

PAINTING LOCAL COLOUR: A SOCIOLINGUISTIC DISPOSITION OF THE LITERARY ARTIST-----George E. Onwudiwe

PAINTING LOCAL COLOUR: A SOCIOLINGUISTIC DISPOSITION OF THE LITERARY ARTIST

George E. Onwudiwe

Department of Igbo, African and Asian Studies,
Nnamdi Azikiwe University, Awka
elogee2002@gmail.com
08035857796

Abstract

Literary artists have advanced human ways of life through their writings. Hence, literature as a work of art merely lends credence to these persuasions by literary artists. It is possible to describe 'Culture' as the art, literature, music and other intellectual expressions of a particular society or time. Therefore, literature being an aspect of culture showcases the people's way of life which includes their language and speech pattern. The writer, as a member of the society advertently or inadvertently voices out the norms, the mores and the lore, and all that give the society its identity. As a result, a writer's cultural and linguistic background are discovered in his work as he cannot completely hide his identity in his works. He may reveal his identity by his choice of words, his literary devices, character and characterization, his setting and all that he employs to present his message. These things often come from the writer's wealth of knowledge which is built in his culture in which he expectedly grew up. This paper examines those aspects of language and culture that literary writers employ which paint the local colour of their culture and philosophy of life as found in some of the works of notable Igbo literary artists. It also examines the level of knowledge of his society and medium of communication, that is, his sociolinguistic knowledge. The findings of the study which, indicate among others, that local colour authenticates the originality of the works, improve their aesthetics and also attract and sustain the interest of the readers will benefit both writers and readers of literary works, especially, Igbo literary works. They will also help to authenticate the discreteness of language which endows on every language its uniqueness.

Instances of local colour projected by literary artists

Literature projects the life of a people or an age. The literary artist in turn presents the experience of the people using his knowledge of the culture of the people which includes their language. As Coupland (2007:107) puts it: "...we reproduce culture through discursive performance. Members of cultural groups perform their culture by creating 'texts' of various sorts – the process of *entextualization*." He, however, goes forward to make this point which is worthy of note:

A sense of culture resides in local processes of enacting or reconstituting culture. When we replay or reconstruct cultural forms, we inevitably work them into new contexts – the process of *recontextualization*. Cultural identification is therefore a tension between given and new....

Coupland's contention above implies that in the process of presenting the various aspects of the people's culture, the artist performs the tacit function of reforming it through propaganda, irony, satire etc. approaches in his work. These aspects of the people's culture are mirrored using various local colour.

PAINTING LOCAL COLOUR: A SOCIOLINGUISTIC DISPOSITION OF THE LITERARY ARTIST-----George E. Onwudiwe

Abrams (2005) thus describes “local color fiction” as often applied to “works which ... rely for their interest mainly on a sentimental or comic representation of the surface particularities of a region; ...” He enunciates such “particularities” as “the setting, dialect, customs, dress, and ways of thinking and feeling which are distinctive of a particular region”. Therefore, for the literary artist to do a good job, he has to display his sociolinguistic disposition which will aid him to recapture and paint a vivid picture of the life and belief of the society his work is set in. Corroborating, Onwudiwe (2014:47) asserts “...for a literary artist to produce interesting and acceptable works, he has to be a good sociolinguist, capable of using language pragmatically to suit his purpose and capture the interest of his readers”.

Earlier, Onwudiwe (2014:44) says: “... sociolinguistics deals with the interrelationships between language and society. In other words, it not only investigates the code and its style of usage, but also it considers the context of usage”. In consonance with this charge, Coupland (2007:47) adds: “... speakers ‘know their place’ in social and linguistic systems”. That is, before anybody speaks (writes) effectively in/about any community, he must first of all be knowledgeable in the language and culture of the community. Thus, Simpson (2004) avers that when a writer uses language efficiently to represent what happens both in the physical and abstract world, language is here said to be performing “experiential function”. Further to that, Onwudiwe (1999) earlier observes that language, and by extension literary writing can be influenced by social and psychological/linguistic variables. The social variables would include “social identity”, “communicative needs”, “situational culture” and “situational variation”. The psychological cum linguistic variables, he enumerates as “linguistic competence”, “exclusiveness” and “our sense of fitness”.

For Taiwo (1976), “the artist has always functioned in African society as a recorder of mores and experiences of his society and as the voice of vision in his own time”. He therefore avers:

Much more fundamental than the mere reproduction of syntax is the conveying in its totality of an experience in a way that reflects its environment without precluding it from general applicability. In looking at the African author’s work we may be able to see its universality... A work which succeeds in realizing its environment to the full often achieves this universality. The happy paradox is that to be fully universal, one must be truly local (ix).

Corroborating Taiwo’s assertion, Emenyonu (1978) affirms that the Igbo Literature has its root in the Igbo oral tradition with the Igbo oral tradition serving as a cosmos of such literary aspects of Igbo oral performance as folksongs, folktale, riddles, proverbs, prayers, including incantations, histories, legends, myths, drama, oratory and festivals. These form the bedrock of the Igbo life, Igbo culture and Igbo world view. Further corroborating Taiwo’s views, Coupland (2007:126) submits that variation in speech should not always be dismissed as ‘free variation’, rather “the variation ... has social meaning and needs to be accounted for”. Therefore, he refers to the approach for accounting for social meaning as ‘contextual account of social meaning’; and goes ahead to reveal the avenue to understand social meaning thus: “This contextual account of social meaning therefore re-emphasises the role of discursive frames for meaning construction ...”; and concludes with this categorical point: “In an active contextualisation approach to ethnicity it is the relationality of ethnic meaning that tends to come to fore” (132). The points made thus far support the claim of this paper that language can be used in a special sense to paint the picture of the immediate environment.

PAINTING LOCAL COLOUR: A SOCIOLINGUISTIC DISPOSITION OF THE LITERARY ARTIST-----George E. Onwudiwe

Speaking on the ‘relationality’ of literary work to ethnicity Obiechina (1975) says that although the novel is undergoing “domestication” in West Africa, it has peculiarities of its own deriving from West African cultural situation. He specifically states, "The novelist draws largely from the local environment to give local colour to their stories. They represent local speech habits, beliefs, custom and mores in order to give a distinct quality to life and action which reflect West African realities."

Similarly, Emenyeonu (1978) agrees that culture wields a great influence on modern Igbo literary writers; and he says “Contemporary Igbo novel, poetry or drama is the extension of Igbo oral literature”. It is a common knowledge that the Igbo oral tradition is rooted in the Igbo culture. Therefore, he continues to reveal the antecedents of modern Igbo literary writer: “He knew his society – its space, its pulse, its dreams and its realities – and through his art he sought to provide fulfilment for his audience”. The fulfilment, apart from being amusement or entertainment also implies nostalgic satisfaction which grows from the use of these aspects of the audience’s culture. In other words, a literary work is adjudged to worth its salt if it presents a people’s way of life and their world view.

Onyekaonwu (1986) supports the above view where he says:

For a great majority of Africans life often begins in the village and wherever these Africans go afterwards they carry the village within them. Their aspirations are largely those of the villagers, their sympathies, emotions and moral values are often those which gave this old village community culture its peculiar character.

For this reason, the modern Igbo writer expectedly makes more impact and reaches out to his audience more when he employs the language and imagery of his readers. It is for this reason that Abanime (1985) argues that it is better to present the message of a literary work in the people’s own language, as there are certain things that the most skilful writer cannot present satisfactorily in a foreign language. Such things include proverbs, anecdotes, riddles, wellerisms, etc. which Azuonye (1985) upholds as kernels that flourish into full expression of Igbo life, Igbo culture and Igbo philosophy; and these are some aspects of Igbo language and culture which the Igbo literary artist draws his linguistic resource from. Chinua Achebe in *Arrow of God* commenting about the pugnacious Obika says (though in English): “The man who has never submitted to anything will soon submit to the burial mat”. This is a transliterated Igbo proverb which reads thus in Igbo: ‘Ekwe ekwe ga-ekwe n’uta ekwere’. This original version of the proverb makes so many things obvious about the Igbo language, Igbo thought and Igbo philosophy. These include the aesthetics of the language partly presented by the alliteration provided by the repetition of ‘e-kwe-’; and the imagery ‘ute ekwere’ which enacts the history pertaining to the burial practice of some Igbo in the past.

The lexicon of a language is equally important as it normally derives from the culture of the language and as such must be used in concert with the meaning it portends in the language. Thus, the institutions, the religious beliefs, the economic system, etc. of a language are preserved in, and transmitted with the vocabulary of the language. For instance, in Igbo language, the number ‘3’ signifies the last point or opportunity that one has to act or take a decision, otherwise it becomes late for the matter. Also, the number of kolanuts to be presented to guests or in occasions in some parts of Igbo land must be even, that is either 2, 4, 8, 16, etc. In the same vein, when a kolanut is broken, the number of lobes determines who will partake in eating it. Of course, one-lobe kolanut is not eaten at all as it is believed to be

PAINTING LOCAL COLOUR: A SOCIOLINGUISTIC DISPOSITION OF THE LITERARY ARTIST-----George E. Onwudiwe

dumb and should be thrown away. A kolanut with 3 lobes is called 'Ikenga' and is often eaten by men only; kolanut with 4 lobes is said to signify the four Igbo market days, while a kolanut with 5 lobes signifies fruitfulness and prosperity in most Igbo communities. A kolanut with 7 lobes and above may call for celebration before they are eaten as they are believed to portend goodwill. Similarly, members of the same age grade and masquerade cults also have their own words (slangs) and number significances too. These are sacrosanct to a people and their culture and they understand them.

Thus far, it has been strongly argued that knowledge of the culture and the language of a writer's audience is an indispensable prerequisite for a successful literary art. Wardhaugh (1998) lends strong credence to this argument where he captures Whorfian ideology about the relationship between language and culture in this statement:

...the world is presented in a kaleidoscopic flux of impressions which has to be organised by our minds – and this means largely by the linguistic systems in our minds. We cut nature up, organise it into concepts, and ascribe significances as we do, largely because we are parties to an agreement to organise it this way – an agreement that holds throughout our speech community and is codified in the patterns of our language.

The above axiom therefore gives strong advice to a literary artist who wishes to be successful in his art. Thus, Simpson (2004) echoing some of the advice says of literary language

... there exists no feature or pattern of language which is inherently or exclusively 'literary' in all contexts. ... After all literature offers the chance to explore language that is out of ordinary, language which is often the preeminent embodiment of the creative spirit.

It needs be stressed here that 'creative spirit' as it concerns this study includes the aim of the literary artist which in turn informs his source and choice of language. Consequently, Onwudiwe (2016) advises the literary artist on the source of his language thus: "... a people's culture presents a collection of their ideas and habits"; and to reach them would require painting their local colour in his writing. Therefore, Azuonye (1985) contends that the art of drawing from the culture, thoughts and beliefs of the Igbo present the code which contain the law, maxims and precepts that govern conduct in the absence of written laws. This, then portrays the full ideology of the Igbo.

Aspects of Local Colour in selected Igbo Literary works

Different aspects of "particularities" of the Igbo society abound for the literary artist to use in his writings to project the culture of the people and therefore connect to his readers easily. Secondly, the use of these aspects of local colour will also educate people from outside the culture about the belief and ways of life of the Igbo people. These "particularities" are many and varied and the writer is free to use them from time to time and as the need arises. Also, some of them present the bad side of the people's culture and in employing them, the writer either condemns them or canvasses for their abrogation.

In this paper, the aspects of local colour to be investigated are setting, dialect (language) and the Igbo philosophy of life as presented in the selected Igbo literary works. The paper also concentrates only on Igbo prose fictions, notably works by Pita Nwana, Tony Ubesie, J. C. Maduekwe, Fidelis Azoma Ihentuge, P. N. Muunonye and G. O. Onyekawu. The investigation will highlight aspects of local colour in the two major periods in the

PAINTING LOCAL COLOUR: A SOCIO-LINGUISTIC DISPOSITION OF THE LITERARY ARTIST-----George E. Onwudiwe

Nigerian literary world – the pre-war period and the post-war periods. The pre-war works refer to those literary works published before the Nigerian civil war, while the post-war works are those ones published after the civil war. Each of these periods presents the picture of the Igbo society at the time. The selected Igbo literary writers represent the numerous writers who greatly projected different aspects of the Igbo culture in their works.

i) Igbo local settings

For any literary work to be properly labelled, it needs to project the actual scenes of the society which it is x-raying. For instance, Chinua Achebe though written in English set his popular works like *Things Fall Apart* in the various Igbo local scenes. This concretizes his stories and also makes them to be more interesting and familiar to the Igbo people. Similarly, aspects of village scenes abound in most Igbo prose fictions with the corresponding village life being played out in them. These local settings help to re-enact the life patterns, mode of conduct at village meetings, the temperament of villagers, the atmosphere at village festivals, etc. hence, Coupland (2007:106) expounding Mead's (1932) thought about social identity says: "Mead argued that social interaction was where people's appreciation of social forces could be seen to work". Therefore, Pita Nwana, a pre-war writer paints a typical Igbo local scene at the time of his writing which was a period of colonial rule in Africa. Specifically, he describes the nature of the Igbo society and Igbo man's ingenuity and hard work in *Omenukọ*. Here, he presents the nature of the Igbo society at the time when there were no cars and people had to travel distances on foot, even with heavy luggage; and foot bridges were constructed across rivers with these words:

- (1) Mgbe ha dum guzoro n'elu ogwe mmiri, eriri dum nke e ji kee ya wee dọbisie. Omenukọ na ndi ibu ya na ndi ọzọ ahụ a na-ezi ịzụ ahịa wee daba na mmiri. ... Ma ihe mere ka mmiri ghara iri onye ọ bụla bụ nke a. Mmadu nile n'ala anyị maara igwu mmiri. (p.3)

Translation: When all of them stood on top of the river bridge, the ropes with which it was tied all got cut. Omenukọ and his load carriers and the other apprentices fell into the river. ... But the reason why no person was drowned was this. Everybody in our land knows how to swim.

Here, a picture of a dilapidated local bridge usually made of bamboo or planks is painted. Secondly, in a typical village setting, everybody has the skill of swimming as the river is their only source of water and every child goes there either to bathe and, or fetch water for use in their homes.

On page 27, Pita Nwana paints the picture of the Evil forest called "Ikpa Oyi" in these words:

- (2) "A na-akpọ ya otu ahụ n'ihia na ọ bụ ebe a na-eli ozu ndi afọ toro, na ndi dara ibi na ndi kiti kpa gbagburu na nwanyi di ime nwuọ".

Translation: It is call that because it is where those that suffered from distending stomach, those that suffered from elephantiasis of the scrotum and those who were killed by chicken pus and women that died in their pregnancy were buried.

This was typical of the Igbo society at the time when certain sicknesses and deaths were termed ill omen and therefore where tabooed. Those who suffer from them where therefore

PAINTING LOCAL COLOUR: A SOCIOLINGUISTIC DISPOSITION OF THE LITERARY ARTIST-----George E. Onwudiwe

not buried, but were thrown into the Evil forest for wild animals to feast on. “Ikpa Oyi” as the name depicts here is dreadful forest.

J. C. Maduekwe, though post-war novel paints colourful pictures of the Igbo typical settings, particularly those reminiscent of the pre-war Igbo society in *Dinta*. He projects the local Igbo hunting scenes right from the beginning of the novel to the end. Also, he paints the typical Igbo homestead where the man lives in his *obi* usually positioned at the frontage of the man’s compound, while the wife (or wives) lives (live) in her (their) hut (huts) within the compound. In his words:

(3) “Ka ihe ahụ mechara, egwu ekweghị ya abakwa nwunye ya na mkpukwe ya”. (p. 2)

Translation: After that incident, he became afraid to sleep with his wife in her hut”.

Other local settings in the novel include the traditional marriage scene of Ntịnuru’s daughter, Kanelechi on pages 57 to 58 where the bride is escorted to her husband’s house with joyful marriage songs. The other scene is the initiation ceremony into manhood usually heralded with members of the age grade joining the celebrant in completing his house as painted with these words:

(4) Ubochi ndi Okpatu kara iburu Ohiakara ata, ayaka malitere n’oge wee kpowa. A ma mmadu ole sepurula aka n’isi nri anyasi ogbugba oso ayaka wee metua ... Otutu ndi inyom buwara ikwe nri ha n’ulo wee suchaa nri ha ... O di nwanyi o buka, ma o bu nwoke jere ije abali, ayaka wee malite dawa, ihe o game bu irahu n’ebe o jere, ... (p. 71)

Translation: On the day the Okpatu age grade scheduled to fetch thatch for Ohiakara, ayaka night masquerade came out early. Only few people had finished cooking for the dinner before everybody went on rampage for fear of the ayaka masquerade ... Many women carried their mortars inside to pound their foo foo ... If any man or woman embarked on late journey before the ayaka masquerade comes out what the person will do is to spend the night there, ...

In this passage, apart from the traditional scene of age grade communal work, the other scenes of controlling the bad habits of late night cooking by women and late night journey are clearly painted.

In *Aghirigha*, P. N. Munonye paints the post-war Igbo scene throughout his work which contrasts the typical and ideal Igbo local scene. The scenes of the wayward and wasteful life of Dike, the chief character which sharply contrasts with those of Okonkwo in *Things Fall Apart*, or Chike in *Isi Akwu Dara N’Ala*, or Ntịnuru in *Dinta* pervade the whole novel. The same is the picture in *Isi Kote Ebu*. Ihentuge paints the scene that hitherto was alien to the Igbo society in these words:

(5) Kemgbe Osuchukwu jiri nweta ego, ya bu kemgbe e jiri bulie ya n’okwa, o dizi ka a ga-asị na mmanya na-egbu ya. Ihe ufodu o na-adighi eri ka o bidoro riwe. Ihe ufodu o na-adighi eme ka o bidoro mewe... Ya mere, ka o jere inu mmanya n’otu ulo oriri, o huru akwukwo ima okwa ... na o nwere ndi ga-aku egwu n’ulo oriri Tanza... Osuchukwu wee kpebie n’obi ya na ya ga-agariri egwu a (p. 6).

Translation: Since Osuchukwu became rich, that is since he was promoted, it seemed as if he was always intoxicated. Some of the things he was not used to eating he started to eat. Some of the things he was not used to doing he started doing them... So, when he went to drink in one restaurant, he saw a poster ... advertising a band that would perform at Tanza Hotel ... Osuchukwu then resolved in his mind to attend the performance.

PAINTING LOCAL COLOUR: A SOCIOLINGUISTIC DISPOSITION OF THE LITERARY ARTIST-----George E. Onwudiwe

The same type of context is painted in *Aghiriigha* this way:

(6) Mgbe Dike na-ahapụ Amị, ndị gomentị nyere ya akpa ego abua, na oḡu pam atọ, na pam ise. Nke a bụ ego ugwọ onwa ya ndị gomentị dotaara ya mgbe o nọ n'Amị, na ego e jiri kelee ya maka oḡu juru afọ o ruuru ndị gomentị. ... Mana o nwere otu omume Dike na-eme jọgburu onwe ya... O na-eme ndị be ha dum ihere, tumadị nna ya na nne ya ... Dike anaghị eji anya ya abuo ahụ nwanị mara mma ... Ulo Dike dika ulo a na-ere mmaị bekee. Ihe a na-ahu nga dum bụ karama mmaị (pp.9 - 10)

Translation: When Dike was leaving the army, the government paid him two hundred and sixty five pounds. This was his salary which the government kept for him when he was in the army, and for government's appreciation of his cherished works... But there is one very bad habit that Dike exhibits... That habit shames all his people, especially his father and his mother... Dike does not overlook any beautiful lady. Dike's house is like a beer parlour. What is seen everywhere are bottles of drinks ...

The above scenes in *Isi Kote Ebu* and *Aghiriigha* represent post-war local scenes of the Igbo society.

ii) Language (Dialect)

Another aspect of local colour painted by the selected Igbo literary writers is the local language, Igbo. Again, Chinua Achebe made frantic efforts to localise his English language in *Things Fall Apart* and some of his other works in order to actually communicate to his audience. His efforts, though quite commendable cannot be said to have well represented the Igbo language, for according to Whorfian hypothesis as recorded by Wardhaugh (1998:216) "One long-standing claim concerning the relationship between language and culture is that the structure of a language determines the way in which speakers of the language view the world". Therefore, the best medium to capture and present a people's world-view is their local language or dialect.

As proffered by Onwudiwe (1999) above, this language or medium is conditioned by the psychological cum linguistic variables and the social variables. The linguistic variables reveal the artist's disposition towards his competence in his dialect or medium in use, his knowledge or use of his mother-tongue, his knowledge or use of the language at various times and contexts, tagged language exclusiveness and sense of fitness. The social variables investigate the use of language to achieve social identity, communicative needs, as well as its fitness into any situational culture and situational variation. In the selected Igbo prose fictions, many of the authors tried so much in this bid, including the more modern works.

On the whole, Pita Nwana is noted for his use of the standard variety of his medium, Igbo language despite the period of writing, the pre-war era. This effort can be attributed to his understanding that he wrote mainly for the few literate Igbo people at the time, and the white colonial masters who would make more meaning out of the standard variety of Igbo, if at all. He, however did not leave out using proverbs which is considered an ingredient in the hand of any competent Igbo literary artist, but was very economical in the use of it. Also, as expected of the period of his writing, he did not bother to Igbonize or translate/transliterate any word with foreign root, hence his use of such words as District Commissioner/D.C. (pp. 20, 21); Warrant (pp. 25); Paymaster (pp. 21); "pound na shilling" (p.24); "Government" (p. 24); etc. By his use of language, he clearly recognizes the social variables of social identity,

PAINTING LOCAL COLOUR: A SOCIOLINGUISTIC DISPOSITION OF THE LITERARY ARTIST-----George E. Onwudiwe

communicative needs, situational culture and situational variation; while handling the issue of linguistic competence and our sense of fitness very well.

J. C. Maduekwe paints a vivid picture of Igbo oral tradition in *Dinta* by his expertise in the use of local language, Igbo. In pages 12, 13, 16, 17, 18, 19, 20, 34, 72, 73, 74 he introduces oral poetry which very well localises the book. In pages 83 to 84, Maduekwe brings in dialogue to make the story real. He uses figurative expressions to a large extent to capture the attention of the audience. Such expressions as

(7) “o jiri eriri gachie ọnụ ya” (p. 1)

(8) “Ma ha amataghị na ihe na-etiri ya bụ ngwesị egwu nọ ya n’ukwu” (p. 14)

(9) “ụbọchị nta ka a chụa ya n’owere nchị” (p. 15)

(10) “ọ na-abụ nwanị napa nwa ya ara, uche asọ di ya ihe” (p. 22)

(11) “Onye nwere nanị otu nwa ji ala ụgwọ ozu” (p. 26)

are a few of the figurative expressions, including proverbs which shape the Igbo language that Maduekwe used to project the form of the language.

By his use of local language fully, Maduekwe displays his sociolinguistic disposition through expressing good competence in his medium and correct use of language exclusively and sense of fitness. On the social parlance, he recognizes and observes situational culture and communicative needs of each context.

Tony Ubesie is one artist that is noted for his eloquence in writing Igbo and as such commands his linguistic competence. In all his novels, he uses standard Igbo to present his message. Beyond that, he is very creative in his use of language to capture and represent every event. In short he is an expert in the use of contemporary language so much so that he observes communicative needs, situational culture and situational variation well through his language. He understands and applies exclusive use of language and sense of fitness. For instance, in *Isi Akwu Dara N’ala*, he creates vivid picture of the war scene with these onomatopoeic words:

(12)i. ‘Gbi-i-i-m!’

‘Gbi-ii-i-m! Gbi-i-i-m!!’ (p. 22)

ii. ‘Wi-i-i! gwom!!’

‘Wii-i-i! Gwom Gwom!’

iii. ‘Fụ-fụ-fụ-fụ-fụ! Wom!-Wom!!’ (p. 23)

iv. ‘kwapụ! Kwapụ!! Kwapụ!!!’, “Unu Dum! Unu Dum!! Unu Dum!!! (p. 47). All these he uses to represent sounds of bombs during the Nigeria civil war.

He also employed the use of dialogue to a great extent, and is prolific in the use of Igbo figurative expressions. In fact, many literatures have described him as one of the few Igbo artists that use Igbo proverbs well. In fact, he is noted for explaining proverbs immediately after use, a feat that makes his works easier for all to read and understand, particularly, women and youths.

Fidelis Akoma Ihentuge and P. N. Munonye are artists who try to display high degree of sociolinguistic knowledge through their medium. Both works paint the language of their period of writing well. Ihentuge tries so much in his use of standard Igbo in *Isi Kote Ebu* with coloration of biblical allusions to make his effort in presenting the danger of wealth at the time. He, however, brings in few dialects in his writing. He tried to employ few proverbs and other figurative expressions. But, Munonye uses some dialects, poetic device (p.46) and epistolary device (p. 97). He also used proverbs in a manner that will not confuse his intended audience. Both authors are aware of the sociolinguistic variables necessary to make their work worth the while and also applied them correctly.

PAINTING LOCAL COLOUR: A SOCIOLINGUISTIC DISPOSITION OF THE LITERARY ARTIST-----George E. Onwudiwe

However, G. O. Onyekaonwu, as Tony Ubesie displays good sociolinguistic disposition in his *A sọkata Eze Anya*. In this work, he has a masterful control of both the local language and the modern level of the standard variety. This gives him good display of all the sociolinguistic variables as exclusiveness, our sense of fitness, social identity, communicative needs, situational culture and situational variation. Such expressions as

(13) ‘Kọọọ---tụ!’ (p. 293)

(14) ‘Chifujọọjị’ (p. 293)

(15) “Yesam!” (p. 294)

(16) ‘D. O.’ (p. 296)

(17) ‘Ọda! Ọdaa!’ (296)

These words paint the colour of the modern court, while the under listed words paint the picture of the army in the modern society:

(18) ‘Lansị kọpụl’ (322)

(19) ‘kọnelu’ (324)

(20) ‘kampụ’ (324)

(21) ‘brigedi hedikwọta’ (324)

are some of the language of the court well painted in the work thus, giving sense of fitness in the use of language, as well as communicative needs. He also recognises situational context and introduced the necessary variation to suit the situation.

All these do not blur his competence in the use of his language, including his own dialect:

(22) ‘a na-agwaghị mgbada na e jije nta’ (p. 294).

He employs exclusive use of language when the people of Amasaa gather an Ọmaliko rises to address them, as on pages 297, 298:

(23) ‘Amasaa kwenu! Yaaa!

Muonu!! Yaaaaa!!

Zuonu!!! Yaaaaa!!!’

He employs the use of the traditional method of counting week days as in

(24) ‘Otu ụbọchị Eke’ (p. 273); and also combines both the traditional and modern methods as in

(25) ‘Taa bụ Satodee Nkwọ’ (p. 297).

He also uses a great deal of Igbo proverbs and other figurative expressions, all which prove his understanding and good use of language exclusively.

It needs be observed also that the titles of most of these works are presented with one figure of speech or the other. For instance:

(26) *Omenuko, Dinta, Aghiriigha* are metaphors;

(27) *Isi Akwu Dara N’ala, Isi Kote Ebu, A sọkata Eze Anya*, are all abridged Igbo proverbs. This masterly coinage of titles show the artists’ sociolinguistic disposition.

iii) Igbo philosophy and belief

One very important local colour often painted by literary artists is the ways of thinking and feeling that are distinctive of the region, here the Igbo region. In fact, each write tries to project at least one aspect of the Igbo philosophy in his work. In the case of the selected literary artists, they all project one aspect of the Igbo philosophy or the other, either to promote it or to canvass for its change or total abrogation. Hence, Coupland (2007) notes: “When we replay or reconstruct cultural forms, we inevitably work them into new texts – the process of *recontextualisation*”. First, the Igbo philosophy of “aka aja aja na-ebute ọnu

PAINTING LOCAL COLOUR: A SOCIOLINGUISTIC DISPOSITION OF THE LITERARY ARTIST-----George E. Onwudiwe

mmanụ mmanụ” – industry and hard work beget success and achievement - is showcased in *Dinta* where Maduekwe presents Ntịnurụ as a hardworking person who vows to stop the evil premonition of *ogbanje* against him and his household; and he succeeds in the end. Here, Maduekwe is trying to give the traditional Igbo belief of *ogbanje* with some new dimension. He does same in *Uru Nwa*, where he fights the Igbo belief that female child is not important as the male child by the effort of Ngozi in reconciling her parents and in ensuring the return of her mother to her matrimonial home. This is in line with Coupland (2007) above.

Also, Pita Nwana projects Omenụkọ as a diligent young man who does not believe in failure. These projections by Nwana and Maduekwe paint the local colour of the Igbo philosophy that there is no food for a lazy man. This is the type of picture painted in *Things Fall Apart* where Okonkwo is seen not to be happy with his father Unọka and vowed never to be like him.

Pita Nwana again paints the local colour of punishment through exile for murder. In *Omenụkọ*, Omenụkọ goes on indefinite exile because he sold his apprentices, including his kinsman which is equated with killing somebody. Chinua Achebe paints this colour when Okonkwo shot and killed his kinsman and therefore went on exile for restitution.

The Igbo strongly believe that “ome mma ga-anata ụgwọ orụ ya; ome njo ga-anata ụgwọ orụ ya” – law of retributive justice. This belief is aptly painted by Tony Ubesie in *Isi Akwụ Dara N’ala*, P. N. Munonye in *Aghiriigha* and Fidelis Akoma Ihentuge in *Isi Kote Ebu*. Ada cajoled Chike, her husband, maltreated him and later abandoned him for the soldiers because the Nigeria civil war disturbed him in his business and reduced him to a beggar to his own wife. She was paid back in her own coin when Chike bounced back to affluence after the war but Ada’s soldier husband abandoned her and their baby. She is in turn rejected and abandoned by Chike.

Dike, in *Aghiriigha* lived a reckless and promiscuous life to the extent of meddling with Orijeji, Obiọha’s wife. This caused him his life as he was caught in the act and stabbed to death by Obiọha. The same is the fate of Osuchukwu in *Isi Kote Ebu* where Osuchukwu lives a promiscuous and reckless life simply because of increase in his income. He abandoned his faithful and lovely wife, Nkeiru for a prostitute, Obigeli who even tossed about until he commits suicide.

These local colour of Igbo belief in retributive justice, here painted as reckless and promiscuous living also show that Igbo hates and abhors incest and promotes chastity. This is another effort of the literary artists in acting as social crusaders and in “reconstituting” culture.

A people’s way of thinking and feeling is a major assignment of any genuine literary artist. As the writer is writing for an audience and represents his people, he needs, as of necessity to identify, project, condemn and correct the people’s feelings and thought in their works. To do this, he has to understand his culture, his people and his language well.

Conclusion

Literature projects the life of a people. This is done through setting the work on the different locales of the society to project the area and different events of the people in those areas; through showcasing the custom of the people. In this bid, he promotes the good aspects, condemns the negative aspects and even canvasses for total abrogation of inhuman ones. The literary artist also highlights the ways of thinking and feeling that the people are

PAINTING LOCAL COLOUR: A SOCIOLINGUISTIC DISPOSITION OF THE LITERARY ARTIST-----George E. Onwudiwe

noted for. To be able to do these feats, the literary artist uses one major weapon, language. For this reason, he must be knowledgeable in the language of his target audience and its nuances to communicate and communicate effectively.

These necessary weapons for good and effective communication through literary writing are what Abrams (2005) refers to as “surface particularities of a region”. To present these “surface particularities” well, the literary artist needs to possess sociolinguistic dispositions to handle such vital variables which Onwudiwe (1999) calls psychological cum linguistic variables and the social variables. These variables will help him understand his target society and their language, and paint the accurate local colour of such society.

The selected Igbo literary artists – Pita Nwana, J. C. Maduekwe, Tony Ubesie, P. N. Munonye, Fidelis Akoma Ihentuge and G.O. Onyekaonwu only represent the numerous Igbo novelists spanning from Pre-war to post-war Igbo literary ages. They have therefore painted a vivid local colour of the Igbo society and culture at these various ages by their credible show of reputable sociolinguistic dispositions.

References

- Abanime, P. (1985). “The Africans of African Literature”, in E. Ihekweazu (ed.) *Readings in African Humanities: Traditional and Modern Culture*. Enugu: Fourth Dimension Publishers.
- Abrams, M. H. (2005). *A Glossary of Literary Terms*. Boston: Thomson Wadsworth
- Achebe, C. (1980). *Things Fall Apart*. London: Heinemann Educational Books.
- Coupland, Nikolas (2005). *Style, Language Variation and Identity*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Emenyonu, Ernest N. (1978). *The Rise of the Igbo Novel*. Ibadan: African University Press.
- Ihentuge, Fidelis A. (1981). *Isi Kote Ebu*. Lagos: Macmillan Publishers.
- Maduekwe, J. C. (1981). *Dinta*. Ibadan: University Press.
- Mead, George H. (1932). *Philosophy of the Present*. LaSalle, III: Open Court.
- Munonye, P. N. (1982). *Aghirijgha*. Onitsha: University Publishing Company.
- Nwana, Pita (1974). *Omenuko*. Ikeja: Longman Nigeria.
- Obiechina, E. (1975). *Culture, Tradition and Society in the West African Novel*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Publishing Company.

PAINTING LOCAL COLOUR: A SOCIOLINGUISTIC DISPOSITION OF THE LITERARY ARTIST-----George E. Onwudiwe

- Onwudiwe, George E. (1999). "Factors that influence choice of language and performance: A case study of two multilingual communities of Awka and Onitsha. M.A. Thesis of the University of Nigeria, Nsukka.
- Onwudiwe, George E. (2014). "The Literary Artist as a Sociolinguist: G. O. Onyekaonwu and his Plays", in Nkoli Nnyigide, Romanus Ezeuko, Nkechinyere Nwokoye, (Eds.) *The Eagle Of Igbo Literature: A Festschrift in Honour of Prof G. O. Onyekaonwu*. Nimo: Rex Charles & Patrick Publications.
- Onwudiwe, George E. (2016). "The Fading Phase of Igbo Language and Culture: Path to its Revitalisation", in Tracie Utoh-Ezeajugh (Ed.), *UJAH: Unizik Journal of Arts and Humanities, Vol. 17, No. 2, pp. 126 - 140*.
- Onyekaonwu, G. O. (1986). "The Development of Modern Igbo Prose Fiction 1933 – 83: An Historical and Stylistic Survey. PhD. Dissertation of the University of Ibadan.
- Onyekaonwu, G. O. (2014). *A Sokata Eze Anya*, in Nnyigide Nkoli, Romanus Ezeuko, Nkechinyere Nwokoye (Eds.), *Mkpokota Oru Nka Goddy Onyekaonwu*. Nimo: Rex Charles & Parick Publications.
- Simpson, Paul (2004). *Stylistics: A resource book for students*. London: Routledge.
- Taiwo, Oladele (1976). *Culture and the Nigerian Novel*. London: Macmillan Education.
- Ubesie, Uchenna T. (1973). *Isi Akwu Dara N'ala*. Ibadan: Oxford University Press.
- Whardhaugh, Ronald (1998). *An Introduction to Sociolinguistics*. Oxford: Blackwell Publishers.