remained the major text book for several decades (see Appendix for extracts). In a letter to the Rev. H. Venn, the C.M.S. Secretary in London, the Rev. S. Crowther pointed to the historic importance of the *Primer*. He reported that:

We had this morning a class of 12 persons, men, women and a boy for the first time to read the Ibo language from print: they were highly gratified at the dawning of the day for the evangelization of their people and nation and prayed God to send his blessing to impart the glorious light of the gospel to the people long sitting in heathen darkness on the banks of the long famed Niger (Figure 4.2).⁷ (See Appendix for other letters)

Yet the *Primer* does not seem to have had the effect of encouraging other contemporary writers to try to provide something of a literary nature for

the Igbo school children. Publications continued along the lines of the traditional grammar books designed to give some assistance to missionaries in their efforts to learn the Igbo language.

In 1861, Schon published *Grammatical Elements of the Igbo Language*. In 1882, Crowther produced a *Vocabulary of the Ibo Language* and, a year later, *Vocabulary of the Ibo Language Part II: English-Ibo*. In 1892, Spencer produced a small *Ibo Grammar* and, in 1901, *A First Grammar of the Ibo Language*. Three years later, Crowther's original *Primer* was enlarged into a two-volume reader, *Ibo Reader*, I and II (Figure 4.3). Crowther died of a stroke on December 31, 1891 (see Appendix for excerpts).

Beyond the compilation of vocabularies, nothing was attempted in the way of a dictionary until about the year 1906, when an Ibo-English dictionary of 306 foolscap pages, which was typewritten, was issued, thanks "to the liberality of the late Hon. L.E. Portman." In 1913, the government anthropologist, Northcote Thomas, published *English-Ibo Dictionary* and *Ibo-English Dictionary*, the second volume of an important six-volume anthropological report on the Igbo (Figure 4.4) (see Appendix for extracts). The translation of the Bible into Igbo was undertaken at this time under the supervision of Archdeacon Dennis. A few years later, Archdeacon Dennis was asked to take the translation to England for publication, along with an *Outline Dictionary of English Words* prepared by A.C. Madam for the use of English-speaking people. On August 1, 1917, the ship in which he was traveling with his wife was torpedoed off the coast of Ireland and he lost his life. According to S.R. Smith,

The manuscripts of the dictionary also disappeared with his baggage. 'Towards the end of August, a fisherman found the box containing the manuscripts on the shore near Towyn, Wales, where it had been washed up. He found a letter inside with an address, to which he sent the manuscripts; and, in this way, they came into the hands of Mrs. Dennis' (Figure 4.5).⁸

Next to Crowther's *Primer*, the Bible was to be the main instrument in Igbo education and literature (see Appendix for excerpts).

It appears that this preoccupation of the early missionaries with the language for its own sake was disliked by their more literary-oriented counterparts, who wanted to see studies in language result in the development of a literature in that language. In the preface of Schon's *Grammatical Elements*, for example, he talked about the attacks on the Rev. J.C. Taylor, who was an Igbo ex-captive, and had just furnished a wide range of biblical translations and vocabularies. He declared:

They may say of his labors what was said concerning those of others, 'that he had saddled the horse by the tail', that is, that he ought first of all to have collected a native *literature* of stories, proverbs, and sayings,

from the lips of intelligent natives, have analyzed them grammatically, and then have addressed himself to the work of translating the sacred Scriptures (Figure 4.6).⁹

It is, however, remarkable that instructions to later missionaries in the field began to include a mandate that they collect folktales, proverbs, riddles, and sayings in the native language.¹⁰ Therefore, the second stage of missionary activities was devoted to the collection of oral narratives and other oral performances (see letters in the Appendix). In 1927, the original *Primer* was again revised and enlarged to include 19 essays on secular topics, a long narrative riddle about the sun, nine short essays on Christian religious topics, and 18 folktales.¹¹ About the same time, the Methodist Mission translated the *Pilgrim's Progress* into Igbo language so that it could be used in schools. The missionaries used these books to teach their pupils to read and create literature.

It must be pointed out that much of this work in literature was not planned, and happened by chance. The goal of the missionaries was not necessarily the preservation of Igbo oral performances. Many of the parents who were persuaded to send their children to school so that they could be taught by missionaries had clearly established expectations. They felt that the “education” which their children already had at home was sufficient to carry them through life. J.F. Ajayi points out that:

They did not want any substitute for this; rather they expected a supplement. They had their own way of bringing up their children to fit into life in the family compounds and the states. They imparted moral and religious education, with clear precepts reinforced by taboos. They gave training in the etiquette and conventions of society; they trained the minds of the children as they taught them to count yams and ears of corn, or to give answers to conundrums, or repeat in their own words the fables of the family history. In the moonlight the children played games and told stories and learnt alliterative verses. As they grew older they were apprenticed to jobs or initiated into further mysteries of life. There was little system, but parents looked on it as education. What they expected from the European was not a substitute but a supplement, a system of apprenticeship by which the children acquired additional arts and skills, the art of reading and writing, gauging palm-oil or manufacturing gun powder or sugar or building boats.¹²

Above all, the parents disapproved of religious teaching in any form, contending that “when they did get a school and had to pay for it, they did not want religious teaching, for the children have enough at home; they teach them that themselves.”¹³ The missionaries initially accepted this stipulation, but soon outmaneuvered the children’s parents. “Let the children come to school for any purpose whatever and it would be the fault of the

missionary if he could not take advantage of the opportunity and make Christian converts out of them.”¹⁴ And they did indeed take the advantage that they foresaw. The schools included in their curriculum what the parents wanted their children to be taught at school, namely, English, arithmetic, reading, and handicrafts, but they also allowed some time for story-telling. Considered a popular pastime of the children in their homes, no opposition was encountered when story-telling became part of the curriculum. However, it was in story-telling that the missionaries found the opportunity they sought. They were quick to recognize the structure of Igbo folktales and used the educational role of folktales in initiating children into the culture of their community.

Therefore, using the structure known to the children, the missionaries constructed short narrative essays about things in Igbo life, but wove into them biblical information and religious instruction. This was the structure used in all short essays in the revised *Primer* which was widely used in C.M.S. Schools.¹⁵ Thus, the essay on the Igbo art of hunting ends with “a famous hunter was Nimrod whose story we read of in the Bible. Esau the brother of Jacob was also a hunter.” The essay on trading as a popular Igbo occupation begins with “trading is a good occupation if embarked upon with the fear of God and honesty,” and concludes with “To cheat your customer is bad. One who fears God should desist from such. Jesus Christ urges you to do unto others as you would that they do unto you.” Another essay describes how the Igbo engage in farm work all year round, and ends with “When God created the first man, the occupation he bequeathed to him was farming, as we learn in the Bible.” A similar essay on fishing among those Igbo people who live near rivers, ends with

Our Lord Jesus asked four fishermen to be his disciples. Do you know their names? They were Andrew, Peter, James and John. Do you know what he charged Peter and Andrew to do when he called them? He said “follow me and I will make you fishers of men!”

Unknowingly, therefore, the Igbo children were learning as much of the Christian religion as could be taught in any formal religious lesson.

But these essays had other far-reaching effects. They remained a pattern for early Igbo writers, who generally incorporated into their works biblical parallels and quotations. This practice is not uncommon among contemporary Igbo writers.¹⁶ For the early Igbo writers, this may have been a way of ratifying their own views and opinions, and making their writings more authentic to the average Igbo reader who has had a background of the stories in the Bible.

The missionaries recorded the folktales that the pupils retold at school. They seized on the didactic nature of many of the tales and the moral tags at the end of most of them, in order to recast some tales. They also invented new ones in which they provided didacticism and moral tags that

reflected Christian morality and ethics. The story *Mbe na Enyi*¹⁷ (*Tortoise and Elephant*), apparently used to show the danger of believing in superstitions, ends with the moral tag that “it is folly to be gullible and accept ideas which have no foundation in fact.” Another story, *Leopard and Lamb*, was recast to show how, in their greed and wickedness, the rich oppress the poor.¹⁸ But the story urges the poor to find strength in Christ’s promise that “blessed are the poor for they shall inherit the earth.” *The Gorilla and Two Cats* was recast so as to emphasize the lesson that “it is better to make little concessions for the sake of peace than lose all of one’s possessions in the pursuit of worldly justice.”¹⁹

A popular Igbo narrative which was told to discourage jealousy in human relationships was recast by Rev. G.T. Basden and retitled “God and the Two Brothers.”²⁰ Basden’s moral at the end of the narrative was as follows “he who seeks to keep his life shall lose it, and he who loses his life shall find it,” quoted directly from St. Luke 9:24. One story in the *Primer* entitled “The Worshipper of God and the Worshipper of King,” seems, from its obvious connotations, to have been entirely made up by the missionaries. The story says:

There lived two brothers whose parents died soon after they were born. An old woman had to foster them. When they grew up, one of them said that he would be worshipping the King and the other said that he would be worshipping God, the creator. His brother jeered and derided him saying ‘Will God throw down food for you from heaven?’ ‘Let me alone’, answered the other brother, ‘I shall not be dissuaded from worshipping God.’ Every day the King sent food and gifts to his loyal subject. When he had satisfied himself he sent the left-overs to his Christian brother, chiding him with ‘I wish *God* would begin to take care of you.’ To all these tauntings the Christian brother made no response, but worked very hard at his farm. Soon he grew prosperous, married a wife and raised a family. On the contrary, the worshipper of the King had no farm and had learned no craft. He had no house, no wife, and no family. He became poor and destitute. He kept begging from door to door till he died. The lesson of the story is that it is better to worship God than King no matter how great a potentate he is.²¹

However, it must be noted that the story misplaced its emphasis and concocted the narrative in order that it should point to the desired moral. It does not say why the worshipper of the King suddenly became helpless and had to beg for his livelihood from door to door. Did the King forsake him, and if so, why? The point of the story may have been to suggest that the Christian was more responsible than the non-Christian, since the qualities of hard work and strength were attributed only to the Christian. But there is no evidence that traditional Igbo culture ever advocated idleness.

Rather, it emphasized hard work, independence, and courage in the face of difficulties.

A favorite missionary hero is usually the poor, helpless, and oppressed child.²² He is often an orphan who is treated badly by his step- or foster-mother. But he survives because of his qualities of patience and his absolute dependence on God. This is the Christian version of the theme of the oppressed child in many Igbo oral narratives. In these narratives, he triumphs over his vindictive stepmother because of the intervention of a benevolent spirit of his dead relatives. However, the oppressed child had to be given a new image (for instance, he was portrayed as helpless because he was not sent to school by his parents) and saved by different means because the missionaries rejected and preached against the belief in reincarnation and ancestor reverence.

The missionaries imported foreign tracts to supplement their stock of collected and revised Igbo narratives. The Igbo version of *Pilgrim's Progress* was in use perhaps because of the symbolic significance of the story and of its characters. Extracts from such works as *The Arabian Nights*, *Grimm's Fairy Tales* and *Tales from Shakespeare* were translated into Igbo and used widely in schools, perhaps to replace the remaining supposedly heathen narratives. Some of these foreign stories were commonly read and retold until some of their features became fused with traditional Igbo narratives. Some of the earliest Igbo writers were products of missionary schools, and the effect of their missionary education is evident in the large number of biblical quotations, allusions, Christian imagery, and vocabulary in their works. Emmanuel Obiechina has pointed out the extent and the pervasiveness of this influence:

It should be no matter of surprise that we find in the popular pamphlet literature a reflection of the triumph of Christian missionary education. The popular authors are committed to, and are often ardent propagandists of Christianity. They are, in the main, professing Christians and most, if not all of them, have at some time or other in their education come under the tutelage of Christian missionaries. Many of them are or have been mission teacher in which role they have not only actively fostered the progress of Christianity but also built up impressive knowledge of the Bible and Christian liturgy which they put to account in their writing...It is therefore no wonder that Christian attitudes and principles have provided one of the major inspirations of the pamphlet literature and the Bible one of the chief literary influences.²³

It can be seen that the missionary presence in the Igbo community in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries was a force both for good and for evil. Good was ostentatiously on the surface, parading in front of the people in the form of literacy and formal education benefits, while the evil

lay hidden beneath the surface, subtle, but immensely damaging because it created confusion regarding the values of society. It has been pointed out that the missionary interest in Igbo oral performances was self-centered and did not seek to preserve the Igbo literary tradition. The stories which were collected and published by the missionaries were only imitations of indigenous Igbo folktales, as were the forms in which they were cast. Using the indigenous forms, the missionaries sought to impose a Western style of life and Christian dogmatism on the Igbo people. Equally, they twisted the framework of a popular tradition—the Igbo folktale—to convey their missionary teachings and message. But this, and the negative missionary attitude to vital aspects of Igbo culture (religion, art, music), must not blind one to their more positive and worthy accomplishments, both among the Igbo and with other African ethnic groups. In his article, “Growth of written literature in English-speaking West Africa,” Obiechina points out how the introduction of an alphabetic script by the Christian missionaries has led to the development of written literature in English by those Africans who had been taught reading and writing in missionary schools. This is particularly true of the Igbo people. Most of the leading Igbo writers (writers in both Igbo and English language) have been products of missionary schools, and since these writers, through their writings, point to the highlights and ideals of the Igbo culture, one can say that the missionaries have indirectly helped to give the Igbo people a cultural continuity and lessons on how to preserve it. Obiechina thus concludes:

The need for Christian missions to spread Christianity as well as a civilization was of immense significance to the growth of written literature in West Africa. Of the two functions, the generality of the missionaries would obviously set a high score on the conversion of the people. To facilitate their evangelical aspiration, the early missionaries had of necessity to learn the West African vernaculars and to reduce them to writings; they translated the Bible, hymn books and other religious works into these vernaculars and taught West Africans to read and write so that they would avail themselves of the Christian message embodied in the translated texts. Each aspect of these contributions is vital to the development of written literature in West Africa. The missionaries, by adapting the West African vernaculars to the Western script and through the use of diacritics to mark tonal inflexions, have made a permanent contribution of the greatest importance to the study of African linguistics...We may even go so far as to suggest that the establishment of departments for the study of African languages in European universities and the tremendous interest in the anthropological study of the oral societies of Africa, which began in the late 19th century and gathered strength in the 20th, owes much of its inspiration to the interest of the early missionaries in the languages and cultures of the African people they went out to convert.²⁴

A clear example of the success of the missionaries in stimulating interest in literary creativity among the Igbo can be seen in the efforts of early Igbo writers. Some of them owe both the tool for creating the literature and its inspiration to their missionary education and their writings, in a way, reflect their gratitude to the missionaries.

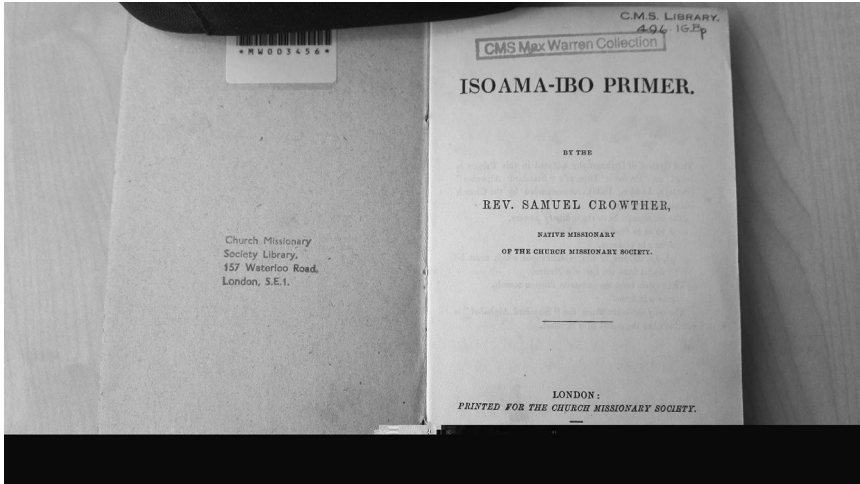


Figure 4.1 First Missionary Igbo Primer.

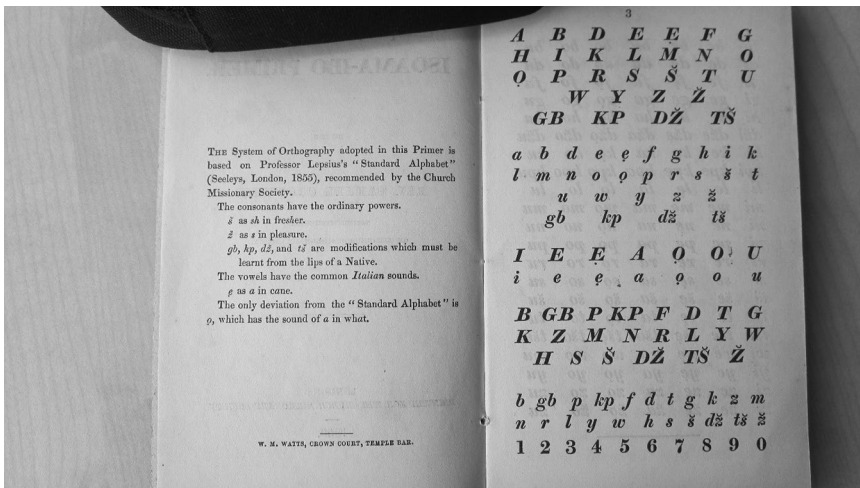


Figure 4.2 Igbo Alphabet Designed by the Missionaries.

8		NUMERALS.		9	
CARDINAL.		ORDINAL.			
1 Nna, otu		Nkembo	Aga	Ayans	Awon
2 Abuo, Nawo	Ke abo		Ayi	Ehen	Ano
3 Ato	Ke ato		Unu	Uzo	Ume
4 Anon	Ke no		Ige	Obo	Osin
5 Ise	Kise		Owo	Ahan	Eme
6 Isie	Nkisien		Oga	Ike	Oma
7 Asa	Ke asa		Ala	Igu	Eze
8 Asato	Ke asato		Icu	Uru	Ume
9 Tegete	Nketegete		Odzo	Arun	Odo
10 Iri	Nkiri		Atun	Ulo	Aka
11 Iri na ma	Nkiri na otu		Ana	Ohan	Okon
12 Iri na abuo	Kiri na abo		Efu	One	Oson
13 Iri na ato	Kiri na ato		Ozi	Unran	Oyi
14 Iri na anon	Kiri na ano		Ato	Nile	Guzu
15 Iri nise	Kiri ni ise		Obi	Madu	Nanyan
16 Iri nisi	Kiri ni isien		Gaba	Donma	Roro
17 Iri ni asa	Kiri na asa		Ahon	Mbala	Wone
18 Iri ni asato	Kiri na asato		Beke	Honron	Siri
19 Iri na tegete	Kiri na tegete		Gadze	Kwere	Minrin
20 Ogon	Kiri ni iri		Neme	Wete	Agaba
21 Ogon na otu	Ogon na otu		Nahan	Mado	Ahonron
22 Ogon na abo	Ogon na abo		Tsuku	Napu	Koara
			Menron	Gara	Akoko
			Kporo	Kete	Ihinye
			Kere	Nawo	Meruru
			Woke	Dara	Okwanran

Figure 4.2 Continued.

10		11	
<p>ST. JOHN III. 16, 17.</p> <p>16 Ma Tshuku hwarra ma du nanyan korin, ya ne otu Okwanran ya, onne kwere ya oga go ofu, ma ya- ga cwete ndon ni nke ni di.</p> <p>17 Tshuku oxi go Okwanran ya bia maado maado ima; keti napa gara ya ni thinye odo.</p> <p>PSALM CXXXVII. 1, 2.</p> <p>1 Ket' ma Tshuku wery' ala, arun gwa han mak' nlo meru ya; ket' ma Tshuku domi' ohan, onne utu ala waran thuru ya okporo.</p> <p>2 Mfya o kporo bilite na otutu, wudery' no odizisi mak' o kporo rie rin nke eberf; wuo otu ahin Tshuku nlo okwanran nanyan ne han waran.</p>		<p>Akuwa Omume Iweterere</p> <p>Ogongon Egue Owenhan</p> <p>Dokoani Amuma Eledi</p> <p>Opupuru Oluahan Onemako</p> <p>Omerin Abiana Amaga</p> <p>Onize Zitora Rokwana</p> <p>Ikwere Okuo Iyinyan</p> <p>Rugara Ofusu Tshibiri</p> <p>Adoba Erunrun Niahube</p> <p>Elpere Dikonu Tobaba</p> <p>Idzihan Onihinye Eriri</p>	
<p>Kwo'm uguo'm. Akwo na ngo. Tshuku isiro ngo edizini woko uguo thinye, ma han maada ihigi nanyan. Tshuku isiro ngo etana maada. Tshuku isiro ngo ezi na otu. I-dzi woko ihinye. Uma na gwo'm. Ene'm umf. Ekwadute ofim ya. Ama ngo'm se agan aliam gwa. Ama ngo'm se o ga aga. Oma nge ma te ya niu ni. Iga go ewen onne gzi odo keti guo'm.</p>		<p>1 Odo go thinye do ike Tshuku. Obi'm agon na, Tshuku One napa'm. Ya napa ga Iorad na ndo kporo han ahi.</p> <p>Ondo doro Tshuku ni me gwa, na ala kpe, obi' oma na maado Yesu wuo Onenapa oyi.</p> <p>Madu nile ga akon opupo Tshuku. Tshuku neren ampana thinye opupo ma madu ya ma gara thinye edzo han.</p> <p>2 Tshuku neren elugue na ala. Tshuku dziri adlan ala me agi. Yesu wuo Okwanran Tshuku. Yesu wwanran nile ayi na paja ayi ni ihinye odo. Ayi meruru ima Tshuku. Ohi ayi ihinye. Ya do onn bagara thinye odo ene me ma ni thinye oma, oga na</p>	
<p>Anadi Osisi Eberf</p> <p>Tshoporoo Osiri Isiro</p> <p>Karia Bilete Dzekute</p> <p>Ekete Otutu Bebere</p>			

Figure 4.3 Biblical Excerpts and Names in Different Igbo Dialects.

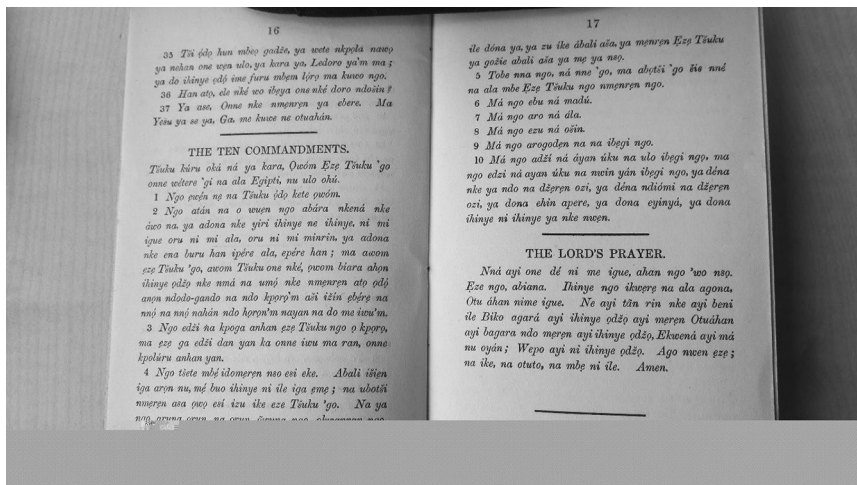


Figure 4.3 Continued.

ANTHROPOLOGICAL REPORT
ON THE
IBO-SPEAKING PEOPLES OF NIGERIA.
BY
NORTHCOTE W THOMAS, M.A., F.R.A.I., ETC.,
GOVERNMENT ANTHROPOLOGIST.

PART II.

ENGLISH-IBO AND IBO-ENGLISH
DICTIONARY.


NEGRO UNIVERSITIES PRESS
NEW YORK

Figure 4.4 Two Titles of Missionary Studies of Igbo People and Language.

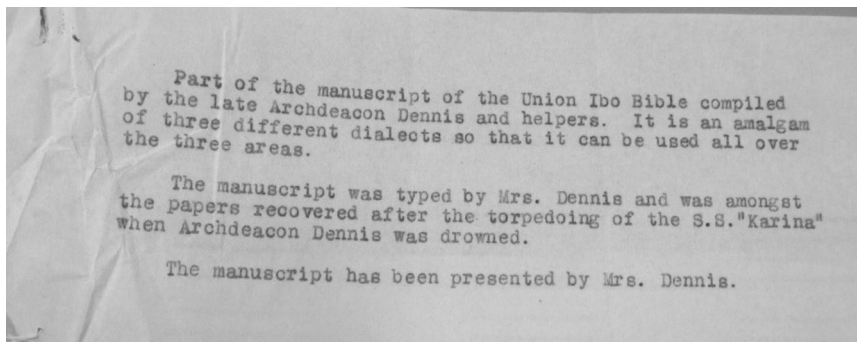


Figure 4.5 Part of the Manuscript of the Igbo Union Bible.

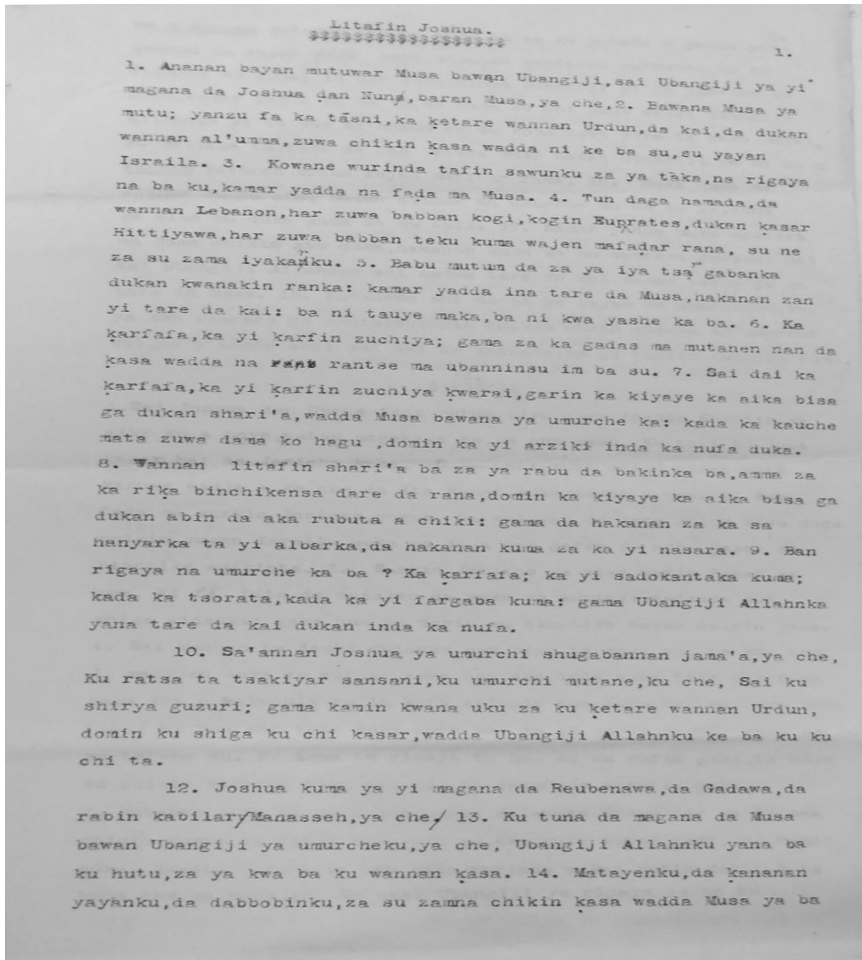


Figure 4.6 Sample of Missionary Writing Mixing Different Dialects as They Were Experimenting with EISOama Igbo—a Kind of Esperanto Unintelligible and Unrecognizable to Native Speakers.

Notes

- 1 For a detailed discussion of missionary activities in Nigeria, see J.F.A. Ajayi, *Christian Missions In Nigeria 1841–1891*, London: Longman, 1965. Also Felix Ekechi, *Missionary Enterprise and Rivalry in Igboland 1857–1914*, London: Frank Cass, 1972.
- 2 The Right Rev. Bishop S.A. Crowther, Preface to *Vocabulary of the Ibo Language*, London: S.P.C.K., 1882.
- 3 Rev. J.F. Schon, *Oku Ibo: Grammatical Elements of the Ibo Language*, London: W.M. Watts, 1861.
- 4 P.E.H. Hair, *The Early Study of Nigerian Languages*, London: Cambridge University Press, 1967, p. 78.

- 5 W.B. Baikie, *Narrative of an Exploring Voyage up the Rivers Kwora and Benue in 1854*, London: John Murray, 1856.
- 6 S.A. Crowther, *Isoama-Ibo Primer*, London: C.M.S., 1857. "Isoama" was a creation of the missionaries designed to stem the tide of controversies over dialect "which will be universally received...all the other dialects will learn to speak it while the 'Isoama' will yield to no other." Unfortunately, the desired objective was not attained because the "Isoama" proved to be a kind of Esperanto which was unintelligible and unrecognizable to native speakers.
- 7 London, C.M.S. Archives, Letter, 22 June 1857, Fernando Po, Rev. S Crowther to Rev. H. Venn.
- 8 S.R. Smith, Preface to *Dictionary of Ibo Language*, Exeter: James Townsend, 1923.
- 9 Schon, *Grammatical Elements*.
- 10 Cf. Crowther on the educational value of fables and proverbs in the charge delivered to his clergy in 1869; C.M.S Archives C A3/04.
- 11 *Akukwo Ogugu Ibo*, London: James Townsend & Sons, 1927.
- 12 Ajayi, *Christian Missions in Nigeria*, p. 133.
- 13 Ibid.
- 14 Ibid., p. 134.
- 15 *Akukwo Ogugu Ibo*.
- 16 See this element in the works of Pita Nwana, D.N. Achara, Leopold Bell-Gam, and others.
- 17 "Tortoise and Elephant," *Primer*, p. 63.
- 18 "Leopold and Lamb," *Primer*, p. 51.
- 19 "The Gorilla and Two Cats," *Primer*, p. 52.
- 20 G.T. Basden, *Niger Ibos*, London: Frank Cass, 1960 (first published in 1938). The Rev. Basden lived among the Igbo as a missionary for 40 years.
- 21 Crowther, *Primer*, p. 64.
- 22 This is supported by the characterization in Basden's stories and also stories in the *Primer*.
- 23 Emmanuel Obiechina, *Literature for the Masses*, Enugu: Nwamife, 1971, p. 74.
- 24 Emmanuel Obiechina, "Growth of written literature in English-speaking West Africa," *The Conch*, 1, 2 (September 1969), pp. 11-12.

5 Early fiction in Igbo—the pioneers*

Pita Nwana (father of the Igbo novel): *Omenuko* (1933)

The first Igbo to publish fiction in Igbo language was Pita Nwana. His novel *Omenuko*¹ was published in 1933 after it had won an all-Africa literary contest in indigenous African languages organized by the International Institute of African Languages and Culture, London. *Omenuko* is a biographical novel that describes events in the life of the hero, Omenuko,² whose home in Eastern Nigeria was a favorite spot for students and tourists in the 1950s and the 1960s. The novel has been reprinted several times in various Igbo orthographies and is a classic in Igbo literature even today. The first edition was in the “Protestant orthography,” but it was soon issued in the other orthographies, which accounts for its general acceptance and wide readership. For decades, it remained the most widely read novel in Igbo language.

Successive generations of Igbo children began their reading³ with *Omenuko*, and those who did not get the opportunity to go to school could still read *Omenuko* at home or at adult education centers. Omenuko’s “sayings” became part of the Igbo speech pattern which the young adult was expected to acquire. Very little is known of the author of *Omenuko*. He did not published any other book and, therefore, seems to have been the ace reporter/father of the pioneer first-generation writers of Igbo literature at its best. He came on the stage, set the pace of a literary tradition, and was heard no more.

Omenuko is set in Okigwe, one of the densely populated areas in the present-day Imo State of Nigeria. The action takes place in the rural communities, around busy market places, where commercial activities go side by side with serious matters, such as settling disputes and planning community projects. The market is more than a meeting place for local affairs.

* The earliest version of “Early Fiction in Igbo” was published in *Research in African Literatures*, vol. 4, no. 1, 1973. A later enlarged version was published in *The Rise of the Igbo Novel* (1978). This chapter is an edited and expanded synthesis of the earlier versions.

Here, people drink palm wine and pour libation, as well as haggling and bargaining over the price of their agricultural products. Families live within walled compounds, and the head of the family supervises his immediate and extended families from his *obi*.

Loyalty to the family often gives way to a larger cause—allegiance to the village, which, in turn, gives way to the clan. Villages are joined to each other by a tight pattern of intersecting paths which converge at major markets where the entire clan meets to consider and discuss matters of primary concern and which may have an impact on their lives. Forests separate one clan from another, constituting a border that is not just a physical boundary, but a border that also represents symbolic cultural and economic boundaries. Justice at the clan level is the responsibility of the elders, who are believed to follow the path of the ancestors.

This setting is relevant to the action in the novel and helps bring out the conflict in which the hero is trapped. It is characteristic of the people, knit together as they are by natural and human factors, to stick together, see things as a group, and act as a group. To exist is to live with the group. Ostracism, whether voluntary or compulsory, happens when an individual alienates himself from the group or consciously goes against the tenets of communal life. The theme of the novel, offense and expiation, emerges from this communal attitude of life.

The novel is set in the last few decades of the nineteenth century, but the most important actions take place in the first two decades of the twentieth century. Omenuko is said finally to have returned to his hometown (at the end of the novel) in “1918 towards the end of the tenth month.” The final episodes in the novel happened in the 1930s when Omenuko, now retired, is portrayed as growing prosperous despite the depression of 1929 and the economic reversals of the years that followed it. This setting forms a background for two distinct generations. Before 1900, government and political control in the areas now occupied by the Igbo was in the hands of the Igbo.

The affairs of the village are decided by a general assembly in which men and women can participate. However, effective control is in the hands of the elders, members of an age set whose turn it is to govern the village at a particular period in their age-grade cycle.⁴

This is the era covered by the first few chapters of the novel. The change in the Igbo political system came in the first decade of the twentieth century when the British Colonial Administration took complete control of the Igbo land. According to Victor Uchendu,

The direct administration had two important features: It based the Colonial Administration of Igbo land on all-purpose native courts, which were established by the Native Courts Proclamation (1900) and derived their revenue from indirect taxation. Following the Proclamation,

Igbo land was arbitrarily carved into Native Court Areas, formed by grouping sovereign political units. Each Court Area constituted a native court system, an all-purpose administrative machinery. The British district commissioner was the president of the court: other personnel included warrant chiefs, the court clerk, and the court messengers.⁵

This is the era covered in the later part of the book where references are made to chiefs, paramount chiefs, white men, the courts, and prisons, all of which were features of the new British administration. The novel, therefore, covers two periods which are close in time but wide apart in the events that characterized them. A large part of the novel, then, illustrates a point of transition from one age to the other. The hero, Omenuko, moves from one age to the other, and the author reflects about the particular society at the time through the hero's actions and attitudes. In the period covered in the early part of the book, there was a kind of autonomy in Igbo behavior. Individuals were free to act as they chose as long as they did not break popular village sanctions or mores. If they did, they had to face and accept the judgment of the elders in their local villages and not worry about the white man's retribution (his presence was hardly felt).

This explains why Omenuko was able to sell his neighbors' sons into slavery and escape justice simply by going outside the jurisdiction of his community elders. But in a later period described afterward in the book, everybody was accountable to the courts of law and to the white man. Ezuma refers to this in the later part of the book (Chapter 8, which describes the ransoming of those Omenuko sold into slavery) when he says,

Remember too, these are the days of the white man. If these children express a desire to be returned to their homes, we would have to let them go, that is, if we refuse to liberate them now. If care is not taken, we might even be in trouble then and they could still go home as they wish, without our having to be paid any money for that.

This awareness of the changing times and the point of transition highlighted in the novel are evident in some of the contrasts in the behavior of the characters. Many people had taken to the new Christian religion, which was one of the bases of the imperialist regime, more so when Christianity was advertised as holding the key to the white man's "knowledge" and to good jobs. But there were still many people who remained loyal to the old religion. They did not give up the rituals which honor the dead, nor did they cease to pour libations to the ancestors; they continued to make obligatory ritual sacrifices to placate angered deities and to restore distorted harmony in nature.

Omenuko covers part of the period in Igbo history with which Chinua Achebe is concerned in *Things Fall Apart* and implies that tension existed between the adherents of the old religion and the Christian converts; however, the author of *Omenuko* avoids a confrontation between the two

religions. There are tensions over the changes that are occurring within the society; despite these tensions, the two forces never clash, and cross-cultural conflicts are kept to a minimum. Generally, the people during Omenuko's time accept the *Pax Britannica* unquestioningly. The white man appears to have all the answers, and his word is law. However, there are some people who would, at times, be so disgusted with the white man that they would repudiate him to his face. For example, when the district commissioner tended to place Omenuko's warrant chieftaincy over the interests and welfare of his community, the people defied the white man's authority. When the district commissioner threatened them with attacking Omenuko and his people as a punishment for breaking the law, they replied that they were ready to face the consequences.

We will be prepared to listen to the law, only when we have killed Omenuko. If you want to execute all of us because of a stranger who came into our midst, we would prefer to die, rather than allow our eyes to see our ears. The District Commissioner was shocked at all these utterances...without their being afraid of the law or the power of authority.

But despite this, Nwana manages to prevent a head-on collision between the Igbo people and the British such as that which occurs in *Things Fall Apart*.

The author of *Omenuko* is able to confine "the falling apart of things" to his hero alone, although he is sufficiently ambivalent, if not critical, about some of the traditions and the general attitudes of his society.

In Pita Nwana's novel *Omenuko*, the hero, after whom the novel takes its title, openly commits a criminal act against his society. He is a merchant by profession, and in the opening of the novel, he is described as having lost all his goods on his way to the market following the collapse of a rickety bridge. With amazing rapidity, Omenuko manages to sell most of his companions (neighbors' sons and relatives who were apprenticed to him) into slavery for his own economic survival. Moreover, he refuses to take responsibility for his action—an outrage toward his fellow men, and an abomination to the gods of the land, and, in particular, to the gods of the earth and the sky. Omenuko is obstinate and very strong-willed, and he waits too long before accepting his people. Because of the enormity of his crime and his recalcitrant behavior, Omenuko is required to offer a ritual sacrifice of atonement in the highest terms ever prescribed by the chief priests of the two angered deities. In the process, he learns self-discipline and comes to appreciate the true values of his society, its concept of right and wrong, and what constitutes true success and failure. For instance, after he has offered the sacrifice of reunion with his people from whom he was separated for many years, Omenuko confesses to his brothers, "I am happier and more at ease now than I have ever been since the day I fled from our town. If death comes to me now, I shall not be afraid" (Figure 5.1).

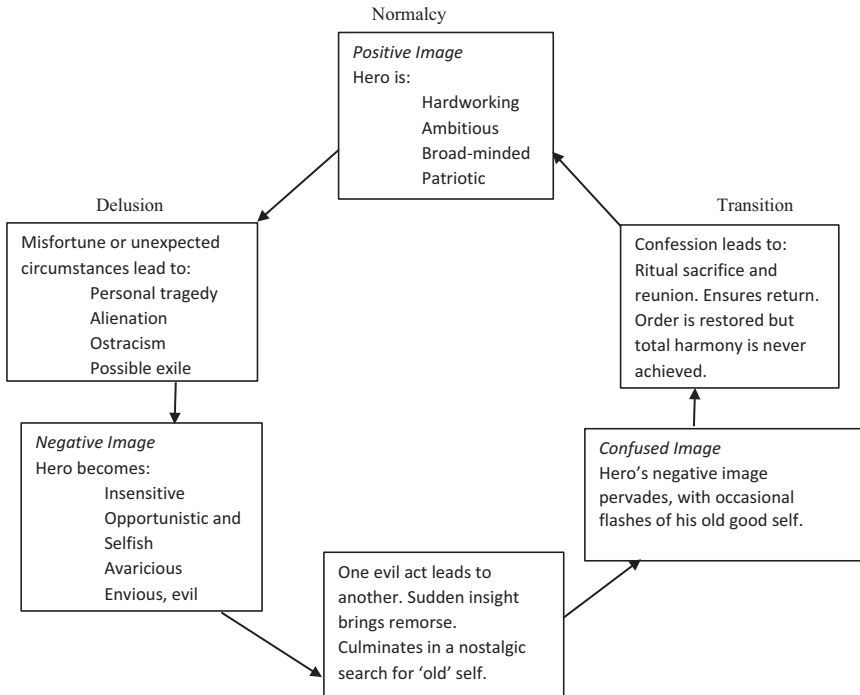


Figure 5.1 The hero in Igbo traditional society.

Omenuko is intelligent and resourceful, but he is also cunning and capricious. He has an overpowering tendency to use to his personal advantage anyone who comes his way. The first instance of this—the selling of his apprentices to make up for his lost goods—is the source of all the conflicts in the novel. But after this first act, Omenuko’s subsequent reactions show a series of progressions in evil and selfish aggrandizement. He is intelligent and crafty enough to recognize the limits of his ability. He would be fighting a losing battle from the start if he tried to fight alone. So Omenuko uses his brothers to provide the moral support necessary in his fight with his people. When he initially solicits the support of his brothers, they respond with serious reproach.

His brothers told him that it [the selling of his apprentices] is a thing unheard of and can never please the ear that hears it...They blamed him for his rash act, because it is an event which can never be forgotten in life. They wondered how he could summon up courage to sell the children of his fellow men merely because his goods fell into the river. ‘Was it the fault of your fellow men that you lost your goods?’

But Omenuko is able to coerce them into submission by threatening them with their own existence. He tells them he will commit suicide and asks them to prepare to fend for themselves in life. He knows fully well how this will affect his helpless young brothers. Thus, they not only forgive him, but also acquiesce to his plans to go into exile as a group. Omenuko realizes the weaknesses in his brothers and fully capitalizes on them. He knows that they will offer little or no resistance if they realize how seriously any action of his could affect all of their individual destinies. Thus, he puts forward well-calculated ideas in his speech:

My ancestors and God [notice that he invokes both the ancestral deity and the Christian God] on high have put me in a condition of life worse than death. I must die. You must therefore prepare, each of you, to fend for himself. I am ready to die.

This successfully disarms them, but he further ensures their continued support when he threatens to kill “all the chiefs and parents of the young men” whom he had sold into slavery. Since he planned to “die with them,” his brothers are quick to recognize that he would be leaving them a legacy of irreconcilable enmity with their community. They would be the ones to suffer when he was no more. According to them, the situation would be “what our ancestors describe as a disreputable legacy that passes from generation to generation! Our children will have to suffer for it and our children’s children likewise will suffer for it.” Omenuko had made the suffering local, and his brothers had been personally affected by it; and as they switched their sentiments, the author removed them from their role of impartial commentators and chorus, to that of active participators and accomplices. Blackmail! They could no longer be the rationale that governed Omenuko’s decisions, because they had themselves become one with Omenuko. As part of Omenuko, they no longer asked, “Is that not enough, must you but contemplate a crime worse than you had already committed?” They now merely did things and ran errands for his interests!

But the brothers had lost something else which was of greater significance. They were no longer in a position to mediate between Omenuko and the people, nor could they ascertain the wishes of the deities on his behalf. It was an office which Igwe had to be called in to fulfill later in the story. Assured of his brothers’ support, Omenuko becomes bold enough to challenge his townspeople more successfully, balancing his conflicts and estrangement in the town with the privileges of his brothers’ firm support and cooperation. It was this togetherness that solidified their decision to flee the town. Although it would seem here that the original theme of alienation of the individual from his community has been broadened into alienation of a family unit from society at large, the author does manage to keep the focus of the action on Omenuko as a character. On the night of their flight, his younger brother Nwabueze is dispatched to go down the major road to see

whether he could hear any sounds or observe anyone coming from the place to where they had planned to escape. It is significant that Nwabueze never heard any sound except the ranting of a lunatic, someone who had lost his senses. The cries of the lunatic were shattering to the peace and quietness of the night, in the same way that the turmoil inside Omenuko was affecting the peace of mind of his family and the immediate world around him. Omenuko was himself like a lunatic. In common with Ibe Ofo, the lunatic, he had been chained (symbolically, but no less significantly) and confined to a "cell." Ibe Ofo suffered physical pain and responded with cacophonous groanings; Omenuko suffered emotionally but he bore his torturing grief in silence. He owes this to his self-confident nature and his evident ability to take care of himself regardless of the situation he finds himself in.

When Omenuko and his brothers had left the town behind them, rain fell in torrents and there were clashes of thunder. The heavens and the natural elements seemed to have broken out in turmoil and rebellion. The entire universe was uneasy, which symbolizes that harmony, that is, the natural harmony, had been upset by the hero's cruel actions. This is the crux of the action of the novel. There is so much in the novel to suggest that there is a general feeling among Omenuko's peers and contemporaries that he has upset the balance of nature through his own actions, and their ramifications both internal and external. Omenuko's overweening ambition to rise above his humble beginnings seems to have produced an extreme reaction in his character: he always puts profit above humaneness. Profit becomes his guide in most of his major actions in the novel; humaneness becomes a consideration only later when he can afford it. Consequently, he is always on top of things, scheming and grasping, the cool man and the manipulative operator. Few of the people he meets recognize him truly for what he is, not even the white district commissioner (who is as gullible as Omenuko's brothers and friends), but each is skeptical in some ways about his motives and intentions. Chief Ike hints at this when he equivocates about facing Omenuko in a public trial.

Sir, Omenuko is a great orator. Perhaps he would use this to my disadvantage when he comes here. He may falsely deny me and still appear to be saying the truth before your eyes.

Indeed, Omenuko knows what to say and when to say it to disarm an opponent in any situation. He knows too when to create a situation of fear in the minds of the people and then take full advantage of the situation he has created and manipulated, as he does over the Mgborogwu chieftaincy while in exile. These elements, destructive yet ingenious, make Omenuko an effective and memorable character.

He is a grasping, smooth, cool operator, making fortunes even in the face of disaster. He is wholly wound up in himself, generous to a fault when he

can afford it, grasping when necessary, cruel and inhuman when his fate is in the balance. The non-Igbo reader may find it hard to sympathize with Omenuko and even more difficult to admire him as a character. But, ironically, among the Igbo people, Omenuko is generally admired. He probably evokes the same reactions as the tortoise, the trickster in Igbo folktales. People may not enjoy the tricks the tortoise plays on the other animals, but they can still laugh with him at his victims, and might even admire his cunning and ingenuity while the innocent suffer. The average Igbo person is probably least likely to find fault with Omenuko's economic motives, much as he may disagree with all his methods.

It is significant that in his exile at Mgborogwu, it is these same factors—an overweening ambition and his grasping and indifferent nature—that bring him into conflict with his hosts. According to the Igbo custom, when Omenuko fled his hometown, he could have sought refuge among the kinsmen of his mother's maiden family.⁶ Instead, he fled to Mgborogwu, where he was without patrilineage (*umunna*), and therefore without citizenship either in the world of men or in the domain of his ancestors. The people seized upon this when they raised their voice against him for seeking to hold the highest office in their land. They protested to the white district commissioner, "We can never allow this to happen in this our own land that one who is after all, a stranger should be our head and chief executive." Omenuko views every opposing action from his hosts as the result of their jealousy over his increasing prosperity. Therefore, he asks the district commissioner to exonerate him, but to punish his opponents severely. Nevertheless, Omenuko is unable to produce a strong case to prove that he is entitled to any rights of citizenship in Mgborogwu. The district commissioner seems to have taken a simplistic view in this matter of citizenship, for he only sees the threat to Omenuko's life and advises him to return to his original homeland to avoid being assassinated by his angry hosts.

For Omenuko, it is an episode that clearly goes beyond the rivalry over a vacant chieftaincy. It brings home to him the full implications of his sins against his people and of his escapist method of severing connections with his heritage rather than face the consequences of his rash conduct. This action, which leads to Omenuko's eventual return to his native land, is very important because it provides the plot with a neat resolution. It provides for the novel its circular structure as it shows a point of departure for, and return from, exile, known in contemporary fiction as "Migration and Return." It is consistent with the author's view in the preface of the novel that "no matter how successful a man may be in a foreign land, he cannot fail to realize eventually that indeed there is no place like home." The bridge episode is an important landmark in the novel, as it marks the point of Omenuko's departure from the right path of life. From then onward, he wanders aimlessly like the prodigal son, pruning here and piling there to make a living but never really achieving full harmony in his existence until he returns

at the end of the novel to that point from which he deviated several years before. The circular structure of the novel thus lends justification to Austin Shelton's remarks that,

The African writer sees social change in part as change from cultural wholeness to fragmentation and disorientation of the individual, who can regain 'wholeness' of self and proper orientation to behavior as well as obtain the deserved rewards only through his maintenance of traditions or a return to the traditionally sanctioned behavior.⁷

Omenuko tries various devices to prevent his "return." He tries exaggerated acts of charity, as well as other diplomatic maneuvers, but to no avail. They only serve as a temporary bridge to reconciliation and continued tolerance of the offender by the offended hosts. Omenuko then realizes more than ever that his original sin against his people has left indelible scars, and though he may be tolerated wherever he goes, he will never win full acceptance anywhere but among his own people. This moral evolution in the hero prepares the way for the final and most important action in the novel. Omenuko later informs his relatives and household in exile:

I am not a citizen of Mgborogwu and I have also been rejected by my original homeland... The primary thing I should do now, is to seek a reconciliation with both human beings and gods whom I have greatly offended and sinned against, and re-establish links with them.

Thus, Omenuko, true to his character, shows his sense of insecurity and disillusionment only when it is necessary to do so. So long as his exile did not seriously threaten his ambition to be wealthy and prosperous, Omenuko could tolerate it. There were times when he considered it lucky that he had reason to flee his town, as "Whenever he thought about his past and reflected upon his present position [as Chief], he thanked God and his brothers that he stayed alive." But Omenuko places material concerns above human life and interests in his place of exile, similar to what he had been doing at home. He is able to grow rich on the Mgborogwu people, but he has little regard for them. He feels no compunction in plotting their destruction and, at one point, wages a full-scale war against them to satisfy his selfish motives. In Omenuko's eyes, no human is worth preserving if they challenge his egocentrism. He virtually seized the Mgborogwu throne at the death of the ruling king, and when the people press charges against him, he completely outwits them, so that, instead of being stripped of the chieftaincy, he wins for himself a separate kingdom.

The bringing of Omenuko back into harmony with man and the gods is accomplished through a ritual sacrifice, in the process of which a close friend of Omenuko, Igwe, acts as an intermediary between Omenuko and his family on the one hand, and the people and their deities on the other.

This sacrifice is very important because of its role in the novel. It is not an ordinary Igbo traditional sacrifice where an offender makes an offering and pours libation and expects the goodwill of the gods. Instead, Omenuko is tantalized to the utmost, before the chief priests make known to him the wishes of the gods. When he enquires how he can atone for his past sins, the priest of the earth-goddess at first refuses to discuss the matter with Igwe, Omenuko's emissary, and then consents to do so only when he has the advantage of Omenuko. The priest of the sky-god similarly refuses to discuss the matter, but, in addition, is scornful of Omenuko:

Your Omenuko who wants to make peace with angered deities, can he go through the rituals doing everything that would be asked of him? Go and ask Omenuko, the sheep that wants to grow horns, how stable is his neck?

This sacrifice also offers the reader another ample opportunity to examine the character of Omenuko himself, and his relationship with the religious ritual, the priests, the chiefs, his cousins, and with everyone he meets. The author analyzes sin and forgiveness within Omenuko, and projects a kind of Islamic atmosphere in the later part of the novel. He portrays in his hero a Moslem air of acceptance—an unquestioning acceptance of one's fate, which seems to explain some of Omenuko's reactions to life and its hard knocks. Consequently, he tackles the rituals of the sacrifice in his characteristically carefree manner, doing what the priests expect of him, saying the correct things, and ransoming the men just as easily and good-naturedly as he once sold them into bondage.

Now, as in the other major actions in the novel, Omenuko is able to dominate at the same time that he is asking for favor, and equally attempts to move fate at the same time that he seems to seek expiation of his sins. Early in the novel when he lost his goods in the river, although he agonized and moaned his fate, he was at the same time plotting his way beyond the tragedy. Although he accepted that he would have to surrender the Mgborogwu chieftaincy to its rightful prince, Obiefula, he, nonetheless, worked secretly to procure (almost by swindling) a new crown for himself, outwitting the district commissioner, while at the same time appearing to be a humble servant who only carried out orders faithfully. He goes home when he can well afford it, having secured his material future abroad. He swiftly placates the gods as a way of putting them (and their menaces) out of the way, and also as a way of putting his past life decisively behind him.

He had gone full circle, exploiting gods as easily as he exploited the white man and the local people. This fact may explain his voluntary retirement at the end of the novel. He has lived a full life with a checkered history which provokes many ethical considerations. The fact that Omenuko, the hero of the book, was still alive at the time the book was in circulation helped to make its impact even stronger.

People visited Omenuko and heard the story of the novel confirmed by his own lips. This is perhaps why he became a kind of household name among the Igbo people of the era. Everyone who read or heard about the book and its story knew for sure that there was a living Omenuko somewhere in Igboland.

The focus on the hero allows Pita Nwana, the author of the novel, to explore fully the fate of the alienated individual in a situation where identification with the group seems the only way to keep alive. Omenuko goes into voluntary exile, where he lives his own life, often remaining courteous to his natal home. He testifies to this when he appears before his people several years later to pledge loyalty to the laws of the land and seek reconciliation. He informs them:

Although I was in another land, and even as chief there, I was still observing the laws and customs of my homeland. There are no laws of our land which I do not remember.

The author clearly presents the fate of the hero as being a result of his personality and individual shortcomings more than anything else.

**OMENUKO:
An Example of Mixed Literary Forms**
(Traditional and Missionary)

Proverbs, sayings, prayers, invocations are freely used in the novel *Omenuko*. There are, in particular, many pungent proverbs and often Nwana uses them to reinforce the character of his hero. Early in the novel he introduces the image of the black goat:

it is better for us to start looking for the black goat in the day time. When it is night and dark, we may not be able to differentiate the blackness of the goat from the darkness of the night.

This image of the “black goat” (usually understood by the Igbo people as symbolizing a traitor in the community) is closely associated with Omenuko in his relationship not only with his immediate community, but also with his hosts in exile. His fellow chiefs perceive him as conniving and devious, the one who always finds a way to get his wishes fulfilled by the white officials. There is no doubt that Nwana has a great deal of admiration for his hero, and this affects his portrayal of Omenuko as a character (Nwana seems at pains to improve Omenuko’s image toward the end of the novel), but throughout the novel, the reader cannot help but notice that Omenuko’s actions parallel those of a “black goat” in his society.

This is even more so when one considers Omenuko’s cynicism as revealed in the peculiar way in which he uses metaphorical forms of expression such

as proverbs and sayings. He twists and turns around these traditional moral dictums to suit his personal idiosyncrasies. Thus, after he had sold his apprentices into slavery, he invites their parents for a discussion “the next morning.” Some of the parents, out of genuine curiosity, do not wait for the morning but come the same night that they receive the message. They are afraid that something may be wrong because “the toad does not run in the day for nothing.” But Omenuko distorts this saying and turns it into a phrase designed to scorn the elders for their innocent curiosity: “Those who rush into a battle with full force, little realize that war is death.” Also when the citizens of Mgborogwu visit him (and he had been tipped off about their conspiracy to unseat him), Omenuko offers them the traditional kola nut. He is customarily expected to bless the kola nut before it is eaten, but he chooses his words as a direct attack on his guests, and curses them indirectly:

Whoever says I don't deserve what is mine, when he gets his, he won't be fit for it. I am for live and let-live, whoever objects to that let him be denied life. Let the kite perch and let the eagle perch too. Whichever obstructs the other, may his wings break.

Thus, Pita Nwana's technique is to use proverbs, aphorisms, and witticisms in those situations in the Igbo culture where they are most appropriate to reinforce content, or to convey a serious thought in a delicate situation without recourse to simple blunt words. In the novel, the proverbs are important for what they say about either situations or conflicts, or the particular actions of the major character.

The Igbo folktale tradition and the missionary narrative pattern, which served as Nwana's models, account for the way in which Nwana begins and ends the novel. Nwana tries to recapture in the story the mood of the traditional Igbo folktale. Usually, the oral performer announces he has a tale, then tells it, and, at the end, draws the moral lesson of his story. Between the beginning and the denouement, he expands or contracts the original base of the story to suit his artistic intentions. Nwana invokes the folktale atmosphere at the beginning of the story with a prologue in which the reader is told the background of the story and the moral points the story is designed to illustrate:

In our own part of Africa, it is almost like a law that a man does not forsake his fatherland. A man can live in a foreign land but no matter how successful he becomes there whether in business or social relationships, and no matter how much the people among whom he lives hold him in high regard, there are bound to be things which will remind him once in a while that he is after all, a stranger...and he becomes more determined to return to his native land.

In the same way, at the end of the novel, Nwana appends a tag in which he not only states his purpose as an author, but also emphasizes the moral of the episode. The narrative is to show the reader “the way in which this world [life] is a perfect mixture of joy and sorrow, hardship and reward, laughter and tears, [and] is in itself, enough lesson for anyone who seeks to learn,” probably in the way that Omenuko learned in the course of the narrative.

If this appears an unsatisfactory ending⁸ for a rather complex story, it must be remembered that Pita Nwana was writing for a definite audience—the Igbo. As with the traditional oral performer before him, it was incumbent on him not to disguise the didactic intention or moral purpose of his narrative when the tale was done. It was a commitment the artist owed at least to the young members of his audience to whom the ethical formulas of the story might or might not be clearly discernible in the course of the narrative. It was part of an existing literary tradition. The resolution of the conflict, as well as the whole idea of sacrifice in the novel, points to possible Christian influence. Omenuko is made to suffer remorse for his crime and then to confess his sin to the chief priests. It is through the priests that he receives both his “penance” and “absolution.” The physical reunion then becomes evidence of his forgiveness and the restoration of the distorted harmony in his relationship with both his people and the gods. This scene reads like the biblical account of the prodigal son. Omenuko, like the prodigal son, strays away from home, realizes the enormity of his sin, and goes home, penitent. He is reconciled with his people, and there is general jubilation. Omenuko is faithful to the old religion, but, occasionally, we notice his skepticism and at times cynicism toward it. For instance, while Omenuko is at the shrine of the sky-god offering his sacrifice as conscientiously as possible, Nwana is able to interpose some conflicting thoughts:

It is true that the vultures approached Iyiukwa’s house at the sound of the small bell, but you must realize that even the most stupid animal in the world would respond to the name you call it, if you make it go through a period of training...The vultures had come to know that whenever Iyiukwa jingled the bells, he was summoning them.

(Of course, to the adherents of the traditional religion, the vultures came as a result of the god accepting the sacrifice, and also through the supernatural power of the chief priest of the god.) This apparent dual allegiance accounts for Nwana’s pattern of resolution of the social conflicts in the novel. We do not have in the hero the type of inflexibility (as Okonkwo, the hero of Achebe’s inimitable novel of the same era, *Things Fall Apart*) which makes compromise an impossible dream. Omenuko would neither betray nor forsake the old ways, but there is nothing in them for which he would stake his life or make a martyr of himself.

OMENUKO's legacy and impact on Igbo literature

Pita Nwana's *Omenuko* was truly a work of art conceived by an Igbo, for the Igbo, about the Igbo (Figure 5.2). Its great success had all the potentials for establishing a solid foundation for the growth and lasting development of a solid written Igbo literature. The novel immediately awakened in the Igbo a spontaneous love for reading. Many people inside and outside school read *Omenuko* for its wit, its volatile humor, and its insistent moral overtones. But nothing ever came again from the pen of Pita Nwana despite the best-seller image of his exceedingly popular first work. There are many people who would remember the novel possibly without remembering its author, and some would scarcely associate the novel with an author. It seemed to such readers that this work was like the book of wisdom sent from on high, and to search for its author would be like searching for the author of the Bible. One reason for this is that while the novel was in circulation, its hero, Omenuko (the fictional name for Chief Igwegbe Odum, whose life was the basis of the story), was still alive, and he therefore diverted, by his presence, all the attention from the author, Pita Nwana, who died in 1968. Visitors, tourists, and students on excursions flooded the home of "the Omenuko of history" rather than the home of the author of the novel.

This apparent overshadowing of "Omenuko of fiction" by "Omenuko of history" came to light in 2011 when an otherwise laudable project to make the novel into a movie was unceremoniously halted because of the controversy over the right of ownership of the book between "the families of Pita Nwana, the author of the novel, and that of the subject-Omenuko." The following is a full account of the sad episode, as reported by the media on June 18, 2011:

The Omenuko story: why the adaptation of the Igbo novel into a screenplay failed

On June 18, 2011 / in Showtime People 12:00 am

BY BENJAMIN NJOKU

The name Pita Nwana, rings no bells, but in the literary community and perhaps, among the Igbos, it is one name that commands a lot of influences. A renowned carpenter and foreman at Methodist College, Uzuakoli, Abia State, Nwana was the author of the foremost novel ever written in Igbo language called *Omenuko*.

Omenuko chronicles the true life story of a quintessential Igbo businessman, otherwise known as Chief Igwegbe Odum of Ndizuogu who lived between the nineteenth and twentieth centuries. Over the

years, the urge to re-invoke the spirit of the man, Omenuko have been met with strong resistance.

Only three years ago, the elegant Stallion as she is better known Onyeka Onwenu, set out with a team of professionals to adapt the novel into a screenplay but unfortunately, that much-million Naira movie project did not see the light of day.

However, determined to see that the story of Omenuko did not die with the author, the 85 year old second son of the famous novelist, Mazi Harry Nwana has come out to advocate support from all and sundry in ensuring that the novel is either translated into English language or adapted as a screenplay.

He also explained reasons the attempts by Onyeka and her team to shoot the epic movie three years ago was not actualized amongst other engaging issues surrounding the Igbo novel.

The journey...

Translating the novel into English language I have been getting a lot of representations from my friends and associates about the need to adapt my father's first Igbo novel "Omenuko" into a screenplay. Though there has been a lot of impediments here and there some of them are man-made while others are legal. The legal aspect of it has to do with the copyright which belongs to the Longman Publishing Company.

The company have been reluctant to grant permission to the writers to want to translate the work into English language or adapt it as a screenplay. I approached the company to fashion out ways of translating the novel to English language. At the moment, the management of the company have agreed in principle, to give a go-ahead order to any writer that wants to translate the work.

For me, I'm not physically strong enough to do the running around. That's why I'm enjoining anybody who is interested in translating the novel either into English language, or adaption into a screenplay to take a bold step and come for a negotiation.

Omenuko is an old novel, which depicts the life of a quintessential Igbo man, Omenuko, who lived between the nineteenth and twentieth centuries. I'm looking for a writer who can guarantee me that he will be able to do a good translation that will be commercially viable. It remains the most popular novel in Igbo language today, which deserves to be made available to other Nigerian languages.

For screenplay...

Sometime ago, our Lady of songs Onyeka Onwenu assembled a team of professionals who wanted to adapt the novel into a screenplay. But the reason the project was not executed was because the descendants of "Omenuko" demanded a lot of money from the team. That was why Onyeka decided to abandon the project.

But I'm still interested in revisiting the project. I want the novel to be adapted into a screenplay. A lot of people have approached me to talk about it. But I relayed the difficulties one faced in trying to adapt the work into a screenplay. If I see somebody who will be willing to take up the challenge, I wouldn't mind reopening talks with the publishers of the novel again. I have discussed with the publishers before now, and they are willing to support the initiative.

Descendants of Omenuko and Pita Nwana

There are two different families who are involved in this issue. They are the families of Pita Nwana, the author of the novel, and that of the subject-Omenuko. Pita Nwana, my father only wrote about Omenuko, which was a true life story of a popular Igbo trader who lived between nineteenth and twentieth centuries. Everybody knew the man as Omenuko.

The novel was not fiction, rather it was a true life story that was weaving around the Omenuko. As you would want to know, the real name of the main character in the novel was Igwegbe. He was an enterprising member of the ubiquitous Odum family.

Odum was late K.O. Mbadiwe's grandfather. So, Igwegbe was one of his uncles. When Onyeka wanted to adapt the novel into a screenplay, she approached a senior member of the Odum's family, Ambassador Greg Mbadiwe to get clearance from them to carry out the project. Ambassador Greg introduced Onyeka to Osuofia Mbadiwe who welcomed the idea and promised to meet with his family members over the proposal. While Osuofia was busy inviting his family members for a meeting, he insisted that a representative from Pita Nwana's family must be in attendance. As a result, I attended the meeting with my daughter, it was a meeting of the family of the subject and that of the author.

Also, Onyeka was in attendance with her team. After the meeting, we unanimously gave our support to the project. But unfortunately, and to my greatest surprise, I later learnt from Onyeka that the project was not carried out, as a result of the fact that some of the members of the Odum's family accused those that attended the meeting of collecting a huge amount of money, which ran into millions of Naira from the project executors. They therefore insisted that they should be given their own share of the windfall.

In principle, no money was mentioned during the discussion. But they wouldn't believe us. At this juncture, Onyeka who couldn't withstand the disagreement decided to abandon the project. That's how the project was not executed to the best of my knowledge.

It was an unfortunate situation, but there was nothing we could have done to salvage it. In any case, the outcome of that unrealized

project neither killed my interest, nor the interests of other members of the Odum's family.

The man, Omenuko

The novel is fictionalized biography of Chief Igwegbe Odum of Ndizuogu, who live from 1860 to 1940.

The real name of the man was not disclosed by my father because he doubted the possibility of Igwegbe's taking it kindly with him, after flattering his role as a slave.

(See more at: <http://www.vanguardngr.com/2011/06/the-omenuko-story-why-the-adaptaion-of-the-igbo-novel-into-a-screenplay-failed/#sthash.mJlz5rDe.dpuf>)

D.N. Achara's *Ala Bingo* (1937)

Four years after the publication of *Omenuko*, a teacher, D.N. Achara, at the Methodist College, Uzoakoli (where Pita Nwana had worked as a carpenter and foreman), published the second Igbo novel in 1937. D.N. Achara's *Ala Bingo*⁹ shows a strong indebtedness to, and influence of, the Igbo oral narrative (Figure 5.3). *Ala Bingo* is a long moral fable. The background of the story is the world of slavery and the imaginary feudal world of lords and serfs. The action takes place around Uzuakoli, Ozuitem, and Item, all familiar Igbo towns, but it moves away from the real world to the supernatural world. The narrative is told in two parts. Most of the action in the first part takes place in the real world, while the second part is set in the supernatural world. The theme—"civility costs nothing but buys everything"—is consistent throughout, but while the first part of the narrative focusses on the older generation of characters, the second part deals with the problems of the younger generation. The two parts are connected structurally because the second segment is a development of the first, and exists because an earlier dilemma had been resolved, thereby making room for a new phase of social experience.

The first part, the discovery and wooing of a river maiden, shows three different situations which illustrate the major weaknesses in the character of the king. The king spies what appear to be human footprints near his river. He wants to know to whom those footprints belong, but fails to do so. Consequently, he seeks help from his servants. However, the only servant who can help him is the one the king refuses at first to see. Why? The king refuses because the servant is sick, and therefore he will have to go to the servant to receive information rather than the servant coming to him. But because his curiosity concerning the footprints is so great and because his other servants cannot find out to whom the footprints belong the king must relent. He must humble himself, disregarding appearances, and visit

the sick servant. In the second situation, the king wants to meet the river maiden but does not know how. He goes to see the “Lord of the East” to ask about this, but he is arrogant and demands the Lord of the East to send a royal escort to receive him. The king has to be made humble again. The Lord of the East will not receive him until he apologizes. The king has been tested with a serf, and a Lord, and neither experience is effective in curing him of the excesses of his personality. The third situation shows his last chance and is the most severe of his tests. The king needs information on how to get hold of the river maiden and make her his wife. The only person who can give him the information is a leper and the king will have to go to him. It is only when the king has nowhere else to turn to that he finally turns to the leper. The leper directs him to the “Lord of the West” who alone can solve his problem. And this time the king goes humbly as a man in need.

It is the king’s obstinacy that brings about his humiliation before a leper, a taboo to all mankind. It is a kind of education for the king who is egoistic, pompous, and intolerably arrogant, yet at the same time incurably simple-minded and naïve. *Igbo echi eze* (“the Igbo recognize/have no kings”) is a popular Igbo dictum, and this story is a running commentary on this Igbo social attitude. The king in the story is metaphorically blind, as he fails to recognize from his high office the true meaning of greatness and the cordial relationship that should exist between a monarch and his subjects. The entire first segment of the book deals with the king learning to disregard outward appearances and assume humility. The second part of the book is a test of the king’s ability to apply the lessons he learned from self-knowledge to his royal functions. He must decide the successor to the throne between two sons of equal strength, and possibly twins. This is the dilemma he must resolve, but he has learned enough to know that “a king who is beset with a complex problem could consult his entire household, including his servants and serfs.” Thus, it is from his subjects that he gets the idea that since the two rival claimants are of equal strength, the final decision could be based on intelligence tests such as exercise in the skill of solving riddles and interpreting proverbs. The subplot then focuses on the explanation of “why the first son succeeds his father” and thereby provides a useful commentary on the Igbo patrilineal system.

The king wisely chooses Ezi-Amuru (wisdom/knowledge from experience) over Amachagburu (“I know-it-all is suicidal”) because he is no longer blind, and has learned to search for inner meanings and deeper significances in every situation of life. Emmanuel Obiechina has pointed out that one major characteristic of Igbo oral narrative is that “the offender is hardly ever left in a state of permanent disgrace and deprivation. He has to suffer and often suffer severely before he is rescued and restored, very much chastened and refined by his punishment.”¹⁰

Achara has kept very close to this tradition in his portrayal of the king in *Ala Bingo*. The book thus presents a theme pertinent to the life of its

community, reflecting in the process something of the culture from which the story comes. The king is made to suffer severely, but he is not left “in a state of permanent disgrace and deprivation.” Instead, he “is refined by his punishment.” Several Igbo oral narratives portray this uncanny look at kingship. The riddles, proverbs, and other oral performances interwoven with the story help to strengthen the plot, while also making Achara’s narrative techniques more vivid and appealing.

Leopold Bell-Gam’s *Ije Odumodu Jere*

The third pioneer Igbo author was Leopold Bell-Gam whose novel, *Ije Odumodu Jere*, an adventure story, published in 1963, three decades after *Omenuko* and *Ala Bingo*. The strong influence of *Omenuko* on Igbo writers is most apparent in *Ije Odumodu Jere (Odumodu’s Travels)* (Figure 5.4).¹¹ The novel is set in the later part of the nineteenth century. The hero, Odumodu, is born in a poor family but works his way to the top by dint of hard labor. His adventures carry him into foreign lands (Europe, North America, and Cuba) where he is antagonized by many of his hosts. He survives, and eventually returns to his original home a wealthy man and immediately sets about to modernize his community.

Like *Omenuko*, Odumodu is involved in a succession conflict over a foreign throne), and the timely intervention of an outsider saves him from assassination. *Omenuko* loses his goods when he and his companions fall into a river. Odumodu also loses his possessions in a shipwreck in which he is the sole survivor. There is a very close similarity in tone and content between *Odumodu’s Travels*, Chapter 10, and *Omenuko*, Chapter 4. The dying king of Finda wills his throne to Odumodu, a foreigner, in the same way that Chief Mgborogwu bequeaths his throne to *Omenuko*, an alien and a fugitive from justice. In both cases, the people conspire to work against the dead king’s wishes. The heir-apparent of Finda tries to have Odumodu assassinated, while in Mgborogwu, the chiefs rise in rebellion against *Omenuko* and make attempts on his life. Odumodu flees from Finda and goes to Mimba, from where he finally escapes to his hometown, Ahaba, where he is received with great celebration and festivities. He settles down, builds modern houses, and is appointed chief of his people. In the same way, *Omenuko* flees from Mgborogwu and goes to Ikpa Oyi, from where he finally flees to his hometown in Okigwe. He settles down, builds modern houses, declines to be chief of his people, but accepts the honorary position of peacemaker and “overseer.” Thus, both novels describe a departure and a return.

But *Odumodu’s Travels* may also have been influenced by other sources. The preoccupation with European history and wars, the author’s knowledge of navigation and oceanography, and the sensitive reactions to life in Europe and to the theme of the slave trade, parallel such treatments in Equiano’s *The Interesting Narrative of the Life of Olaudah Equiano, Or, Gustavus Vassa, the African*.¹² Odumodu was nearly as versatile as Equiano.

He was a teacher, a carpenter, a cook, a sailor, an administrator, a counselor, and a preacher. *Odumodu's Travels*, too, has many things in common with Daniel Defoe's *Robinson Crusoe*¹³ and Jonathan Swift's *Gulliver's Travels*.¹⁴ The account of the shipwreck of Odumodu and his subsequent captivity by a gang of dwarfish creatures "who crawled in and out of holes," reads like an account of Gulliver's experiences with the Lilliputians.

Perhaps the strongest influence on *Odumodu's Travels* is that of Christian missionaries. Apart from verbatim quotations which the author makes from the missionary *Primer* (1927),¹⁵ there are more persuasive influences in plot and characterization. The hero is caught between two worlds. He tries to be Igbo but is caught up in Western ways. The author strives to build his theme into a race issue, but succeeds only in making a case for his hero as a Christian. He succeeds in showing some differences in behavior, which result from belonging to another culture. He does not succeed in portraying the deep-rooted racial conflicts that he seems to be striving so hard to reveal. However hard he tries to stress his hero's blackness, the question of race remains only on the surface of the novel. The narrative dangles between moving in the direction of racial prejudice, and a conflict in codes of values. Bell-Gam settles for the more manageable theme. Odumodu triumphs over the oppressive white race not because he is black, but mostly because he is a Christian who practices the teachings of the Bible as well as Christian doctrines. The opposition of the citizens of Finda to his marriage with their princess does not deter Odumodu from working to improve the people of Finda, including their standard of living, methods of government, as well as their moral values. The author invests Odumodu with uncommon qualities of humility and selfless service. Odumodu wants to devote his time to the service of his fellow human beings, and when Finda does not give him the chance, his missionary zeal to spread the word moves him to migrate to Mimba, where he builds schools, trains teachers, and instils in the masses an appreciation of the dignity of labor. He admonishes them, saying that "whoever is not ashamed to work with his hands will never die of starvation. No work is too mean or inferior for a man in need." The image that the author projects of his hero throughout the novel is one of a suffering but undeterred missionary. He is rejected by the very people he seeks to "save." He loses everything in his possession, including his wife and children, but Odumodu is neither discouraged nor dissuaded from his mission to "go forth and teach all nations." He advises all the people he meets and converts to "live your lives according to the ten commandments." One of the successes of the novel is that the author is able to dramatize for the white worlds of Finda and Mimba, some of the unpleasantness and irritations which missionaries may unknowingly cause the people they have come to convert. The significance of this irony becomes obvious when one remembers that Odumodu is a black African Christian endeavoring to convert Europeans and teach them "the good life" in the nineteenth century, the era of European "civilizing mission" to Africa.

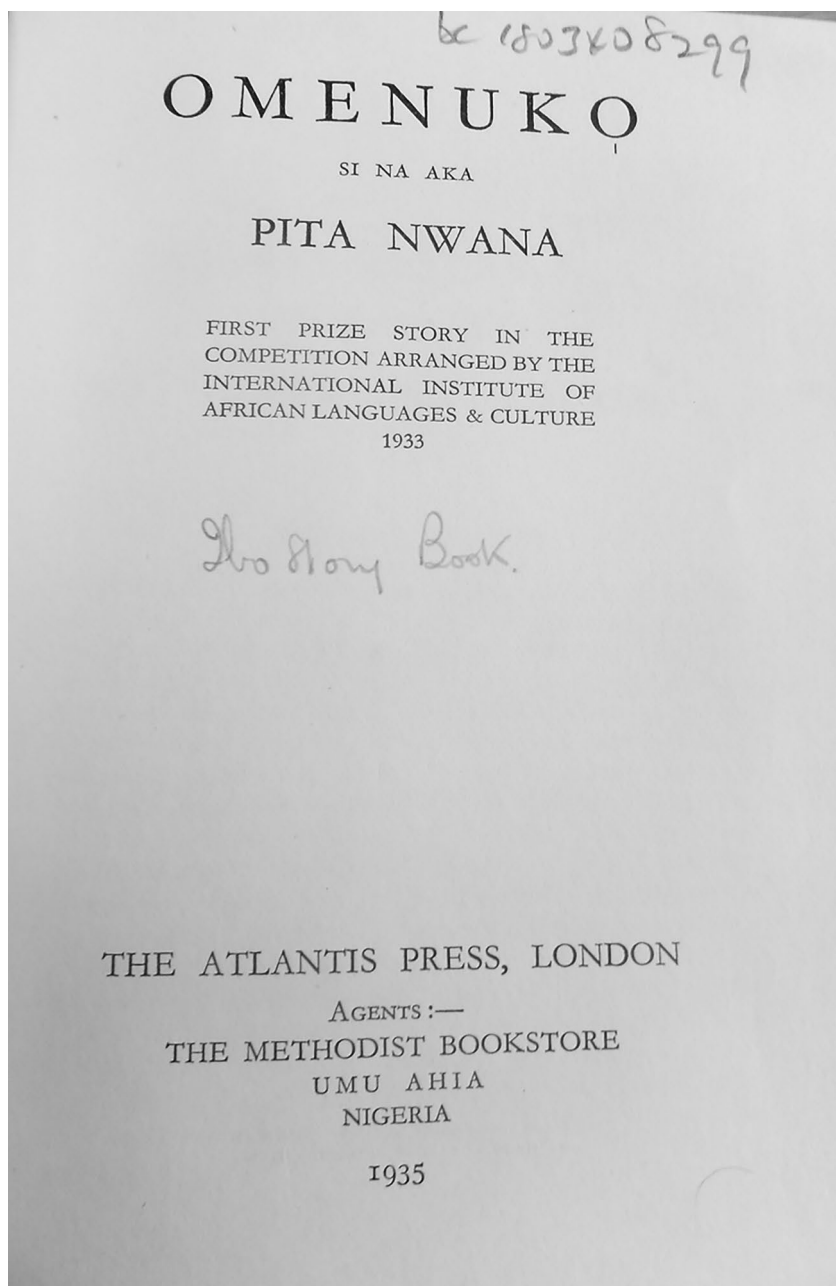


Figure 5.2 First Edition of Omenuko. C.M.S. Archives, London.



Figure 5.3 First Edition of Ala Bingo.

ALA BINGO
Akụkọ arọrọ arọ

SI N'AKA
D. N. ACHARA
(Certificated Teacher, Methodist Mission)

Uthman Ibrahim, nwanta akwukwọ na Government
College, Umuhia, sere uru ihu oyiyi n'akwukwọ a



LONGMAN NIGERIA

Figure 5.3 Continued.

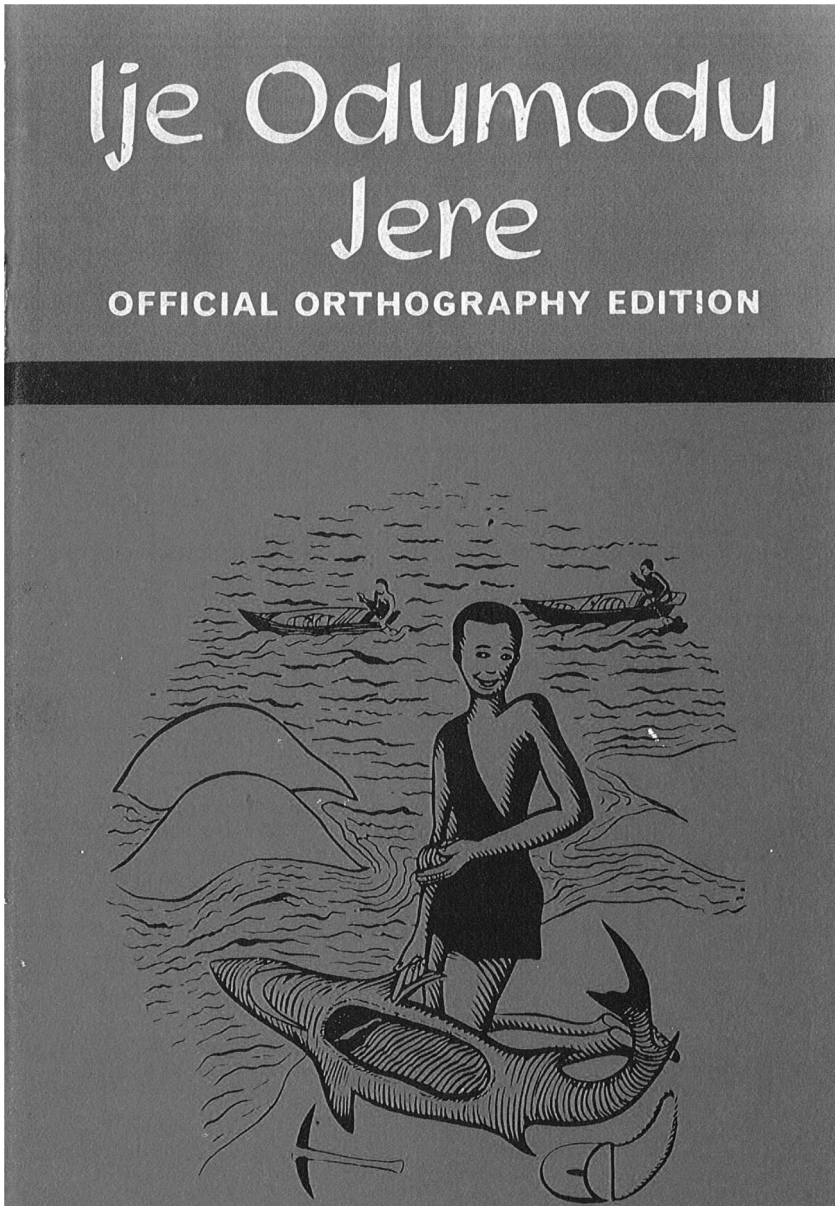


Figure 5.4 First Edition of Ije Odumodu Jere.

Notes

- 1 Pita Nwana, *Omenuko*, London: Longman, 1933 (reprinted 1963), translated into English in 2014 (See: Ernest Emenyonu, *Omenuko*, New York: African Heritage Press, 2014).
- 2 *Omenuko* is a fictional name for Chief Igwegbe Odum (1860–1940) of Ndi-zuogu, whose life was the basis for the story. See A.E. Afigbo, “Chief Igwegbe Odum: The *Omenuko* of History,” *Nigeria Magazine*, 90 (September 1966), pp. 222–231.
- 3 Many also read the Igbo Bible, but the Bible did not have as great a readership as *Omenuko* since *Omenuko* was published in the two rival orthographies of the Igbo language, unlike the Igbo Bible which was in the “Union orthography” and virtually read only by the Protestants.
- 4 V.C. Uchendu, *The Igbo of South East Nigeria*, New York: Holt, Rinehart and Winston, 1965.
- 5 *Ibid.*, p. 46.
- 6 Cf. Okonkwo’s exile in Chinua Achebe’s *Things Fall Apart*, London, 1958.
- 7 Austin Shelton, “Behavior and Cultural Value in West African Stories,” *Africa*, XXXIV, 4 (October 1964), p. 357.
- 8 Cf. O.R. Dathorne, “Ibo Literature: The Novel as Allegory,” *African Quarterly*, VII, 4 (January/March 1968).
- 9 D.N. Achara, *Ala Bingo* (Longman, 1963) (published in Igbo, translated into English by Ernest Emenyonu) (unpublished).
- 10 Emmanuel Obiechina, *Literature for the Masses*, Enugu: Nwamife, 1971, p. 71.
- 11 Leopold Bell-Gam, *Ije Odumodu Jere (Odumodu’s Travels)*, London: Longman, 1963 (Published in Igbo).
- 12 Olaudah Equiano, *The Interesting Narrative of the Life of Olaudah Equiano or Gustavus Vassa the African*, London, 1789.
- 13 Daniel Defoe, *Robinson Crusoe*, London: William Taylor, 1719.
- 14 Compare *Gulliver’s Travels*, Boston, MA: Gin and Co., 1914, pp. 7–12 and Bell-Gam, *Ije Odumodu Jere*, p. 41. Although Daniel Defoe’s *Robinson Crusoe* (1719) is mentioned as translated into Igbo by Methodist missionaries for their schools in Igboland.
- 15 Cf. *Akwukwo Ogugu Ibo*, London: James Townsend and Sons, 1927, pp. 28, 33, and Bell-Gam, *Ije Odumodu jere*, p. 41.

6 The crisis of standardization of written (literary) Igbo language

Pioneer efforts of F.C. Ogbalu:
Founder and architect, Society
for Promoting Igbo Language
and Culture (SPILC)

With the appearance of Adams and Ward in the Igbo Studies scene, a most prolonged controversy over Igbo orthography ensued. For in 1929, R.F.C. Adams, an inspector of education in the then Eastern Nigeria and Dr. Ida Ward, a linguist of the School of Oriental and African Studies (London University) introduced phonetic symbols to represent or replace Igbo sounds not hitherto well represented by separate characters. This imposition of a new system of writing Igbo, with its attendant spelling changes, sparked off a vehement opposition involving the Roman Catholic Church (supporting the innovation) and the Anglican church (opposing it). The involvement of these churches intensified and prolonged the controversy which according to Ogbalu, ‘could have been settled much more easily were it not for the involvement of the two giant missionary bodies that dominated the educational system at the time’¹

L. Nnamdi Oraka (1988)

Without Frederick Chidozie Ogbalu (1927–1990), known in his lifetime as Mazi F.C. Ogbalu, what is known today in the Academy as Igbo Language and Cultural Studies would in all probability be nonexistent. F.C. Ogbalu was neither a linguist nor a literary person, and some people derided him for this. But it was F.C. Ogbalu, teacher and educator, who conceived the discipline of Studies in Igbo Language and Culture as a fit and proper subject in the school curriculum.

I had elsewhere² addressed this issue of the belittling of Mazi F.C. Ogbalu. I take the implication of this denigration to mean that Mazi F.C. Ogbalu did not go to a particular university; did not sit in a classroom of a Department of Linguistics, listen to lectures on tagmemes, philology, morphology, and the like, for 48 months or so; and did not come out at the end with a piece of paper which tells us that he had been admitted to the honorable court of linguists. It does not matter if he is never seen or heard of again. He has become a linguist, and will be known as such forever thereafter. This is leaving the substance to pursue the shadow, for as the saying has been from time immemorial, “the hood does not make the monk.” The significance

of F.C. Ogbalu's landmark contributions in the field of Igbo language and culture studies lies in the fact that he laid the firm foundation on which the edifice now stands. Everyone else then and now stands on his shoulders. The biblical parable of the sower provides the most apt analogy:

Listen! Once there was a man who went out to sow corn. As he scattered the seed in the field, some of it fell along the path, and the birds came and ate it up. Some of it fell on rocky ground where there was little soil. The seeds soon sprouted, because the soil wasn't deep. Then when the sun came up, it burnt the young plants, and because the roots had not grown deep enough, the plants soon dried up. Some of the seeds fell among thorn bushes, which grew up and choked the plants, and they didn't produce any corn. But some seeds fell in good soil, and the plants sprouted, grew and produced corn: some had thirty grains, others sixty, and others a hundred. And Jesus concluded, 'listen then, if you have ears!'

(St Mark's Gospel, Chapter 4)³

Mazi F.C. Ogbalu sowed the seeds of Igbo language and cultural studies, and they fell on good soil. Decades later, the plants that sprouted and grew have stood the vicissitudes of harsh weather, torrential rains, scorching heat, and even the calamity of a civil war. There is every reason, therefore, to pay to Mazi F.C. Ogbalu the tribute he deserves, without reservations. The core of his legacies is in his invaluable contributions in laying the foundations and charting the course and promoting the growth of Nigerian and, indeed, African literature in African languages despite not being a linguistic or a literary scholar. It is for this reason that this book is dedicated to him. We must indicate that our implied definition of language is an amplification of Chinua Achebe's agelong cryptic statement that language encompasses a people's worldview. Achebe goes further in his usual elliptical manner to add that "no one can understand another whose language he does not speak." It becomes clear, therefore, that for Chinua Achebe, and for the purpose of the entire study of this book, *language* is more than mere words. It is indeed more than "the system of human expression by means of words." Rather, in our context, Igbo *language* incorporates the Igbo worldview, Igbo culture, Igbo essence, Igbo life, Igbo literature, and, I dare say, Igbo people as a human species.

We must dismiss outright the views which claim that by paying attention to Igbo, Yoruba, Hausa, Efik, Ibibio, Ijaw, and Idoma studies, we are engaging in pseudo-scholarship and doing a disservice to Nigeria because we are seemingly stressing the things that divide more than they unite us as Nigerians. You can use the same flimsy argument on the platform of the Organization for African Unity (OAU), to disparage and negate the relevance of studies in Nigerian history, Nigerian drama, Nigerian music, Nigerian literature, Nigerian religion, Nigerian geography, Nigerian education, and so forth. It should be clear that Nigeria is a microcosm of the African *reality* in its cultural, social, and linguistic diversities. The aggregate of its

parts gives us the whole. We must understand and develop the parts as a means of developing the whole. It is akin to the late indefatigable Nigerian leader Dr. Nnamdi Azikiwe's theory (in another context) of "tribalism as a pragmatic instrument for national unity." To survive the tests of time, a language must be kept alive. Mazi F.C. Ogbalu laid the foundation for keeping Igbo language alive in its literature and social usage.

Intensive research into Igbo language is far more necessary now than, perhaps, it has ever been in the last 100 years. We have monumental pressures from the fields of science and technology, which challenge our scholars to reach into the archives of their great minds and come up with the tools for equipping the Igbo language to meet the demands of our time. To be alive, a language must be popular to its users and must have the functional capacity to enable the users absorb into the language any important phenomenon which evolves or intrudes into the culture and for which an expression or terminology must be found. This is the sign of a living language, a language which will transcend generations and live from century to century. Making a language popular is the function of the news media, law courts, town and village meetings, market activities, formal education arenas, musicians, story-tellers and, very importantly, creative and imaginative writers. In a distinguished class by themselves are oral performers and creative writers in Igbo language. They manipulate words, sayings, and idiomatic expressions so deftly and magically sonorous that listening to their oral performance becomes a gratifying experience that one constantly looks forward to and never gets tired of. From time immemorial, the proverb has been an indispensable element used by the best of Igbo orators, minstrels, raconteurs, and so forth to embellish their speeches, songs, or narratives to make them exceptionally pleasing to the ear. Chinua Achebe captures its true essence in his novel *Things Fall Apart* when he describes the proverb as "the palm oil with which words are eaten." In a conventional analogy, it is described as follows: how does salad taste without a dressing?

The controversy brought about in 1929 by the introduction of phonetic symbols into written Igbo by Adams and Ward, went on for decades and impeded in no small way, the development of literature written in Igbo language. However, it was a protracted battle between different camps of Igbo linguistics scholars. The scope and dimensions of the battle and its disastrous consequences have been comprehensively addressed and analyzed in other chapters of this book. While the linguists battled themselves, F.C. Ogbalu approached the development of Igbo language and culture in a unique way. He took the matter to the doorsteps of its most important constituency—the users of the language. He used a grassroots association—Society for Promoting Igbo Language and Culture, beginning with his secondary school students, to start a revival movement which soon went viral.

The Society for Promoting Igbo Language and Culture is in outlook, national, non-denominational, and open to all irrespective of race, ethnic consideration, or creed. The idea was first nursed by Chidozie Ogbalu in 1948, when he was a young tutor at the Dennis Memorial Grammar School

(DMGS), Onitsha. But this idea did not materialize until a year later, at the St. Augustine's Grammar School, Nkwerre, in 1949. Ogbalu used an already existing cultural association formed by him—the Society for Promoting African Heritage—as the nucleus of the Society for Promoting Igbo Language and Culture. So much was the impact and popularity of this Nkwerre-based “school club” that, in 1950, newly educated (crop of) Igbo men met in the chemistry laboratory at the D.M.G.S. premises, Onitsha, to formally inaugurate the Society for Promoting Igbo Language and Culture, Nigeria. At this “formal” inaugural meeting, Dr. Akanu Ibiam (formerly Sir Francis Ibiam), a medical doctor who later became the first African governor of the former Eastern Region of Nigeria, was elected president. The late Dr. S.E. Onwu who later became the first African Director of Medical Services, Eastern Nigeria, became the first vice president. The second vice president was the late John Cross Anyogu, the first Igbo Roman Catholic Bishop. Mazi F.C. Ogbalu, the current national chairman and founder of the Society, was then appointed first national secretary, and the late Mr. D.C. Erinne (a scientist) became the first national chairman. Thus, the SPILC, which was first started as a mere “school club,” took off as a national cultural association in 1950.⁴

Henceforth, as the saying goes, “the rest is history.” The synthesis of Mazi F.C. Ogbalu's legacy in the field of Igbo studies is best summarized by the eminent Igbo linguistics scholar E. Nolue Emenanjo:

When, therefore, all these contributions are put together, F.C. Ogbalu comes out as something close to a titan, a colossus who stands head and shoulders above any Igbo man, dead or alive, in terms of contributions to Igbo literary development. ...Some people have called him the “Chaucer” of the Igbo language... Ogbalu's consummate commitment to Standard Igbo as fully explained in his book of that name has helped to put modern Igbo on a path of sanity and universal acceptability... In sum, since the 1940's, Ogbalu has been the solitary and consistent figure in the fore-front of Igbo cultural revival, ... Igbo studies in general and Igbo literary history in particular.⁵

Notes

- 1 L. Nnamdi Oraka, “The Role of F.C. Ogbalu and the Society for Promoting Igbo Language and Culture in the Promotion of Igbo Education in Nigeria” in Rems Nna Umeasiegbu (ed.) *The Study of Igbo Culture: Essays in Honor of F.C. Ogbalu*, Enugu: Koruna Books, 1988, pp. 94–106.
- 2 Ernest N. Emenyonu, “Preserving the Igbo Language for the 21st century” in Rems Nna Umeasiegbu (ed.) *The Study of Igbo Culture: Essays in Honor of F.C. Ogbalu*, Enugu: Koruna Books, 1988, pp. 51–63.
- 3 St. Mark's Gospel, Chapter 4, verses 3–9.
- 4 Nnamdi Oraka, “The Role of F.C. Ogbalu...” pp. 94–95.
- 5 E. Nolue Emenanjo, “The Ogbalu factor in Igbo Literary History: An Overview” in Rems Nna Umeasiegbu (ed.) *The Study of Igbo Culture: Essays in Honor of F.C. Ogbalu*, Enugu: Koruna Books, 1988, pp. 33–50.

7 On the threshold of another blackout

A new controversy over the standardization of written (literary) Igbo*

We must free our writers to write in whatever dialect they know and speak. Children in schools in particular must be encouraged to write in the dialect they speak...

Chinua Achebe (1971)

Igbo literature is again on the threshold of a blackout at a time when government and people in Igboland have begun to celebrate its emergence from over half a century of eclipse and self-denigration. Scholars of Igbo studies will recall the historic controversies which greatly retarded the development of written Igbo language and literature, almost as soon as an Igbo alphabet was designed by the early missionaries. It began with a divisive controversy over orthography, which took the form of a religious war. There existed two parallel orthographies—the protestant orthography associated with speakers from the old Owerri province (Owerri, Orlu, Okigwe, Umuahia, Arochukwu, Mbaise, etc.) and the Roman Catholic orthography associated with Onitsha and its environs. There were others. None was willing to yield to the other. Christians in Owerri Province read the Bible translated into what was called the “Union Igbo,” while Christians in Onitsha and its environs read the Bible in “Onitsha Igbo.” As Donatus Nwoga rightly acknowledges,

while these (Bibles) give rise to mutual comprehensibility of the dialects—making Onitsha Protestants understand Owerri Igbo and Owerri (Roman) Catholics understand Onitsha Igbo, we were faced with the emotional and religious attachments which became problems interfering with the establishment of a standard Igbo for business and literate communication.¹

In 1961, the orthography dispute was apparently resolved with the establishment of the “Onwu orthography,” but it did not settle the dialect question

* First presented at the African Literature Association Conference, Michigan State University East Lansing. April 16–19, 1986.

which gave rise to another bitter controversy which the standardization of written Igbo in 1972 was supposed to have resolved. Recently, Nolue Emenanjo proclaimed that “the dialect question is now a non-issue. From the missionaries’ Isumama, through Dennis’ Union Igbo, through Ward’s Central, we are now in the era of Standard Igbo. The period of ‘black-out’ is now over.”² But Africa’s leading novelist, Chinua Achebe, himself an Igbo, has refused to shout “hurrah!” He believes that if anything, the so-called standard Igbo is an open invitation to another era of eclipse in Igbo studies and can, at best, lead to a blind alley. In one of his strongest published reactions, Achebe warns that “the fate of one of the great languages of Africa cannot be abandoned to the whims of a tiny conclave of linguistic dogmatists.” And taking Emenanjo more personally, he declares:

Emenanjo points out, quite correctly, that Igbo has been written since 1852. The fact that in all that time it has failed to produce any significant literature in spite of the devoted work of successive schools of grammarians (Union, Central, and now, Standard) may not strike him as remarkable. But, of course, he believes fervently that the school he espouses is the school to end all schools. He is entitled to his faith. But those of us who wish to remain sceptical must surely be free to do so. For it would be tragic indeed were we all to put our faith in the latest school only to discover perhaps after another fifty wasted years that Emenanjo was just another misguided enthusiast. And where would Igbo be then? *Ife lue n’itọ, o me gini? O to?*³

Achebe contends that,

we must free our writers to write in whatever dialect they know and speak. Children in schools in particular must be encouraged to write in the dialect they speak... Better by far to have lively prose and poetry in a multiplicity of dialects than have one dialect and no literature to speak of.⁴

And to give impetus to his position, he proceeded with Obiora Udechukwu to edit an anthology of Igbo poetry, *AKA WETA*⁵ in which he permitted his contributors to write freely in their community dialects. Apparently outraged by this, Emenanjo wants Achebe stopped, contending that “The deliberate and ill-motivated attempts...to write in dialects is not only an attempt to set back the fast-moving hand of the clock of Standard Igbo, but also an unnecessary exercise in futility...”⁶ Other Igbo scholars including Ebo Ubahakwe, Philip Nwachukwu, M.J.C. Echeruo, F.C. Ogbalu, A.E. Afigbo, Obieze Ogbo, and Donatus Nwoga, to mention but a few, have added their voices. The controversy widens, and far from pointing to the road of stability in Igbo literature, the present dispute promises to usher in another era of sterility and diminish in the process, whatever may have been achieved in

the past decade following the general outcry for the revival of Igbo language and culture and an impressive government response.⁷

This is a very disturbing signal because usually what passes as a mere scholars' debate or an academic debate in other arenas, often changes in Igbo hands into a destructive encounter that leaves all participants bruised and no glory for the common man or the onlooker. Over the years, the much publicized Igbo republicanism has shown itself to be a two-edged sword. It has produced a race of daring, dynamic, and self-assured people. But it has also bred a species of humans who love to talk, who love to argue, and who argue to no end. The talk is pleasant. It is articulate. But it is endless. By the time it has exhausted itself, the point which it sought to make had been lost to every listener. That is the tragedy of dialogue in Igbo scholarship. It invariably degenerates into a meaningless cacophony. Even when it seems to be attaining a solution, it has an uncanny way of regenerating a debilitating issue and the cycle resumes with its traditional trauma.

The present controversy assumes immense proportions with potentials for tragic consequences because language is the major factor of Igbo identity, which itself has become for the Igbo, the most sensitive topic of discussion in contemporary Nigeria. Language is central to Igbo philosophy of life. It is the single most important index for assessing mature intellect. If one is not adept in the intrinsic use of language, he will have little claim to Igbo wisdom and social esteem. That was why the ancestral Igbo were genuinely indignant that the presumptuous and interfering white man who could not speak their language should dabble into such sacred issues as land law and social justice. "Does the white man understand our custom about land?" they asked. "How can he when he does not speak our language?" they sneered. And Achebe no less supports their mockery and cynicism with, "no man can understand another whose language he does not speak." Language is synonymous with life for the Igbo people. The word *Igbo* stands for the language, the people, and, by a little extension, the land. That is why any discussion and controversy over language easily draws the attention of many prominent Igbo people. It can as easily divide as it unites them.

The question in the present controversy is quite clear. One can almost equate it to that humorous riddle about food thus: "which would you rather have good grammar or good taste?" But the answer is not as clear-cut with the question of the status of dialects in any literature, and more so, Igbo literature. Some dialects in Igbo are not nearly as mutually comprehensible as may be the case with dialects in other languages. Given that written Igbo literature was made almost extinct soon after its birth and severely retarded in its subsequent development because of a similar controversy over orthography, can the Igbo afford another situation where the standardization of the language becomes a deterrent to full and free imaginative literary creativity? On the other hand, can Igbo scholars and artists encourage the proliferation of literary creations without regard to a set of minimum standards about

style, especially in a tonal language where a mistake in a simple diacritic mark can alter meaning and ruin intent? The present dispute is significant because, unlike literature in English produced by Igbo authors, the audience for the literature in Igbo is exclusively the Igbo, and this includes millions of Igbo-speaking people who may not be literate in English but who love to read and discuss literature and ideas in their mother tongue. Igbo scholars are divided in their answers to the aforementioned questions as well as their proposed solutions.

Donatus Nwoga has ridiculed the idea of allowing “everybody who has talent to write in whatever dialect or words that come to him easily and sooner or later some dialect of most impressive literature will become the natural standard Igbo.” He contends that “this is a counsel of laziness, and misconceives the meaning of the history of language development.”⁸ He argues that “it is fashionable, even among those who have had a written language for centuries, for people to speak in their dialects especially for purposes of local in-ness,” but revert to the “standard for written communication.”⁹ What he advocates in terms of the status of dialects in Igbo literature is that “dialects can still remain for the literary purposes of distinguishing the locality from which a character comes and his level of education,”¹⁰ otherwise the language of written Igbo literature should be *standard* Igbo. He proposes that the Igbo should,

Use the resources of our dialectal differences to develop the written language in terms of increasing the denotative distinctiveness of words and in terms of providing connotative variables for various forms of meaning. In other words, we could use dialect variants and attach definite separate meanings to them where the dialect variants originally had the same range of meanings within the group of Igbo speakers; also where possible, to retain the dialect variants where they continue to have the same meanings in order to reflect variant shades of meaning or mood or feeling.¹¹

Nwoga, therefore, is not only optimistic that the standardization of written Igbo will ensure the preservation and progressive growth of the language, but also believes that such a development will augur well for Igbo literature because it will provide it with a flexible living language with manipulable symbols. He suggests that the Igbo should embrace this and “adjust intellectually to the possibility of using these variants from the different dialects for making Igbo a viable literary written language.”¹²

F.C. Ogbalu, who perhaps more than anyone else, has contributed most to the growth and development of Igbo language and literature through the persistent efforts of the Society for Promoting Igbo Language and Culture (SPILC) founded by him. Although he has been active in advocating standard Igbo, he shows some flexibility in his own writing. According to Ngozi Anyaegbunam, Ogbalu “adopts dialectal tolerance and eclecticism in his

novel *Obiefuna/Obiefula, Ebubedike* and *Uwaezuoke...* in an (obvious) experiment in which he combines writing in several dialects.” Anyaegbunam states that Ogbalu refers to this experiment in the preface of *Obiefuna* as the standard Igbo: “these three books have so incorporated several dialects in Igboland that an Igbo from any of the Igbo speaking states—Anambra, Imo, Rivers and Bendel—can easily read and understand them without difficulty.”¹³ Ogbalu believes that this process will preserve the best in every dialect while enriching the language as a whole and lending dignity and variety to its literature. Ogbalu’s experiment does not seem to have been embraced by other major Igbo writers despite the challenge and artistic curiosity which it seems to promise. Ogbalu’s is an attempt to put into practice one aspect of Nwoga’s theory of the utilization of dialectal resources.

Unlike Ogbalu, Nolue Emenanjo is unequivocal and absolute in his position. He asserts:

Whether or not some people are prepared to admit it, a literary standard Igbo (fluid as it may be to the non-initiate) now exists. And all authors should try to approximate to this model... There is a Standard Igbo variety used by people who are educated in Igbo... Standard Igbo is not everybody’s cup of tea. It is the subject of study and is learnt in schools, colleges and universities, from well-edited books. It does not come naturally no matter our exposure to or our interest in Igbo.¹⁴

Emenanjo speaks with a tone of rigid finality and seems to have little patience with people who do not seem to understand the infallibility of his stand on standard Igbo, or on Igbo linguistics and literature for that matter. It is more his manner of saying things (even when he is correct), rather than what he says, that seems to alienate his critics. In his bid to make a strong case for the standardization of Igbo language, he is, in the eyes of some critics, turning Igbo language into an abstraction totally unrelated to a people and place. Obieze Ogbo was probably thinking of this type of dogmatism when he charged that the Society for Promoting Igbo Language and Culture has

mutilated Igbo language beyond recognition, (and) has virtually priced the Igbo language off the market of Nigerian languages... they have done untold harm to Igbo language, and seem unconsciously to be promoting Igbo grammar and syntax to the utter detriment of Igbo literature.¹⁵

If Emenanjo must sell to his Igbo readers, what Achebe has called his “pet illusion” or any innovative ideas about Igbo language and literature, he must do so with lesser superficiality and make more effort at clarity in communication. One must agree with Achebe that a statement such as “Mbaise

has a nasalized and labialized glottal fricative... but not an aspirated bilabial approximant... if ever such a phoneme exists,"¹⁶ is, at best, a "display of obscurantist grammatical jargon" and, at worst, a cheap showmanship in pompous pedantry. Emenanjo cannot be communicating with his Igbo audience with that kind of jargon. They want to understand what he is saying first and foremost. It is for this reason that one again agrees with Chinua Achebe that "language is never created by grammarians. It is made by the people and enriched by their poets. If grammarians must come, then they will have to come later, much later and in humility to study and classify what has been created."¹⁷

There is every reason to actively encourage mass production of Igbo literature. At the moment, there is very little output to justify the existence of written Igbo since 1852. Compared with the other two major Nigerian languages—Hausa and Yoruba—written Igbo literature is still sprouting when its counterparts are enjoying luscious bloom. Even some lesser and emerging Nigerian languages can confidently compare with the Igbo output in written literature. In the last decade, mostly because of active government interest in the revival of Igbo art and culture, which is rubbing off on Igbo literature, a reasonable amount of work has been produced in Igbo poetry, drama, and novel. When these are considered as coming from a written literary tradition that is over a century old, it must be admitted that it is indeed a very lean achievement, distinguished neither in quantity nor really in quality. To reverse this trend, something akin to a revolution would have to be advocated. The process of bringing it about may well be unorthodox and unconventional. Achebe has argued (and this writer is persuaded) that one immediate way is to encourage free and abundant imaginative literature in Igbo language. To do this, people must be encouraged to write in any dialect of Igbo that they know best and can create freely in. The simple target is to stir consciously people's interest in Igbo writing. Those who will write will do so because they love to tell a story or they enjoy writing poetry or plays. Many of them may not be literate in English. Some of them may be too old to learn to write in standard Igbo. None of these should be allowed to constitute an impediment to them. To require them at this stage to "approximate to Standard Igbo" would be counterproductive. This does not mean that their works would not be published in standard Igbo as advocated by Emenanjo's school of thought, or in "Modern Igbo" as envisaged by Achebe and others of his following. What it means is that publication in Igbo can no longer be left in the hands of wayside and neighborhood printers who know only how to turn the knob of machines but know nothing about the manuscript before them. Major publishing companies in Nigeria must take a stake in publishing in Nigerian languages. This involves employing editors trained in the relevant language. An editor responsible for Igbo texts must be well trained in Igbo language studies and linguistics. He should be competent in the process of editing, to take care of all technical shortcomings of the manuscript

including spellings and tone markings. It would not matter, therefore, whether an author writes in a remote dialect, Owerri Igbo, Onitsha Igbo, Nsukka Igbo, Rivers Igbo, or Bendel Igbo. His publisher would see to it that his manuscript reaches his readers in a form that is currently acceptable to majority of Igbo readers.

Meanwhile, F.C. Ogbalu's experiment in *Obiefuna/Obiefula*, *Ebubed-ike*, and *Uwaezuoke* should be further explored by writers who have the linguistic competence to undertake such. It could yield an acceptable mixed literary Igbo.

If not yet undertaken, the time is ripe to embark on M.J.C. Echeruo's proposal for the preparation and production of "an Igbo-wide Dictionary of word-lore... (which would) keep alive... the words and idioms of the Igbo people... (which would) tell one where they are most used and what they mean or used to mean."¹⁸ This project can only be meaningfully undertaken after a reliable dialect survey of Igboland had been carried out.

Even after these measures had been taken, the most important way to ensure the continued growth of imaginative literature in Igbo is to keep the Igbo language alive. The most effective way of ensuring this is to give Igbo a compulsory and prominent place in the school curriculum. Schools and colleges located in the Igbo-speaking states of Nigeria should be required to undertake serious teaching of Igbo language and literature. Colleges of Education and other institutions of higher learning should expand their offerings and programs in Igbo studies to ensure a continued supply of well-trained teachers of Igbo language and literature. The Igbo must do everything possible individually and collectively to avoid another blackout in the history of Igbo language and literature.

Notes

- 1 D. Ibe Nwoga, "Dialect Variation and the Development of Written Igbo" in Frederick Chidozie Ogbalu and E. Nolu Emenanjo (eds.) *Igbo Language and Culture*, Vol. II, Ibadan: University Press Ltd., 1982.
- 2 *Uwa Ndi Igbo: Journal of Igbo Life and Culture*, Nsukka. No. 1, June 1984, p. 93.
- 3 *Uwa Ndi Igbo*, p. 95. Achebe ends with an Igbo saying: "a third failure is a bad omen; spells doom."
- 4 *Anu Magazine*, Cultural Division, Ministry of Education and Information, Owerri, Imo State (n.d.), pp. 38–39.
- 5 *Aka Weta*, Okike Magazine, Nsukka, 1982.
- 6 *Uwa Ndi Igbo*, p. 95.
- 7 Since 1979 the government of Imo State has established an annual lecture, "Ahiajoku Lectures" in November every year, devoted to scholarly lectures on Igbo civilisation in the areas of history, agriculture, arts, science and cosmology. Prominent among the earlier lecturers were, Prof. M.J.C. Echeruo (1979), Prof. B.N. Okigbo (1980), Prof. A.E. Afigbo (1981), Prof. A.O. Anya (1982), Prof. D.I Nwoga (1984 – there was none in 1983), and Prof. B.O. Nwabueze (1985).
- 8 Ibe Nwoga, *Igbo Language and Culture*, Vol. II, p. 104.
- 9 *Ibid.*, p. 105.
- 10 *Ibid.*, p. 105.

11 Ibid., p. 108.

12 Ibid., p. 114.

13 Ngozi Anyaegbunam, "The Perpetuation of the Black Out: An Unnatural Solution to a Natural Problem" (An unpublished paper, 1985).

14 *Uwa Ndi Igbo*, pp. 91–92.

15 Ibid., p. 103.

16 Ibid., p. 94.

17 Ibid., p. 95.

18 Michael J.C. Echeruo, "The Future of Igbo Studies: A Very Modest Proposal" in Frederick Chidozie Ogbalu and E. Nqlue Emenanjo (eds.) *Igbo Language and Culture*, Vol. II, Ibadan: University Press Ltd., 1982, pp. 228–237.

8 Chinua Achebe and the problematics of writing in indigenous Nigerian languages

Towards a resolution of the Igbo language predicament*

Two things emerged from the annual *ODENIGBO* lecture given by Chinua Achebe on 4 September 1999, at Owerri, Imo State, Nigeria. First, the lecture brought Achebe into a head-on collision with Igbo linguistics scholars. Second, it provoked scholars of Igbo language and literature to start debates again on the problematics of creating literature in an indigenous language in a multicultural, multilingual situation where a foreign language, as an official language, has gained national currency even at the grassroots level and marginalized the status of the mother tongues, as is the case in Nigeria. The controversy surrounding the Igbo Oral-Written Interface is an age-long conflict dating to 1841 when a concerted effort was made by European missionaries to create a standard written Igbo from a wide variety of spoken Igbo dialects. What gave the controversy a posture was that it was a clear-cut battle between scholars of Igbo linguistics led by Nolue Emenanjo, then Rector of the Institute of Nigerian Languages, Aba, Abia State, on the one hand, and creative artists led by Africa's leading novelist Chinua Achebe, on the other. Furthermore, the controversy is more clearly defined in linguistic terms, by what Donatus Nwoga appropriately labeled "the legislative dogmatism of artists." Sadly, however, the effect was in 1999 the same as in 1841. Writing in the Igbo language has for more than a century stagnated as each phase of the controversy creates fresh impediments not only for the development of Igbo Literature but also of Igbo Language Studies in general.

The issues involved will be discussed here in four stages, namely: (a) the origins and substance of the controversy in which the Igbo Oral-Written Interface is engulfed, (b) Chinua Achebe's 1999 *ODENIGBO* lecture and the dimensions of the controversy it engendered, (c) analysis of the key issues, and (d) proposals toward a lasting resolution of the critical issues.

* An earlier version of this chapter was published in Toyin Falola and Barbara Harlow, *African Writers and Their Readers: Essays in Honor of Bernth Lindfors Vol. 2*. New Jersey: Africa World Press, 2002.

The origins and substance of the controversy

The Igbo language has a multiplicity of dialects, some of which are mutually unintelligible. The first dilemma of the European Christian missionaries who introduced writing in Igbo land in the mid-nineteenth century was to decide on the orthography acceptable to all the competing dialects. There was the urgent need to have essential instruments of proselytization in native tongue: the Bible, hymn books, prayer books, etc. The ramifications of this dilemma have been widening and the complexity growing ever since. Since 1841, three proposed solutions have failed woefully. The first was an experiment to forge a synthesis of some selected representative dialects. This Igbo *Esperanto*, “christened” *Isuama Igbo*, lasted from 1841 to 1872 and was riddled with uncompromising controversies all through its existence. A second experiment, *Union Igbo* (1905–1939), succeeded through the determined energies of the missionaries in having the English Bible, hymn books, and prayer books translated into it for effective evangelism. But it, too, fell to the unrelenting onslaught of sectional conflicts. The third experiment was the *Central Igbo*, a kind of standard arrived at by a combination of a core of dialects. It lasted from 1939 to 1972, and although it appeared to have reduced significantly the thorniest issues in the controversy, its opposition and resistance among some Igbo groups remained persistent and unrelenting. After Nigerian independence in 1960, and following the exit of European Christian missionaries, the endemic controversy was inherited by the Society for Promoting Igbo Language and Culture (SPILC) founded by F. C. Ogbalu, a concerned pan-Igbo nationalist educator who also established a press devoted to the production and publication of educational materials in the Igbo language. Through his unflinching efforts, a fourth experiment, and seemingly the ultimate solution, *Standard Igbo* was evolved in 1973 and since then largely sustained creativity and other forms of writing in the language until 1978 when Chinua Achebe hurled the first “salvo” challenging its linguistic legitimacy and socio-cultural authenticity. At the launching of this writer’s book *The Rise of the Igbo Novel*, published by Oxford University Press, which has in part explored the influence of European Christian missionaries on the development of Igbo orthography and written literature, Chinua Achebe strongly criticized the way early missionaries had designed Igbo orthography, the *Union Igbo*, and imposed it on the Igbo people. Achebe blamed the near stagnation of creativity in the Igbo language ever since on that dictatorial missionary manipulation. Since then, whenever and wherever Achebe had a chance, he continued unsparingly his attacks on the *Union Igbo*. Matters came to a head when His Grace Dr. A.J.V. Obinna, Archbishop of the Catholic Archdiocese of Owerri, invited Chinua Achebe from the United States to deliver the 4th in the series of a pan-Igbo annual lecture *ODENIGBO* in 1999. *ODENIGBO*, a creation of Archbishop Obinna, began in 1996 as a deliberate interventionist initiative of the intellectually

vibrant and philosophically astute scholar/prelate to foster and maintain an intra-ethnic discourse on matters of significance in Igbo socio-cultural development. By having the lectures delivered in Igbo before a pan-Igbo audience and simultaneously published in the Igbo language, Obinna sought to emphasize the homogeneity of Igbo people despite dialectal differences in speech. Furthermore, the exclusive use of the Igbo language in the highly celebrated lectures ensured grassroots participation in the discourse unlike any other lecture series in existence with similar goals and objectives. The choice of Chinua Achebe as the 1999 lecturer seemed also an ingenious move to arrest an incipient suspicion in some quarters that *ODENIGBO* was a religious rather than a socio-cultural event which drew its resources and inspiration from Igbo scholars who were first and foremost Roman Catholics. Chinua Achebe was a professing Anglican. Thus, this choice was significant in that it bestowed credibility on *ODENIGBO* as a pan-Igbo non-denominational cultural event open to all who have the survival, growth, and stability of the Igbo language and culture at heart. And nothing could have been more appropriate than Achebe's chosen topic "*ECHI DI IME: TAA BU GBOO*" (literally, *TOMORROW IS PREGNANT, TODAY IS TOO EARLY TO PREDICT...*).

Chinua Achebe's lecture

In his lecture, Achebe traced the history of missionary influence on the evolution of orthography for the Igbo language, and the process of creation of *Union Igbo* as the standard for written Igbo at the turn of the twentieth century. He adversely condemned the way and manner in which the standard was devised and blamed the checkered nature of the development of Igbo Language Studies since then on Archdeacon T. J. Dennis, the missionary whom he identified as the brain behind the creation of *Union Igbo* and its imposition on the Igbo. To Achebe, *Union Igbo* was a mechanical standardization, and its use in the translation of the Bible into Igbo in 1913 was a legacy detrimental to the growth and development of the Igbo language and culture. He charged Dennis furthermore with "tinkering" with the roots of the Igbo language out of sheer ignorance of the natural process of language development in human societies. In that process, Achebe alleged that Dennis had in his missionary overzealousness and colonial mentality done irreparable harm to the Igbo language in particular and Igbo culture in general. And then, by extension, Achebe condemned and derided present Igbo linguistics scholars, who it seemed to him, have followed Archdeacon Dennis' subversive linguistic approach by making and imposing dogmatic rules on *Standard Igbo* evolved in 1973. He called such scholars "disciples of Dennis" and alleged that they too had unwittingly done more harm than good to the development of contemporary Igbo Language Studies. He charged that their various dogmatic impositions on the Igbo language, when compared to the strides made in Yoruba and Hausa studies, were

responsible for the slow pace of Igbo Language Studies. Achebe pointed to the stability in the Yoruba language development studies as a credit to another missionary, Adjai Crowther, who had a totally different approach in the process of selecting a standard for written Yoruba language. Achebe was convinced that Crowther owed his success to his sensitivity to the Yoruba language of which he was a native speaker. One dialect in the Yoruba language, the Oyo dialect, was selected early and nurtured into the standard for writing in the Yoruba language.

Perhaps what was most revolutionary in Achebe's *ODENIGBO* lecture was not what he said but rather what he did. Two decades after his initial condemnation of *Union Igbo* as well as *Standard Igbo*, Achebe had not shifted from his position that Igbo writers should be free to write in their various community dialects unencumbered by any standardization theories or practices. Then as in 1999, he resented attempts to force writers into straitjackets, maintaining unequivocally that literature has the mission "to give full and unfettered play to the creative genius of Igbo speech in all its splendid variety, not to dam it up into the sluggish pond of sterile pedantry."¹ In keeping with this principle, therefore, Achebe wrote and delivered his *ODENIGBO* lecture in a brand of dialect peculiar only to Onitsha speakers of the language and almost unintelligible to more than half of the audience. He was making an unmistakable millennium statement which would be hard to miss by those Igbo linguistics scholars whom he had once referred to as "egoistic schoolmen who have been concerned not to study the language but steer it into the narrow tracks of their particular pet illusions."² The organizers of the lecture were forced to make an unprecedented move, printing two versions of the 23-page lecture in the same booklet: one in Achebe's original version, and the other in the conventional *Standard Igbo*. The climax of Achebe's position on the Igbo Oral-Written Interface was his call for the total abolition and the scrapping of *Standard Igbo* in which the Igbo language has been written and accepted by scholars since its evolution in 1973. Nothing could be more divisive at a forum assembled to celebrate Igbo cultural and socio-linguistic homogeneity despite dialectal diversities. Nothing could be more devastating for concerned scholars of Igbo Studies who had looked forward to the early decades of the twenty-first century as the era of Igbo Renaissance after over a century of fratricidal acrimonious controversies, first over the choice of a pan-Igbo orthography and then over the standardization of written Igbo. Reactions to Achebe's views in the lecture were predictably fast, especially from linguistics scholars devoted to the theory and cause of *Standard Igbo*.

Reactions to Achebe's views: Innocent Nwadike

Achebe's lecture drew many reactions both positive and negative, but more the latter. The most detailed and indeed the most negatively extreme came from Innocent Nwadike, then an Igbo language lecturer at the University

of Nigeria, Nsukka, apparently totally dedicated to the cause of *Standard Igbo*, as evident in his tone and language. What strikes the reader about Nwadike's article, "Achebe Missed It," published in a Nigerian weekly magazine (*The News*, 27 March 2000), was not the substance of Nwadike's disagreement with the views of Achebe, or his right to do so, but rather his compunction to deride and insult, as can be seen in the following excerpts:

- 1 "Achebe *had nothing to offer his audience except throwing of sand...*"
- 2 "Achebe's lecture turned out to be real throwing of sand which *ended in pronunciation of the heresy of the last century of the second millennium...*"
- 3 "*Achebe's tragedy and failure started when he descended from his Olympian to copy without verification...*"
- 4 "*Achebe was led astray* and he marshalled out historical fallacies..."
- 5 "Though Achebe has persistently stressed his unalloyed love for Igbo language, *he has done nothing towards its promotion and growth, except continued destructive criticism since the 1970s...*"
- 6 "In the course of his lecture *Achebe levelled many false accusations against Dennis and very heart-breaking are the lies against the dead...*"
- 7 "*Anyone who reads Achebe's lecture will notice an air of superiority and worldly triumphalism* exhibited by the author almost *arrogating to himself* transcendental power which belongs to God alone..."
- 8 "Let him [Achebe] as from today, *learn to respect his people and all constituted authority...*"
- 9 "Let not Achebe *constitute himself as a cog in the wheel of progress* like Chief Nwakpuda of the Old Umuahia who tried to stop a locomotive engine from passing through his village..."
- 10 "Achebe *should stop embarrassing himself*, for a beautiful face does not deserve a slap as the Igbo say..."

(*Emphasis mine*)

The danger in resorting to name-calling in the course of an important discourse is that it distracts from the main focus of the essential argument. The issue of deciding on a standard for writing Igbo so Igbo Language Studies can move on is too paramount to be sacrificed on the altar of rhetoric and polemics. Although freedom of expression is encouraged and cultivated in the Igbo republican culture, and a *child who washes his hands could eat with kings*, this is not an invitation to anarchy and the denigration of hierarchy. The critical method is an important and significant substance in literary criticism. How one says something in an Igbo gathering is as crucial as, and perhaps more crucial than, the thing one wants to say. Nwadike's discourteous choice of words, his personal attacks on Achebe,

and his apparent gloating in subjecting Chinua Achebe to public ridicule are, to say the least, most unfortunate and quite antithetical to the Igbo cultural norm which restrains a child from jesting at, ridiculing, or speaking in utter derision of an elder, no matter the facts of the case. The Igbo have a saying that *the public ridicule or disgrace of a titled elder is more painful than his execution* (i.e., killing him).

Chinua Achebe was not a reckless man, and not in the least a careless writer. If anything he was a man who thought carefully about issues and a conscious artist who was quite cautious in his choice of words for public utterance. He would, as the Igbo say, *look left and right before crossing the road*. Igbo wisdom admonishes the on-looker to *carefully search the direction at which a weeping child is pointing, for the child's mother or father may well be there*. We applauded when, on behalf of the African continent, Chinua Achebe single-handedly took on the obnoxious institution of European colonialism and flawed it. We fully concurred when Achebe, on behalf of African culture and dignity, reduced to size the egocentric, egoistic, and presumptuous early Christian missionary and colonial administrator. We applauded Achebe's heroic and altruistic vocabulary in his novel *Things Fall Apart* (1958) when he lashed at the irreverence and high-handedness of the early Europeans who came to Africa:

Does the white man understand our custom about land?

How can he when he does not even speak our tongue? But he says that our customs are bad; and our own brothers who have taken up his religion also say that our customs are bad. How do you think we can fight when our own brothers have turned against us? The white man is very clever. He came quietly and peaceably with his religion. We were amused at his foolishness and allowed him to stay. Now he has won our brothers and our clan can no longer act like one. He has put a knife on the things that held us together and we have fallen apart.³

In his lecture, however, Achebe seemed to be charging not at the misshapen European bull but at the lamb at the sublime shrine of his people's spiritual existence. He once declared that a language is more than mere sounds and words; indeed, a language is a "people's world view." A language is a sacred symbol of a people's humanity. A committed African writer would carry the burden of the conscience of his community. Chinua Achebe positioned himself at the forefront of the committed African writers who use art to better the lives of their fellow men and women, to restore the lost dignity of the African past, and as a celebration of life in the present. So rather than dismiss Achebe's views arbitrarily or hastily, we should examine them thoroughly and inform ourselves whether the spokesman of African cultural realism and renaissance had in fact missed the point about what is best for his own people's language and culture; whether in the full glare of bright lights, Chinua Achebe had misread the colors of the garments in his

innermost closet. Only then can we look him fully in the eye and say *the novelist erred!*

Analysis of key issues

Two supreme facts have to be established unequivocally at the onset. First, there is a *Standard Igbo* in existence; it is a reality; it cannot be set aside. It is not perfect, but it is the best framework we have in existence for further development and improvement. It is a major legacy left for Igbo Language Studies by the SPILC and its inimitable founding president, the late F.C. Ogbalu. In a seminar of the SPILC in August 1974, a Standardization Committee was set up. It was all-embracing in composition: “lecturers of Igbo Studies at institutions of higher learning, State Schools Management Boards and the Mass Media.”⁴ Since 1974, substantial improvements have continued to be made on the final product of the Standardization Committee. There is now in existence a very useful supplement, *Igbo Metalanguage*, produced under the auspices of the Nigerian Educational Research and Development Council (NERDC), which also sponsored the production of *Yoruba Metalanguage* and *Hausa Metalanguage*. *Igbo Metalanguage* serves as a common reference for writers, teachers, and examiners. It is a useful glossary which is an invaluable guide for anyone who wishes to learn the application of *Standard Igbo* in creative or other writings.

The second incontestable fact is that Igbo Language Studies and development currently, as has been the case for almost half a century, lagged behind the other two Nigerian major languages—Hausa and Yoruba. As Donatus Nwoga pointed out in his exceptionally brilliant study, “From Dialectal Dichotomy to Igbo Standard Development,”⁵ the National Language Policy in Nigeria has been a major catalyst in the development of educational materials in the three languages designated as *major*. Nigeria, which speaks 394 indigenous languages, has given up on choosing an official language from amongst them, but instead settled for English, a colonial inheritance, as its language of business, education, and government. The National Language Policy identified three languages—Hausa, Igbo, and Yoruba—as major and required them to be studied in schools as a means of advancing the theory that “first language education is the best tradition in the early years of the educational process.” This policy has greatly enhanced the production and publication of educational materials, texts, and literature in the three major languages. The population of the Igbo-speaking people is at least the third highest in Nigeria’s 2010 estimated 152 million population. It is a fact, however, that Hausa and Yoruba scholars and writers have made greater and far more impressive strides in the development of teaching and reading materials in Hausa and Yoruba languages than their Igbo counterparts have done for the Igbo language. It is most likely also that, outside Nigeria, Igbo is the least studied of the three languages. The reason is not difficult to find. The endless squabbles over orthography, standardization, and the

like, can hardly inspire interest and excitement in prospective learners in and outside Nigeria. Igbo people have not put their house in order, and prospective learners do not waste time on something in chaos. It is, therefore, in the best interest of the Igbo people and Igbo Studies that the crisis be resolved quickly and in the best possible manner so that Igbo Studies can take its rightful place in the academy.

Two other issues deserve close critical attention because of their centrality in any possible solutions for the issues under review. First, to what extent should we blame Archdeacon Dennis for the stagnation and tardiness in Igbo Language Studies because of his invention of *Union Igbo* as the medium for translating the Bible into the Igbo language in 1913? Second, can we set aside the work of the Standardization Committee of 1974 as a compromise for moving forward Igbo Language Studies in the twenty-first century?

It would be quite absurd to blame Archdeacon Dennis for the instability in Igbo Language Studies for an alleged error in linguistic judgment made a century or more ago. It would be like blaming the British for the misrule and instability in the Nigerian government since the attainment of independence in 1960. Nigerians have had more than half a century to right the wrongs, correct the anomalies, refocus the directions of the country, and stamp out unprogressive legacies planted by the British at their exit. To continue to blame Archdeacon Dennis for our woes would be tantamount to saying that the issues of orthography and standardization have been stagnant and unrevisited since 1913. Yet we know that some Igbo language scholars have invested considerable amounts of time and energy for decades at least, into research in the Igbo language and culture. Can we easily forget or afford to ignore the tremendous works of the late F.C. Ogbalu and Donatus Nwoga, or the unflinching endeavors of Ebo Ubahakwe (late), Nolue Emenanjo (late), M.J.C Echeruo, Chukwuma Azuonye, B.I.N. Osuagwu, Chinyere Ohiri-Aniche (late), and G.E. Igwe, among others? These scholars have made tremendous strides in their studies to move Igbo Language Studies forward. We must, therefore, reject any approach that negates gained grounds. Any new studies must build on the noble achievements of previous endeavors. So, instead of taking 1913 as our point of reference, we must turn to our achievements since 1982 and build on them. Nor can we close our eyes to Archbishop A.J.V. Obinna's 1996 landmark action toward a renaissance of Igbo Language Studies. It is regrettable to discuss the *ODENIGBO* Lecture Series as simply a "closed door" religious and Roman Catholic event, or to see the prelate as seeking to upstage the paraplegic *AHIAJOKU* Lecture Series initiated by the Imo State Government in 1979. Obinna is nationally and internationally recognized for his ardent interest in and commitment to the preservation of Igbo language and culture in particular, and the arts and humanities in general. It was not a surprise to keen observers that he initiated the *ODENIGBO*

Lecture Series. He would have done no less if he were an Anglican, Baptist, or Methodist Archbishop, or for that matter if he held the sacred *ofọ* of the traditional religion in his *Emekuku* village near Owerri. Many Igbo scholars had greeted with overwhelming enthusiasm a similar vision by the late Gaius Anoka when his brain child, the *AHIAJOKU* Lecture Series, was initiated under the auspices of the Imo State Government. By the early 1990s, Igbo scholars had begun to witness with dismay the derailment of the noble objectives of the *AHIAJOKU* lectures owing largely to self-defeating manipulations and infighting by government bureaucrats. The *AHIAJOKU* lectures simply became one more government event, and like many things in government and civil service, it became *the community goat that always died of hunger*. Archbishop Obinna's initiative came just in time to arrest total public disenchantment with what had started off as a dynamic and progressive renaissance in modern Igbo culture. Since the end of the Nigerian Civil War in 1970, the Igbo people seem to have developed a bewildering self-destructive tendency, with a sharp instinct for *killing their best*. Progressive ideas are treated with levity and cynicism. Novel initiatives for development are scoffed at and opposed to the bitter end, and when they are crushed, we realize too late that the perpetrators had nothing much to offer and, in most cases, nothing at all. In the fifth year of *ODENIGBO*, the Imo State Government suddenly woke up from almost a decade of amnesia and slumber to remember *AHIAJOKU* and almost immediately picked one more lecturer who spoke to a pan-Igbo audience about sacred ancestral Igbo culture and customs, *in the English language!* If history is anything to go by, *AHIAJOKU* will sooner or later make another *jaywalk* into coma. It is on record that Archbishop A.J.V. Obinna and the late Anglican Archbishop B.C. Nwankiti in 1998 stood unflinchingly firm against all odds in their opposition to the desecration of Igbo artifacts, historic sculptures, and other spectacular works of art by an Islamic-minded Military Governor-turned-born-again-Christian, in the name of presumed reverence for the sanctity of a new found Christianity. It is one thing to denigrate Archdeacon Dennis, who may deserve it; it is another to try to undermine the heroic efforts of Archbishop Obinna, who does not deserve it at all.

If we may return to Archdeacon Dennis, one final word is in order. Saint or sinner, let us allow Archdeacon T.J. Dennis, his *Union Igbo*, and his tinkering with the Igbo language, to go down in history as among those sad and costly prices which Nigeria had to pay for being subject to an imperial overlord who rode roughshod over our God-given languages, sacred customs, and traditional cultures. And let's move on!

Let us now turn attention to the second issue: "Can the Igbo set aside the present *Standard Igbo* as a necessary compromise for Igbo social unity and cultural homogeneity, and attempt a fresh start?" What has been discussed so far is substantial enough to indicate that setting aside the present

Standard Igbo will not only be retrogressive but indeed suicidal. What is happening to the Igbo language with its multiplicity of dialects, and strivings to find a *standard*, is not a peculiar phenomenon. Germany had its language problems. England had its own. Finland evolved Standard Finnish as the solution to its dialectal problems at the end of the nineteenth century. Can we learn anything from each model and each approach? The best model of Igbo written language will be the one that is accessible to, or has the potential of being accessible to, Igbo people across the board.

Often, it is simplistically assumed that the Yoruba next door achieved their *Standard Yoruba* without rancor and schism, and that the selection of the Oyo dialect by the missionary Adjai Crowther in 1842 has never been challenged to date. Nothing could be farther from the truth. The Yoruba had something that was lacking in the Igbo traditional society: the institution of royal paramountcy as a central authority that exercised political power of a controlling nature. The Igbo, instead, had a decentralized political system that put a central controlling authority out of the question. Establishing a *standard* in any language is a political action and is often accomplished where there is political control along with economic initiatives. It becomes easier to establish and enforce a language policy relative to the language of the group with dominant political power. Often, the dialect of the dominant political group became the *standard*, and political and economic instruments were used to sustain and legitimize it. The decentralized nature and politics of the Igbo as a group have not made the standardization process easy. The fragmented Igbo set-up which was a source of strength in the past has become a liability in the present. What has worked for the Yoruba has not worked for the Igbo, but it was not only because the Yoruba had traditional rulers who exercised central authority. The Yoruba had their full share of controversies over orthographies and dialects. The Oyo, Ijebu, Ondo, Ekiti, Ijesha, Igbomina, and Kabba all staked their claims. But there was political intervention when, following Nigerian independence, Chief Obafemi Awolowo, the Premier of the Western Region, introduced Free Primary Education in this region of Nigeria and decreed that the Yoruba language to be taught in the schools would be the Oyo dialect. That was a major factor in the stabilization of *Standard Yoruba*. But standardization does not mean the death of sectional dialects. The spoken language need not be identified as synonymous with the written standard. Political intervention was a great catalyst in the creation of the modern *Standard Yoruba*, but Yoruba linguistics scholars did not rest on their oars.** They devised some linguistic mechanisms for solving

** I am grateful to Prof. Emmanuel N. Obiechina (late) and Prof. M.J.C. Echeruo for allowing me to discuss the complexities of this topic at the various stages of writing this chapter. Their views and generous suggestions proved immensely helpful in my completion of the chapter. I am also grateful to Prof. Akinwumi Isola (late), of the University of Ibadan for his useful information on the Yoruba language background.

the problems created in the process of standardization. They fished out words from other dialects to satisfy new demands that could not be met by the Oyo dialect. They created the policy of mutual give-and-take among the various dialectal groups for the purpose of enriching the *Standard*. Yoruba linguistics scholars disagree (as will always be expected in academic circles), but they never lose sight of their collective responsibility to standardize the language in the interest of the unity and identity of all Yoruba people. This commitment to a collective goal has yielded immense dividends in Yoruba Language Studies. The Yoruba alphabet was introduced in 1842 by early Christian missionaries, as was the Igbo alphabet at about the same time. The first novel in the Yoruba language was published in 1938 not long after the first Igbo novel, *Omenuko*, was published in 1933. The father of the Yoruba novel, D.O. Fagunwa, began writing in 1938, the same decade as Pita Nwana, the father of the Igbo novel. But today, the Igbo cannot boast of half the literary output that exists in Yoruba language: a corpus that includes more than 185 novels, 80 plays, and a large number of collections of poetry and translations of other works into Yoruba. In addition, there are in existence the volume *Yoruba Metalanguage: A Glossary of Yoruba Technical Terms in Language, Literature and Methodology*, and several Yoruba grammar books and reference works. There are translations of the Nigerian Highway Code in Yoruba. Although Chinua Achebe's *Things Fall Apart* is a classic novel that incomparably depicts Igbo culture and its worldview, the most successful translation of it in a Nigerian language is the Yoruba edition published in 2000. There are, however, two Igbo translations of *Things Fall Apart*, namely: (1) Izuu Nwankwo, E: *Ihe Aghasaa Chinua Achebe* (2008), and (2) P.A. Ezikeojiaku, *AGHARATA* (2009). The Yoruba Writers Association was established in 1982 and is still going strong and increasing its cultural and educational impacts on the growth and development of Yoruba language and literature. Igbo linguists, scholars, and writers can learn something from their Yoruba counterparts, at least from their intellectual attitude of accommodation and their commitment to the collectivist goal of advancing the development of Yoruba Language Studies from one generation to the next despite differences in the Yoruba dialects which they speak in their intra-ethnic forums.

It is important to stress again that standardization does not mean the elimination or invalidation of other sub-dialects or the marginalization of the people who speak them. For instance, I speak the *Mbieri* dialect of the Igbo language. Nobody can force me to speak any other dialect. If I have to address an audience in my local community, I will speak to them in our local dialect. If, however, I decide that my address will be published, I will have to have it written out in a form that is accessible to all Igbo readers. At the moment, I might not know how to write flawlessly in that accessible *Standard* form. I might resort to writing my speech in English and then have someone proficient in *Standard Igbo* translate it for me, or I could

write it in *Mbieri* dialect the best way I know how and then have an expert in *Standard Igbo* put it in the proper form and character until I am competent to do so myself.

The linguistic issue is complex and cannot be resolved by resorting to rhetoric and polemics. Dialects may be mutually unintelligible, but that does not change the structural unity of the language from which they all emanated. Igbo language scholars must work hard at the problematic grammatical level of Igbo as a language. One regrets to say that some Igbo language scholars are investing their time and scholarship in the areas of covering before *Textbook Selection Committees* of the Ministries of Education, and examination bodies in search of script-markers, rather than in the areas of genuine language development research projects. There is an urgent need for proper language education in the Igbo-speaking areas of Nigeria. People need to be properly enlightened about the present and future state of their language. A language draws its source and strength from the grassroots. The greatest potency of a language is in the domain of its metaphorical usage, which resides with the users of the language. A language can die by the way scholars structure, “unstructure,” or deconstruct it. A language gains its currency by usage. Stale usages will invariably, with time, wear off, and the language and its owners will move on. Tinkering with the Igbo language as if it were a toy is unacceptable either in the hands of T.J. Dennis or in the hands of any contemporary Igbo grammarians who seem out of touch with the owners of the language. Inventing new words is a common phenomenon in any language development process, but if it is misused it can stultify or stifle the growth of the language. Achebe had a point when he criticized the tendency by a few linguists who, acting like a cabal, would invent new words and blame the populace to whom they may well sound foreign for “being absent at the meetings where the new words were ‘inducted’ into the language” (Achebe 1999, 46). A language is the property of its collective owners and those who do anything on their behalf must “seek their consent” before making radical changes in their usage. But Achebe was not correct when he accused Igbo language scholars of “wanting all Igbo people to speak the same dialect” (Achebe 1999, 48). The call of the scholars is for a *standard written Igbo* not *spoken Igbo*. The spoken language is not synonymous with the written standard language. A strong program of public enlightenment or mass language education is necessary to allay the fears of people who may think that the establishment of a written standard will compel them directly or indirectly to learn another group’s dialect. In the absence of a central authority to decree the use of *standard Igbo* in all primary schools located in the Igbo-speaking states of Nigeria, as was the case with the then Yoruba Western Region, the best hope is for a strong official language policy for primary and secondary schools. The Igbo language has to be taught at all levels in the educational system. Children should be able to read in Igbo before they learn English at the beginning classes, and what they read must be written in consistent

Standard Igbo. The inconsistency from the *Union Igbo* to *Central Igbo* and then to *Standard Igbo* which Achebe complained of in his lecture (46) is, indeed, a concern, but it is part of the process of the development of the language. It will not be in the interest of either the children who constitute the future generations of Igbo writers and scholars, or the Igbo language itself, to adopt Achebe's suggestion that "the language must be allowed to sort itself out in due course" (48). After more than 150 years of waiting, a "hold-on" policy is not the best approach to stimulate the growth of the Igbo language and literature. We must teach the *standard* that we have now in our schools. And we must reject Mazi Obieze Ogbo's suggestion that two linguistic strands be developed whereby "all students in the old Onitsha province can be taught the Onitsha dialect and all students in schools of the old Owerri province can be taught in Owerri dialect" (104). This, in effect calls for two parallel forms of *standard* written Igbo. Donatus Nwoga had the best response when he dismissed it as a return "to the perennial tale of Igbo sectionalism, pride, and inability to yield to the common good."⁶ We need a uniform *Standard Igbo* to project the Igbo language to the world. We need a *Standard Igbo* in which Igbo scholars, creative writers, philosophers, and scientists can give vent to their special areas of knowledge. We need a *Standard Igbo* in which reading and teaching materials can be developed so that the Igbo language can be a subject of study for Igbo speakers as well as other Nigerians and nationals of other countries of the world.

All this has enormous challenges for Igbo linguistic scholars and writers. Igbo grammar books are necessary at all levels of the educational system. Igbo language texts need to be strengthened by the works of Igbo creative writers. Several volumes of Igbo dictionaries are needed to supplement the grammar books and works of fiction in Igbo. An Igbo Language Bureau and Igbo Writers Association are essential to define the directions of Igbo language development for the future. Policy issues can be dealt with even in abstract terms as long as a sense of direction is clearly stated and any form of linguistic imperialism avoided.

Pragmatic proposals toward possible solutions

Workable solutions are necessary for the positive advancement of Igbo Language Studies in the twenty-first century. First and foremost, all Igbo linguists, writers, and scholars should fundamentally accept and authenticate the existing *Standard Igbo* as a framework for future actions toward the development of the language. Future actions should include feeding new ways and logistics into the development process such that successive generations can further improve the language to accommodate new concepts and experiences relevant to their age.

Igbo language scholars should be more flexible in their approaches to the expansion of the language. Impositions of illogical and unnatural forms should be avoided. It is not necessary to evolve every word in the Igbo

language for the sake of linguistic purity. Words can be chosen from any dialect of the Igbo language to accommodate a new concept. Imaginative coinages by the masses themselves may be preferable to “tedious compositions of scholars.” It will be beneficial to adhere to Donatus Nwoga’s suggestion that “borrowings appropriately adapted to the phonology of the Igbo language would be a most satisfactory manner of solving the problem of lexical expansion” (Nwoga 1994). Words and concepts from other languages should be absorbed and rendered phonologically in Igbo. There is no need to evolve a new Igbo word for “telephone” for instance, when it can simply be indigenized through an Igbo spelling and pronunciation instead of inventing a whole sentence to give it an Igbo name. Insisting on inventing a new word for every new concept may produce strange and inappropriate nomenclatures. An example is the word *Mahadum* for “university.” *Mahadum* does not indicate in historic terms the institution known as university. A university is defined by its function. *Mahadum* is a statement of scope. In any event, “university” is no longer a new concept anywhere in Igbo land, the rural villages included. Pronunciations may differ according to the age of the speaker in the village or urban setting. After all, the word *matimatiki* for mathematics has successfully made its way into Yoruba language. The Igbo minstrels and comedians have been vastly successful in this regard both in their metaphorical coinages and idiomatic usages.

The present *Standard Igbo* should be seen and used as a centralizing instrument and framework for further development through the writing of texts and different types of dictionaries and metalanguage texts which provide meanings for new coinages and idiomatic expressions in different dialects of the Igbo language.

The Igbo language should be taught in schools at all levels. Children in schools situated in Igbo land should be able to read in Igbo before they learn English. The Igbo language should also be used in teaching other subjects in the school curriculum including science and mathematics, as this will enable appropriate words to be devised for technological data and concepts. New words and expressions should be tested in controlled situations before formal incorporation.

Creative artists should, while writing in the existing *Standard Igbo*, freely use the idioms of their particular dialects as a means of enriching their texts and characterizations. In spite of standardization, the survival of various dialects of the Igbo language should be encouraged strongly.

An Igbo Language Bureau should be set up for the effective harmonization and implementation of policies aimed at projecting the direction of a dynamic development of Igbo Language Studies.

All ramifications of Igbo Language Studies have suffered stagnation in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries because of sectional differences over orthography and dialect. The twenty-first century should learn from the errors and build on the gains of the past. The responsibility of all Igbo language scholars should be, in the words of Donatus Nwoga,

to standardize for the Igbo people a language which unifies them and gives them identity...a language that can be the subject of study by non-Igbo people in Igbo land, by other Nigerians in their own homes, and by other nationals of the world as one of the developed languages of thought and literature.⁷

Notes

- 1 Chinua Achebe, "Editorial and Linguistic Problems in *Aka Weta: A Comment*," *Uwa Ndi Igbo*, 1 (1984), p. 95.
- 2 *Ibid.*, p. 95.
- 3 Chinua Achebe, *Things Fall Apart*. New Hampshire: Heinemann, 1996, pp. 124–125.
- 4 See: F.C. Ogbalu and E.N. Emenanjo, *Igbo Language and Culture* Vol. 2, Ibadan: University Press Ltd, 1982, pp. 98–102; 102–114.
- 5 Donatus Nwoga, "From Dialectal Dichotomy to Igbo Standard Development," in Kalu Ogbaa (ed.), *The Gong and the Flute: African Literary Development and Celebration*, Westport, CT: Greenwood Press, 1994, pp. 103–117.
- 6 Nwoga, p. 109.
- 7 Nwoga, p. 104.

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9 The female voice—rebuttal and response to patriarchy

Julie Onwuchekwa's
Chinaagorom (1983)

Ihe oma kwesiri nnomi

Ọtutu ndi wee bido nomiwe ndu na mgbalị Dọkita Chijioke na oriaku ya. Ọtutu umu nwoke luru umu nwanyi amughị ezi akwukwo wee were oriaku Dọkita Chijioke na-amara nwunye ha atụ. Ndinyom ufodu amughị oke akwukwo werekwa Dọkita Chijioke na-amara di ha atụ.

Anyaa wee bido meghewe otutu ndi mmadu, ndi chere na uwa nwanyi bu nani imu umu na isi nri n'usekwu. Ọtutu ndi mmadu wee bido matawakwa na oge a na-ahapuru nwoke nani ya ibu mkpa ezi na ulo agaala, na aka abuo na-achidata aki n'uko karia otu aka. Egwu dara n'ihu azu ka azu na-agba.

(A good thing is worthy of emulation)

Many people began to emulate the life-style and progressive ideas of Doctor Chijioke and his wife. Many men who married wives not so well educated drew the attention of their wives to Doctor Chijioke's wife as a model to be followed. Some married women who were not privileged to receive proper education cited Doctor Chijioke's wife to their husbands as a perfect example to be copied.

Many people became enlightened as their eyes and minds were opened to new ideas, especially those who had firmly believed before that women were created to bear children and attend to kitchen duties, nothing else. Many people began to realize and accept that the era was over when the man alone was expected to shoulder all the responsibilities for the upkeep and sustenance of the family. It dawned on them that two hands were better than one when it came to carrying loads. Indeed when the drummer changes the beat, the dancers change their dance steps.

(*Chinaagorom* p. 93*)

The passage above is a kind of Epilogue that tells the reader in a nutshell what the novel *Chinaagorom* is all about, the author's design in writing the novel, and its proven impacts on the people and community depicted in the novel.

* The English translations in this chapter are mine. They are at best literal translations.

The title of the novel is *Chinaagorom*—(God is my witness; God pleads my case; God vindicates me). It foreshadows the events and actions of the plot that will unravel gradually though not without detours, twists and bumps. Onwuchekwa molds the slippery clay pot with adroit hands and skillfully choreographs the tale in a way only a person grounded deeply in the art of the Igbo traditional raconteur can do. The narrative is as intriguing as it is complex. But Onwuchekwa may have been guided by the Igbo proverbial truism that advocates gradual approach to delicate issues of truth and justice. The process must be as unhurried as it is transparent in the bid to achieve a credible denouement.

Chinaagorom is a tale that intrinsically challenges tradition without outwardly assaulting it. The theme of the novel is *Nwanyi bu ihe*—“The Female Entity Counts” or “The Female Essence Matters.” This theme is crafted and embellished with irony, humor, suspense, and the invocation of metaphysical medium to resolve a mystery. Through these, some conventions that are, or should, no longer be tenable, are surreptitiously repudiated without causing rancor or feud. Popular stereotypes and distortions of the essence of African (Igbo) womanhood in reality or its reflection in fiction are subtly harmlessly overturned in *Chinaagorom*. The thematic concerns and message embedded in the passage quoted at the beginning of this chapter are manifested without appearing to have been slapped on or superficially imposed. The core of the story is about hopes and impediments, trials and drawbacks, travails and triumphs in marriage. It is set at a time when educating the female child in a traditional patriarchal Igbo society was seen as an unnecessary wasting of precious resources. The male child was destined to succeed, lead, and rule the family and the society at large. The female path (indeed destiny) was unquestionably circumscribed—she was here to serve and obey, and justify her existence by producing children of both sexes for her husband, but preferably male children first and foremost to ensure lineage continuity. Her value as a woman and her tenure as a wife in the family were determined by the above criteria—the bar and the standards were set by sexist patriarchy and inflexible tradition.

Chinedum (God leads me; God is my refuge), the major character in the novel, is a graduate engineer with specialization in petroleum engineering. He is a promising high-profile senior civil servant in Lagos. He is selected for further studies in America which will culminate in his obtaining a doctorate degree in petroleum engineering making him senior to everyone else in the establishment except the white chief executive, Dr. Wood. Chinedum has a small family—his young wife and a six-month-old son who remain in Lagos while their husband/father goes to America. He is of the Igbo ethnic group and, like several kith and kin in Lagos, has his ancestral family in Eziukwu, a suburb of Aba—a thriving commercial city in the Igbo heartland of Eastern Nigeria. The Eziukwu community in Lagos has a social organization that binds all of them together. They also bond together in a welfare association that dutifully looks after their individual and communal interests.

Everyone in the community is his/her neighbor's keeper. So when Chinedum left for America, he was not afraid that his family would lack essential social support. It was there in abundance, offered whether or not it was sought by his wife, Chinagorọ after whom the novel takes its title. Two months after Chinedum's arrival in America, there is a compelling reason for him to return to Lagos for essential consultations and collection of data. This is how the author reports the transformational situation and its consequences:

Onye yere anụ ngiga tara anụ ya

(He who does his things knows the repercussions)

Mgbe Chinedum nọrọ ọnwaa abụọ n'America, ọ deteere oriaku ya akwukwo na ya ga-abia Naijiria ijuta ndi isi ọrụ ha ihe, na ya ga-anọ nani otu izu uka wee laghaechikwa Amerika. O dekwara na aguu ihu oriaku ya anya na nwa ya na-agusi ya ike. Chinedum dekwara ubochi oriaku ya ga-abia chere ya n'Ikeja, ebe ugbo elu na-ada.

Two months after his arrival in America, Chinedum wrote to inform his wife that he will be coming to Nigeria for some consultations at the office. He would be staying only one week. He said also that he missed his wife and child very dearly. He told his wife the day she would come to the airport to pick him up. On the said date, Chinagorọ looked her best when she went to the airport with the baby well clad, baby-sitter, and the driver to pick up Chinedum.... The next morning, Chinedum went to his office for the consultations... He got all the information he needed the same day. He then spent the remaining six days enjoying a good time with his beautiful wife. Chinedum, however, strongly cautioned his wife not to inform their parents (at home) or friends and relatives in Lagos about his brief visit. Before Chinedum returned to America, his son Uchechi (God's will; God's grace) was already eight months old and had started walking because he was a lively baby. Chinedum also had made his wife stop breastfeeding the baby.

N'echi ya, Chinedum wee jee n'ulo ọrụ ha maka ozi o site ya bia. O wee jutachaa ihe nile o si maka ha bia n'otu ubochi isii ndi fodurunu were mee ka oriaku ya nwee ezigbo obi ọtu.

Chinedum dorọ oriaku ya aka na nti ka ọ ghara idere nne na nna ha abụọ leta na ya biarutere. O mekwara ka ndi ala ha bi na Legosi ghara imata na ya gbarutere. Tupu Chinedum na-aghapu Legosi alaghachi Amerika, Uchechi eruola onwa asato, wee jewekwa ije n'ihu na ọ bu nwata di gara gara. Chinedum mekwara ka oriaku ya napukwa ya ara.

(Chinaagorom pp. 8-9)

As if these clues were not enough, the next chapter of the novel starts with the sub-heading: **"Those who do not have sufficient information about something usually talk about it anyhow."** In the narrative that followed, Chinagorọ informed her husband two months after his return to America, that she was pregnant. Her husband strongly told her not to reveal to

anybody whosoever, that she was pregnant. But as the Igbo in all their wisdom state in a proverb, 'pregnancy cannot be covered with hands.' Soon the scandalous gossip began to circulate in Lagos that an abomination had been committed by Chinedum's wife: she had had an illicit affair and become pregnant in her husband's absence. What's more, she was still occupying her husband's house. She had repulsed wise counsel from family and friends to remove herself from Chinedum's house. The pressure was not only from Lagos where she was held in contempt but also from both her maiden family and her husband's family who urged her to leave Lagos and seek shelter in her father's house whose image she had tarnished. To all these abuses and entreaties, her unequivocal response was that she would stay put until her husband came back from America to kick her out. Onwuchekwa in the remaining twenty-five chapters of the novel, must navigate the narrative in such a way to keep the salacious gossip harmlessly afloat (while buying time), sustain the suspense, and probe psychological frames of mind of the key characters to achieve a credible resolution when Chinedum eventually comes back from America. She achieved this to the letter. Harmony and social equilibrium were restored at the end of the novel, and society at large was the better for it. It took tremendous skill and talent to accomplish this.

In *Chinaagorom*, Julie Onwuchekwa exploits limitless artistic characterization possibilities, refreshing and innovative narrative techniques, and highly imaginative manipulation of language, all of which make this novel the inimitable pace-setter it has proved to be and recognized for.

Chinaagorom is set in Lagos, a cosmopolitan metropolis which is incomplete without a symbiotic correlation of its members with their rural/cultural foundations. There is coming and going between the two worlds. The new urban realities do not negate sources and origins. Recourse is made to customs and traditions to validate truth and authenticity. Ethnicity is a source of joy and cohesion instead of divisiveness and rancor. Inter-ethnic relationships and fraternizations are encouraged in the novel. The hero of the story is Igbo, but not only does he speak all the three main Nigerian languages, his domestic staff at home—Inyang, Ekaete, and Okon—are Ibibo/Efik, and his inseparable friends at Aba are Mazi Essien Udo (Ibibo/Efik), Mazi Kayode (Yoruba), Mazi Briggs (Rivers), Alhaji Ibrahim (Hausa), and Mazi Kunle Babatunde (Yoruba), among others. To complicate the plot, as it were, the author introduces female rivalry at some points and female bonding at other points of the story.

Names of major characters in the novel not only establish their identity but also point to the special attributes and idiosyncrasies associated with each character.

Apart from **Chinedum** and his wife, **Chinagorọ** whose meanings are decipherable even from the surface, there are other Igbo names in the novel that Onwuchekwa used to project special human virtues or characteristics peculiar to the persons bearing the names. They include Ihekammanandu (things are better when one is alive), Dibugwu (husband is a woman's crown), Chijioke (all gifts are by God; in God's hands), Obidiya

(her husband's choice), Ekemma (awesome; created to perfection), Ogemdi (my time will come; God's time is the best), Oriaku (consumer of wealth), Obiageli (born to enjoy... born into wealth), and Ajughiekwu (doesn't care to know before talking/dabbling/poking nose into a matter; busybody, gossip). Wherever the individual bearing any of these names appears in the story, he or she never fails to act or behave as connoted. The significance of these names is best appreciated in their social contexts.

In *Chinaagorom*, the community at Eziukwu has two prominent (well-known) diviners whose names (Okpọtọkpọ and Ochaachagbute) define and reveal their professional integrity and status among people in their community. Divination is an important element in Igbo traditional religion. The perception of it in the culture is neither sinful nor antithetical. It is revered by practitioners of the traditional religion who firmly believe that when in doubt about any mystery or event beyond human knowledge, the best recourse is to seek answers from the spirit-world whose agent is the diviner. Non-believers of the traditional religion may not go to diviners or seek answers through divination, but they never throw sand at the agency, as the saying goes. In the chapter of the novel featuring the two diviners, the enigmatic puzzle was to find out the truth that was threatening to tear the community apart namely, Chinedum's wife's pregnancy in the obvious absence of her husband in faraway America.

The favored diviner (identified so because of his track record of accurate divination) goes by the name Okpọtọkpọ (overwhelming/real/authentic). Apart from the onomatopoeic jingle in the name, he is a reliable diviner with wide-spread reputation for accuracy when he approaches the gods for answers to mysteries beyond human comprehension. Onwuchekwa does not simply say 'Okpọtọkpọ is always right'; instead, she has the reader get the testimony from the court of public opinion, the community thus:

Oke Dibia na-anata ndị mmụọ ezi okwu

Mgbe ha abụọ rutere n'ụlọ otu okpọnkụ dibia aha ya bụ Okpọtọkpọ, ha nye ya otu naiira bụ ihe o ji ebido ile ihe. Okpọtọkpọ chiri ochi si, "Ụnụ b́jara maka ihe gbasara nwanyị d́ ime. Ebe ahụ unu b́ mmanya aga, mmemme adighi ya. Unu na-esogbu nwata nwanyị ahụ n'efu n'ihị na o b́ afọ ime d́ ya ka o b́." Chijioke na Ihekammanandụ wee t́kpọ d́b́ja ahụ mkpu wee kwuo n'otu olu, "Ị maghị anya ya d́ anyị".

A renowned authentic diviner gets true answers from the spirits

When the two men (father of the bride and father of the bridegroom) got to the house of the famous diviner Okpọtọkpọ, they gave him one Naira, the consultation fee to begin the process. Okpọtọkpọ laughed and said, "you've come because of a woman who is pregnant. You are worrying yourselves for nothing. You are harassing an innocent woman because she is carrying her husband's pregnancy (baby)." Chijioke and Ihekammanandụ simultaneously shouted at the diviner saying sarcastically that he got it wrong." (p. 12)

Ndị mmadụ dum wee para anya n'aka n'ihị ma ewu ma ọkuko n'ala maara Ọkpọtọkpọ na-anata ndị mmụọ ezi okw. Ha anaghị ezi ya azụ aka. Ọ bụ ọ na-ekwu, ọ na-ere dị na dibia.

...He told them too how the husband had come back to Lagos from his place of studies in America for a very brief period. It was during that visit that his wife missed her monthly period.

Everyone stood still in awe because even goats and fowls knew that Ọkpọtọkpọ always got true answers from the spirits. The spirits never showed him the back of their palms. He is 'one who pronounces and it happens.'

(p. 16)

In contrast, the encounter with the not-so-reliable other diviner, Ọchaachagbute (literally, harvests fruits before they are fully ripe; tells you what you want to hear), is described thus:

Mgbe nna Chinedum jì iwe laha agọ ya, o wee jekwuru dibia ọzọ bụ Ọchaachagbute. Ihu na-asukwa nna Chinedum ka anwụrụokụ n'ihì na iwe juputara ya n'obi. Ọ dị ya ka akụ ya ọ gbara udele.

When Chinedum's father left in anger, he went straight to the other diviner Ọchaachagbute. His countenance was full of rage, fuming like smoke from a burning fire. He was like a hunter whose arrow caught a vulture.

O wee nye onye dibia otu naira ka ọ gwa ya ihe o kwere bja. Ọchaachagbute wee chĩa ọchì sị, "Ọ dị omiikọ na nwunye nwa gị atụala ime n'aka ndị iko ya, wee na-agba isi akwara. Ihere ga-emegbu ya ma di ya lota ebe ọ gara." Obi wee tọọ Chijioke uto nke ukwu, o wee werekwa otu naira ọzọ nye onye dibia n'ihì na ọ gbatarà ihe ọ chọrọ. Onye dibia a gwakwara ya ka ha jisie ike gwaa ekwu otu ọ ga-adị mfe iriọ nwa ya ma ọ lata; n'ihì na ha nile hụrụ nwunye nwa ya n'anya na-amaghì na akpaì nwa nkita n'akpa, ọ taa akwa. Chijioke wee kele ya wee lawa n'obi uto.

He paid the one Naira fee and asked the diviner to tell him the object of his mission. Ọchaachagbute laughed and said, 'It is regrettable that your daughter-in-law got pregnant by one of her concubines and has remained stubborn. She will be put to shame when her husband comes back.'

Chijioke was overwhelmed with joy and paid the diviner extra one Naira for giving him the answer he was looking for. The diviner admonished him to find the best subtle way of breaking the sad news to his son when he returned, because everybody loved his wife without realizing that if the dog was not monitored it could eat eggs; there was no knowing what an unguarded child might do. Chijioke thanked him and left rejoicing.

(p. 15)

In *Chinaagorom*, proverbs, aphorisms, and sayings of the elders are indeed ‘the palm oil with which words are eaten’ (by the Igbo) to paraphrase Chinua Achebe’s wise saying in his *Things Fall Apart* (1958). Accomplished traditional artists—raconteurs, storytellers, minstrels, orators, etc.—understood the sublime position of the proverb in Igbo oratory and exploited it to the fullest. Julie Onwuchekwa uses proverbs in the novel in diverse ways to achieve pleasing effects. The novel starts with a prologue consisting of three verses of a poem. The first few lines aptly capture the central theme of the story:

Okwu Mmalite

Onye chi na-agoro
Ihe anaghi eme ya
Onye ya na chi ya so
Ukwu ojoo anaghi akpo ya
O turu kpukum
Ma o wufughi u
Onye o dakwasiri
O di o gburu nwa mmuo
Ihe ka mma nda ndu
Onu di kwuru njo
kwughachiri mma

Prologue

Whoever has God defending him/her
Will never be put to shame
Whoever God abides with will never go
astray
The person might slip but will never fall...
Might be overburdened
And even look like he had murdered a
spirit-child
Things are best when witnessed in real-life
situations
Then, slanderous tongues will eat their
words. (p. XI)

After this idiomatic prologue, many chapters of the novel begin with proverbial sub-headings:

Oke nne ewu kpuru anaghi ara nwa ya ahụ (like Mother goat, like child), **Onye yere anu na ngiga tara anu ya** (he who does his things knows the repercussions), **Ndi amaghi ebe e liri ozu na-abo ya n'ukwu** (those who do not have sufficient information about something talk about it anyhow), **Oke Dibja na-anata ndi mmuo ezi okwu** (the renowned dibia (diviner) gets correct answers from the spirits), **Ihe ka mma na ndu** (things are better done alive), **Onye amaghi ibe ezi ya** (he who is ignorant learns from others), **E mee ngwa agbanahu odachi** (quick action (swift intervention) prevents unforeseen tragedy), **Ndi oji okpa ebie okazi** (wayward women, adept at snatching husbands), **Ire oma ka ejula ji aga n'ogwu** (soft words slow down anger), and **Nchipta ede abughi okuko ya** (perception is far from reality).

Each of these sayings signals the event or action to be narrated in the chapter. It is not the incorporation of proverbs and sayings that is essentially noteworthy, but the way the author positions them in the narrative and the idiomatic way the words are manipulated. Thus, the anticipated consequence of Chinagoro’s alleged illicit affair would be her immediate expulsion from the house by her husband on coming back from America (**ugbo nwa mkpi**—p. 10). And although everybody loves Chinagoro, her alleged illicit affair is indefensible and so, the loudest noise cannot wake

up a person the gods have gripped (...**ekwe akuteghi onye ala ji...**—p. 12). Armed robbers are described as people who turn the night into day (...**ndi oji abali mere ehije...**—p. 20). Chinagorọ was expected to have a painful protracted labor because of her alleged sinful act. But by her mother's testimony, she instead delivered the baby in the twinkle of an eye (...**otu o siri mụa nwa ka ebe a na-anyu maa miji**—p. 24). Her easy manner of delivery was elsewhere said to have taken no longer than a person spitting out cough (...**dika ebe agbupuru ukwaraa**—p. 26). Equally, Chinagorọ's calm and pleasant comportment was a deterrent to wayward husband-snatchers (**Agwa oma ya mere ka ndi oji okpa ebie okazi wee gbuloo ahu n'ebe di ya no**—p. 88).

Chinagorom is embellished with some intrinsic subtle narrative touches that only a woman can best display in a tale about female empowerment in a patriarchal environment where actions, thoughts, and spoken words are dominated by masculine macho sensibilities. Particular ingredients for a dish define the geographic location in Igbo land where the food is a favorite. Thus, before Chinedum arrived, his mother had already prepared okazi soup cooked with mushroom and achara vegetable (unique to particular areas in Abia State of Nigeria) (**Tupu Chinedum erute, nne ya eteelarị ofe okazi etinyere ero na achara...**—pp. 66–67). Julie Onwuchekwa knows very well the cultural or food habits of different parts of Igbo land. Similarly, she knows the intimate innuendos embodied in the songs which women dance to at the birth of a child, the way only women can talk and sing about unabashedly as in:

Biam biam ka mma n'ebe?	Where are push-ups best?
Biam biam ka mma n'ute.	Push-ups are best on the mat (in bed)
Biam biam ka mma n'ebe?	Where are push-ups best?
Biam biam ka mma n'ute.	Push-ups are best on the mat (in bed)
I bįachaa ya gi abįata nwa	When the push-up is over, a child is born
Biam biam ka mma n'ute.	Push-up is best on the mat (in bed)
I bįachaa ya gi abįata ihe	(For) when it is finished, a great harvest is reaped
Biam biam ka mma n'ute.	Push-ups are best on the mat (in bed).
	(p. 76)

The next song is even more far-reaching in feminine vocabulary and innuendos:

Ma o bughị ma nwa	Without a child (motherhood)
Onye na-enye m?	Who would give me (anything)?
Ma o bughị ma nwa	Without a child
Onye na-enye m?	Who would give me?
Aka ncha	A bar of soap
Onye na-enye m?	Who would give me?

Ụlo ukpo,	A house
Onye na-enye m?	Who would give me?
Ji buru ibu	A big yam
Onye na-enye m?	Who would give me?
Ọdụ okporoko,	A stockfish
Onye na-enye m?	Who would give me?
Ụlo jooji	A piece of George cloth
Onye na-enye m?	Who would give me?
Nri gbara abụla	A delicious meal
Onye na-enye m?	Who would give me?
Ma ọ bughị ma nwa	Without a child
Onye na-enye m?	Who would give me? (pp. 75–76)

But while the women are exalting childbirth with ululations and dancing to songs laced with phallic metaphors and lewd rhythmic hip movements, Julie Onwuchekwa brings into the narrative something no male novelist has dared bring into the pages of a story set in Igbo patriarchal family where the major goal of marriage is to have children in abundance—the more, the merrier. *Chinaagorom* most probably is the first novel by an Igbo author, male or female, where a modern family planning procedure—tying up the wife’s tubes to stop further pregnancy—is openly practiced and indirectly canvassed, at the initiative of a husband but with full acquiescence of the wife. It could not have happened without a prior discussion and agreement by the couple. This is how the unprecedented phenomenon is reported in the novel soon after the birth of Obiageri, the third child of Chinedum and his wife, Chinagoro:

Onụ juputara obi Dọkita Chijioke, ya na-eme ego ka ọ naghị ara ahụ mkpata. Dọkita Chijioke gurū ada ya Ọbjageri. Mgbe oriakū ya nọrọ ọnwā atọ ọ mūrū nwa, Dọkita Chijioke wee kpọrọ oriakū ya gaa ulọ ogwu ka ha wee kechie ya akpa nwa; ka ọ gharakwa itū ime.

Dọkita Chijioke na oriakū ya wee na-ekporizi ndū. Ha na-eri ihe gurū ha, na-eyikwa ihe masiri ha; ma na-azuputakwa umū ha otu o kwesiri. Ọ bughị imuju ulọ bu ya, kama ọ bu izuputazi ha bu isi. Onye muta otu ọ ga-azulite, ọ ga-adi ezi ndū ruo oge Chi ya kpọrọ ya.

Dr. Chijioke, filled with joy and happiness, freely spent money lavishly to celebrate the birth of the baby. He named her Obiageri. Three months later, Dr. Chijioke took his wife to the hospital to tie her tubes to avoid pregnancy permanently. Thereafter, Dr. Chijioke and his wife began to enjoy life to the fullest—eating what they liked, dressing as they pleased while raising their children. It is not how many children one has that matters, rather how well the children are raised and nurtured growing up. If you limit the number to how many you can comfortably raise, you will live long. (p. 92)

It is important to point out that in both style and content, Julie Onwuchekwa is a talented, self-conscious artist. In *Chinaagorom*, it seems she set out to write a balanced story. Beauty—physically, morally, and behaviorally—is not a monopoly of one gender alone. Chinedum is lavishly admired for his physical appearance and more:

Many people who knew Chinedum gathered together to greet him, men and women alike. Wherever Chinedum entered women stood still and stared at him. They wished he was their husband or boyfriend. His good looks and wonderful manners stunned anyone who met him.

(p. 68)

“Any woman Chinedum shook hands with wished she could take full possession of the owner of the hand. His laughter and smiles pushed up the heart-beat of many women. He was indeed more beautiful than a woman” (p. 71). As for his wife, “Chinagoro, was well behaved, brilliant, and exquisitely beautiful. She was like a sprouting yam tendril in a farm. And she was in no way like other ladies who used their waists (hips) to ensnare men” (p. 3). Furthermore, “Many people said the day God created Chinagoro and lavished all those physical endowments on her, He didn’t create anybody else that day. When other women looked at her, they became disgusted with themselves” (p. 30). “Women as well as men enjoyed socialization for fun. Both sexes drank whisky at the right occasions in the right company” (p. 72).

Stylistically, Onwuchekwa seemed to fully realize that languages grow in various ways such as borrowing from other languages, adapting some foreign words by indigenizing them, and retaining some foreign words without trying to coin long phrases or sentences as their equivalents in the local language. Thus, in *Chinaagorom*, the reader sees words like *whisky abuo* (two bottles of whisky), *olilo Dubonnet* (a bottle of Dubonnet), *olilo champagne* (a bottle of champagne), *igbe coke abuo* (two crates of coke), *otu olilo brandy* (one bottle of brandy), *Tonic wine abuo* (two bottles of tonic wine), and *katon beer isii* (six cartons of beer) (p. 39). Elsewhere there are *Ha tara bread...* (they ate bread), *taakwa sausages* (they also ate sausages) ... *Ha nukwara Quaker Oats na Milo* (they had Quaker Oats and drank Milo) (p. 72). In some cases, she interposes English words in Igbo sentence structures as in “Chinedum wee nye Oriaku ya ogu naira nise ka o were jee zuta forms na Postal order oji etinye maka ya bu ule” (p. 81)—“Chinedum gave his wife 25 naira to buy forms and postal order for the said examination.”

Female attributes and quintessential abilities are not flaunted in *Chinaagorom* to reprimand decadent tradition or patriarchy. Instead, they serve as tools for the re-education of males and females alike for the best interests of the society at large. However, on the critical issue of female education on

equal plane with the education of male children, Julie Onwuchekwa does, indeed, call a spade, a spade as evident in:

Oriaku Ayodele chiri ochi sika
ya na o di ezi mkpa karichaa
ugbu a di ya bu Dokita kay a bu
nwunye ya burukwa onye muru
ezi akwukwo n'ih na nkwa
dagharja uda, etegharja egwu.

Ayodele's wife laughed as she declared that it is very important at this time that your husband has a doctorate degree that you, his wife, should also be highly educated because when the drummer changes the beat, the dancers also adjust their dance steps. (p. 78)

Continuing,

her friend strongly urged her (Chinagoro) to discuss with her husband when he returned from work that she would like to further her education because highly educated men these days preferred to have equally well educated wives. This would help to lessen the burden of family responsibilities for husbands. A highly educated woman also conferred prestige and dignity on her husband. Ayodele's wife further told Chinagoro that there were many highly educated women these days who determinedly worked towards snaring and snatching educated husbands whose wives did not have higher education. It was only a matter of time, she emphasized, before Chinagoro would realize the truth of what she was telling her.

(pp. 78–80)

What is particularly significant here is that the importance of female education is articulated by a woman for a fellow woman. What Julie Onwuchekwa is demonstrating here is that female empowerment can be done within and among women themselves. But beyond empowerment, Onwuchekwa advocates female education as a right for all women folk whether married or not. “Ugbu a o matala na nwanyi bu nwa matakwa nwa nwanyi muru ezi akwukwo bara uru ma o luru di ma o lughu” (p. 94)—“Now she understood that girls matter, and that female education mattered, married or single.” The novel ends on the high note that female empowerment is for the best interest of the society at large.

All said, *Chinaagorom* is a story about love, the love that transcends everything in marriage as a human institution. Julie Onwuchekwa captures in the novel this sublime romantic love where husband and wife mutually connect to each other in spite of distractions. Chinedum and Chinagoro's faith or trust in each other is a model worthy of emulation in both fiction and real life. Julie Onwuchekwa is a pace-setter and, *Chinaagorom*, an Igbo feminist novel for all seasons!

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10 Tony Uchenna Ubesie

The quintessential Igbo novelist*

I think I succeeded in one aspect: proving to the Igbo man that a good novel is a possibility in Igbo. That has not only created a wide readership for Igbo Literature but also encouraged other authors to try their hands in writing in Igbo.

Tony Ubesie

Tony Ubesie may be an unfamiliar name to many Nigerian/African readers of fiction written in English. He may be totally unknown to readers whose reading excludes materials written in the Igbo language. Among Igbo readers too, his popularity or even an awareness of his existence as a writer may be limited to those students in secondary schools and teacher training colleges at a point in time who read his works as required texts for the West African School Certificate (WAEC) or the Teachers' Grade Two (Higher Elementary) Certificate Examination as well as Students of Igbo Language Studies in Colleges of Education and other tertiary institutions. Yet, Tony Ubesie is a very important contemporary Nigerian, indeed African creative artist and probably the most gifted Igbo novelist of all time. His art of the Igbo novel makes him the quintessential writer in the Igbo language of the twentieth century.

Tony Ubesie was born in Enugu, Nigeria on February 22, 1950 and died untimely on February 11, 1994 as a result of a mechanical accident. He was as versatile in his professional career as he was in his creative writing. An accomplished broadcaster, educator, community leader, actor, and producer, Ubesie was also a novelist, poet, and playwright. In an article titled "Tony Uchenna Ubesie (1950–1994): The Man and the Artist", E. Nolue Emenanjo (2001, pp. 1–19) described Ubesie as "a man of many parts":

...In professional terms he was a broadcaster....a producer of a number of vibrant and popular Igbo programs (on radio and television). But he did many other things. He was a big poultry farmer...farming was

* An earlier version of this chapter had been published in: C.D. Narasimhaiah and Ernest N. Emenyonu (Eds.) *African Literature Comes of Age*. Mysore: Dhvanyaloka, 1988.

an occupation very close to Tony's heart. He started farming at Achi (his hometown). When he retired from his broadcasting job in 1992, he gave himself up to full-time farming....As a full-time university undergraduate, Tony was into very many things. He was a contractor of books and related items. He was a supplier of customized exercise books to secondary schools with their logos on the exercise books. He collected texts for translation into Igbo and farmed these out to translators. He organized customized T-shirts for secondary schools. Tony was such a gifted man that he could handle many equipment (sic) without any formal training in these. He repaired his tractors, watches, clocks, radio and television....But writing remained a very serious passion in Tony...In a letter (to Emenanjo dated October 1, 1993—five months before his death), Tony revealed his impact on Igbo Literature: 'I think that I succeeded in one aspect: proving to the Igbo man that a good novel is a possibility in Igbo. That has not only created a wide readership for Igbo literature but also encouraged other potential authors to try their hands in writing Igbo.

(pp. 11, 18)

Tony studied Linguistics and Nigerian Languages specializing in the Igbo language at the University of Nigeria, Nsukka (1976–1980). He graduated in 1980 at the top of his class with Bachelors of Arts, second class upper degree.

Author of several novels including *Ukwa Ruo Oge Ya O Daa* (1973), *Isi Akwu Dara Nala* (1973), *Mmiri Oku Eji Egbu Mbe* (1974), *Ukpána Okpoko Buuru* (1975), and *Juọ Obinna* (1977), Ubesie's distinction as a writer lies in his stylistic innovations and thematic realism, surpassing any Igbo imaginative creative writer before him. He brings a fresh awareness to familiar themes and discusses contemporary social and cultural issues in ways never before done in the Igbo novel.

What may be described as Ubesie's art of the novel is characterized by a mastery of language usage which makes his writing easy to read, an inimitable sense of humor which totally traps the reader, sophisticated irony which leaves the reader wondering about the meanings and motives in every problematic human behavior, and authentic characterization which mirrors the human beings in the environment of his novel indelibly in the mind of the reader during and long after the novel. His patterns of resolution of human conflicts in his works are neither forced nor melodramatic. Many Igbo writers have exploited the proverb to good narrative effects. But it is only Ubesie who dexterously expands the frontiers of the world of the popular proverbs, embellishing them with new dimensions which add to the reader's insight into his environment. He does not simply say "*Nwoke na ihe ga-eme, maka na enyi noro ndu, ya na dinta ana-agbari*" ("Man is used to the ups and downs of life because when alive, the elephant must contend with the hunter"), but Ubesie must add an extra dimension: "*Enyi nwuọ*

anwuo, ya na ijiji ahụ anya. Ma abuzu hụ nke anya ya na-ekwesighi ihu, o were ukwu gbapuo onwe ya afo, gba umu uwa nkiti" (*Juọ Obinna*, p. 31) ("When dead, the elephant still contends with flies. All that is part of suffering. But when the rat sees that which is not meant for its eyes, it ignores everything and pierces its own stomach" (commits suicide)). Proverbs are in structure, the same. Ubesie's usage makes them unique and invigorating. His proverbs do not just communicate hidden meanings, but they broaden the reader's knowledge of life in general.

Some authors make us laugh once in a while when they introduce amusing anecdotes. Ubesie's humor is effusive and contagious, and it creates in us an internal feeling of delight that lingers on and on. For example, in the narration of serious events set in the Nigerian Civil war, Ubesie interjects this:

Obinna had by now become very annoyed with God. He recalled the song of the man who said that his reason for going to church and at the same time sticking to his ancestors, is that any day God does not answer his prayer; his ancestors will come to his aid. Obinna reasoned in his mind that may be, the gun shots heard these days everywhere in Igboland have led God to abandon the Igboland in favor of a more peaceful place.

(*Juọ Obinna*, pp. 104–105)¹

His ironies are penetrating and profound. His tension really creaks. The over-beaten track of culture clashes gives way to the more problematic and contemporary dilemma of generation gaps.

Romanus Egudu² tells us that "when in Igbo tradition someone wants to express admiration for a story, he or she says that it is "sweet" (i.e. it is fabulously interesting), and goes on to explain that it makes you continue "laughing" until the sides of your body become almost broken. One primary element that makes for this effect in a story is the narrator's "putting of salt" here and there in the story. *Salt* stands for verisimilitude or historical detail for fabulous or folkloric anecdotes. Anecdotes are the salt with which stories are seasoned, just as, according to Chinua Achebe, "proverbs are the palm oil with which words are eaten." Ubesie has learnt to add salt to his stories in the exact quantity that makes each dish he puts before his reader, a most delicious one. Two of his novels, *Juọ Obinna* and *Isi Akwu Dara N'ala*, based on the Nigerian Civil war will provide detailed illustrations.

Juọ Obinna is an ironic commentary on the Biafran "straggler", the loud-mouthed 'we-must-fight-to-the-last-man' advocate who shows his dexterity by dodging army conscriptors. He is adept in military tactics without reaching the war front. Ubesie creates him as a simple yet complex and pathetic character. He has a fantastic imagination and can weave endless stories of his gallantry so effortlessly, fitting in every minute detail of military maneuvers that the reader cannot but believe and acknowledge him as

a distinguished war hero. His audience is always the womenfolk who adore him for his heroic deeds, his dare-devil adventures, and his indefatigable commitment to win the war. *Biafrans* who lived through the war will find in this character a revelation of sorts. He is an alarming ironic symbol of the people's delusion. Ubesie created him to show the people "where the rain began to beat them," to borrow Chinua Achebe's words.

The following passage is how Ubesie makes Obinna, the protagonist after whom the novel takes its title, report a supposedly major chivalrous action toward the dying minutes of the war. Obinna is explaining to two gullible ladies the origin of the scars on his body:

Anyi si n'akuku ndi nche na-anoghi banye nime ogige ha, rute ebe ndi soja ha na-arahu ura, tuo greneedi abuo, oso wee su. O o kwa ndi ka foro ndu na-agba oso! O bughi ndi nwuru anwu ebe anyi na-acho uzo anyi ga-esi gbaputa ka mgbo a turu m n'aka, mgbo ozo tukwaa odibo m ahu nkwu. O daa n'ala. M wee nuo iyi si na kama mu agaghi ebulata ya, Ogu a rie isi m. M buru mgbo agbara m n'aka buru ya, buputa ya ebe anyi huru ndi nyeere anyi aka. O bu ezi okwu na mgbo a turu m n'aka bu ogu ka m gburu n'ula oru, apa mgbo abuo m bu n'ahu ugbu a bu ihe m ga-eji na-echete magbe nwoke na ihe mere. Ihe ozọ emeghi, m nọkata mgbe m ga-amuta umu, m kpọkọọ ha, gosi ha apa mgbọ a, kọrọ ha na nna ha bu odogwu.

(p. 174)

We slid through an unguarded part of the military camp until we reached where their soldiers were sleeping and released two grenades... But as we were making our escape I was hit by a bullet on the arm while another bullet hit my batman on the thigh. He collapsed, I vowed to perish rather than abandon him there. Ignoring my own bullet wound, I carried him single-handedly until I was able to get help...I have two other bullet wounds which I shall ever carry with me as a testimony of when a man was indeed a man.

This episode comes in the second to the last page of the novel. It is typical of Ubesie's narrative technique that the downfall of the villain is delayed till the very last scene (often, the last page) of the novel. In this case, Obinna is allowed to have his laugh until nearly the very end when his foil, Mazi Onyido who has arrived unnoticed in the course of Obinna's egoistic narration, does not confront Obinna through a direct repudiation. Instead, he entertains Obinna's audience with a story whose design is too obvious to miss:

Okorobia na umu agbogho, ano m na-anu akuko unu na-ako, o wee di m uto. M si ka m kooro unu akuko maka otu enyi m nwoke sokwa

luo ogu a. Aha ya bu Obinwanne. Ihe di iche n'etiti ya na Obinna bu na onye o bula kpara ike n'uzo nke ya. Obinna bu apa mgbo egbe abuo. Obinwanne bukwa apa mgbo egbe abuo. Ihe ozo dikwa iche bu na o gbapugbeghi onu egbe o bula n'ihu ogu wee butea pa mgbo nke ya. Nani oso ka o no na-agba nihu ogu, ogu bikwaa. N'ebe o jere ohi mmanu ugbo ala ka ugbo elu no gbaa ya egbe nke mbu. Ebe a no gbaa ya egbe nke abu o bu mgbe ojere izo akpa okporoko ka ogu biri. Ibe ya luru ogu gbute isi, kpulata ufodu ndi ha dotara n'agha, ma nani ihe o dotara n'agha bu otu akpa okporoko.... Nke ka njo bun a oge ufodu, Obinwanne choo igho aghugho, o kee akwa ocha n'isi ka onye *Shellu* kuchiri nti, ma o bu, o sunye uwe kaptin o zutere n'ohi, supu nke ogwu aja o na-eyi.

Ogbenyeanu enwekwaghi ike ijide onwe ya. O jide onwe ya, o gakkwaghi ejide onu ya aka. "Mazi, I si na Obinwanne a bu onye?" "Obinna maara onye o bu. Juo Obinna.

(p. 175)

Gentlemen and ladies, I enjoyed listening to the story you were told. I can also tell you the story of a friend of mine who also fought in the war. His name is Obinwanne. One difference between him and Obinna is that each was a hero in his own way. Obinna has the scars of bullet wounds. So does Obinwanne. Another difference is that my friend never fired a shot in the war despite his two bullet scars. He evaded the war till the end. It was while he was stealing petrol that he was hit from an air raid. That accounts for his first wound. He got the second one as he was trying to steal a bale of stock fish at the end of the war...About the only thing he "captured" in the war was a bale of stock fish...But he could disguise himself and pass in turns as a critically injured soldier and a military officer in a Captain's full uniform which he managed to steal from somewhere...

Ogbenyeanu could not contain herself any more. "Mazi," she asked, "who do you say is this Obinwanne?" His reply: "Obinna knows him. Ask Obinna" (hence the title, *Juo Obinna*, Ask Obinna).

The two episodes achieve several things. They establish Obinna as a fraud and a pathological liar. They show him as a liability to Biafra and not the gallant hero that he consistently advertised himself as. They provide the moment of truth and self-knowledge for the audience and by coming at the conclusion of the story, reinforce with a dramatic impact the truism that appearance must not be mistaken for reality. But the novelist achieves these without robbing the reader of the charming delight which a narrative well told evokes. Obinna's integrity is on trial in the "people's court," and he is found wanting. It is a gradual process of revelation made more effective by

the rhetorical question with which the novel ends. This is Ubesie's favorite style of ending his novels. The title of the book and its ironic significance come at the very last line of the narrative in a form of witticism or aphorism which is a terse summation of the theme or moral purpose of the novel. This technique is true of *Juọ Obinna*, *Isi Akwu Dara N'ala*, *Ukwa Ruo Oge Ya Odaa*, and *Ukpana Okpoko Buuru*. Each ends as it started on a high philosophical note. The beginning introduces a psychological probe into an aspect of human behavior which constitutes a serious social problem. The ending shows Ubesie's resolution of the problem with an insight into the rationale for the ultimate choice. In the Igbo version of the passage under discussion, we notice another peculiarly Ubesiean literary technique. He does not translate words from the English language that have become common vocabulary among the Igbo. Instead, they are retained and rendered in the local versions as evident in their Igbo spellings. Hence, *greneedi* for "grenade," *awa* for "hour," *komando* for "commando," *soja* for "soldier," *kaptin* for "captain," *mejo* for "major," *galon* for "gallon," etc., a factor that points to the element of elasticity in the Igbo language in particular and the culture in general, to absorb new ideas in their frameworks.

Although irony is a highly developed and powerful tool in Ubesie's art, it is not his only embellished literary device. The humor in his anecdotes, as hinted earlier, is both contagious and irresistible and, generally coated with subtle statements with satiric designs. *Juọ Obinna* is replete with these, and a few examples will suffice.

Obinna was visited by Captain Emeka, a close friend in whom Obinna can confide. Obinna is narrating his vicissitudes during the war:

O kooro Emeka ka ya si wee malitejewe uka mmiri ngozi, ka ha na-ekpere ya ekpere ya ga-eji na-agbanahu ndi soja. Ma mgbe ya kwusiri ije uka ncha ncha bu mgbe a biara n'ime ulo uka kpuru ndi a ga-akpuba soja. O kokaara ya kay a si je gwochaa ogwu na be Mazi. Onyido, ndi soja wee buru uzo je kpuru onye gwooro ya ogwu o ga-eji na-agbanahu ha.

(p. 22)

He told Emeka how he joined a new spiritual church so that they could pray for him not to be conscripted into the army. Well, he quit the church after military officers came right into the church and conscripted people. He told Emeka how Mazi Onyido, a renowned medicine man made for him charms to render him invisible to conscriptors. But then, Mazi Onyido himself got conscripted.

(*Juọ Obinna*, p. 22)

Myths of the invulnerability of certain segments of the Igbo society were rife during the war. Recourse to famous medicine men was well known

even if hushed. What could be more ironic than the conscription of the very man who makes charms to render people unconscriptable? The first part of the episode clearly portrays Obinna's cowardice, but Ubesie must add the second segment to reinforce and complete the portrait of Obinna as a half-hearted unpatriotic element in the emerging republic.

In another anecdote, Obinna who is at a loss to understand how the whole world is turning against him, recalls the story of the Rat and a Pot of Soup.

Oke mabara n'ite ofe ndi mmadu maputa. Mgbe ndi ahu na-achu ya, ha na-eti mkpu na-asi "lee oke nwude," "lee oke nwude," oke wee tugh-aria si ha, "unu ana-asi lee oke nwude, Unu Nuru na oke di ike mgba, mmadu ano ji na-achu nani oke ka a nwude ya?"

(*Juo Obinna*, pp. 120–121)

A rat fell into a pot of soup and quickly scampered out and fled. People pursued it with shouts of "catch the rat! catch the rat!" The bewildered rat turned round and asked his pursuers: "What is the idea of four men pursuing a rat?"

(*Juo Obinna*, pp. 120–121)

In yet another anecdote, Obinna is being led through thick bushes by Ndubuisi, an accomplice in crime. They are looking for a safe place to share a booty. The bush path seemed interminable, but Obinna dared not ask a question or utter a protest:

Ohia ohia ka ha na-awa. Ha aputaghi n'okporo uzo. Obinna ajughi ase ebe ha na-eje, maka na gi na fada noro nime ulo uka na-ekpe ekpere, o si gi muchie anya, arula uka; muchie, n'ih na o nwere ihe o huru. Fada abughi nwata n'ekpere.

(*Juo Obinna*, p. 143)

They waded through the bush. Obinna never asked where they were going to. For, if you are praying with a Reverend Father in the church and suddenly he asks you to close your eyes, don't argue; simply obey him. He must have seen something. The Reverend Father is no small child in the business of praying.

(*Juo Obinna*, p. 143)

(Realize that the Roman Catholics do not shut their eyes while praying).

One is struck by the unusual imagery in the story—criminals looking for a safe place to help themselves to stolen bags of money vis-à-vis a religious priest and his supplicants deeply engrossed in an elevated religious prayer. But Ubesie shows the depravity in the profane by its relative contrast with the sacrosanct.

In *Isi Akwu Dara N'ala*, the focus is on another perspective of the war. Chike, the protagonist is what every woman would want in a husband. He is what every mother longs for in a son. He is every child's hope of a father. He is handsome, educated, fabulously rich, and famous for his kind-heartedness and broad-mindedness. While the going is good, his family life is intact and harmonious. When the times change and money and food are hard to come by (even palm kernels and lizard meat become luxurious delicacies), his family life degenerates. His wife Ada goes after the men in uniform for her personal survival, abandoning her children. She even betrays her husband to army officers because he appears to be in the way to her full amorous gratification. She further complicates the situation by having a child for one of the numerous military "bed fellows," and when she runs to him at the end of the war, she finds out that he is a happily married man with children. As a last resort, she goes to Chike who feels no qualms in throwing her back to where she belongs: the road.

This is a familiar theme in Nigerian post-war fiction, but Ubesie's handling of this theme is at once new and refreshing, different and enlightening. The uniquely humorous proverbs and sayings are there. The creaking suspense is evident. The subtlety and philosophical undercurrents abound as we are treated to incongruities in human values and behavior. Ubesie unveils another "war-front" as ravishing and devastating as the tanks and armored vehicles. Elegant wives and young ladies are high targets of the men in uniform. They could be snatched, lured away, or voluntarily offer themselves in exchange for security and comfort. Ubesie probes the feminine mind caught in each of these situations and highlights the social consequences.

Ada's action is a crime against her children, her people, and the land. Ubesie uses various situations to depict her willful and remorseless behavior as in the following passages:

- 1 Kwa ubochi, Ada na-egbu otu okuko, were na-ete ofe. Chike ji anya ya ahu ya ma o na-egbu okuko ndi a. O naghi akpo nwoke no nso ka o bia gbuoro ya okuko di ka umu nwaanyi ndi Igbo si eme. O na-eji aka ya egbu ya. O ji ya ete ofe. Chike na-anu uto okuko ahu n'ofe, ma o dighi mgbe o tara anu okuko e ji tee ofe (pp. 133–134).

Everyday Ada would kill a fowl and cook soup with it...Although the Igbo custom demands that a man should kill the fowl, Ada never asked any man. Chike would be given some food by her, but without any meat whatsoever... (pp. 133–134).

- 2 ...n'omenala Igbo, nwaanyi anaghi ata eko okukọ ma di ya nọrọ ya. Ma ọgu emeela, ọtutu mmadu hapu omenala, mewe omenelu! (p. 126).
In the Igbo custom, a woman cannot eat a gizzard when her husband is around. But the war has led people to trample on sacred customs! (p. 126).
- 3 Ada erijuola afo, meruo ala dika onweghi ihe mmadu nwere ike ime ya (p. 129).
Ada fed fat and desecrated the land, daring anyone to challenge her (p. 129).
- 4 Ada mechaara omume o mere ebe ahu nke bun a site n'ubochi ahu gawa n'ihu, ebe ọ bula mmadu kpọrọ ya aha, ndi maara ihe agbupu asu. Ndi okenye maara Ada chọwa igo ọfọ, ha asi Chineke ekwekwala ka nwa ha nwoke luta onye di ka Ada, ma ọ bu ka nwa ha nwanyi di ka Ada. Ọha obodo akpopula ya n'ubo. Onye I kotaara maka Ada, ọ si gi hapu ya kọwa ihe ozo (p. 144).

When old people poured libations and made incantations they prayed God to save their sons from such a wife as Ada...They prayed to God that their daughters never be like Ada. When you mentioned her name to anyone, he/she would tell you to change the subject... (p. 144).

This method of characterization is unique to Ubesie, and it makes the desired point much more than pages of descriptions of actual behavior. Ada is clearly portrayed through her action as a willful, inconsiderate, and callous person. Although the first part of the passage fully underscores this, Ubesie intensifies the image of monstrosity in Ada's orphan-like mode of feeding her husband. The wonder is that her husband does not force his way through Ada's absurdity. This may be Ubesie's pointer to the kind of domestication of men foisted on the Igbo society during the war, by women with new-found power—an unholy alliance with home-wrecking military officers. Thus, the bravado which Ada manifests in the passage only serves to reflect her diminishing integrity and personality. In sharp contrast to his wife's false appearance of security and courage, Chike's fortitude and resilience are apparent. The passage reveals the kind of society in the novel and the author's ability of effectively reflecting its changing moods. At the beginning of the novel, Ubesie emphasizes Ada's beauty (as well as Chike's wealth) through characterization. At the end of the novel, Ada's depravity (like Chike's maturity and spiritual purification) is again emphasized through characterization, and we see the society in the novel (peaceful and warlike) in its changing but not necessarily conflicting roles.

A reader of Ubesie must at all times be alert to his pace of narrative and the ingredients of his art. The continuous flow of proverbs unique in their sound and message, challenges the intellect all the time. At the height of the disintegration in the family, the totally disoriented Chike is described in this disconcerting manner:

Ukwu na-ama Chike jijiji. Ọbara ya na-agbọ ka mmiri ọku. Anya na-achi ya aju. Ọbara di ya n'anya ekwighi ya ahu uzọ nke ọma. Mmadu ha ya ka nwa oke n'anya, Ma, ọ chọọ ime ihe ọ bula, ike agaghi adi ya mee ihe ahu maka na aguu na-achi ya aju. Ọ buru na o tie onye rijuru afo ọkpọ, ya onwe ya tiri onye ahu ọkpọ ga-ebu onye o tiri ọkpọ uzọ daa.

(p. 112)

Chike was shaking all over...like a boiling kettle. He felt dizzy and people looked like rats to him...hunger had sapped him of all strength. If he hit any person with all his strength, he would himself collapse.

(p. 112)

There is a tinge of irony in the image of a man who hits an opponent with all his strength, and then collapses. Ubesie is drawing attention to the devastating impact of hunger, for in the hectic days of the war, starvation was used by the Federal side as a deliberate weapon of war.

Whether he is writing about the tragedies of war, courtship and marriage, the fantasies of youth, chieftaincy and power struggles, or armed robbery, Tony Ubesie is consistent in his sensitivity to language and an almost geometric control of his subject matter. He has become in the true Igbo narrative tradition, “the story vendor” and “owner of words.”

After nearly half a century of struggling, loss, and near extinction, the Igbo novel has been re-discovered. Tony Uchenna Ubesie restored to it its vital missing links of authentic form and a pleasing voice with which it was endowed at birth in 1933 by that treasured founding father, Pita Nwana in his classic, *Omenuko*.

Notes

- 1 Tony Ubesie, *Juọ Obinna*, Ibadan: University Press Ltd., 1975. Page references are to this edition and will be indicated within the text. All English translations used in this chapter are mine.
- 2 R.N. Egudu, “Achebe and the Igbo Narrative Tradition.” *Research in African Literatures*, Vol. 12, No. 1, Spring 1981, 51.

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11 Interviews with two major Igbo novelists

J.U.T. Nzeako and Chinedum Ofomata

Interview of Author J.U.T. Nzeako by Ernest N. Emenyonu

Venue: Modotel Hotel, Enugu, Nigeria, June 27, 2013

EE: With me here is one of the most famous veteran writers in Igbo language. I have been trying for many years to have this opportunity. We are here for the Igbo Studies Association Conference, and I thought it's proper as a prelude to that conference to hear your views as one of the most important writers in Igbo language today. This is an essential part of my research on the origin and development of the novel in Igbo language. I am very grateful you are here, I deeply appreciate it. As a matter of fact, I know JUT Nzeako from the cover of your books and reading your novels. So, may I begin with the question, who is JUT Nzeako?

JUT: Well, I am Joseph Uchekukwu Tagbo Nzeako from Abagana in Njikoka Local Government Area of Anambra State. I am the last of Mr. Joseph and Mrs. Priscilla Nzeako's four sons and the seventh of their nine children. I grew up in the village where my father had retired as a church teacher. I grew up in the village and schooled in the village, so I was able to mix up with the villagers and then tap some Igbo customs and tradition from those elders especially my own father who was influential in the community. So, when I left primary school, I entered secondary school, and when I finished, I started working as a journalist. But, in the primary school, we studied Igbo language. I happened to attend an Anglican school, and in those days, Anglican schools were doing well in Igbo Language Studies. We were doing Igbo language in primary school. So, when I left school and entered secondary school, I started writing. I wrote my first, second, and even third novels as a student.

EE: As a student in secondary school?

JUT: *Okuko Agbasaa Okpesi* was my first publication and incidentally, my set used it in WAEC (the West African Exams Council). When I finished my secondary school, I started working as a journalist. I trained as a journalist in Budapest, Hungary. I came back and started work as

English journalist. Then at a certain stage when I had attained the position of editor, I was invited (because I had written some Igbo books) by the then general manager of NTA (Nigerian Television Authority) to come and help develop Igbo news and current affairs since I was able to write Igbo books. 'Are you ready?' I said yes. Then, he asked me how I would do it. At that time on television, Igbo news was read three minutes on air. No maps, no films, nothing... the news reader would just come and read the headlines and then round everything up. So, I told him I could help with some modifications. He gave me a free hand: he told me whatever I needed, I should speak with him. I told him that I would need manpower and I would need material. He gave me free hand to hire relevant new staff. I interviewed and recruited people to be trained on the job. He gave me two months to go on air, but before it was three weeks, we went on air to everybody's amazement. How did we perform the magic? We were using reporters. If someone was going to report some news in English, then we would add another reporter to also report the same news in Igbo. After an interview in English, if the person interviewed is Igbo-speaking, he will be interviewed also in Igbo. If he is not, then we would re-edit the material and broadcast it later in Igbo language. We did the same thing with the news. We translated into Igbo the news set for broadcast in English and aired it at the same time for the news in Igbo. That was how I set up Igbo news and current affairs in NTA. About my private life, I am happily married to Dr. (Mrs.) Constance Nzeako, a lecturer, and we are blessed with children.

EE: Where does your wife teach?

JUT: At the College of Education, Nsugbe, Anambra State.

EE: How did you start writing? It is not usual for a boy in secondary school to start writing in Igbo at a time when English was the language everyone tried to be most accomplished in. Besides, not only were you writing in Igbo, but your first book was a collection of stories about Igbo customs and traditions written at a time when you were still a young boy. How did you start writing in Igbo language?

JUT: It just happened that one day I went to the market to buy two Igbo books we were required to read for the class. One was thirty pages long, the other one, thirty-six pages. When I tried to buy them, the money I had was not enough and that was all I could get from my father because there were many of us he was catering for. I begged the seller to cut down the price for me, and he said no. When I turned the pages, I said, 'thirty pages for one, and the other one thirty-six pages.' I went home angrily because the books were too costly for their sizes. I asked myself whether I couldn't write a story that was more than thirty-six pages. At school, I went to the teacher who taught us Igbo, I have forgotten his name, and told him that I wanted to write stories in Igbo. He encouraged me to do so if I felt I could. I went home and started

writing. I wrote in an exercise book with biro pen. Then I wondered how to publish what I wrote. So, I went to the library to look for names of publishers who published Igbo books. I came across Thomas Nelson and Sons. I looked for their address in Nigeria, I couldn't find it. So, I wrapped the exercise book I wrote the stories in and posted it overseas to England. After that, I forgot about it. Then, one day, I got a letter saying that they had accepted my work, and they told me the people who read it for them and told me that I would receive advanced royalty. I said, 'advanced royalty?' After some time, they sent a contract to me that they will pay me ten percent of sales and later they sent me some money. I was so delighted to receive an amount I had never touched in my life before. So, the first person I went to was that my Igbo teacher. I went and told him. He was very happy. Then, I went to the principal of the school and told him, showed him the letter. He was so delighted. He told me it would not end there. I was awarded some prizes for my achievement. Furthermore, the following Sunday at church, the principal preached a sermon about it. He told the students that while some of them were whiling away time doing nothing, their fellow student had written a book accepted by a foreign publishing company for publication. I was very happy, with that motivation, I started off on another work. When I wrote that second work, *Chi ewere Ehibie Jie*, I turned it in to the same publisher, but I did not stop there. I started writing to other publishing companies like Longman, Macmillan... So, that was how I started.

EE: Let me ask you a question about publishers before we go back to your earlier writing. Some of your books are still being read today. Some are published by Nelson, some by Longman... What is your connection with those publishing companies today?

JUT: In fact, most of them disappointed me because they allowed the books to be pirated and even when reports about piracy were sent, they were nonchalant. And to my greatest disappointment, some of their staff even indulged in the piracy. So, what I decided was to start selling off some of the original manuscripts of those books. I would go to the traders who pirated them and say now, buy the manuscripts and do the right thing. Those works published by Longman, at the time, I had problem with them since some of their staff were the people pirating them. Even in some cases, I went to Lagos to purchase copies to supply to schools that demanded them. After some time, I told the publishers that I would cancel the agreements/contracts since there were no records of sales or returns. They stopped paying me royalty, and I canceled the agreements.

EE: So, let's get back again to the secondary school days when you published Igbo books that you and your classmates read as textbooks. How did the students feel when they saw that the books were written by you? What was the name of your secondary school?

JUT: The name of my secondary school was Anglican Grammar School, Oraukwu, Anambra State. Well, the students were happy, at least some of them. There were some who were jealous. But the principal of our school was very happy indeed especially when WAEC listed them as selected books for examination.

EE: Do you remember the principal's name?

JUT: Yes, Mr. N.D. Chiwuzie.

EE: I hope you did not answer questions on your own books in exams?

JUT: Well, I did, and I failed some because the questions could be 'what did the author mean by saying this or that?' And when I say what I meant, the examiner disagreed with the answer!

EE: This is very unique because I have just been trying to remember anybody who has this kind of background. So far, I haven't come up with anybody. How did your parents feel when your first book came out? You were in secondary school, did you tell them you were writing a book?

JUT: I did not tell them (about writing a book). They were very glad. They were happy when the book came out.

EE: I have seen that this book was published as far back as 1964. This is somebody, a practicing journalist trained in Bulgaria and writing articles in English and then getting contracts and copyrights in Igbo about books written in Igbo. Have you published anything in English like a novel?

JUT: Just of late, I wrote one novel in English. The title is *Such Affection*.

EE: Has it been published?

JUT: Yes.

EE: What made you write in English when you were already a leading writer in Igbo language?

JUT: Well, I wanted to diversify a little.

EE: But you had already diversified: you have a collection of short stories, you have poetry, you have a novel and you have even written something on Igbo customs and traditions.

JUT: I wanted to try my hand in English too to show I can equally write in English.

EE: Does that mean that at some point, you might even want to translate these books (the Igbo books on the table) into English?

JUT: Maybe. If need be. But, I wanted first of all to enrich the Igbo language literature because as at the time I started writing, we hadn't too many titles. Just very few. Even though, readership was poor. It was only limited to schools.

EE: I will like to ask this question. Many writers who don't even have twenty percent of your output are going places, giving talks, attending conferences... Why is it that it has taken me almost ten years to locate you?

JUT: I want to concentrate on the work. I felt I did not need publicity, and I wasn't playing politics. Some people play politics. For instance, when

Ogbalu (Mazi F.C. Ogbalu) died, the Society for Promoting Igbo Language and Culture (SPILC), which he founded, almost started fading away, until it came to a final stop. It is not active again. This was because people who succeeded Ogbalu wanted to use the office of the president or the leader of the society to play politics. Instead of doing the actual work of trying to promote the language which Ogbalu instituted, they started something else. One example is the so-called 'SOROM SUAIGBO' which is going nowhere other than that somebody who, as a vice chancellor of a university, did not during his tenure, promote Igbo language in the university. But when he left office and felt he will fade away wanted to use 'SOROM SUAIGBO' to attain some political status. He has an office. He was given a car and given money by the government but that is not the end. He is not achieving anything. Because the problems facing the Igbo language are still there. None of them has been solved by 'SOROM SUAIGBO.'

EE: I am glad you mentioned that because that was going to be my next question. One of the hindrances to the development of Igbo language among readers and among students is to make it really a serious educational matter instead of a political issue. So, you have been in this practically all your life, how do we deal with this situation? For the interest of Igbo language. For the interest of Igbo people. For the interest of our children and for the interest of posterity?

JUT: Both the government, the education sector, and the general public helped to kill Igbo language in one way or the other because Igbo language is not given the recognition it deserves. Take for instance, in the schools, certain schools, tertiary or secondary institutions, if students speak Igbo language during school hours, they are punished—given some manual labor to do. But, they are free to speak English which is a foreign language. So, we choose to kill our own language in favor of a foreign language. Here is another example: two or three people could be conversing in Igbo until a Yoruba person joins them. They immediately switch to English or Yoruba if they had a smattering of Yoruba language no matter how crudely, but they are happy to forgo their own Igbo language. Whereas, when two Yoruba people are conversing and an Igbo person joins them, they will continue speaking Yoruba and the Igbo person will look stupid staying with them. The same thing is applicable to Hausa. If you are in company with a Hausa man and he meets a fellow Hausa man, he drops English and they will start conversing in Hausa. But the Igbo are ashamed of their own language. They don't like to speak their language. Back when I was in Budapest, I met an Igbo. I was told he came from Eastern Nigeria. As a matter of fact, he hails from Aba. When I met him, I greeted him in Igbo, he pretended I was talking Latin. He didn't even look at my face. I remained in the city for about one week, then I met him again, he told me *'that language, those people, that*

country' referring to Nigeria, referring to Igbo people. He told me he traveled with a Ghanaian passport to Hungary, rather than a Nigerian passport with an Igbo name. So, such people don't feel proud of their language. If we don't feel proud of our language, how can we promote our language? Again, the school system has no deep interest in teaching Igbo language in the schools now. Go to the school library, you don't find Igbo books. Most of the schools don't have Igbo books in the library. Then, the teachers themselves that teach the language are looked down upon as never-do-well people, '*You did not see another subject to teach than Igbo?*' they would mock. They don't give Igbo language teachers the same status they give people teaching other subjects or studying other subjects. So, the government has to come in. In fact, I even think that the governments of Igbo-speaking states should get together, sit down, and discuss how to promote the language; otherwise, it will go the road Latin has gone and end up only in prayer books. The governments should encourage the creation of Igbo departments in higher institutions to train teachers of Igbo language, give scholarships to those who wish to study Igbo language the same way they give scholarship to those who wish to study French and other foreign languages, including English. So, the government should come in, the education sector should come in for the general public to react. When they see changes coming up, the reaction will be simultaneous. There was a time the Anambra State House of Assembly announced that they had set aside a day on which deliberations should be done in Igbo. It was welcomed even though some parliamentarians would tell you that they did not learn Igbo... they can't speak Igbo. They could mix Igbo forty percent with English sixty percent, but it is a nice venture. And if other Houses of Assembly could follow suit in Igbo-speaking states, at least, people will see the importance attached to the language by those institutions and we will come back to life. There was a time an Igbo newspaper was published in Enugu. The readership was poor—people didn't patronize it, not even the general public: if you are holding the newspaper and they say '*can I see this?*' Immediately they see it is in Igbo, would tell you, '*ah, I can't read it.*' So, the newspaper didn't last.

EE: So, it is then something of a mindset and attitude?

JUT: Yes.

EE: But in addition to all of these agencies you have talked about, parents at home have to do something too. Because there are, and I can speak from personal experience, parents who feel that it is more prestigious for their children even inside their home to speak English all the time. In America now, we have so many Igbo families whose children cannot speak Igbo! And some of the parents didn't seem to mind. Our Igbo people should borrow a leaf from Yoruba people and from Hausa people. There is nothing wrong with speaking good English, but there is

everything wrong in being an Igbo person and you speak good English but say you don't know how to speak Igbo or write Igbo or read Igbo. It is not something that even a law can do because some of the people even in the houses of legislature may not be able to communicate effectively in Igbo, but the Anambra House of Assembly initiative is a wonderful idea. Is it still going on?

JUT: I think it has been stopped.

EE: The question then is how do we get Igbo people, Igbo parents, to accept the idea of the necessity of helping their children embrace their mother tongue passionately? You put it so beautifully, if nothing is done to keep Igbo language alive, it will die like Latin and we don't want that to happen. There are over twenty-five million people today who are Igbo by origin. In fact, more than that. So, a language that has been given to us by our ancestors should not die in our own hands. How do we reach the Igbo parents?

JUT: Do you know that in some communities, you might be surprised that even in local village meetings, people get there to speak English, to address people in English. Even when some government officials visit local communities, the welcome address is normally in English even though the community is totally Igbo and the official will also reply in English. So, I think that, going back to the question of what should be done, maybe an all-out concerted effort should be made to 're-educate' the citizenry including the involvement of churches because some churches are guilty of the same thing. Reach out to churches to help spread the word that people should take interest in Igbo... then, there are ways we can achieve it. Like in schools, any parent whose child did not do Igbo language in nursery school should not be given admission into secondary school. And, if you go to secondary school, you must do Igbo. If you start like that, parents would be compelled to send their children to schools where they will study Igbo language. Some parents don't like to send their wards or their children to those places they teach Igbo or speak Igbo language.

EE: I was interested that you mentioned the churches. I attended a church service in my village some years ago. It was the burial of somebody who had died and the person who preached the sermon was from the village, but he preached in English and I would say that ninety-nine percent of the people who were there were Igbo-speaking. Yet, this priest preached in English and had somebody translate what he said into Igbo. Today, English is a world language. Igbo could become a world language depending on the attitude of the people.

JUT: Hungarians use their language for instruction in schools. Russians do the same as well as other countries the world over. Even Hausa people here study in Hausa language and outside the country, Hausa language is doing well. Why can't Igbo? Because we have not collectively decided to give Igbo language a befitting status.

- EE: We'll soon finish, but I want to now focus on your own writing. I see that in every novel you have written, you started with *Okwummanite* (Foreword/Prelude) and then you go into the story. What is the purpose of that *Okwummanite*? Is it to let the reader know what the story is all about or the philosophy behind the story?
- JUT: Well, *Okwummanite*, is not the summary of the story but a sort of appetizer.
- EE: I have read many of your books, I like *Nkoli* very much. I see that *Nkoli* was published first 1973, and raises some questions about: family intrigue, the problem about co-wives, etc. You made the female protagonist say a number of things that I believe are your own thoughts. For instance, advice against polygamy, with the mother saying she would not advise her daughter to go into a family where the husband is already married and be a second wife or third wife and that the only way the daughter could marry somebody who is already married is if the wife had died. You are writing this in 1973. I begin to wonder. This was a time when it was still fashionable to have many wives, many children, and so on and so forth. You seem to be saying in this story that people do not know really what goes on in those polygamous families—the rivalry between wives, the intrigue, the fights, etc. I find this book very interesting, and I wonder if you can talk a little bit more about *Nkoli*. What made you write this book?
- JUT: *Nkoli* originated just one day that I was going to work early in the morning because I had to be in the office at 3AM to be able to write the news that will be read at 6:30AM. So, the driver went round collecting our staff along the way before he came to collect me. A female staff in the vehicle was narrating a very pathetic story, her experience in their family. I did not join them when she started the story, I joined them when she had told quite a lot of the story. So, when we got to the station we stopped. I called her and asked her her name. She told me her name was Nkoli. I said okay Nkoli, 'Are you from Owerri and your dad is marrying many wives?' She said yes. I said okay. 'How many siblings have you?' She told me. I said okay, what about the other wives? She told me. We parted. Later, I started to develop what I heard her say in the vehicle into a story that incorporated other experiences I had about polygamous families. I joined everything together to produce the novel, *Nkoli* named after Nkoli in real life.
- EE: Have many things changed from the time you wrote this book to the present time? In terms of marriage and the desire for children, sons in particular and the rivalry between co-wives?
- JUT: Even though the practice of polygamy has not died down completely, changes are happening. Bear in mind the reasons for a polygamous family. Some of them might be because the first wife hadn't male children. The wife has given birth to female children, the man needs male children. Reasons could also include some misunderstandings between husband and wife; the husband goes and marries another wife. It could

also be as a result of a wayward husband who impregnates some girl. Whatever the reason, it doesn't augur well for a man to have multiple wives in the family. In our own system because even in some places where wealthy people go out to marry, you still have problems. In the absence of the man, the children will start killing themselves, struggling for the man's property to inherit. Their mothers will go all out trying to do some funny things in the family to kill or eliminate rival co-wives. So, the ills are enormous. The ills surpass the benefits derived from polygamy. So, in recent times, people are realizing especially those people who have female children, that instead of going to remarry and create problems, they can go and adopt male children. That one solves the problem. Again, some people who think that once you have male children, all is okay for you, are also realizing that female children can take more care of the parents than the male children. Because the male children will marry and focus their attention on their own family not looking at their parents. But, the female children even though they have married and have children, still come back to look after their parents.

EE: Two more questions and then we are done. One is again about your books. You've written so many books, which one do you think is your best book? Your favorite book?

JUT: It is just like asking somebody, you have eight children, which one do you like best?

EE: Alright, of all your books, if you want to relax now which one will you pick to read?

JUT: Any of them will serve me right.

EE: Fine. The last question. It relates to an earlier statement you made. The question is: what is your message to people—teachers, students, and others—who are looked down upon because they are passionate about speaking, teaching, or learning Igbo language especially at college and university levels?

JUT: Well, the fact that at present, Igbo language is not given its merited status, doesn't mean it will continue like that. So, people who are opportuned to go into higher institutions, I will advise them to study Igbo. There will be a time when the Pharaoh who knows Joseph will come on the stage and then, they will start to enjoy like other people who are enjoying studying other languages now.

EE: Well, thank you very much. It has really been a pleasure talking with you.

JUT: Thank you very much. I have enjoyed our conversation.

Interview of Author Chinedum E. Ofomata by Ernest N. Emenyonu

EE: First of all, welcome to my house, and to my library. We met first at the Igbo Studies Association 2013 conference (June 27–29, 2013) in Enugu last week. But it has been my deep aspiration for quite some time now

to locate you. So, it's really a great pleasure. No history of Igbo literature today will be complete or accurate without reference to Chinedum Ofomata. So, please tell us a little bit, about yourself.

CO: Thank you Prof. Thank you so much. First of all, I have to say I am very happy, and delighted to be here at Mbieri. An Igbo proverb says that 'a big ocean brings big fishes.' For me to be here, I should say that I'm highly privileged and see myself as one of the luckiest people to be here with Professor Emenyonu. So, thank you very much, it is a pleasure meeting you.

So, coming to your question, I am Chinedum Ezekiel Ofomata from Ogbuka in Orumba South Local government area in Anambra State, Nigeria. I was born in Umunze, although I'm from Ogbuka, but I was born in Umunze where my parents resided then. I was born on June 22nd, 1962. After primary and secondary education, I gained admission in 1982 to study Igbo at the Ihe Amufu College of Education in Anambra State. I read Igbo language because of my love and my interest in Igbo Language Studies. During my years at the college, I was elected the first president of Society for Promoting Igbo Language and Culture branch at the college. I was also the course leader of all the students reading Igbo language at the institution. I was also into student politics and was elected the chief whip in the students' union.

EE: Why did you choose to read Igbo? I ask because at the time you are talking about it was not a popular field of study to say the least.

CO: Thank you sir. That's a very wonderful question. I forgot to say something about that. In fact, as a young man who was in his early twenties, handsome and vibrant, to the society it seemed like an abomination to hear a young man of my type say he was going to a university to study Igbo. In fact, the society never accepted, never believed in Igbo Language Studies. People would ask you: 'what is it in Igbo that you don't know? So, you decided on Igbo because there was no other course in the university?' They saw you as somebody that didn't do very well in secondary school, so the choice was because you were academically a weakling, and not intelligent at all. To the local community, only wretched people went to the university to study Igbo Language and Culture. So, they were saying, 'this young man that is so fine and a socialite, of all the courses he decided to settle for Igbo?' It wasn't easy for me at all. It so affected me that at a point I decided to drop the course because even the girls were running away from me.

EE: So, how did you reverse that decision?

CO: It was not easy, but deep inside me I believed that rather than drop the course, I was determined to study Igbo in a way nobody before me had ever done. I would study Igbo Language and Culture in a way that would make society at large appreciate it as a worthy course of study in a university. So, what did I do? First, I founded a club called 'Prestigious Nze na Ozo Society' in the college, and I was the president of the club.

EE: But you didn't have an *Ozọ* title?

CO: No, no, no. It was a club on the campus, and I made it known to the members that we were not titled men as such so we would distinguish ourselves by wearing white caps not red including me the president, even when the members 'crowned' me '*Igwe*.'

EE: In Anambra, '*Igwe*' is a popular title. What does it mean?

CO: *Igwe* simply means 'traditional ruler.' Elsewhere you would say Eze (King), but in Anambra and Enugu States, the title is a symbol of rulership as high as the sky... indeed it connotes the universe.

EE: So, by crowning you *Igwe* and you have formed this club, your purpose then was to enhance the dignity and respect for Igbo language?

CO: Yes, the dignity for Igbo Language and Culture and also make Igbo Language and Culture enviable and attractive. And more importantly, make the students feel that this was something to be identified with pride.

EE: How did one become a member?

CO: Oh beautiful! In order to attract students, I formed a cabinet and with it, set up a spectacular cultural group known as '*Igbaeze* group' for cultural performances. When they performed they drew crowds. We went to town and bought musical equipments: local drums, gongs, and all what not.

EE: So, by highlighting the culture, you also highlighted the language?

CO: Yes the language because language is also culture. It is in the language that people understand the culture because when you are speaking the language, you are reflecting and also practicing the culture. So, when that *Igbaeze* was introduced, the students' attention and interests were captured especially when as *Igwe* a palace was established for me. I had a palace and a town crier. In fact, almost all the things that were done for royalty in a local community in *Igboland* were being practiced on the campus. I had a town crier, if I have any message, I sent that message through the town crier, who was a student. Not only that, I hardly came out in the open. An *Igwe* doesn't come out anyhow. I didn't go to the refectory. If I wanted to eat, somebody would go to the refectory and get food for *Igwe*, to eat in the palace. And if there was any function in the college, I would attend. They would present *kolanut* to me, I'd break the *kolanut*, and after that I'd be driven back. There was a student that had a vehicle then, so they used the vehicle to take me back to my palace. So, it wasn't easy for me. Immediately I arrived at a function, the students would stand up and hail me: '*Igwe* has come!' There would be a glamorous fanfare to welcome the *Igwe*. So for that other students wanted to be members of the club because we now made it exclusive... we said that whoever was a member of the club should be called *Nze*. And the *Nze* in *Igboland* is a titled man. A woman that was in the club was called *Lolo*. And if you were not a member, we regarded you as a poor and wretched student. In *Igboland*, it is only people that are rich that can now afford to get titles. So, from there students were

scrambling to be members. Later as Igwe in the Igbo culture, when I wanted to celebrate the famous 'Ofala' festival, the college authorities would not allow it.

EE: What is *Ofala*?

CO: Ofala is an annual occasion the Igwe celebrates to see his subjects and interact with them... it is the only time the people can talk with the Igwe. So, 'Ofala' is a special glamorous festival when Igwe comes out to see his subjects and everybody rejoices with him. It is always a big celebration.

EE: Why did the college refuse the celebration?

CO: They refused my celebrating the Ofala claiming that I was becoming more popular than the Provost (chief executive of the institution). But I had indeed achieved my goal. Igbo language and its attendant flamboyant customs and cultural practices had caught the attention of the students in a positive way. Studies in Igbo Language and Culture became not only popular and respectable, it was coveted!

EE: This is a very interesting story, and it should really be heard because what was at the background was that you wanted to uplift Igbo Language and Culture. And then, you approached it from a point of view people would understand because in Igbo culture as in many other African cultures, music is there, performance is there, art is there. Once you combine these, you'll get attention. So, I congratulate you on that. You not only achieved your purpose, it set a pace and precedent. But how did that translate into your being the prolific and famous author that you are today?

CO: I started my writing about Igbo Language and Culture at this stage as a student. I even told one or two of my friends that my aim was to be an author. They saw it as a joke and laughed at me.

EE: First, people laughed at you because you were going to read Igbo, now you want to be an author writing books in Igbo?

CO: Yes, I took my studies seriously and in practicing the customs at the level of a traditional ruler, I had in the process, been exposed to the full ramifications of the Igbo culture, enough to write my first book titled, *Anugba ajo ọsọ*.

EE: *Anugba ajo ọsọ* is an Igbo proverb?

CO: Yes, the full title is *Anugba ajo ọsọ agba ya ajo egbe*. That is 'the way you behave determines the way you'll be approached or treated.' When I wrote the book, I took it to my head of department, Mazi N.L. Oraka.

EE: Who also himself is an author?

CO: Yes, he is the author of *Ahubara Eze Ama*. He was a great mentor. When he read the manuscript, he told me yes, he had gone through it; it was a very interesting work, but it was still a pamphlet. He told me that any book that is not up to hundred pages is seen as a pamphlet. He told me that I should go and increase the volume. When I finished enlarging it to a bigger volume, I went back to him, he liked it and said he would help me get it published. He wrote a letter and asked me to take it to Fourth Dimension Publishers at Enugu. I took the manuscript

to them. They accepted the manuscript. After going through it, they gave me a contract for the publication. We signed an agreement. After writing that *Anugba ajo ọsọ*, I felt motivated because of the way my teacher, N.L. Oraka, encouraged and guided me. So I went on to write another novel called *Ihe onye metere, o were isi ya kwo*. I took it again to Mazi Oraka. He directed me again to the publishers, who accepted it for publication. Then followed another, and another, and another manuscript. That was how I started, the rest is now history.

EE: Alright, you've talked about your first novel, and others that followed it. It has been years now. You have since done your Master's degree in Igbo Studies. You are now a publisher with a long chain of publications, yours and other writers?

CO: Yes, I did my Master's in Igbo Studies not Linguistics.

EE: How did you become a publisher?

CO: First, let me mention something I forgot earlier. When I was in secondary school, I was very much in love with Igbo novels. Not only did I enjoy reading them, they also inspired me. Although, God is the greatest inspirer of all time, inspirations came also from other sources. I read books like *Nza na Obu* written by F. Chidozie Ogbalu, it was very interesting. Then *Chioma* by Oruchalu, *Nkoli* by J.U. Tagbo Nzeako, *Ukpana Okpokoko Buuru* by Tony Ubesie. These were the books I could remember that were so inspiring to me. After reading them, along with *Mbediogu* by Ogbalu (the novel we read when we were starting our first year in the secondary school), I was motivated to start writing. I was equally inspired by the teachers who taught us Igbo language all through the secondary school years, especially one Mr. Nwagbara. Teachers indeed matter! Now, coming to your question, I am a publisher, but that was not my primary motive for going into Igbo Studies. I became a publisher because of Igbo language, the same way Igbo language made me get a job and then made me leave the job so that Igbo language could be kept alive. I've been fighting for this, for the survival of Igbo Language and Culture. It was my sad experience that manuscripts accepted for publication by Fourth Dimension, Macmillan, Oxford University Press, Longman (all established publishers), would remain in their hands for years, unpublished. I also sent to some local publishers in Onitsha but the experience was the same. They claimed that there was no market for books in Igbo language. They would say: 'Why are you disturbing us? If we publish this book how many people are going to buy it? Who wants to buy a book written in Igbo language? Who and who are speaking Igbo language now?' They went as far as to say that the language was almost a dead language. So, they did not want to invest their money in things where they would not recoup the money. I did not give up. I saw the handwriting on the wall—if I had to wait for these publishers to publish my books, they will never be published. I, therefore, decided to take my destiny into my own hands, and become my own publisher!

- EE: Now two more questions. One, you have written many books for children. That is very commendable... ‘Catch them young,’ the saying goes. So, how did you get into writing for children in addition to writing for adults?
- CO: Thank you Prof. That’s a very nice question. You see, my writing life is full of challenges and I respond to each challenge as it emerges. A female researcher from London visited the University of Nigeria, Nsukka some years ago looking for children’s books and not finding much, asked why there were no children’s books in Igbo language. By then, I had noticed the gap and the challenge, and in response had written a series of children’s stories in Igbo. I gave a set to the professor at Nsukka who now presented them to the visiting researcher. She thanked the professor and took them with her to England. I have since then continued to write for children. It is for me a challenge and a worthwhile commitment.
- EE: Let’s round up with this question. For writers everywhere and I think mostly so in Nigeria, one big headache now is piracy. Are you experiencing this and how are you coping with it?
- CO: Thank you Prof. Yes, it is the greatest problem and headache we have in Nigeria today. Piracy has killed creativity. Piracy has killed the writing industry. Piracy has killed the publishing industry. In fact, piracy has destroyed everything creative in this country today. A country that does not have creativity is dead. Piracy has even destroyed education because most of us who are writing want to have some returns for our labor. But not anymore. Immediately your books are published, you suddenly see them being sold everywhere but the ones being sold are not the ones you published yourself or were published for you elsewhere. The legitimate publications are under-cut, and under-sold leaving authors poor and wretched. This is unlike most other places in the world. This is the fate of not only authors but other creative artists in Nigeria—musicians, film makers, actors, etc. Artists alone cannot win the war against piracy. The governments—Federal and State should come in and salvage the situation which threatens all aspects of artistic and scientific endeavor in Nigeria.
- EE: Thank you very much Chinedum Ofomata for your creativity, indomitable courage, and progressive ideas. Never give up!
- CO: Yes sir. But before we conclude this interview, I want to use this opportunity to say thank you to people who encouraged me, people who made me not lose hope, people who were behind me to be where I am today. Igbo language has given me a lift and a crown to serve its cause unflinchingly now and always. I remain committed to its cause.
- EE: Thank you indeed. I’ve enjoyed reading your books, I’ve even enjoyed more listening to you. So, continue with the dynamism!
- CO: Thank you Prof. Thank you sir.

Appendix

Table A.1 Igbo language novels 1933–2015 (by decade)

<i>S/N</i>	<i>Title</i>	<i>Author</i>	<i>Date</i>
1	1 Omenuko	Pita Nwana	1933
2	2 Ala Bingo	D. N. Achara	1937
3	1 Elelia Na Ihe O Mere	D. N. Achara	1952
4	1 Ije Odumodu Jere	Leopold Bell-Gam	1963
5	1 Ukwa Ruo Oge Ya	Tony Ubesie	1973
6	2 Erimma	J. U. T. Nzeako	1973
7	3 Oka Mgba	John Iroaganachi	1973
8	4 Nkoli	J. U. T. Nzeako	1973
9	5 Mmiri Oku E Ji Egbu Mbe	Tony Ubesie	1974
10	6 Aka Ji Aku	Tagbo Nzeako	1974
	7 Ukpana Okpoko Buuru	Tony Ubesie	1975
12	8 Mbediogu	F. Chidozie Ogbalu	1975
	9 Ahubara Eze Ama	Oraka	1975
14	10 Uwaezuoke	F. Chidozie Ogbalu	1976
15	11 Ju Obinna	Tony Ubesie	1977
16	12 E Nenebe Eje Olu	Tony Ubesie	1977
17	13 Uru Nwa	J. C. Maduekwe	1978
18	14 Isi Akwu Dara Nala	Tony Ubesie	1979
19	15 Otu Mkpisi Aka	J. C. Maduekwe	1979
20	1 Nwata Rie Awo	Goddy O. Onyekaonwu	1980
21	2 Obi Nwanne	Kalu Okpi	1980
22	3 Uwadiogwu	N. B. Obodo	1980
23	4 Emecheta	J. U. T. Nzeako	1980
24	5 Juochi	J. U. T. Nzeako	1981
25	6 Oji isi kote ebu	Walter C. Eneore	1982
26	7 Oku Uzu Daa Ibube	Goddy O. Onyekaonwu	1982
27	8 Aku Na Uba	G. O. S. Obioha	1983
28	9 Onye Chi Ya kwo N'azu	Ndubodii Ben Obodo	1983
29	10 Chinaagorom	Julie N. Onwuchekwa	1983
30	11 Ogwumagala	Nolue Emenanjo	1984
31	12 Ikenga	F. Azoma Ihentuge	1985
32	13 Onukwube	Otu Odunke	1986
33	14 Uwa Bu Ihe Efu	Nnadi C. Onwubuariri	1987
34	15 Ako Bu Bdu	Anelechi B. Chukuezi	1988

(Continued)

<i>S/N</i>	<i>Title</i>	<i>Author</i>	<i>Date</i>
35	16 Mkpuru Onye Kuru	Ray C. Anene	1988
36	17 Ezinne	Chika Anyasodo	1989
37	18 Adaaku	Obioma B. Mogbogu	1989
38	1 Agha Erila M	Chike Okonkwo	1990
39	2 Echiche	Asonye Uba – Mgbemena	1990
40	3 Okwe Agbaala	I. U. Nwadike	1991
41	4 ojimba	Anosike Ubani	1991
42	5 Oja Dufuo Dike	Ray C. Anene	1991
43	6 Nwata Bulie Nna Ya Elu	Inno U. Nwadike	1992
44	7 Mkpa Akwukwo Darue Ala, O Zuolo Ikuku	Tony Ubesie	1993
45	8 Ugochi	Okwuchi Nwoko Osuchukwu	1993
46	9 Anu Gbaa Ajon Oso...	Chinedum E. Ofomata	1994
47	10 0 Ji Ihe Nwata	Lae, Chukwuneke Okoro	1995
48	11 Mkpuru Onye Kuru N ^I uwa	Okwuchi Nwoko Osuchukwu	1996
49	12 Ihe Onye Metere	Chinedum E. Ofomata	1996
50	13 Ajo Obi	G. I. Nwaozuzu	1998
51	14 Adaeze	Inno U. Nwadike	1998
52	15 Akuebionwu	Don Nnawuihe Epuchie	1998
53	16 Nwogure	Phillip N. Edomobi	1998
54	17 Ajo Nwa A Na-eku N'ikpere	Ben Igbokwe	1999
55	18 Anu Ebu Nwa	Chukwuemeka Ike	1999
56	19 Chianu	Marshal Chibiko Ihedioha	1999
57	20 Agbusi Gbaa Otule	J. U. T. Nzeako	1999
58	21 Ukwu Jie Agu	J. U. T. Nzeako	1999
59	22 Nkata Ekpudo Onye Aghugho	J. U. T. Nzeako	1999
60	23 Ihe Ojoo Gbaa Ajon Oso...	Chinedum E. Ofomata	1999
61	1 Onye Chi Ya Akwatughi	Chinedum E. Ofomata	2000
62	2 Dibia Na-agwo Otoro	Chinedum E. Ofomata	2000
63	3 Oguejiofo	Ray C. Anene	2000
64	4 Onye Oma Emeka	Mmuotulumanya J. Okafo	2000
65	5 0 Ruru Out Mobe	Maazi Jon Ibe	2001
66	6 Mmiri Mara Nkwume	B. Nnorom Oguchukwu	2001
	7 Emerole	J. N. Ibe	2001
68	8 Ugonna	Chinedum E. Ofomata	2001
69	9 Chinenyeze	Don Nnawuihe Epuchie & Chris Nudka Obichere	2001
70	10 Eke na Egwurugwu	Inno U. Nwadike	2001
71	11 Ihe Nwata Huru	Chinedum E. Ofomata	2002
72	12 Uwa Mgbede	S. N. Okafo	2003
73	13 Onye Gawara Njem Nyuchie Nsi Uzo	Millicent, G. Asogwa	2004
74	14 Ariri Nne Kwara	Ikechukwu Nwankwo	2004
75	15 Chioma	S. U. Oruchalu	2005
76	16 Uwa Bu Agha	Inno U. Nwadike	2005
77	17 Onwu Egubughi Uwa	Chinedum E. Ofomata	2006
78	18 Osa Enwe Akwu...	Ndubodii Ben Obodo	2006
79	19 Okuko A Gbatara n'Afa	Ray C. Anene & D. C. Maduelosi	2006
80	20 Chima na Ezimma	Maazi S. N. Okafo	2006

<i>S/N</i>	<i>Title</i>	<i>Author</i>	<i>Date</i>
81	21 Ikweaku	Okeke Chika Jerry	2007
82	22 Nwanyi Lelia Di Ya	Casmir U. Abara	2007
83	23 Chimaijem	Ezeibe B. U (Odoziaku)	2007
84	24 Akwuna Kawa Nka...	Maazi Ben Igbokwe	2008
85	25 Ebubedike	F. Chidozie Ogbalu	2008
86	26 Oke Soro Ngwere	Okechukwu C. Ihejirika	2008
	27 Agharata	P. A. Ezikeojiaku	2009
88	28 Chukwu Ka M Ma	Chinedum E. Ofomata	2009
89	29 Asamma	Okeke Chika Jerry	2009
90	30 Ulumma	Chinedum E. Ofomata	2009
91	31 Kpolla M Be Anyi	Chinedum E. Ofomata	2009
92	32 Ofunna	Chinedum E. Ofomata	2009
93	1 Ochiawuto	Rev. Sista Coronata Chinyenwa Nwachuwu (IHM)	2010
94	2 Ugochinyere Nwata	Maazi R. M. Nwokelue	2010
95	3 Nwata Hu N'Anyia O Kwe	Onyejegbu Obiokoye Dennis	2010
96	4 Mmiri Zochaa Anyanwu Awa	Joseph J. C. Dike	2011
97	5 Ihe Agi kwuru	Okwuchukwu Barnabas Umeh	2011
98	6 Akuko Ifo Ala Anyi	D. I. Nwafo	2011
99	7 Onwu Gini Ka Anyi Mere Gi	Rev. Sista Coronata Chinyenwa Nwachuwu (IHM)	2012
100	8 Uwa Akaala Nka	Chris Nduka Obichere	2012
101	9 Ndi Nwe Egwu	Emmanuel Chukwudi Ibekwe	2012
102	10 Ogbenye Nwee Ndidi	Ray C. Anene	2012
103	11 Ohia na-aso Nkata	Emmanuel Chukwudi Ibekwe	2012
104	12 E Lewe Ogaranya Anya	PIN Okoye	2013
105	13 Aka Aja Aja	Okeke Chika Jerry	2013
106	14 Uwa Na-Eme Ntughari	Obunne Victor C.	2013
107	15 Nkita Atakaa Akpa Dibia	J.U. Tagbo Nzeako	2013
108	16 Akamkpo Chinedu	Nnenna Ihebom	2013
109	17 Ihe Nyiri Okuko	J. Uchechukwu Nzeako Jnr.	2013
110	18 Ihe Nwata Eribeghi	Uchechi Lynda Mmakwe	2014
111	19 Odogwu Be Anyi	Nnenna Ihebom	2014
112	20 O Natara Chi	Nwada Okoye V. Chidimma	2014
113	21 Akuanata	J. U. Tagbo Nzeako	2014
114	22 Onye Ana-ekiri ekiri	Uchechi Lynda Mmakwe	2015
115	23 Ijiji Na-Anaghi Anu Ndumodu	Omenli Obianuju C.	2015
116	24 Aku Si Na Chi	Hon. Ezejesi N. R.	2015
117	25 Uwa Adighi Ka E Chere	Uchechi Lynda Mmakwe	2015
118	26 Uwa Di Omimi	Anayo Ikeora	2015
119	Okpa - Aku Eri Eri	Ude Odilora	N/D
120	2 Robo Umu Nwoke	Igbo	N/D
121	3 Uche Bu Afa	Dr. Goddy O. Onyekaonwu	N/D
122	4 Ugo Chi Nyere Nwata	Maaz Robert M. Nwokelue	N/D
123	5 Nka Di Na Nti	Mazi B. Emeka Okoro	N/D
124	6 Aghiriigha	P. N. Munonye	N/D
125	7 Ogene Ike Na-Akpo Dike	J.U.T Nzeako	N/D
126	8 Aturu Ga-epu Mpi	Onyefuluchuku Ndubisi	N/D
127	9 Ewu Amuo N' Ogburi	J. U. T. Nzeako	N/D

MY JOE. RADIO TALK.

By Bishop D.B.Hall.

Some time ago I read a definition of a "bore". It said, "A bore is someone who keeps talking about himself when you want to talk about yourself".

Well, to-night for half an hour I have been asked to talk about myself and my work. It is not an easy task. I hope I shall not bore you. If I do it may not be entirely my fault!

I am an Anglican Bishop, one of the two Assistant Bishops on the Niger. The other is an African, Bishop Dimieari, who now lives at Aba, and as well known here where he used to be Archdeacon. Our "Diocesan" is Bishop Patterson who lives at our Headquarters in Onitsha.

The Niger Diocese stretches roughly from Warri and Agbor in the West to the Benue River in the North, to the far side of Cameroons in the East, and to the sea coast in the South. It is a very large area. But we do not work it all. By agreement with some of the other Protestant Missions, certain sections are left largely under their jurisdiction. Thus the Basel Mission is chiefly responsible for work in the Cameroons, the Scottish Mission for an area around Umuahia,

and the Methodist Mission for areas around Umuahia, nearly all of Ibo-land and of the huge Delta area where there are many different tribes and languages. Each Bishop is allotted an area of his own to supervise, though we interchange quite often. My own area includes nearly all the Niger Delta and four Districts in the Owerri Archdeaconry. I might say here that each Church District contains anything from ten to sixty Churches and nearly as many Schools. My area has over 500 Churches and over half that number of Schools.

So if sometimes you in Port Harcourt wonder where I am and say, "Why is the Bishop not here?" you must remember that like St. Paul I have "the care of all the Churches", and like St. Paul I am "in journeyings often".

I reckon that I spend about half of my time touring the Districts about one third of my time in Port Harcourt, and the rest of my time attending meetings and conferences, most of which are held in distant places. I certainly cannot complain of lack of variety. Neither can I complain of lack of friends. I get tumultuous welcomes everywhere from an extremely friendly people. How glorious the children are too! There is an Arab proverb which says, "One enemy is too many. But a thousand friends are not enough". Very true. I hope I have no enemies. I have certainly got thousands of friends already in the Country. The great trouble is that I meet so many for so short a time that there is little chance of getting to know them properly.

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Sometimes I feel like a King. This was certainly the case at one place where the people produced in my honour an old banner first used at the time of the Coronation and bearing the words, "Long may they reign." As I have no wife I wondered to whom the word "they" referred! It reminded me of a story told by Bishop Patterson, who is also a bachelor. Once when he was on tour someone said to him. "We welcome the shepherd, but where is the shepherdess?" I have been given many titles in my time, "Your Grace", "Your Excellency", "Your Worship", "Your Honour". Once a letter was addressed to me as "The Lord Bishop of Cambridge". On another occasion a European friend in Port Harcourt sent a letter round to me by hand. I scribbled an answer and sent it back by the same

2.

messenger. He returned to his master's house saying, "I have brought you a letter from the Pope". But I have never yet attained to the heights of Bishop Vining, now Bishop of Lagos and Archbishop of West Africa, who was once my predecessor here. A letter arrived at the Post Office addressed to "Almighty God, Port Harcourt". The Post Office officials wrote on the envelope, "Try Bishop Vining". They were right !!

Apart from my proper title, if you want to call me by another name the best is the one already mentioned - "Shepherd". For that is what I try to be. That is why I often carry round with me my Pastoral Staff or Shepherd's crook. It is a sign of my office. I have to try to care for the thousands of people in my charge, to visit them, protect them, help them, tend to those who are sick, seek and save those who are lost. It is great and exacting work. There is my Priestly office too. The celebrating of the Sacraments, the conducting of Services, the proclamation of the Gospel. Pastor and Priest. It is no light job. But it is a happy one.

Now let me speak in greater detail of my three main jobs - Touring, Work in Port Harcourt, and attendance at Meetings.

Firstly, then, Touring, "In journeying often," have you ever been out on the creeks? Perhaps you have been as far as Okrika, or Bonny, or Abonnema. If you have you know a little, but ~~not~~ only a little. Journeys like that are what we in England call "chickens feed." Very small, small. Or perhaps you have only been out in a large launch. Again, you do not know much of the real creek life. To do this you should travel in a canoe. Once I arrived at Membe at 2 a.m. after 18 hours continuous travel by canoe. We had 3 or 4 hours sleep, then started off for Abonnema. This time we took 22 hours - bitten all night by mosquitoes, unable to lie down - or to walk about, and with no washing or cooking facilities. Not very pleasant for a European!

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Perhaps the slowness of travel in the creeks can best be illustrated by the story of a letter. One of our Pastors who lives at Brass sent an air mail letter to Bishop Patterson who was on leave in England. The letter arrived at C.M.S. House, London, the day after the Bishop had returned to Nigeria by air. "The letter was forwarded to Worcester where they thought that the Bishop might be. From Worcester it was re-directed back to Nigeria. The letter when opened was found to state: - "To-morrow I am setting off to Onitsha to attend the Board Meetings." It arrived back at Onitsha on the same day as the Past or himself arrived! In other words, the letter had travelled by air to London, by train to Worcester, and back

by air to Nigeria during the same period that the Pastor himself had been painfully paddling up from Brass.

But canoes are not always slow. Once I had the unique and wonderful experience of travelling all the way from Bonny to Port Harcourt in a Chief's racing gig. It had 40 paddlers sitting each side from stem to stem. With bunting and flags flying, a small band playing in the middle to beat the time, and with war-cries and singing, the Archdeacon and I with boys and baggage were propelled to Port Harcourt in just over 5 hours through the heat of the day. When we arrived a large crowd gathered at the wharf to see this unusual sight. Incidentally, I am often accompanied on tour by the Archdeacon or another Missionary. So much for creek travel.

"But what", you may ask, "actually happens when you reach your destination?" Well, as we approach the place concerned we are sometimes met by cheering crowds in highly decorated canoes which circle round us and escort us in. Canons explode with great violence, and not a little danger. Sometimes men are seen dancing on the bank firing rifles into the air. Some have been known to fall into the water in their excitement and to continue their dancing there! Others may swim out to meet us. A large

→ I might also add that the good news has just been received from England that a new motor launch has been purchased for the service. It should arrive in 2 or 3 months.

3.

number of Church women are sure to be there. Sometimes they are dancing. At other times they are singing hymns. There are the school children with bands and banners singing a welcome song. I have sung this song in many parts of England when on deputation work. But I shall not attempt to sing it now or many of you might swithhh off! In front of them all there often stands the Paramount Chief in full regalia. Perhaps there is a Scout there too signalling the word "Welcome". After landing, shaking hands, and sometimes joining in the dancing, we proceed to the Church. Here a short Service is held - Hymns, Prayers, and a Devotional Address. Here follows an Address of Welcome, and a short discussion in which we are told of their joys and sorrows, their progress or backwardness, their successes and failures, their problems and needs. Then, if there is a School at the Station, off we go to speak to the children. An Entertainment may follow, and then, invariably, comes the procession bearing Kola - gifts of food which they lavish generously upon us - sometimes a sheep or goat, always a fowl, eggs, yams and fruit. We have often tried to stop this giving. But it is quite useless. It is an old custom. The people love to give and are most generous. If any European friends of mine should sometimes hear the bleating of a sheep proceeding from the direction of my compound I hope they will forgive me. I soon get rid of them either for my own nourishment or by selling them for some good cause.

When touring on land I go, of course, by kit car, well piled

When touring on land I go, of course, by kit car, well piled up with bush gear, kitchen, pots, pans, china, cutlery, tinned food camp bed, bath, lamps, kerosene, filter, robes and clothing. The first indication that we are getting near our destination is usual the sight of palm branches stuck into the ground on each side of the road. These may continue for a mile or more. A very biblical welcome! The first persons to greet us are the school children who have marched out with band and banners to escort us in. The women are usually there also. On arrival at the Station we follow much the same procedure as that already described - a visit to the Church, then to the School, and so forth. Then on again to the next Station. We may visit anything from 3 to 6 places a day according to their size and the time taken in travelling.

Travel by car is not without its excitement as many of you will know. Once, when rushing to catch the Oron Ferry to Calabar, we crashed into the bush at over 40 miles an hour. I still wonder how I am alive to day! On another occasion at 8 p.m. our headlights failed and we landed nearly upside-down in a ditch. Ten people we did not know were there crawled out of the back of the car which also contained a full drum of petrol. We walked to the nearest village where the people kindly lent us 4 bicycles. With these we cycled 13 miles through the bush, arriving at our Rest House just before mid-night. Here, perhaps, is an appropriate time

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Touring, although very tiring, is perhaps the most satisfying of all my work. It encourages the Pastors and the people and lets them know that they are not forgotten. It also helps me to gain an insight of the real Church work and to understand the problems. Here is a quotation from an Address of Welcome of a small outlandish bush Church.

"We raise our hearts, and all who are here
 bid your Lordship hearty welcome and cheer.
 We are poor and needy,
 Thou mindst our poverty,
 Our place is distant and crooked;
 Thou tracedst it out and visited;
 We are less civilized and famous,
 Yet you remember and visit us,
 We are backward in our affairs,
 But we always pray for God's care.

Before I leave the subject of touring I should, of course, mention the many special Services I have to take. In nearly every District there is at least one Confirmation to be held. Often I have to Institute and Induct the Pastor, licence Lay Readers, admit members to the Mothers' Union, Women's Guild or Women's Association. Then there may be a Foundation Stone to lay, or a Church or School to dedicate, and there are always big Services on Sundays. Mention should also be made of a special 5 week visit to the Spanish Island of Fernando Poo. I want there last November to visit the British Chaplaincy which, although run by the Methodists, sees to the needs of members of all Protestant Missions. Over 20,000 Nigerians work

there. It was an interesting and absorbing task.

Now for a brief description of my work at Port Harcourt. Firstly there is my office work. As I have no clerk and no type-writer this takes a great deal of time. Often I have to go to my Archdeacon or local General Manager of Schools for advice, and sometimes they help me by answering letters or doing some typing. There are many callers to interview, personal letters to write, and sermons to prepare. Recently, too, I have been helping to prepare 3 booklets for use in the Diocese - one on "Hymn Tunes" another on "Occasional Prayers", and the other on "Supplementary Services", in Ibo and English. There are two large Anglican Churches in Port Harcourt St. Cyprian's and St. Peter's, which I help from time to time as well as several smaller Churches in the vicinity. Then there are the Teachers' Training College at Diobu, Elelenwa Girls' School, and Okrika Grammar School to be visited, to say nothing of the Bookshop and Printing Press. As most of you know there are daily Religious Services broadcast from this studio. Five Protestant Missions share in this work. I am the Chairman of the Committee and sometimes conduct the Services myself. Every Thursday from 5.30. to 7.p.m. I run my Bishop's Fellowship for young men and senior schoolboys in the Bookshop Upper Room. This is partly religious and partly social. We have games such as table tennis, darts and boxing, lectures, debates and religious talks. From June to November I also take a special weekly Confirmation Class for Secondary School-boys. Others have to take my place when I am away. I am also a member of the

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Over and above all this I naturally feel that I have a duty to perform for the Europeans. But also, my other duties do not allow me to see nearly enough of my fellow countrymen. However, once a month I take Services for them at Christ Church, the small Church in Miller Avenue behind the Catering Rest House. The Methodist take similar Services there once a month also. There are also occasional Weddings and Baptisms. And on most Wednesday evenings when I am home you can see me on the Police Grounds tagging down the left wing playing hockey for the Europeans against the Police.

Now if word about Meetings. These sometimes last for a week or more and maybe held in any part of the Diocese involving much travelling. They may be Diocesan, Archdeaconry or local - Synods, Conferences, Boards, Committees. To these must now be added Provincial Meetings with other Bishops of West Africa. Most of you will have read of our recent trip to Freetown in connection with the Inauguration of the West African Province. It was a great and memorable occasion, and another step forward in the progress of the Church. One of the first decisions made when the new Provincial Synod met under the Chairmanship of our first Arch-Bishop was to divide the huge Lagos Diocese into four, and the Niger Diocese into two. So by this time next year the Niger Delta will have a Diocese of its own. This will correspond to the area which has always been known as the Niger Delta Pastorate or N.D.P. But to return for a moment to the formation of the Province. One of the results, I fear, will be more meetings and more expensive travel.

We shall, for instance, probably have to go to Lagos next October to appoint Bishops for the new Dioceses.

I once heard a meeting described as "a place where minutes are taken and hours are wasted." Sometimes one is tempted to applaud that statement. It is very wearisome to listen to constant repetition of the same argument or to speeches which are

October to appoint Bishops for the new Dioceses.

I once heard a meeting described as "a place where minutes are taken and hours are wasted." Sometimes one is tempted to applaud that statement. It is very wearisome to listen to constant repetition of the same argument or to speeches which are off the point. But meetings are integral part of the democratic way of life. Through them the voice of the people may be heard and their representatives may record their votes. Thus many mistakes and misunderstandings are avoided. In the old days when Bishops formed a Committee of one, decisions were more quickly made but they were not always wise.

I am not sure however whether the pendulum in these days has not swung too far the other way. Sometimes we seem to be Committee mad. What time and money we spend on these things! But I suppose it is better to have too many Committees than too few.

That, then, is a brief description of my job - touring, preaching, confirming, visiting, writing, and discussing. Behind it all is the inspiration of the Gospel, and an attempt to help the people of this great Country by telling them the Good News of God as seen in Jesus Christ.

Thank you for your many kindnesses to me. And thank you for listening. I hope that you have not been bored.

Kachifo. Good Night.

Index

Note: *Italic* page numbers refer to figures and page numbers followed by “n” denote endnotes.

- Abigbo Group: *Umu Koleji* 28–29
Achara, D.N. 68–70
Achebe, Chinua 1–2, 3, 24, 117;
 ODENIGBO lecture 91–92, 96;
 problematics of writing in indigenous
 Nigerian languages 89–103;
 written (literary) Igbo language
 standardization, crisis of 78, 79, 81,
 82, 85–87
Adams, R.F.C. 77, 79
Adibe, Okonkwo 33
adult education 9–10
Afigbo, A.E. 82
African Language Literatures (Gerard)
 4, 6–7
African literature, definition of 1–2
African Studies Association
 (ASA) 2
AGHARATA (Ezikeojiaku) 99
AHIAJOKU Lecture Series 96, 97
Ahubara Eze Ama (Ofomata) 136
Ajayi, J.F. 42
AKA WETA 82
Akintola 33
Ala Bingo (Achara) 68–70, 73, 74
Amadi, Elechi 2
Anglican Grammar School 128
“The Ant and the Lazy Dog” 19
Anugba ajo oso (Ofomata) 136, 137
Anusiem, Raphael 33
Anyaeibunam, Ngozi 84–85
Anyogu, John Cross 80
aphorisms 63, 110, 120
The Arabian Nights 45
ASA *see* African Studies Association
 (ASA)
Awolowo, Obafemi 33, 98
Azikiwe, Nnamdi 33, 79
Azuonye, Chukwuma 96
Baikie, William 40
Basden, G.T. 44
Bell-Gam, Leopold 70–71, 75
Bendel Igbo 87
Benson, Bobby 33
Birmingham University Archives 7
British Museum 7
Caroline 30, 31
Central Igbo 82, 90, 101
Chi ewere Ehibie Jie (Nzeako) 127
Chinaagorom (Onwuchekwa) 104–114
Chioma (Oruchalu) 137
Church Missionary Society (CMS)
 7, 38, 39
C.M.S. Schools 43
*The Constitution of the Federal
 Republic of Nigeria* 1979, 8
Crowther, S.A. 39–41, 51n6, 92, 98
Defoe, Daniel 71
“*Democracy*” 26
Dennis, T. J. 91, 96, 97, 100
Dennis Memorial Grammar School
 (DMGS) 79–80
dialect 39, 40, 51n6, 81–87, 89–92, 95,
 98–102
DMGS *see* Dennis Memorial Grammar
 School (DMGS)
Ebubedike 87
Echeruo, M.J.C. 82, 87, 96
educational services 10
Efik 11, 78, 107

- Egudu, Romanus 117
 Ekiti 98
 Ekwensi, Cyprian 2
Eleven-Eleven 30–31
 Emecheta, Buchi 2
 Emenanjo, E. Nolue 80, 82, 85, 86, 89, 96, 115–116
 Emeyonu, Ernest N.: interview with Nzeako 125–133; interview with Ofomata 133–138
English-Ibo Dictionary (Thomas) 41, 49
 Erinne, D.C. 80
 Ezikeojiaku, P.A. 99
- Fagunwa, D.O. 99
Federal Republic of Nigeria National Policy on Education 8–10
 female voices 104–114
 fiction 52–76; *Ala Bingo* 68–70, 73, 74; *Ije Odumodu Jere* 70–71, 75; *Omenuko* 52–68, 72
A First Grammar of the Ibo Language (Spencer) 41
 folktales 12–16, 20, 23, 24, 42–44, 46, 59, 63
 Fourah Bay College 38
 “The Fox and the Hen” 17
 “From Dialectal Dichotomy to Igbo Standard Development” (Nwoga) 95
- Gerard, Albert S. 4, 6–7
 “God and the Two Brothers” 44
The Gorilla and Two Cats 44
A Grammar of the Ibo Language (Schon) 39
Grammatical Elements of the Igbo Language (Schon) 41–42
Grimm’s Fairy Tales 45
Gulliver’s Travels (Swift) 71
- Hausa 9, 11, 39, 78, 86, 91, 95, 107, 129–131
 Hausa Metalanguage 95
A History of Tigrinya Literature (Negash) 4
 humor 15, 26, 27, 30, 65, 116, 117, 120, 122
- Ibiam, Akanu 80
 Ibiam, Sir Francis *see* Ibiam, Akanu
 Ibibio 11, 78, 107
 Ibo 9, 39–41
Ibo-English Dictionary (Thomas) 41, 49
Ibo Grammar (Spencer) 41
Ibo Reader (Crowther) 41
 Idoma 78
 Igbo Language Bureau 101, 102
 Igbo Language Studies 86, 89, 91–93, 95, 96, 101, 102, 115, 125, 134
 Igbo Metalanguage 95
 Igbomina 98
 Igbo novel, definition of 1, 2
 Igbo Oral-Written Interface 89, 92
 Igbo Studies Association Conference 125, 133
 Igbo Writers Association 101
 Igwe, G.E. 96
Ihe Aghasaa Chinua Achebe 99
Ihe onye metere, o were isi ya kwo (Ofomata) 137
 Ijaw 78
 Ijebu 98
Ije Odumodu Jere (Odumodu’s Travels) (Bell-Gam) 70–71, 75
 Ijesha 98
 Ike, Chukwuemeka 2
 imagery 13, 15, 16, 25–27, 29, 30, 45, 122
 indigenous Nigerian languages, problematics of writing in 89–103; Achebe’s *ODENIGBO* lecture 91–92; key issues, analysis of 95–101; Nwadike’s disagreement with Achebe’s views 92–95; origins and substance of the controversy 90–91; proposals toward solutions 101–103
The Interesting Narrative of the Life of Olaudah Equiano, Or, Gustavus Vassa, the African (Equiano) 70
 invocations 62, 105
 irony 15, 27, 30, 37, 59, 71, 105, 116–118, 120, 121, 124
Isi Akwu Dara Nala (Ubesie) 116, 117, 120, 122–124
Isoama-Ibo Primer (Crowther) 51n6
 Isuma Igbo 82, 90
- Jenewari, Erasmus 33
Juọ Obinna (Ubesie) 116–121
- Kabba 98
 Koelle, S.W. 40
- language: importance of 9; indigenous Nigerian languages, problematics of writing in 89–103; policy, implementation of 10–12; written (literary) Igbo language

- standardization, crisis of 77–88;
see also individual languages
 Lawson, Rex Jim 33
Leopard and Lamb 44
*A Literary History of the Novel in
 African Languages: The Evolution
 and Development of the Igbo Novel
 (1857–2015)* (Achebe) 4
 “The Lion and the Bush Rats” 17–18
 literary history, need for 6–12
 literary origins of Igbo 13–24

 Madam, A.C. 41
Mbe na Enyi (Tortoise and Elephant) 44
Mbieri dialect 99, 100
 Methodist Mission 42
Mgbediogu (Ogbalu) 137
 Ministries of Education: *Textbook
 Selection Committees* 100
 minstrelsy, in traditional Igbo society
 25–37; *Eleven-Eleven* 30–31; features
 of 27; popular groups 27–37;
Seven-Seven 29–30; *Umu Kolejii*
 28–29
 missionary influence, on orthography
 and written literature 38–51
Mmiri Oku Eji Egbu Mbe (Ubesie) 116
 Munonye, John 2
 “A Musical Competition between my
 Mother and Me” 29
 My Job (radio talk) 142–146

 National Council of Nigerian Citizens
 (N.C.N.C) 33
 National Language Policy 95
 N.C.N.C *see* National Council of
 Nigerian Citizens (N.C.N.C)
 Negash, Ghirmai 4
 NERDC *see* Nigerian Educational
 Research and Development Council
 (NERDC)
Ngele Agun’egbu 21–23
 Niger Expedition 39
 Nigerian Civil War of 1970, 97, 117
 Nigerian Educational Research and
 Development Council (NERDC) 95
 Nigerian Highway Code 99
 Njemanze, B.A. 32
 Njemanze, Israel Nwaṓba 31–36; death
 of 36–37
 Njoku, Amanze 33
 Njoku, Brnjsmin 65
Nkoli (Nzeako) 132, 137
Nkwa Love 28
 non-formal education 9–10

 Nsukka Igbo 87
 Nwachukwu, Philip 82
 Nwadike, Innocent: disagreement with
 Achebe’s views 92–95
 Nwaebo, Nze Iheanyichukwu 28
 Nwana, Pita 4, 52–62, 99, 124
 Nwankiti, B.C. 97
 Nwankwo, Izuu 99
 Nwoga, Donatus 81, 82, 84, 89, 95,
 101–103
Nza na Obu (Ogbalu) 137
 Nzeako, Constance 126
 Nzeako, J.U.T. 125–133, 137

 OAU *see* Organization for African
 Unity (OAU)
 Obiechina, Emmanuel 45
Obiefuna/Obiefula 85, 87
 Obiligbo 33
 Obinna, A.J.V. 90–91, 96, 97, 118–121
 ODENIGBO lecture 91–92
 ODENIGBO Lecture Series 96, 97
 Ofala 136
 Ofomata, Chinedum E. 133–138
 Ogbalu, Mazi F.C. 77–80, 82, 84–85,
 87, 95, 96, 129, 137
 Ogbo, Obieze 82, 85, 101
 Ohiri-Aniche, Chinyere 96
 Ojike, Mbonu 33
Okuko Agbasaa Okpesi (Nzeako) 125
 Okonta, Eddy 33
 Okoye, Ifeoma 2
 Olaiya, Victor 33
Omenuko (Nwana) 4, 6, 7, 52–68,
 72, 76n2, 76n3, 99, 124; legacy and
 impact on Igbo literature 65–68;
 mixed literary forms 62–64
 Ondo 98
 Onitsha Igbo 87
 Onitsha Market Literature 27
 Onwuchekwa, Julie 104–114
 Onwu orthography 81–82
 Onwu, S.E. 80
 Oraka, L. Nnamdi 77, 136
 Organization for African Unity
 (OAU) 78
 orthography 9, 95, 96, 102; dispute
 77, 81–83; missionary influence on
 38–51, 91; Onwu 81–82;
 pan-Igbo 92; Protestant 52, 81;
 Roman Catholic 81; Union 76n3
 Oruchalu, S. U. 137
 Osuagwu, B.I.N. 96
Outline Dictionary of English Words
 (Madam) 41

- Owerri Igbo 87
Oxford Archives 7
Oyo 92, 98, 99
- Pax Britannica* 55
Pilgrim's Progress 42, 45
piracy 138
polygamy 132–133
Polyglotta (Koelle) 40
Portman, L.E. 41
prayers 14, 39, 40, 62
pre-primary education 9
'The Present State of Igbo Literature' 2
Prestigious Nze na Ozo Society 134
primary education 9
Primer 40–44, 71
proverb 3, 15, 16, 24, 26, 41, 62, 63, 69, 70, 79, 107, 110, 116, 117, 122, 123, 134, 136
- riddle 15, 24, 26, 42, 69, 70, 83, 90
Right, Joseph D. 2–3
Rivers Igbo 87
Robinson Crusoe (Defoe) 71
- St. Augustine's Grammar School 80
sarcasm 27
sayings 3, 16, 18, 41, 42, 52, 62, 63, 71, 77, 110, 122
Schon, J.F. 39–42
School of Oriental and African Studies (SOAS) 7
Seven-Seven 29–30
Smith, S.R. 41
SOAS *see* School of Oriental and African Studies (SOAS)
Society for Promoting African Heritage 80
Society for Promoting Igbo Language and Culture (SPILC) 79, 80, 84, 85, 129, 134; Standardization Committee 95, 96
Spencer, J. 41
SPILC *see* Society for Promoting Igbo Language and Culture (SPILC)
Standard Finnish 98
Standard Igbo 80, 82, 84–86, 90–93, 95, 97–102
standardization 91, 92, 95, 96, 98, 99, 102; written (literary) Igbo language, crisis of 77–78
Standardization Committee of 1974, 95, 96
Standard Yoruba 98
Students of Igbo Language Studies in Colleges of Education 115
- Swift, Jonathan 71
symbolism 16
- Tales from Shakespeare* 45
Taylor, J.C. 41
Teachers' Grade Two (Higher Elementary) Certificate Examination 115
Textbook Selection Committees (Ministries of Education) 100
Things Fall Apart (Achebe) 24, 54, 55, 64, 79, 94, 99
Thomas, Northcote 41
"The Three Night Wizards" 32, 37
"The Tiger and the Lion" 18
"Tony Uchenna Ubesie (1950–1994): The Man and the Artist" (Emenanjo) 115–116
"Tortoise and the Magic Drum" 19–20
- Ubahakwe, Ebo 82, 96
Ubesie, Tony Uchenna 115–124, 137
Uchendu, Victor 53–54
Ukazu, Michael 28
Ukpana Okpoko Buuru (Ubesie) 116, 120, 137
Ukwa Ruo Oge Ya O Daa (Ubesie) 116, 120
Umu Koleji 28–29
Union Igbo 81, 82, 90–92, 96, 97, 101
Uwaezuoke 87
Uzodimma, E.C. 2
- Venn, H. 40
Vocabulary of the Ibo Language (Crowther) 41
Vocabulary of the Ibo Language Part II: English-Ibo (Crowther) 41
- Ward, Ida 77, 79, 82
Wesleyan Missionary Society 38
West African Exams Council 115, 125
West African School Certificate 115, 125, 128
witticism 17, 26, 27, 63, 65, 120
written (literary) Igbo language
 standardization, crisis of 77–88
- Yoruba 8, 9, 11, 78, 86, 91, 92, 95, 98, 99, 102, 107, 129, 130
Yoruba Language Studies 99
Yoruba Metalanguage 95
Yoruba Metalanguage: A Glossary of Yoruba Technical Terms in Language, Literature and Methodology 99
Yoruba Writers Association 99