

## Chapter Thirty

### **CADENCES OF ORALITY IN THE WRITTEN CODE: ASPECTS OF THE LANGUAGE OF SOME NIGERIAN (IGBO) WRITERS OF ENGLISH EXPRESSION**

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#### **Introduction**

Anybody examining the language of African literature is likely to discover that he is obliged to specify what language- as a medium – he is talking about: whether it is one of the colonial languages of Africa or an indigenous African language. The basic assumption has to be made that for a consideration of the literature of any one country in Africa, there is a sharp distinction between these two categories of language. Nigerian literature, for example, is either Nigerian literature in an indigenous Nigerian language, or Nigeria literature in English.

But such a neat division would not tell the whole story about Nigerian literature. Even when one is exclusively discussing Nigerian literature in English, one may find that what one probably should be talking about is Nigerian literature of English expression rather than Nigerian literature in English. For scholars of English language in Nigeria are emphatic over the existence of Nigerian English (see Jowitt, Bamgbose and Ubahakwe), and this recognition imposes a burden on the scholar of Nigerian literature in English who now has to find out whether what he is dealing with is in fact a Nigerian literature in Nigerian English.

What would the expression “Nigerian English” imply? It could be categorized vertically as the English whose standard form has been interfered with by some indigenous Nigerian language, or horizontally as that English language which has been interfered with by some recognizable way of speaking and writing English peculiar to Nigerians as a whole rather than to any one ethnic group in Nigeria. These interferences – both vertically and horizontally – have been of such magnitude as to warrant the classification of “Nigerian English” as a dialect of the English language (See Adeniran, Banjo and Bamgbose). Thus, whichever way a categorization of the English language in Nigeria is done, the truth is that a literary work of art written by a Nigerian is most likely to reveal many evidences of a Nigerian dialect of the English language, and this implies that it may be preferable to refer to such literature as a Nigerian literature of English expression (“English expression” suggesting a dialect form of the English language) rather than a Nigerian literature in English, and “English” suggesting the standard form of the language).

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It is our recognition of some peculiarity in the English used in Nigerian literature that makes us want to examine this English closely. For reasons of scope and inclination, we will be dealing with a variety of English that we find in novels written by some Nigerians who are Igbo both by birth and upbringing. The thesis, simply stated, is that these writers have consciously and unconsciously, but often more consciously, written their English in such a way as to suggest some Igbo language nuances. Because we are concerned with “nuances” rather than “concrete” factors, the approach to this issue is far from being wholly linguistic, especially since we are aware of, and occasionally frightened by, the current tendency to reduce linguistics to some kind of bony science of symbols and mathematical equations. We believe that literature, often implying a conscious and idiosyncratic manipulation of, and game-playing with, the conventional laws of language, will for long resist any linguist’s overdone scientification of language.

What interests us in this essay has once been called “Iboized English”, described by Bernth Lindfors, the author of that uncomfortable phrase<sup>1</sup>, as an English “characterized by a quiet prose... calm, graceful, proverb-studded idiom which resembles natural expression in their native tongue” (167). Bernth Lindfors’ attempt to pin down the constituents of what we prefer to call “Igbo rhythms in English”, if it does not supply all the details, does emphasize an essential point: that his “Iboized English” is more justifiable as a stylistic *impression* than as a linguistic phenomenon that is amenable to clear-cut identification. And the greatest joy of literature-and perhaps its enigma and frustration – lies in this fact that one’s understanding of and empathy with it can never divest itself of this impressionistic quality.

Bernth Lindfors identifies those who use “Iboized English” as belonging to an “Achebe School” (47). They belong to an “Achebe School” for the reason that they, like Achebe, are Igbo, and that they have followed Achebe’s footsteps in experimenting on this kind of English that “resembles natural expression in their native tongue”. By Lindfors’ identification, the practitioners of this art of “Iboized English” would include writers like John Munonye, Flora Nwapa, Onuora Nzekwe, Elechi Amadi, Nkem Nwankwo, Chukwuemeka Ike, Clement Agunwa, and, we add, the twenty-first century female novelist, Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie. In the rest of this paper, there is an exploration of some of the factors that create this impression of “Igbo rhythms in English”, with examples drawn from the novels of some of the writers mentioned above.

The phenomenon of “Igbonization”<sup>2</sup> of English will be examined under four aspects. The first is the transliterative aspect which is more or less an attempt to transliterate Igbo into English; the second is what has been described as “cushioning” (see Young); a process whereby some lexical items of a language are forced into a language of discourse which attempts to

accommodate the disquieting presence of these “foreign” lexical items. The third is the metaphoric aspect which is the writing of Igbo idioms and proverbs in English, and the fourth is the “character” aspect which is a conscious attempt to capture Igbo speech nuances in a linguistic framework that is both syntactically and lexically English. The four aspects are, however, by no means mutually exclusive, for it is an interplay of all of them that creates this total impression of “Igbo rhythms in English”.

### **The transliterative tendency**

The transliterative tendency is an attempt by some of these writers under consideration to remain as faithful as possible to the syntactic laws of Igbo, while using English words. The implication of this tendency is far-reaching. The vocabulary of any language generally reflects quite easily the surface structure of that language. The word is always a tale-teller: its utterance or graphological representation calls to the mind of the hearer or reader an immediate idea, no matter how vague, of that language. But the mere mention of a word is only a minute first beginning in the process of communication: words now have to be arranged in a conventional, syntactical, order (of that language) for a fuller meaning to emerge. In a situation where an attempt is made to communicate via the syntax of one language bearing the burdens of the vocabulary of a different language, effective communication is bound to be impaired. Impaired communication, however, is not lost communication. Syntactic congruence between languages is a fairly common phenomenon, and it may be difficult for a language to claim exclusive right to a particular syntax. But a language can make claim to a convention of syntax, and when the vocabularies of a language are imposed on the syntactical conventions of another language, there is a dissociation between syntax and vocabulary. This dissociation creates difficulties in meaning. The owner or speaker of the vocabulary-supplying language senses something “queer” in what has been expressed, while the owner or speaker of the syntax-supplying language, if he understands the vocabulary-supplying language without difficulty, knows that what is happening is transliteration.

Igbo writers in English who have embarked on this transliterative exercise are apparently aware of the problems in communication which they cause. Most of them thus often make a conscious effort to ensure some reasonable communication in English, the vocabulary-supplying language of their transliteration, even though they attempt to retain as much as possible the syntax of Igbo in their expressions. This “reasonable communication” is made possible because these writers often try to reconcile the syntax of Igbo and the vocabulary of English by operating on a level of maximum congruency between the two. The degree of success achieved varies from writer to writer, and the most successful of them, Achebe, uses a transliteration that conveys very “passable” English. In the following illustration, some extracts from some novels by these Igbo writers in English have been made, and an attempt is made to provide the Igbo word-class correspondences – between words or, where word-for-

word correspondence is not possible, between word-groups. In some cases, the distortion of English syntactical conventions is obvious; where there is no distortion as such, the Igbo analogues would still be quite unidiomatic in English:

**English:** [What] [we] [are eating] [is finished]. (*Things Fall Apart* 19)

**Igbo** [Ihe] [anyị] [na-eri] agwụ go].

**English:** [Hold] [your tongue] [in] [your hand]. (*Arrow of God* 20)

**Igbo:** [Jide] [ire gị ] [na] [aka gị ]

**English:** [You may laugh] [if] [laughter] [catches] [you]. (*No Longer at Ease* 56)

**Igbo:** [Mụa amụ ] [ma] [amụ ] [jide ] [ gị ].

**English:** [That boy] [does not] [look at you] [with] [good eyes]. (*The Potter's Wheel* 30)

**Igbo:** [Nwata ahụ] [a dighị] [ele gị] [anya Ọma].

**English:** [Mama] [we] [have] [one who has come]. (*Jagua Nna* 137)

**Igbo:** [Nne] [ayi] [nwere] [onye Ọbịa].

**English:** [Look at] [the heads] [this war] [has eaten]. (*Survive the Peace* 6)

**Igbo:** [Lee ] [isi n'ile] [agha nke a] [rigoo].

**English:** [It] [is] [the truth] [you are speaking]. (*Idu* 23).

**Igbo:** [Ọ] [bụ] [ezi okwu] [ka Ị na-ekwu].

**English:** [This thing] [filled my] [stomach] [like food]. (*Efuru* 181)

**Igbo:** [Ihe nke a] [juru m ] [afỌ ] [dịka nri.]

**English:** [Go] [and] [throw down your bones.] (*Highlife for Lizards* 37)

**Igbo:** [Jee] [ka] [ị ghasa Ọkpụkpụ gị n'ala].

**English:** [It is not] [the type] [of rain] [that comes empty-handed].

(*The Journey within* xiii)

**Igbo:** [Ọ bughị ] [udị ] [mmiri ] [na-agba aka a bịa.]

It is pertinent to observe of the extracts above that they are all direct speeches by some characters in the novels. Almost all these characters are villagers or strongly tradition-oriented people, and they make these utterances in conversations featuring the traditional folk. The quotation from Ekwensi's *Jagua Nana* is uttered by Jagua herself. We know that she is a city woman through and through, but the novel also shows that she had her

upbringing in the village, and her speech quoted above is uttered while she is conversing with her mother in her village of Ogabu. As Ekwensi puts it, Jagua Nana “spoke rapidly in Igbo now that they were in Iboland (sic)” (137).

We can thus conclude that the transliterative impulse by these writers is not a freakish impulse; rather they make a creative use of transliterated speech for purposes of categorizing character and delineating roles.

### Cushioning

On the simplistic level, it might be said that the linguistic jig-saw involved in transliteration is just a question of imposing the vocabularies of one language on the syntax of another. But, as we have tried to explain, the transliterative phenomenon is much more complex than the mere transference of the lexical items of a second language on the syntax of a first language. There is an artistic attempt to involve the syntax of Language One and the vocabularies of Language Two in a dialectical relationship that would ensure communication in Language Two even at the same time as it makes that communicative event not come off so easy. In cushioning, there is an attempt to use naked, untranslated, lexical items belonging to the first language in a syntactic environment that surely belongs to the second language. Often, however, some attempts are made to make these lexical items understood in context. The cushioned words shed off some degree of the “jarring” impact which inevitably occurs when the vocabularies of a language suddenly intrude in the discourse of a different language. There is a high degree of cushioning involving Igbo in the English of these writers under examination.

We shall distinguish between two broad types of cushioning in this literature under discussion. In the first, the cushioned Igbo lexical items are bound in one way or the other – the degree of bounding, however, differs from writer to writer, and even from book to book. In the second, the cushioned words are free, and the authors are compelled to device other ways of making themselves understood.

Under bound cushioning, one finds expressions like the following: “*chi* or personal god”; “onwubiko – ‘Death, I implore you’”; “*ogbanje*, one of those wicked children who ...”; (*Things Fall Apart* 25, 70) “the *okwo* ... is a hollow trunk; (*The Concubine* 35); “Uchenna... meaning ‘father’s thoughts’”; “the great point of *ici* is that it is a test of fortitude”; *nchi* (grass cutter) (*The Potter’s Wheel* II); “*iyi uwa*... objects with which the sick girl... belonged” (*Blade among the Boys* 46); “*ogu*... a strip of cloth... with a raffia belt” (*The Only Son* 75); “*Ch m!* My God!” (*Half of a Yellow Sun*, 28), and “*echi eteka*; ‘Tomorrow Is Too Far’ (*The Thing Around Your Neck* 188).

In all the cases referred to above, we find that the authors employ the informatory style of writing, and the impression is unmistakable that they are trying to explain certain Igbo lexical items which cannot be adequately translated into English to an audience that may not understand Igbo. The informatory stylistic approach may not be so obvious; a writer may apply some greater finesse in cushioning the Igbo lexical items he/she had used, as does Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie in all her fiction. This is the case where Achebe writes: “Meanwhile, he reached for the little wooden bowl which had a lump of white clay in it. ‘Here is a piece of nzu’, he said”. *Arrow of GOD* 61). Here, the reader is indirectly told that *nzu* is the same thing as “a piece of white chalk”. In some other cases, what we have are undisguised anthropological descriptions of certain events and items the authors are anxious that their ‘foreign’ readers should understand (*The Concubine* 35, 46; *More Than Once* 14, 19; *Danda* 35, 47; *Wand of Noble Wood* 45).

The “free” cushioned Igbo words are free in the sense that the authors do not even attempt to explain their meanings – at times some of these words are not even italicized to show that they are not English words. The reader may or may not be able to guess what the writer means; it certainly appears as if the author has taken him for granted. He/she (the writer) seems to be saying: “well, if you understand Igbo you may know what I mean; if you do not, you need’nt bother: you would still understand the novel”. It is not surprising that some of these novelists have attached glossaries at the end of some of their novels, conscious of the fact that the reader may need the services of just glossaries for a fuller understanding and appreciation of their novels (*Toads for Supper* 188-192; *The Naked Gods* 253-254; *Danda* 155-157; *The Journey Within* 241-242). In the words of Nkem Nwankwo while introducing his glossary at the end of *Danda*, “the novel is set in Ibo (sic) land and there are allusions to Ibo (sic) practices which a non-Ibo (sic) might find difficult to grasp. To help such a reader, a guide seems called for” (155). Adichie is an eminent practitioner of the art of using “free” cushioned words, and one suspects that this might irritate some of her non-Igbo readers.

All told, cushioning as a literary device may not serve the best interests of the reader. It could jar, disrupt, create discontinuity in the smooth flow of the process of understanding, and disorganize the entertainment value of literature. But these writers seem to have found this stylistic burden a helpful avenue for tackling the interests of their varied types of audience.

### **The language of metaphor**

The two metaphoric genres that feature in the novels of these writers are idioms and proverbs. A good deal has been written about the place of the proverb in Igbo oral prose (see Nwoga 186-204; Emenanjo and Ogbalu 186-204; Ogbalu 140-144; Okonkwo 99-105; Obiechina 155-156 and Emenanjo 109-114), and we have tried to show elsewhere that there is a strong proverb tradition in Igbo oral and written literatures. (“The Poetic Dynamics”). The issues often raised while discussing the proverb in Igbo oral and written literatures are

twofold: the content of these proverbs and their stylistics. It is the second that is more germane to the argument of this article. By the stylistics of the proverb one thinks mainly of its application in the spoken language, and the point emphasized is that the proverb-and this is also true of the idiom-is essentially a rhetorical genre featuring mainly in speeches and conversations. Proverbs and idioms as rhetorical genres are by no means peculiar to the Igbo, but their use is quite pervasive, and one cannot really think of a good Igbo without them.

Indeed, the proverb can be taken as a model for Igbo literature. This is in the sense that a very effective way to explain to a traditional Igbo folk the concept of literature is to say that it is a kind of proverb (*ilu*); some metaphor of language the whole of its repertoire which not only presents a totality of the Igbo world but also does so in a creative manner. This is of course another way of making the conventional literary observation that a literature does not only have a content but also a style. When so explained, the Igbo folk would understand literature as being something that cannot exist outside of the individual and the group, but a kind of life they live every moment through the medium of language.

Linguists are generally agreed on the existence of universal and specific characteristics of language. The tendency in discussing the specific characteristics of a language is to focus attention on the purely linguistic issues that are more phonological and syntactical than lexical. But one would like to observe that part of what constitutes the inner structure of language is *the way* a people use that language – admittedly a rather vague thing to say – so as to derive some aesthetic value somewhat peculiar to a people. A people's way of using language thus becomes part of the aesthetic definer of such people; and this link between language and aesthetics brings to one's mind the notion of literature.

The writers under study here make a generous use of proverbs in their novels. They use these proverbs stylistically to emphasize themes, satirize occasions, categorize and define characters. This helps them portray a distinct impression of an Igbo world view. But apart from this thematic value of the proverb, the manner these writers apply both proverbs and idioms in speeches and conversations by characters end up colouring their English with Igbo speech habits; habits that make for "literariness", pungency, succinctness and economy – not in the sense of number of words, but in the sense of there being no need to say more – of expression. We shall proceed to illustrate with few examples.

In Achebe's *Things Fall Apart*, we are told that "Okonkwo had clearly washed his hands and so he ate with the kings and elders" (8), an English translation of the Igbo proverb: *nwata kwochaa aka mma, o soro ndi eze rie nri*. In the novel, this proverb of achievement comes after Achebe has revealed to the reader the fact that Okonkwo has achieved some greatness for himself. The author might well have decided to leave out the proverb and his point would still have been made. But he goes on to add this proverb, which then makes Okonkwo's

achievement motivation reflective of a folk characteristics. The proverb is thus a verbalization, in metaphor, of an important aspect of Igbo value system. The English language, in which the proverb is expressed, now becomes the medium of expression some Igbo cultural values – system.

In *Arrow of God*, a novel with almost an overdose of proverbs, there is a passage in which Ezeulu, the Chief character, addresses some elders of Umuaro. The first utterance in his address is a greeting. After that, he utters this proverb: “when an adult is in the house the she-goat is not left to suffer the pains of parturition on its tether” (18), an English translation of *okenye adighi anọ n’ụlọ ma nne ewu a nọrọ n’ogbiri ime a na-eme ya*. Ezeulo credits the proverb to his ancestors – thus rooting his views on tradition – and proceeds to make a speech where his proverb – metaphor is reduced to its prosaic dimensions. The speech contains another proverb, and he ends it with a third: “when we hear a house has fallen do we ask if the ceiling fell with it? (18) – *a n’ụ na ụlọ dara, a na-ajụba ma uko eso wee da?* What precedes the proverb is the argument that if Umuaro decides to send an emissary to virtually declare war against their neighbours, it is not relevant *how* nicely or crudely the message is delivered: the war would come anyway, no matter how. After the point, Ezeulu’s concluding proverb makes only a thin allusion to the preceding argument; it rather forces the minds of his listeners to the future. They are being compelled by the power of metaphor to see in this future the possible consequence of their decision – a falling house that must collapse with its roof; a catastrophe that is already in motion and cannot be arrested. After the proverb, Ezeulu does not say more, other than his abrupt end-of-speech salutation. Here we find the subtle aesthetics of the Igbo proverb genre, when adequately applied in oratory, at work: a proverb begins a speech; the speech decodes the proverb, sometimes using another proverb to do so, and another proverb ends the speech, leaving behind it a lingering feeling of sabotaged anticipation; of a “needed” explanation that is not made because it is not actually needed, having been implied in the proverb.

It is this kind of creative use of the proverb that leaves in the mind of the reader who is acquainted with the demands of Igbo oratory an impression that here he is being confronted with an Igbo way of speech, even though what the reader is reading is English.

In Achebe’s *No Longer at Ease*, one notices that most of the proverbs in the novel appear in the sections of the novel either featuring the tradition-oriented Umuofia characters who live in Lagos, or set in Umuofia itself. In both cases, the people speak in Igbo, and the proverb is almost a permanent feature of Igbo speech. Similarly, fifteen of the seventeen proverbs in Agunwa’s *More Than Once* are uttered by traditional adult males who live in a traditional setting where Igbo is the only language of serious conversation. In Amadi’s *The Concubine*, set in a purely closed, traditional village, all the proverbs except one, are uttered by male

elders. In Ike's *Toads for Supper*, most of the proverbs, which Amadi, the main character in the novel, calls "solid Igbo" (95), are used by characters featuring in the sections of the novel set in the village. In *The Potter's Wheel* by the same author, a novel with a purely village setting, there are again many proverbs, and most of the characters who use them are adult males.

Onuora Nzekwu uses these proverbs rather indiscriminately, especially in his first two novels, *A Wand of Noble Hood* and *Blade Among the Boys*, but even his pedantic display of proverbs still creates the impression of an Igbo inner characteristics of language lying underneath the surface of the syntax and vocabulary of the English language. In *Highlife for Lizards*, he makes a striking use of the proverb: to buttress the masculinity of character which he has bestowed on his heroine, Agom. The issue here is that, among the Igbo, women do not always speak in proverbs, except when they are conversing among themselves, and even then they use proverbs sparingly. But in *Highlight for Lizards*, the heroine, Agom, uses proverbs generously, especially when in confrontation with the male folk. Behind her proverbful of utterances one hears an Igbo male voice, and it is no surprise that she cuts the image of a tough, hardened character whose masculinity is symbolized by her eight-year barrenness before she begins to get children.

One observation that must be made about the actual writing of these proverbs in English is that the exercise is transliterative in a good number of cases, especially when, as is the case most of the time, these proverbs are directly uttered by the characters. The transliterative quality of these proverbs thus reflects a conscious attempt to present, graphologically, the true phonological situation: of utterances made by people who are speaking the Igbo language.

What is true of the proverb is also true, to a large extent, of the idiom. Indeed, the recognizable Igbo idioms used in most of these novels numerically outstrip the proverbs by far. Most often they are phrases or clauses used either as parts of some authorial sentences, or, which has been more the case, in utterances made by characters in the novels. The idioms contribute to the "Igboness" of the language of these novels more than the proverbs because the idioms are used more freely and flexibly, and they are not often used to categorize and define characters as the proverbs are. The idioms are not as deep and complex as the proverbs, and so they operate more on the surface level of the structure of language. Their communicative value is more immediate to the reader because they do not demand as much mental effort as proverbs in decoding the meanings they convey. What these idioms do is often to take the place of English expressions that would have been shorter or longer, less metaphoric and thus less literary. They may often imply using more words than would have been the case if the whole utterance were in straight-forward, standard, English, but they are at the same time more explicit because the images they convey are often quite apt to express

the intended meaning of the speaker. Most idioms are word-groups within the sentence, for which reason the utterance in speech, often called the sentence, is incomplete without these idioms. When sentences are therefore made in the English language, and such sentences have as part of their constituents some word-groups that are “unEnglish” idioms, then there is likely to be an impression that the sentence is not representative of standard English. In a situation where the idioms are recognizable Igbo idioms, the reader who is familiar with the Igbo language is most likely to feel he is reading some kind of “Igbo in the English language”. We will give few illustrations selected randomly from a number of the novels by novelists under study.

In Ike’s *Toads for Supper*, there is a sentence which goes thus: “But now that Mazi Onwuzulike had called the evil disease by name, he had no mouth to talk, not knowing how to begin” (123). The sentence is syntactically English: there is a subordinated clause introduced by “but”, followed by the main clause of the sentence, and finally there is an adverbial clause which ends the sentence. However, there are two Igbo idioms in the sentence: “had called the evil disease by name” (*Ọ kp Ọro aj Ọ Ọya ah Ụ aha*) which is part of the subordinated clause, and “he had no mouth to talk” (*Ọ h Ụghị Ọn Ụ oji ekwu okwu*) which is the main clause of the sentence. The first idiom could have been stated in unidiomatic English as “he bluntly stated the ugly facts”, and the second as “he was speechless”. A similar phenomenon occurs in *The Potter’s Wheel* where Obu is temporarily spared further punishment by a tormentor, Samuel, who declares that there is always a “next time” when he will teach Obu “how water got into the pumpkin”(131) (*otu mmiri siri baa n’opi Ụgb Ọg Ụr Ụ*); an Igbo idiomatic expression which means “a hard lesson” in English. The point then is that the presence of these Igbo idioms add Igbo speech nuances to a sentence that is supposed to be in English language; in other words, the English is no longer the “Queen’s English” but a variety of it, with peculiar characteristics.

In Achebe’s *Things Fall Apart*, Enoch is so zealous over the Christian religion that the folk of the village call him “the outsider who wept louder than the bereaved” (167) (*onye ezi kwara akwa karia ndi nwe ozu*). If Achebe had wanted an expression that is standard English, he could have written something of this nature: “Enoch was more enthusiastic over the Christian religion than the white people who brought it”. In *Arrow of God*, a character asks his companion “to hold your tongue in your hand” (20) (*Jide ire gi aka*); an Igbo idiomatic expression for “shut up”. In *A Man of the People*, the villagers of Anata feel that Josiah’s crimes are becoming too revolting and persistent as to attract attention and justify disciplinary action, and the way Achebe expresses this succinctly is to use an Igbo idiom which says that Josiah “has taken enough for the owner know”(86) (*o werela ka onye nwenu ga-ama*).

This tendency to use Igbo idioms is so pervasive in the novels of these Nigerian writers of Igbo origin that it is perhaps necessary to give more examples. In Agunwa's *More Than Once*, some travelers are advised not to travel at night through a village with a bad reputation, "so that bad tales may not be told over you"(124) (*ka a ghara iḳkwasí ụ́nụ́ ajọ́ aḳḳọ́*); an Igbo idiomatic expression for "so that you will not become subjects of a tragic story". The picaresque character of Nkem Nwankwo's *Danda* always lets people know that he finds the world an enjoyable place to live in; a notion the writer describes with the Igbo idiom of "eating the world" (9) (*iri uwa*). Efurú, the heroine of Flora Nwapa's *Efurú*, is a likeable fellow, and the author uses the Igbo idiom: "has the face of people" (9) (*o nwere ihu oha*) to express this idea. When she is beaten up by her husband, she feels very ashamed about it, and this feeling of shame is expressed by the author as that Adizua "had rubbed charcoal on her face"(13) (*o tere ya unyi n'ihu*). Munonye's novels have such idiomatic expressions like Ibe and Nnanna being "salt and oil"(59) (*nnu na mmanu*) to refer to the fact that the two boys are very close to each other; looking "worse than a vulture beaten by rain"(13) (*idi ka udene mmiri mara*) for "neglected"; "old enough to shoot down a female"(32) (*ruru ogo igbatu nwayi*) for "has reached the age of puberty", and "it was like a hot soup, which must be eaten slowly and with cunning"(40) (*iji nwayọọ racha ofe d'ọkụ*) for "should be handled carefully". In *Highlight for Lizards*, Onuora Nzekwu expresses the idea of "stupidity" in the Igbo idiom of "taking food from the nose"(34) (*isi n'imi eri nri*); in *Survive the Peace*, Ekwensi describes the word "upstart" with the Igbo idiom of "a child of yesterday"(176) (*nwa nnyaa*); and I.N.C. Aniegbó, in *The Journey within*, describes the fact of a child resembling the father closely with the Igbo idiom: "You blew him from the nose"(15) (*i zipụụ ya n'imi*).

We would like to observe that even from the very few illustrations given above, a good number of these Igbo idiomatic expressions in the English language have been written in transliterated forms. In such cases the feeling of the rhythms of Igbo in the English language is heightened. This is because two factors are involved: the syntactic factor, already discussed, which is characteristic of transliterations, and this factor of a language (L<sub>1</sub>) being the vehicle of the speech nuances of a different language (L<sub>2</sub>) suggested by the idiomatic expressions of that language (L<sub>1</sub>).

### **The Rhetorical Impact**

So far, we have attempted to itemize the factors that create the impression of an Igbo rhythm in the English language as used by the writers under study. But our exercise is really somewhat mechanical, for this feeling of an Igbo rhythm in English is the consequence of a total impact registered by the combination of the transliterative factor, the metaphoric factor, cushioning and a fourth which is rather enigmatic, and which one would hurriedly describe as "a hidden morphology of language". This "morphology" – certainly not to be confused with the morphology of words – is neither just a syntactic factor, nor a semantic factor, nor

the metaphoric factor alone. It is rather a way with words; a way of saying things which is peculiar to a people. It has something to do with “the character” of language. This character” of the language may not be English. Instead it is the character of a different language *in which the writer thinks*. An excerpt from Achebe’s *Arrow of God* will illustrate what we are trying to say:

‘I know’, he told them, ‘my father said this to me that when our village first came here to live the land belonged to Okperi. It was Okperi who gave us their land to live in. They also gave us their deities—their Udo and their Ogwugwu. But they said to our ancestors—mark my words—the people of Okperi said to our fathers; We give you our Udo and our Ogwugwu; but you must call the deities we give you not Udo but the son of Udo, and not Ogwugwu but the son of Ogwugwu. This is the story as I heard it from my father. If you choose to fight a man for a piece and farmland that belongs to him I shall have no land in it’ (15)

In the above quotation there is not one proverb, not one idiomatic expression and not one transliteration. The names of the deities are so well cushioned that they are understood for what they are: proper names that have neither syntactic nor semantic value in the linguistic environment in which they appear. The passage then is standard English. And yet the speech does not have an English “character”, with its stress-synchronicity. The body is that of English, but the voice—the syllable-isochronistic rhythm – is that of Igbo. And the reader of this passage who knows Igbo language well—the way the biblical Isaac knew, not only the bodies but also the voices of his sons, Jacob and Essau—will be in a position to appreciate this fact fully.

It is this combination involving the transliterative factor, cushioning, the metaphoric factor and the “character” factor that gives the reader the total impact of a rhetorical heritage. The constants of Igbo rhetoric—and by rhetoric we imply the creative art of conversation and speech-making – include a predilection for proverbs and idioms, a penchant for anecdotes, an impulsive use of parenthesis, and a linguistically in-built mechanism for humour and wit. The overall effect is often that of an utterance that is just sufficient to convey all that needs to be conveyed; no more, no less. As one village folk would put it in a characteristically idiomatic framework, it is not every-thing that must be verbalized, but that which is not verbalized should be understood (*Ọ bụghị ihe n’ile ka a na-ekwucha ekwu, ma na nke a kwughị ekwu bụrụ eze eji ire agụ Ọnụ*). These oral forms have greatly informed the language of many an Igbo writer in both Igbo and English, and these constitute the rhetorical heritage in their prose. The trans-literative tendency in the writings of the members of “the Achebe School” is essentially a graphological mechanism for bringing maximally to the surface this

rhetorical heritage. The exercise, then, creates a powerful sense of Igbo rhythms in English, as typified in the following three extracts:

‘I shall tell you word, Araba’, said Idengeli. ‘I am not afraid of you. Why should I be? Do you feed me? Do I come to your house to beg for yam? My name is Idengeli. Ask in Aniocha and they will tell you that I am one that fears neither spirit nor man. Then who are you that I should be afraid to tell you word? Go and sit down! Listen to me. You will do what the chieftain tells you to do. This Umunna will have only one head. Is that not our word, people of our land? (*Danda* 47).

‘Amadi, my words are few. You have painted my face and your mother’s face with charcoal. I have always pulled your ears with my hand and warned you to beware of these township girls. I begged you to put your sword in the sheath because one day you will be tired of lying down with a woman... Nwakaego is waiting for you, just as the water in the broken pot waits for the dog to drink.... Now that you have eaten the thing that has kept you awake let me watch you sleep! Now that you have fallen into the hands of the township girls who help the gods to kill, you will understand why I have been warning you to avoid women as you would avoid lepers. When a child eats a toad, it kills his appetite for meat! (*Toads for Supper* 20)

‘The world is changing... I do not like it. But I am like the bird Eneke-nti-oba. When his friends asked him why he was always on the wing he replied: “Men of today have learnt to shoot without missing and so I have learnt to fly without perching”. I want one of my sons to join these people and be my eyes there. If there is nothing in it you will come back. But if there is something there you will bring home my share. The world is like a Mask dancing. If you want to see it well you do not stand in one place. My spirit tells me that those who do not befriend the white man today will be saying had I know tomorrow’. (*Arrow of God* 46).

These are only representative samples. It is only adequate that Achebe should be the high priest bringing up the rear of this literary procession. For he is adept at this art of stretching the resources of the English language to accommodate Igbo rhythms. These writers are impelled upon by “the technology of the intellect” (Goody; Okpewho) to present the written code in cadences of orality.

**Notes**

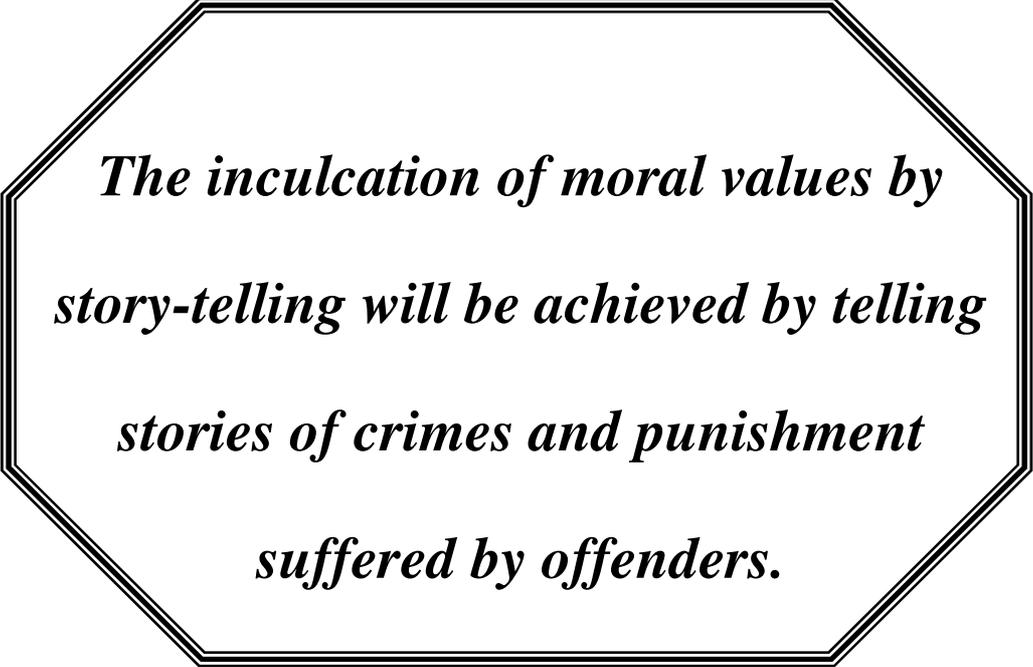
1. Uncomfortable because it reminds one of “Engli-Igbo”, an expression which gained currency in most post-primary schools in Igboland as that type of speech in English which is occasionally punctuated with Igbo words and expressions. “Engli-Igbo” became a derogatory term, suggesting that the speaker was not capable of speaking an English that was “English” through and through, without the burden of naked linguistic interference from Igbo (see “Cursed Bilingualism”). The mentality then was that English, the status language of learning and good job, was superior to Igbo, and should not be subjected to this indignity of code-switching. It is comforting to note that this attitude has suffered an almost complete reversal, and today the ridicule would be on the person-and there are many of such people-who is not capable of speaking the Igbo language without punctuating it with English words and expressions.
2. “Igbonization” is preferred to Lindfors’ “Iboization” for two reasons: one is that our researches show that “Igbo”, and not the anglicized “Ibo”, is the authentic word for both the people and their language, as J.D.W. Jeffreys, one of the earliest, fairly well-informed, British anthropologists on the Igbo did point out as far back as 1930. (See Intelligence Report on Awka Division, p. 106. (CSO 26/4, File No. 27737. Nigerian National Archives, Ibadan); the other is that the insertion of “n” between “o” and “i” is more faithful to the morphemic derivational rules of English where a consonant always proceeds the “-ize” morpheme of the verbal.

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*The inculcation of moral values by  
story-telling will be achieved by telling  
stories of crimes and punishment  
suffered by offenders.*