

# Sociolinguistics in Chinua Achebe's *Things Fall*

## *Apart*

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### Abstract

This paper deals with the study of sociolinguistics in Chinua Achebe's novel *Things Fall Apart*. Language and society are dependent on each other and always move cooperatively in the growth and progress of people. Language exists and prospers inside the human society. People's culture, thought and behavior modulates and dictates their use of language since man is a linguistic animal. This conception is demonstrated in literary works like Achebe's *TFA*. The novelist solicited his linguistic and communal backdrop for innovative reaction in his novel. This creative virtuosity and skill entails the English language that tormented many languages owing to its amalgamating role in countries like Nigeria with multilingual communities. The inventive potential of the writer has entitled him to manoeuvre the language to evince his sociolinguistic milieu. This paper operates by reviewing the expanse and the efficacy in the use of code-switching, coinages, creole, culturally dependent speech style, direct translation, hybridization, loan words, nativization, pidgin, proverbs and semantic extension. The novel follows the nativization process by elucidation and explanation of the subject and issue to reflect the nativisation of English language in Africa. Achebe immersed intensely into the usage of these sociolinguistic components and the utilization of other language canons independent of the Igbo language.

**Key Words:** Code-switching, Coinages, Creole, Culturally dependent speech style, Direct translation, Hybridization, Loan words, Nativization, Pidgin, Proverbs, Semantic extension.

### Introduction

Language is the significant asset and distinctive inventive quality of human beings through which they socialize amid themselves and abide a relationship between man and society. Human beings learn the language in society as the language system invariably escorts the social pattern and culture. Language conveys the thought and feeling of the speaker as well as the culture and tradition of the society. Language

is inevitably posted within a socio-cultural surrounding of a community and hence contextualized. It is obvious that in language contact condition, a second language (L2) is surely to be affected and regulated by its linguistic abode. Whenever English begins to be used by the people in a region or country where English is not the native language, it endures an affair of rebirth which is both linguistic and cultural. In this regard Yamuna Kachru and Larry Smith express:

People in Africa, Asia and other parts of the world often need to express themselves through the medium of English. Inner Circle Englishness, such as American and British, are not always adequate for such purposes. Meanings that need to be expressed in local contexts demand the nativization of English (*Cultures, Contexts and World Englishes* 106).

Another realm where sociolinguistic study is of substantial importance is in directing the individuality of the use of language following the person's nationality. This commences Englishes and thus we have British English, American English, Canadian English, Indian English, Ghanaian English and even Nigerian English. The chief rationale of Nigerianism in English is not simply the instance of mother tongue interference; it can also be the issue of the accession of the English language and the sociolinguistic environment and situation in which English is used. English as a foreign language is been raised, trained and acclimatized to attune the culture of the people and thus eventually it achieved little percentage of native shade that distinguishes it from the local English style used in England. A novelist is virtually inevitably influenced by his native language even while writing in a foreign language. Certain devices the African writers, especially Achebe, use to display native or indigenous shade and subtlety in their writing styles are: code-switching, coinages, creole, culturally dependent speech style, direct translation, hybridization, loan words, nativization, pidgin, proverbs and semantic extension.

In the controversy of foreign language acquisition, there are two groups: First group led particularly by Ngũgĩ Wa Thiong 'o that promotes the application of African indigenous languages not moderated by foreign external imagery via English linguistic principle since these are the languages of local and the working class people which are pertinent and relevant in the rebellion against colonization and it dispenses direct approach to the rich African traditions. The second group led by Chinua Achebe that advocates the acquisition of the English language and its linguistic manipulation to create the communicative linguistic consequence necessitated. He further states that such a linguistic exercise assists to encourage the African way of life in their African literary works. In this situation, it is pivotal to place the use of language in *TFA* in its appropriate sociolinguistic context. Language being a socio-cultural verisimilitude the sphere of the novel exhibits the readers to the actual realm of bilingualism

and multilingualism and various sociolinguistic events dealing with the characters and their special linguistic custom and courtesy.

### Direct translation

A classic example of translation is: “I cannot yet find a mouth with which to tell the story” (TFA 34). The statement: “I am Dry-meat- that-fills-the mouth” (TFA 66) is a direct translation of *A bu m anụ kpọrọ nku na- eju ọnu* that means, ‘I am small but mighty’. Another example is: ‘...her husband’s wives...’ (TFA 60) which is the translation of *ndi nwunye di ya*.

### Semantic extension

Examples are: “You want to talk to our big father?” (TFA 93). “How is my daughter Ezinma?” (TFA 34). Actually, Ekwefi is the biological mother of Ezinma, but Chielo calls her ‘my daughter’ as a kind of harmony, affection, and gentleness. Similarly, Uchendu greets Obierika and two other men who visited him: “Welcome my sons” (TFA 96). He addresses them as sons because he is as old as their fathers.

### Code switching

Examples are: *Kedu afa gi?* ‘What’s your name?’ (TFA 15). ‘A man cannot rise against the destiny of his *chi*’ (TFA 92). The comment: ‘He sat down in his *obi* and mourned his friend’s calamity’ (TFA 87). Certain other examples are: *ilo*, (TFA 74) *foo-foo* (TFA 67), *ogbanje* (TFA 56); *iba* (TFA 53) and *ozo* (TFA 48).

### Proverbs in the work

“My grandfather used to say that other people just farted, but his own fart always released shit” (TFA 283). “Did I speak with water in my mouth?” (TFA 337). “If a child washed his hands he would eat with kings” (TFA 6). “A man who pays respect to the great paves way for his own greatness” (TFA 14). “A toad does not run in the afternoon for nothing” (TFA 15). “An old woman is always uneasy when dry bones are mentioned in a proverb” (TFA 15).

### Culturally dependent speech style

One of the examples of nativization in the novel is:

We shall all live. We pray for life, children, a good harvest and happiness. You will have what is good for you and I will have what is good for me. Let the kite perch and let the eagle perch too. If one says no to the other, let the wing break’ (TFA 14).

Another example is Egwugwu's greetings to Umuofia people: "Umuofia kwenu! Yaa! Umuofia kwenu! Yaa!" (TFA 63).

## Borrowed words and expressions: Intentional borrowing

### Pidgin and Creole

Some of such words are *osu* – outcast (TFA 111-12); *inyanga*, from pidgin meaning pride; an old woman (TFA 9); *nso-ani* – a religious offence or taboo (TFA 22); *ochu* - murder (TFA 91); *iba* – feverish condition (TFA 53); *umunna* – a wider group of kinsmen; *ndichie* – elders of the land (TFA 9-11).

### Formal and functional borrowing

"Whenever he was ill with fever, or once when he fell from a tree, his mother would rub his body with *okwuma*" (TFA 26). "You think the *dibai* has sent the black cat to bite us?" (TFA 134) "I will not let this witch control him. I will consult the *dibia* Nwafor Agbala when I return home; the man's medicine is famous in our parts" (TFA 126). "Do you cook *ofe nsala* well?" (TFA 259). "[Ugwu] was pleased to let Mama cook but he did not eat *ugba* and dried fish she made for dinner" (TFA 253).

"Mama brought the baby, wrapped in a brown shawl that had the unpleasant smell of *Ogiri*" (TFA 308). "I knew that you *chi* was wide awake" (TFA 506). "Your *chi* will break away the rocks on your path" (TFA 121). Some of the other examples are: *Ogbanje* (TFA 54, 56, 130), *Iyi-uwa* (TFA 540), *Ikenga* (TFA 145), *Foo-foo* (TFA 51), *Udu*, *ogene*, and *ekwe* (TFA 5).

### Coinages

"I do not mind where the woman my son will marry comes from, but I do not want a *wawa* woman" (TFA 126). Other coinages are: *Nyamiri*, *Nyem mmiri*, 'Ina *nyamiri* ! Where are the Igbo people? Who is Igbo here? Where are the infidels?' (190), *Kotma* (TFA 127), *Rain-maker* (TFA 24), *Iron horse* (TFA 97-98).

### Hybridization

Some of hybrids involved in TFA are: *Ozo* (TFA 48), Female *ochu* (TFA 91), *Ozo* dance (TFA 41), *Ozo* society (TFA 121), *tufiakwa!* (TFA 71), *uziza*, *umunna*, *obi*, *egwugwu*, *oriokpa*, *ogbanje*, *ozo*, *ikenga*, *okwuma*, *suya*, *ugba*, *ogiri*, *tie-tie* (127), *jigida* (TFA 20) medicine house or shrine (TFA 10), bad *chi* or personal god (TFA 13), *agadi nwanyi* (TFA 9), ancestral spirit or *egwugwu* (TFA 85), outcast or *osu* (TFA 111).

## Conclusion

*TFA* by Achebe observes the various deforms and distorts of linguistic shape in the English language to demonstrate their utilization in the novel. The cultivation and the domestication approaches engaged by Achebe assist to implore the cultural scene in which the happenings took place. In the novel, Achebe employs all linguistic devices and concepts to display and convey the account and information of the text as these are the aspects of nativization of the English language to represent the native colour and taste. Thus, *TFA* in a way surveys the features of Nigerian English that are the artifacts of their particular common and social context. Also the novel manifests the fact that language is accountable to the cultures of their users and cannot be separated from the culture. That means language is subservient to the culture in which it functions. Language and culture are parts of the same coin that exists side by side.

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