

A Linguistic Stylistic Study of Chinua Achebe's *Anthills of the Savannah*

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Abstract

The aim of this study is to carry out an analysis of stylistic devices in Chinua Achebe's *Anthills of the Savannah*. The specific objectives are the analysis of varieties of English introduced in the novel, which are the Standard English, the Nigerian Pidgin, and the English with local flavor. The methodology of the study is sampling technique. Sample passages are analysed using linguistic stylistics as the framework. These are passages of varieties of English that are deployed by the author to perform literary and aesthetic functions. The findings of the study include: the Standard English is used for the realization of satire in the novel. It is also employed for delineation of characters. Varieties of English in the novel reveal the social status of characters. Furthermore, they demonstrate the author's mastery of the English Language and his craftsmanship.

Introduction

In literature, the deployment and mastery of devices for the development of themes and delineation of characters is a realization of the craftsmanship of the writer which comes under the study of his style. A writer maneuvers words and employs other devices to give his work artistic quality and literariness. This is partly what we study under style. Style is pervasive and occasions the uniqueness and masterpiece of a literary work. Every writer has a way of using words which is his style. Thus, style is a peculiarity of a writer, hence, the sobriquet: 'style is the man'.

Style in literature comprises narrative techniques and other literary and linguistic devices employed to tell a story. Narrative techniques are the literary technique, literary device, or fictional device or any of the several specific methods the creator of a narrative uses to convey what they want – in other words, a strategy used in the making of a narrative to relay information to the audience and, particularly, to 'develop' the narrative, usually in order to make it more complete, complicated, or interesting (<https://en.wikipedia.org> as cited in Yakubu and Kinrin, 205). Narrative techniques or literary devices, apart from giving artistic flavour to a work, are the communicative tools used by the writer to pass across his message to the audience. A writer uses a number of devices to develop the themes of his work and characters.

Deployment of literary devices (style) distinguishes a literary work from other forms of writing. Narrative devices, according to Adepaju are "techniques of fiction that operate as constituent units within the more pervasive techniques such as characterization, plot, setting, and point of view" (79). Adepaju gives flashback, foreshadowing, framing, and irony as examples of narrative devices. These devices which the author says operate as constituent units develop characters, plot, setting, and themes. Other examples which have not been mentioned by Adepaju are symbols, images, and other figures of speech; soliloquy, dramatic irony, suspense, pantomime, flash forward, humour and caricature, stream of consciousness, interior monologue, etc.

The writer's creativity is a factor of how he uses not only words but also the literary devices to create the fictional world to entertain the audience and pass his message across. The writer's use of these

devices is his style. Literary devices are in several forms: it may be linguistic or literary. Any technique whether narrative techniques, linguistic, or paralinguistic devices in a literary work which are employed to develop plot, character, setting, and themes and introduce artistic flavor in the work is considered in this study of style as a literary device. Schorer observes that narrative technique is “the means by which the writer’s experience, which is his subject matter, compels him to attend it, technique is the only means he has of discovering, exploring, developing his subject, of conveying its meaning” (378). Literary devices or techniques are important in literary works. They are the writers’ expressive tools for the transmission of his messages and they also account for the artistry of literary works. Any device in literature that promotes an understanding of the writer’s message, the characters and setting is a literary device.

Furthermore, linguistic and paralinguistic devices such as code-switching and code-mixing, register, varieties of language, foregrounding, parallelism, tone and mood, etc in literary works account for the writer’s craftsmanship. All the devices in a poetic, narrative, or dramatic work are employed to project the message and produce the artistry of the work to make it a masterpiece.

The quest to know how a writer says what he wants to say and how he passes across his message to the audience is important thus, the study of the writer’s style. Style has functions in a literary text. This ranges from aesthetic effect to delineation of characters and the development of the themes of the literary work.

In Achebe’s novels, like *Things Fall Apart* and *Arrow of God*, the English language which is the medium of expression is used creatively for artistic effect. It is used in a way to efficiently convey the sentiments and sensibilities of the traditional society. In these novels, the English language is made to adapt to the local environment and accommodate the native elements to successfully develop the theme of culture. For his maneuvering of the English language, Achebe exonerated himself thus:

The price a world language must be prepared to pay is submission to many different kinds of use. The African writer should aim to use English in a way that brings out his message best without altering the languages (sic) to the extent that its values as a medium of international exchange will be lost (cited in Nwachukwu-Agada, 36).

Achebe is a committed African writer whose novels project his society. Achebe has a social vision and he uses his novels for the reformation of his society. He does not sacrifice content for form and his language does not alienate him from the people and the traditional society. In his novels, he uses homely images and symbols for a better understanding of his message. Great writers across the globe who are interested in the projection of their society have done this in order to express the sensibilities of their immediate environment, the people, the flora and the fauna effectively. Yakubu and Ibrahim have observed that writers from different parts of the world have used English with local flavor in their works (189). This shows that a number of writers have maneuvered the English language to introduce varieties of English in their literary works for aesthetic effect and to convey messages.

Every writer is a product of his society. Achebe’s commitment and social vision for African society inform his domestication of English. As a committed writer, Achebe has observed that:

Christopher Okigbo believed, as I do, that art and community in Africa are clearly linked. African art as we understand it has not been distilled or purified and refined to the point where it has lost all traces of real life, lost the vitality of the street, like art from some advanced societies and academic art tend to be. In Africa the tendency is to keep art involved with the people. It is clearly emphasized among my own Igbo people that art must

never be allowed to escape into the rarefied atmosphere but must remain active in the lives of the members of society. (56).

Literature performs many social functions and these are what Achebe uses his novels to achieve. The novels not only educate but they also entertain. In Achebe's literary works, reality is portrayed in the form of people's experiences, their attitudes, occupations, feelings, and frustrations and in the way they speak. Any writer who deviates from this part is described by Achebe as a "contemporary intellectual of futility" (55).

In this study, the researchers are interested in investigating deployment of varieties of English in Achebe's *Anthills of the Savannah* that create aesthetic effect and enhance transmission of message. In response to this, they employ linguistic stylistic approach in the textual analysis. According to Ogunsiji,

Linguistic stylistics is primarily concerned with the use of language and its effect in a text. Given a piece of literature, a poem for example, a linguistic analyst will be interested in describing the form and function of language in the poem, paying attention to certain curiosities that may be accounted for in linguistic terms. (24).

The focus of the present research is in tandem with the position of Ogunsiji. It is interested in finding out the functions of language and how words have been used artistically to develop the themes of the novel, delineate characters, define setting and mood, and create aesthetic effect. Words are used in various ways to produce the above outcome. The above functions of language are the areas that the analysts work on. The researchers' conclusion will be based on the impression created by the author's use of words in the novel to pass across his messages.

It should be stressed at this juncture that Ogunsiji's mention of the genre of poetry does not preclude other genres of literature like prose and drama. The present research is on the genre of prose fiction, the novel, and the tenets of linguistic stylistics such as the 'effects' and the 'functions' of language are applicable. In a narrative work, poetry, or drama, language is the means through which themes and characterization (in prose and drama) are made possible. Furthermore, the tenets of linguistic stylistics that will drive the analysis of *Anthills of the Savannah* in this research are related to Stanley Fish's affective stylistics which is concerned with the emotional power of words and the effects they can produce on the listener or reader. Writing on affective stylistics, Wales observes that rhythmic pattern of words can express different effects (14). Language is flexible and therefore, it is capable of performing different functions. In *Anthills of the Savannah*, Achebe has created varieties of English to use as devices to develop themes and delineate characters.

Literature Review

There are earlier studies that are related to the present one. Some of these works will be reviewed in this section to reveal the gap that this study is going to fill. First in this exercise is Mshelia's (1-15) "A Linguistic-Stylistic Analysis of Students' Reading Public Notices on the Campus of Federal University Gashua, Yobe State". He did an analysis of students' circular pasted on notice boards at three levels of language, which are graphological, grammatical, and semantic levels using Crystal and Davy model. His paper is on error analysis in the areas of concord, pluralisation, spelling and inappropriate use of words. Even though Mshelia's study and the present one are on linguistic stylistics, they are different in focus and theoretical orientation. While Mshelia is interested in the students' use of English with the aim of correcting their errors for an improvement, the present study is interested in the deployment of

linguistic stylistic approach to reveal Chinua Achebe's message and craftsmanship in the novel, *Anthills of the Savannah*.

Next is Jolayemi's study which is a systemic text linguistic study of Olu Obafemi's plays. He identifies linguistic elements such as allusion, varieties of English, bilingualism, metaphor, proverbs, etc, that project the message of a text. Even though Jolayemi's study is on plays, it is an inspiration to the present study because of their similar focus. However, the two studies are quite different in their theoretical orientation and design. Apart from the themes, the present research is interested in analyzing varieties of English to reveal their contributions to character development.

Furthermore, Oguzie (10-19) in his study of Chukwuemeka's *Toads for Super* points out that in the novel, proverbs are a stylistic device and they embody the philosophy of Igbo people. The present study in its analysis of proverbs takes a different perspective thereby making it unique.

Yakubu (198-206) in his analysis of proverbs in Ola Rotimi's *Ovonramwen Nogbaisi* observes that proverbs have literary functions and they are an aspect of African literary tradition. His analysis reveals that Ola Rotimi uses proverbs in the play to develop the themes of rebellion, revenge, and conquest. This earlier study helps to redefine the paradigm of the present research in its analysis of proverbs in Achebe's *Anthills of the Savannah*.

Another research that is related is Azuike's (234-244) "Code-Switching and Code-Mixing as a Stylistic Device in Character Delineation: Achebe's *A Man of the People* and *No Longer at Ease*". In the study, Azuike identifies the Standard English, the Substandard English and the Nigerian Pidgin as the linguistic codes in the novel, and characters switch from one code to the other depending on the situation, the topic, and the role that a character has to play. The analysis reveals that code-switching and code-mixing are a stylistic device that contributes to character development in the novel. Even though the present study is on literary devices in Achebe's *Anthills of the Savannah*, it is not interested in the analysis of code-switching and code-mixing. Nevertheless, it draws inspiration from Azuike's study on *A Man of the People*.

In this literature review, the contribution of the present study to knowledge is made obvious. The textual analysis that will be carried out shortly will reveal clearly the contribution of this research in the canvas of the existing studies on style in literature.

Linguistic Devices in Achebe's *Anthills of the Savannah*

The mosaicist uses cubes, the pointillist: daub, the painter: brush, and the sculptor uses wood, stone, clay or metal (Osundare, 137) but the creator of a fictional universe uses language. He creates literary devices using linguistic and paralinguistic symbols. These devices develop characters, setting, themes, and advance the plot of the literary work.

In *Anthills of the Savannah*, Achebe uses a number of devices to delineate characters, describe the setting, and project the themes of social stratification, culture, dictatorship, politics, and social injustice. In the novel, there are the Standard English, the Nigerian Pidgin, and the English with local flavor. The Standard English is the speech of the characters at the top of the educational and socio-economic ladder including those in the middle of the hierarchy. It is the language of the elite and top government officials. It is used for official transactions and in social gatherings. The Standard English in the novel is a device that effectively projects Kangan, a West African country. Furthermore, it effectively mirrors a West African society and also defines the socio-economic set up of Bassa, the capital of Kangan. In addition to these, the Standard English is Achebe's instrument of satire in *Anthills of the Savannah*. Below are extracts from the novel for proper analysis of the above points:

‘You are wasting your time, Mr Commissioner for information. I will not go to Abazon. Finish! *Kabisa!* Any other business?’ ‘As your Excellency wishes. But...’ ‘But me no buts, Mr Oriko! The matter is closed, I said. How many times, for God’s sake, am I expected to repeat it? Why do you find it difficult to swallow my ruling on anything?’ (1).

The above utterances are in the near native variety of English which is the Standard English. It is the variety that Achebe develops for the elite in the novel and the well-educated characters. The above passage is a dialogue between Sam, His Excellency, the President and Mr Christopher Oriko, the Commissioner for Information at a council meeting. The two of them are well-educated and they use the Standard English. They belong to the privileged class and the Standard English in the novel is a hallmark of their class, thus, varieties of English in the novel highlight the theme of social stratification, a phenomenon that exists in Kangan.

Furthermore, the Standard English is the variety for conducting the business of the government. His Excellency and Mr Commissioner are top government officials and the business of the council is conducted in the Standard English. In the novel, language is deployed by Achebe to develop the theme of dictatorship. As a military leader who comes to the position of leadership through a coup, His Excellency has no respect for collective decision. He does not listen to anybody and he does not accept the opinion of his cabinet members. He forces his decision on members of his cabinet. His Excellency’s speech in the above passage reveals so much about him.

Moreover, the Standard English is the variety employed by Achebe to introduce satire in the novel:

On my right sat the Honourable Commissioner for Education. His is by far the most frightened of the lot. As soon as he had sniffed peril in the air he had begun to disappear into his hole, as some animals and insects do, backwards. Instinctively he had gathered his papers together and was in the very act of lifting the file-cover over them and dragging them into his hole after him when his entire body suddenly went rigid. . . . He drops the file-cover in such panic that everyone now turns to him and sees him perform the strangest act of all: the scattering again of his Council papers in panic atonement and restitution for the sacrilege he has come close to committing. Then he glances round the table until his eyes meet His Excellency’s and fall dead on the mahogany. (2-3).

The above story is narrated by Mr Christopher Oriko, the Commissioner for Information, a member of the ruling class and it is in the Standard English. The Standard English in this narrative is not only to project the social class of the characters in the story, but also to show the author’s detestation for the ruling class. The passage ridicules the Honourable Commissioner for Education, a member of His Excellency’s cabinet. Language is the vehicle of satire. In the above passage, imagery is used as a complement for the realization of satire. Language has made it possible for the author to achieve his aim and also succeed in passing his message across to his audience effectively. The novel, *Anthills of the Savannah* as Achebe’s accomplishment is as a result of his mastery of language. Below is another passage of satire which reveals a literary function of language:

He is in mufti as he now tends to be more and more within the precincts of Presidential Palace: a white *danshiki* tastefully embroidered in gold, and its matching trousers. By contrast many of my colleagues especially the crew from the Universities aspire to the military look. Professor Okong wears nothing but khaki safari suits complete with

epaulettes. It is amazing how the intellectual envies the man of action. . . . We began to crawl out into the open again. In his precise manner the Attorney-General says: 'Your Excellency, let us not flaunt the wishes of the people'. 'Flout, you mean, I said. (4 – 5).

The above passage is in the Standard English and the narrator is Chris Oriko. He lambasts two members of the cabinet. First, is Professor Reginald Okong, who is portrayed as a sycophant. Okong is described in the novel as a buffoon and a man with doubtful scholarship. He lacks wisdom and originality. His stock in trade is sycophancy. He is caricatured in the novel for his mode of dressing which is to please His Excellency. He tells the president what he (the president) wants to hear. He accuses Ikem Osodi wrongly for the failure of the referendum in Abazon and slanders Christopher Oriko, a cabinet colleague, whose recommendation has made him a minister. He does this to win the favour of the president in order to retain him in the office. His behavior as described in the above passage reveals the narrator's indignation for him. Oriko's second butt of attack is the Attorney-General who is portrayed as obsequious; he is ever ready to worship His Excellency. He is one of those canvassing for President-for-Life for Sam, His Excellency. His sentence is grammatically wrong and this is intended to reveal the Attorney-General's deceptive character. The narrator in the passage has exposed his weakness in the use of language. He has no integrity and he is not intelligent. Like Okong, he needs the President's favour, therefore, his attempt to defame Chris. In the above passage, the Standard English as a variety of English is used as a vehicle for the realization of satire in the novel.

To appreciate how language develops the theme of the novel, we should analyze the following passage:

'Beautiful. Just beautiful. Now can anyone here tell me anything about that crowd screaming out there?' he looks at each of us in turn. No one stirs or opens his mouth. 'That's what I mean when I say that I have no Executive Council. Can you see what I mean now, all of you? Take your seats, gentlemen, and stay there!' He rushes out again. . . . When the doors swing open again, an orderly announces: *Professor Okong Wanted by His Excellency!* "I go to prepare a place for you, gentlemen. . . . But rest assured I will keep the most comfortable cell for myself." (9 – 10).

His Excellency's tone of voice carries threat and scorn. The way he addresses members of his cabinet shows he has no respect for them. By detaining them in the office, they are humiliated and dehumanized. He instills fear into members of his cabinet by constantly reproaching them. Furthermore, His Excellency's speech is full of command thereby projecting the themes of dictatorship and intimidation. His language projects an unhealthy working environment. The language is hostile and this implies that we cannot expect good governance from this team working under His Excellency. He wants to be president for life at all cost, so, he is tyrannical in all ramifications. Let us also analyze the following passage:

'It may not be easy to leave even if I wanted. Do you remember what he said during that terrifying debate over his life presidency? I told you, didn't I? For one brief moment he shed his pretended calmness and threatened me: If anyone thinks he can leave the Cabinet on this issue he will be making a sad mistake.' (119).

His Excellency is a sadist with violent disposition. The passage which is also in the Standard English is couched to reveal the theme of life presidency. Furthermore, the character of His Excellency

is projected in the passage. He is a monster in human skin and he is blood thirsty. He does not think twice to eliminate anyone he perceives to oppose his ambition.

The Nigerian Pidgin

The Nigerian Pidgin is the variety that is associated with those on the lower rung of socio-economic ladder. They are the taxi drivers, other ranks in the army and the police, house maids, cooks and sales girls. Below is an example:

‘I beg make you no flash light for my eye’. Wayting?’’For sake of what?’ ‘Na him make I no de gree come for dis una bigman quarter. Na so so wahala.’ (36-37).

This is the speech of one of the taxi drivers in the novel. The speech reveals the class that he belongs to: the less privileged class. Kangan society is stratified and the character himself has stated this in his speech. As a device, use of varieties of language has developed the theme of social stratification.

Below is another example:

‘How you go know? You de read paper?’ ‘Ah, Madam I de try read small. The thing we this oga de write na waa. We like am plenty’. ‘Tell me one thing you done read’. ‘Ah. How I go begin count. The thing oga write too plenty. But na for we small people he de write every time. I no sabi book but I sabi say na for we this oga de fight, not for himself. He na big man. Nobody fit do fuckall to him. So he fit stay for him house, chop him oyibo chop, drink him cold beer, put him air conditioner and forget we. But he no do like that. So we come salute am’. (135-136).

This is a conversation between Elewa, Ikem’s girlfriend who is a sales girl, and two taxi drivers. Elewa, and these taxi drivers belong to the same social class, hence, their use of the Nigerian Pidgin. Ikem, on the other hand belongs to the privileged class. The use of words and phrases such as ‘oga’, ‘small people’, ‘oyibo chop’, ‘cold bear’, reveals the existence of class division in the novel and the meal habit of the ruling class. As a device, the Nigerian Pidgin, like the Standard English is introduced to develop the theme of social stratification. Furthermore, this variety as used here sheds light on the character of Ikem Osodi as a human rights activist.

Here is another passage in the Nigerian Pidgin:

‘Make I fix Madam small sometin’. (64).

The speaker of this sentence is Sylvanus, Mr Christopher Oriko’s cook. His expression reveals his occupation and by extension, his social class. He is seeking his employer’s permission to cook for Beatrice, Chris’s girlfriend.

Let us analyse the theme that is projected in the following passage:

‘Na only poor man de sabi say him brother never chop since morning. The big oga wey put poor man for sun no de remember. Because why? Him own belle done full up with cornflake and milk and omlate’. (193).

The theme of social stratification is expressed in the above passage through juxtaposition of words and phrases. Phrases that are opposite in meaning are used in the passage to project class distinction: ‘big

oga' contrasts 'poor man'. And 'never chop' contrasts 'belle done full up' to show how workers suffer while the employers enjoy.

Indigenised English

Domesticated English with Igbo rhetoric is another variety of English in the novel that reveals character and expounds the themes of the novel. Below is an example:

' . . . But don't forget that our wise men have said also that a man who answers every summons by the town-crier will not plant corn in his fields. . . The cock that crows in the morning belongs to one household but his voice is the property of the neighborhood. You should be proud that this cockerel that wakes the whole village comes from your compound. . . . If your brother needs to journey far across the Great River to find what sustains his stomach, do not ask him to sit at home with layabouts scratching their bottom and smelling the finger'. (122).

The above passage which is in proverbs, is the speech of a character with rural background; a white bearded elder; the leader of the delegation from Abazon. His language is full of proverbs, tales, and epigrams to project Igbo world view and the theme of traditional values within a modern environment. The use of Igbo rhetoric shows Achebe's desire to portray the culture of his people. Furthermore, the passage sheds light a great deal on the character of Ikem Osodi who is the subject of discussion in the passage. He is an achiever, an activist, and an editor, who has won national recognition. Below is another passage of the English with local flavor:

' . . . I don't know why my tongue is crackling away tonight like a clay-bowl of *ukwa* seeds, toasting over the fire; why I feel like a man who has been helped to lower a heavy load from off his head When we were told two years ago that we should vote for the Big Chief to rule for ever and all kinds of people we had never seen before came running in and out of our villages asking us to say yes I told my people : We have Osodi in Bassa. . . . he is our eye and ear. (126).

Many native elements are captured in the novel to project Igbo native milieu and develop the theme of culture. In the English with local flavor, the flora and fauna are a key feature. Achebe knows his society very well and he is conscious of the world view of his people, so he blends the English language in a way to express their sentiments, yearnings and aspirations. The last expression in the above passage is an attempt to use English like the native language; this projects Igbo speech habit in order to promote the culture of the people. The expression is a transposition of idea from Igbo to English which reveals the status of the character as an unlettered person. Even though the novel is set in the post-Independence era, it reveals Achebe's concern for the culture of his people. He has the mastery of the English language so he maneuvers it to produce aesthetic effects in the novel in a way to demonstrate his craftsmanship.

Conclusion.

In *Anthills of the Savannah*, Achebe's craftsmanship as a novelist lies in creating varieties of English to perform literary function. The manifestation of his craftsmanship is in the ability to develop varieties of English in the novel for character delineation and the development of the themes of the novel. Achebe deploys the Standard English for satirical purposes, development of characters and the theme of social

stratification. The English with local flavor reveals the status of characters from the traditional society and develops the theme of culture. Language in *Anthills of the Savannah* produces the needed aesthetic effect and as well transmits the author's message.

Beyond transmission of message, language has been used in the novel creatively to generate aesthetics which enhances the literary quality of the novel. Furthermore, varieties of English in the novel reveal the social status of characters. They develop the themes of dictatorship, intimidation and culture. But it should be noted that these varieties of English in the novel which reveal social class are not a hard and fast rule as there are overlapping coincidences because there are some characters at the top and the middle of the socio-economic ladder that code-switch and code-mix between the Standard English and the Nigerian Pidgin in informal situation.

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