

## A Pragma-Stylistic Assessment of Proverbs as Speech Acts in Ifeoma Okoye's *The Fourth World*

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### Abstract

Proverbs are sapient nuggets treasured in the myriad cultures and languages of the world as embodiments of cultural values and thoughts. Proverbs are aesthetically crafted and strategically injected into a discourse to foreground the intended message. The paper examines how Okoye exploits proverbs as speech acts in *The Fourth World* to advance the dominant theme of poverty which pervades a typical Nigerian state, the stylistic tools employed, and how the textual-situational context modulates the variegated functions of the proverbial utterances. Using the Searle's model of Austin's Speech Act theory as the analytical framework, the study analyses qualitatively a sample of ten proverbs randomly drawn from the text. The analyses account for when, why, how, by whom, and to whom the proverbs are uttered and how these contextual parameters impact on the speech acts performed. The findings show that the wisdom embedded in the proverbs are foregrounded using such stylistic devices as imageries, simile, metaphor, repetition, and parallelism. However, beyond these ornamental features, the proverbs are encoded as intentional acts of meaning targeted at performing some polyfunctional speech acts, predominantly assertives, directives and expressives. The inherent stylistic devices in the proverbial texts are shown to be functional accompaniments which hammer home the message with implication for a huge spectrum of pragmatic-stylistic effects. The paper concludes that the entire stylistic architecture of proverbs is a functional-pragmatic factor targeted at performing context-modulated illocutionary goals.

**Keywords:** Proverbs, Speech Acts, *The Fourth World*, Pragma-stylistics

### Introduction

Proverbs are sapient nuggets that have been used in social interaction globally for ages. Their popularity and utility stem from the fact that they "contain everyday experiences and common observations in succinct and formulaic language, making them easy to remember and ready to be used instantly as effective rhetoric in oral or written communication" (Mieder, p. xi). Proverbs encompass the way of life of a people: their beliefs, cultural values, ethics, norms, precepts, ideals and the codes of conduct that guide their daily living. They are typically traditional propositions that proceed from the ideological leanings of a speech community, providing punchy, succinct memorable and ready-made wise sayings that fit almost every conceivable occasion or social situation. Generally, one's ability to encode and decode proverbial utterances is often indicative of one's linguistic prowess and pragmatic competence in the language.

The aesthetic and functional character of proverbs has elicited a lot of scholarly attention across disciplines. Many scholars have studied proverbs from the purview of linguistics and cultural studies. Within the domain of linguistics and literature, proverbial

studies have been domiciled in stylistics, sociolinguistics, semantics, pragmatics, discourse analysis, and literary criticism. Specifically, Jha and Bhuvaneshwar (2019) conducted a discourse analysis of the structure of Maithili proverbs using a sample of five proverbial exchanges derived from casual conversation. The study specifically examined the position of proverb in the exchanges; its sequential emergence in the structure of the proverbial exchange, and the literal, prototypical and contextual meaning of the proverbs. Gwozdz (2019) made a stylistic investigation of a corpus of eighteen proverbs found in Martin Amis's *London Fields*. The study found that lexical substitution is the most qualitatively considerable alteration of proverbial structure and that the use of structural changes or canonical forms has a different value for a given discourse. Dash (2013) investigated socio-cultural praxis and stylistics in selected Odia proverbs presenting a basic idea about the formation, meaning, and use of the proverbs. Park and Milica (2016), using a stylistic approach, looked at proverbs as artistic miniatures. The study inquired into the use of literary text with specific reference to the tales of Ion Creanga, focusing on the discursive and textual traditions that influenced the author's style, the prominent registers of influence and the seminal texts that had impact on the author's literary works. Also Oni and Nwabudike (2018) conducted a socio-cognitive analysis of selected proverbs in Ola Rotimi's *Kurunmi*. The study examined a corpus of fifteen proverbs used in war situation to reveal their socio-linguistic implications and ideological projections.

Each of the paremiological studies cited above varies in theoretical and methodological approaches. Thus, the multi-coloured umbrellas of the different scientific approaches to proverbial studies led to asking different questions and therefore getting different answers, given that each model privileged certain aspects and shadowed others (Park & Milica, 2016; Grzybek, 2014). Besides this observation, not much has been done on proverbs as speech acts in literary works. Jesensek (2004) recommends that "further research on the topic of speech-act-related functions of proverbs remains still an important desideratum for paremiological pragmatics" (p.152). This paper thus aims at a functional stylistic investigation of proverbs as intentional acts of meaning in literature using Ifeoma Okoye's *The Fourth World* as the spreadsheet. This scholarly disposition is underpinned by the fact that literary works serve as a rich repository of the proverbs of different cultures, considering that the use of proverbs in literature has enjoyed a long-standing, venerable tradition. "There is a definite unanimity among scholars that literature and proverbs stand together since the dawn of antiquity" (Park & Milica, 2016, p. 379).

Black (2006) endorses the incursion into pragmatic concepts in a stylistic study thus: "Since pragmatics is the study of language in use (taking into account elements which are not covered by grammar and semantics), it is understandable that stylistics has become increasingly interested in using the insights it can offer" (p.13). Drawing a connection between pragmatics and stylistics in proverbial investigation, Grzybek (2014) submits that a functional stylistic study of proverb is interested in the function of proverbs in natural communication contexts whether oral or written which encompasses the analysis of speech act performances, focusing on the 'how' and 'why' of verbal exchanges (p.70). Goodwin and Wenzel's (1979) similarly assert that structural analyses of proverbial texts will certainly gain in value if focused on actual proverb performance in speech act (Cited in Mieder, 2004, p.132).

The above views underpin the pragma-stylistic approach adopted in this paper and justify why this study is more interested in the analysis of the speech acts performed by proverbial utterances than in the aesthetics of proverbial constructs. The paper thus investigates proverbs in textual-situational contexts assessing how proverbs are employed as speech acts to underscore the thematic concerns of the text as well as how context modulates the variegated functions of the proverbial utterances. According to Luger (1999), “What is uttered with communicative intent fulfils a function, and has a purpose” (Cited in Jesensek, 2004, p.149). Therefore, proverbs usually uttered with communicative intents perform different functions in specific communicative situations.

Using the Searle’s model of Austin’s Speech Act theory as the analytical framework, the study analyses qualitatively a sample of ten proverbs randomly drawn from *The Fourth World*. The analyses account for “when, why, how, by whom, and to whom the proverbs are used in the text investigated and how these parameters of the situational context impact on the speech acts performed. The objectives of the study are to examine how Okoye exploits proverbs as speech acts in *The Fourth World* to advance the discourse goals of the text, explore how the textual-situational context modulates the variegated functions of the proverbial utterances, and expose the stylistic resources employed in the proverbs.

### **An Overview of Proverbs**

Proverbs are treasured in the myriad cultures and languages of the world as embodiments of cultural values and thoughts. Burger (2010, p.107) conceives of proverbs as “socially accepted formulations of convictions, values, and norms particular to a specific culture and era.” On his part, Mieder (1996, p.597) submits that proverbs are succinct traditional statements that embody apparent truths which have currency among a people. He believes that proverbs are short, generally known sentences of the folk that encompass wisdom, truths, morals, and traditional views in a metaphorical, fixed, and memorable form that are handed down from generation to generation. It could be gleaned from these views that proverbs are inescapably a product of people’s culture, providing punchy, witty, didactic, and sapient messages drawn from the folkloric and ideological leanings of the people. The didactic messages embedded in proverbs give a commonsense approach to numberless life’s phenomena.

Proverbs exhibit some stylistic devices which foreground the punchy message they encode. Ptashnyk (2009) in Jesensek (2004, p.143) refers to proverb as an “intriguing, expressive, and unexpected verbalization of thought”. This view underpins the expressive and emotive potential of proverbs. The timely use of a proverb in a discourse context accentuates the rhetorical effect of the utterance. This perceived effect cannot be elicited from a non-proverbial utterance that expresses the same proposition within the same social context. In view of their communicative import, proverbs are aesthetically crafted and strategically injected into a discourse to underscore the intended lesson and bring it to the forecourt of the hearer’s mind. Some of the external stylistic features associated with proverbs are *alliteration*: ‘Practice makes perfect’; *parallelism*: ‘Ill got, ill spent’; *rhyme*: ‘A little pot is soon hot’; *ellipsis*: ‘More haste, less speed’, ‘Once bitten, twice shy,’ etc. There are also internal features such as hyperbole, paradox, personification and metaphors (Meider, 2004, p.7). A proverb may undergo structural

modification or lexical substitution to encode modern and evolving realities or cultural variations.

Norrick (2014, p.7) sums up the usual features that characterize proverbs to include: traditional figurative saying, ability to constitute a complete utterance, self-containedness, traditionality, didactic potential, metaphoricity (or imagery) and prosody, rigidity of form allowing limited restructuring and variation. However, he notes that this fixedness does not “preclude variability through time and from one community to the next” (p.12). Meider (2004, p.7) stresses that the fixity paradigm only operates in proverb collections; otherwise, proverbs can be used rather freely. Proverbs are therefore characteristically succinct and frozen; however, they can be manipulated leading to a truncation or extension. The shortness criterion is hence not a benchmark given that proverbs can also be long. Even when they are truncated, familiarity with the proverb enables the hearer to recover the full proposition. Norrick (1985, p.45) tags this maximal recognizable unit as the kernel of the proverb.

The study of proverbs is known as Paremiology. It is concerned with the “definition, form, structure, style, content, function, meaning, and value of proverbs” (Mieder, 2004, p. xii). The stock of proverbs used in a specific language or culture is often compiled and studied. However, this form of study robs the proverbs of their actual use and function in specific social contexts. Although proverbs have meaning outside specific context their actual use in context modulates their meaning. Thus, Mieder recommends that proverbial utterances be analyzed in their unique contexts, which may be social, literary, rhetorical, journalistic, and so forth (p.9). This study is hence a step in the right direction as it investigates proverbs in textual-situational contexts of use.

### **Functional Stylistic Account of Proverbs**

Defining stylistics holistically has constituted an enigmatic challenge to linguists, the reason being partly that the discipline covers a variety of approaches to the study of texts. However, the common core feature of stylistics, regardless of the approach, is the primacy given to language in textual analysis. Wales (2009) recognizes that style as a concept is difficult to define owing to its numerous, varying shadings; she notes that stylistics is simply and broadly the “study of style’ adding that stylistics “characteristically deals with the interpretation of texts by focusing in detail on relevant distinctive linguistic features, patterns, structures, or levels and their significance and effects on readers” (p.1046). Wales’s assertion reveals that the writer’s linguistic choices affect the reader or hearer as the case may be quite significantly and buttresses another of her observation that the goal of stylistics “is not simply to describe the formal features of texts for their own sake, but in order to show their functional significance for the interpretation of the text” (2001, pp.437-8). Stylistics analysis is therefore aimed at functionality, given that it analyzes texts not for their own sake but with a view to identifying their functional significance to the text recipients.

Simpson (2006) validates the functionality paradigm: “stylistics is interested in language as a function of texts in context” (p.3). Context in this regard encompasses the physical, linguistic and social contexts that produce the text. Similarly, in their aim of stylistics, Crystal and Davy (1969) suggest that a stylistic analysis should go beyond a mere identification of the apparent features of style in a text and should also “explain where possible, why such

features have been used and ... classify these features into categories based upon a view of their function in the social context” (p.10).

Situating proverbial studies in stylistics, Hrisztova-Gotthardt and Varga (2014) present two major approaches and draw a dichotomy between them. The first which they tag traditional stylistics regards proverbs as stylistic devices and as such assigns them individual characteristic stylistic attributes outside of textual use. The second viewed as modern stylistic approach conceives of style as a functional-pragmatic factor and thus focuses on observing proverbs in their context of use (p.3). The latter meshes well with Wales’s (2009) position that “the parameters of the situational context contributes to a text’s meaning, and that therefore contextualization needs to be part of the theory or model” (p.1049). This implies that although proverbs are a manifest feature of style in both written and oral communication, their utility and significance in discourse extend beyond their inherent ornamental features to accommodate the fact that they are encoded as intentional acts of meaning targeted at performing some illocutionary functions in the discourse context. Sandig (2006) believes that stylistics of the latter kind is pragmatically oriented, since style is regarded as a manner of performing an act (cited in Jesensek, 2014, p.133). The author adds that proverbs possess diverse stylistic and pragmatic potential and thus fulfill many different functions within a text. Saeed (2003) conceives of pragmatics as “the field which studies how learners fill out the semantic structure with contextual information” (p.18). This definition presupposes that for the meaning of a proverbial utterance to be holistically interpreted, there is the need to improve on the expression meaning by taking into consideration all the resources which context confers on it. This paper therefore argues that the entire stylistic architecture of proverbs is a functional-pragmatic factor targeted at performing context-modulated illocutionary goals.

### **Speech Act Theory**

Speech act is the communicative meaning of an utterance based on the function the utterance is meant to perform in the definite social context. As observed by Leech (1983), “When we try to work out the meaning of an utterance, this can be thought of as an attempt to reconstruct what act, considered as a goal-directed communication, was it a goal of the speaker to perform in producing the utterance” (pp.14-5). He believes that the meaning of an utterance, in this regard, is its illocutionary force.

There are three facets of a speech act: locutionary act, illocutionary act, and perlocutionary act. (Austin, 1962; Searle, 1969; Mey, 2001). In the first, the speaker utters a certain sentence; in the second, the speaker does something by uttering the sentence; in the third, the speaker achieves something by uttering the sentence. However, scholars differ considerably in their classification of illocutionary acts. Austin (1962) identifies five classes: verdictives, exercitives, commissives, behabitives and expositives (pp.150-152). The verdictives are concerned with giving a verdict by a jury, arbitrator or umpire by way of estimating, reckoning, appraising, and judging. The exercitives involve the exercising of powers, rights, or influence. Acts in this category include appointing, voting, ordering, urging, advising, and warning, among others. Commissives are utterances that commit one to doing something. They typically include promising or undertaking and also declaration or announcement of intention to do something. The behabitives, as the name implies, deal with attitudes and social behavior

which are manifested in acts such as apologizing, congratulating, commending, condoling, cursing, and challenging. Lastly, expositives show how utterances fit into an argument or conversation. Utterances such as *I reply, I argue, I concede, I illustrate, I assume, I postulate* are generally expository. The author however notes that the classification is not stringent and may allow for wide possibilities and overlaps.

Searle (1969) embraces a six-tier categorization into assertives, directives, impositives, commissives, expressives, and declaratives. The assertives commit the speaker to the truth of the proposition made. It could be in form of stating, suggesting, boasting, complaining, claiming, reporting, declaring, describing, notifying, informing, predicting, classifying, etcetera. The directives are acts targeted at making the hearer take a particular action or refrain from taking a particular action such as demanding, commanding, assigning, requesting, ordering, threatening, advising, allowing, forbidding, recommending, etc. The impositives are competitive illocutions such as asking, imploring, and begging. The commissives commit the speaker to some future action such as threatening, promising, vowing, offering, guaranteeing, among others. The expressives are acts which show the speaker's emotion or psychological attitude towards a situation. Examples are thanking, congratulating, pardoning, blaming, praising, apologizing, criticizing, complaining, reprimanding, consoling, reproving, and condoling. Finally, declaratives are illocutions that cause a change of state when uttered by an authorized person. Examples are christening, naming, resigning, dismissing, appointing, sentencing, and excommunicating (Leech, 1983, pp.104-106; Cutting, 2002, pp.16-17). The points of convergence and divergence between the Austin's and Searle's models are not of interest to this study. However, Searle's model is adopted based on the simplicity of terminology used.

### **Proverbs as Speech Acts in *The Fourth World***

This analysis is premised on the assumption that proverbs contribute to the textual realization of speech acts. Proverbs are typically used in *The Fourth World* to make a conversational contribution targeted at performing certain speech acts in the discourse context. This observation affirms the view that proverbs can function as expressions of speech acts such as warning, persuasion, argument, confirmation, comfort, appeasement, demands, threats, advice, conviction, admonition, reprimand, assessment, characterization, explanation, description, justification or summarization (Rohrich & Mieder, cited in Jesensek, 2014, p.135).

Ten proverbs selected randomly from the text are presented, analysed and discussed below:

1. *'When one says "yes", one's chi says "yes" too'* (p.8).

Chira, who is just back home on holiday, rushes to hospital to see her ailing father, Akalaka. The father having lost all hope of recovering from the sickness wants desperately to say something very important to his only child. She decries his despondency and seeks to shore up his spirits as a therapeutic measure targeted at boosting his strength of will and ultimately expediting his recovery. She recalls from background knowledge her father's proverbial utterance in such situations and resorts to the same proverbial locution to remind him of the

shared belief it encodes. As a direct speech act, the utterance is asserting the truth of a belief held by both father and daughter and reassuring the former. However, the locution can also be interpreted as an indirect speech act belonging to the expressives. The speaker is indirectly rebuking and reproving her father for his despondency despite the shared belief and admonishing him to be resolute, unwavering, and strong willed. This indirect illocutionary force is presumably employed due to the unequal power relations between the speaker and hearer. As observed by Mieder (2004), "Proverbs provide a means of mitigating the effect of an utterance that would have been confrontational, impolite or face threatening. They owe their effectiveness to the indirect and less threatening way of expressing something that must be said" (p.140). The stylistic use of lexical and structural repetition of 'one says "yes"' and 'one's chi says "yes"' in the proverb draws forcible attention to the invaluable message the proverb conveys.

2. *'You can do only two things to yam. Boil it or roast it'* (p.14).

Chira's father utters proverb 2 to his wife when he is faced with the ugly situation of a landlord's threat of eviction if he fails to pay his accumulated rent. Having spent sleepless nights thinking about how to raise money and not finding any means in sight, he squares up to face whatever action the landlord chooses to take. As a speech act, the speaker is not merely asserting his belief but is more importantly expressing his resolve to face the consequences. The illocutionary force is that he is resigning to fate and challenging the ugly situation to run its course. The stylistic use of parallel structure in the compound sentence employed in the second part of the proverb, *Boil it or roast it*, accentuates the perlocutionary effect which is that the speaker is poised to accept any potential outcome of the precarious scenario in equal capacity.

3. *'The poor don't dream of rice dishes'* (p.22)

4. *'Don't defecate where the grass is taller than you'* (p.22).

These two proverbs were uttered in the same paragraph by Chira's primary six teacher, Miss Fasiba, in response to Chira's innocent expression of her ambition to take the national entrance examination to a federal government secondary school. Chira is of course very intelligent; her only crime is that her parents are extremely poor to afford secondary education. Structurally, 4 is a declarative sentence and 5 an imperative one, but functionally both are contextually targeted at the same perlocutionary effect of convincing Chira to refrain from pursuing her ambition depicted in the colourful imagery of 'rice dishes' and 'tall grass' to accentuate the teacher's disdain. 'Rice dishes' and 'tall grass' are obviously metaphors for opulence and wealthy lifestyle which Chira should be far from envisaging. In terms of illocutionary force, 4 belongs to the assertives and 5 to the directives. However, both proverbs find a convergence as expressives. Miss Fasiba's real intention in uttering both proverbs in succession is to reprimand, rebuke, and ridicule Chira for desiring to have what her parents cannot easily afford.

5. *'Nobody walks in front of his chi, ahead of his personal god'* (p.28).

A decontextualized interpretation of this proverb will situate it in the class of assertives. Chira is very worried about her father's critical health condition occasioned by many years of abject poverty and futile struggles to earn a decent living. She recalls that her father has taken the alias Akalaka, which means 'destiny,' to buttress that one's lot in life is determined by fate and not effort. Chira utters proverb 5 because she has begun to question or interrogate that belief which has held her father bound. Although the locution conveys a belief held to be true traditionally (assertive speech act), its primary illocutionary force in the context belongs to the expressives as Chira is actually questioning and criticizing the age-long belief and subtly recommending that people should take their destiny in their hands. This underscores the fact that proverbs are not absolute truths. Although proverbs capture generational wisdom and encapsulate the norms and beliefs of a people, these long cherished beliefs are often questioned in the light of contemporary realities. Thus, proverbial invectives should not be embraced blindly because unlike absolute truths, they may change overtime. This submission explains what Mieder (2004) identifies as "the semantic indefiniteness of proverbs which results from their heterosituativity, poly-functionality and poly-semanticity" (p.9).

6. *'The day I go hunting is the day antelopes climb trees like monkeys'* (p.137).

Beyond the aesthetic effect of the repetition 'The day...the day' for emphasis and the use of the simile '*antelopes climb trees like monkeys*' in proverb 6 lies the communicative meaning of the utterance, which is the speech act it performs in the textual context. Chira recalls this proverb to explain to her friend Ogom how Akalaka, her father, would have reacted to her futile search for job. The imagery of antelopes climbing trees emphasizes an anomaly that reinforces Chira's bad luck evident in her inability to finish secondary school through no fault of hers and also the lack of job opportunities in the country to support indigent children like her. The utterance falls under the class of assertive speech act as Chira is complaining and bemoaning her fate.

7. *'You don't reject ill-fitting clothes when you are stark naked'* (138).

After the prolonged and fruitless search for a job, Chira eventually spots a small noticeboard announcing a vacancy for a petrol attendant. As she heaves a sigh of relief praying that the job is still available, her friend Ogom asks her if she is sure she can do such type of job. Chira then utters this proverb as her mother's philosophical approach to such situations. The imagery of stark nakedness foregrounds Chira's state of abject poverty and total helplessness. It validates her emotional disposition to make do with what is available however undesirable and 'ill-fitting' it might be. The imagery brings Chira's emotional disposition to the forecourt of the reader's mind, situating the speech act in the class of expressives. In uttering this proverb, she is subtly reproving Ogom for expecting her to wait for an ideal job in the face of utter hopelessness and enormous family responsibilities.

8. *'A borrower is far better than a thief'* (p.158).



This proverb is crafted in a comparative structure to justify the borrowing culture that reigns among the residents of Kasanga Avenue, the ‘Fourth World’ of the novel characterized by abject poverty with its associated ills like hunger, poor housing, illiteracy, unemployment, disease, and death, among others. Chira, an eighteen-year-old school drop-out, is saddled with the overwhelming responsibility of fending for her ailing mother and herself following the death of her father which resulted from lack of money to assess healthcare. She searches frantically for a job to no avail and is reluctant to borrow money having been unable to repay the loan she has taken earlier. Left with no choice, she braces up to borrow considering it more noble than stealing. The opportune use of proverb in this precarious situation provides the prod that rationalizes the loathsome culture of borrowing. The illocutionary force is on the one hand assertive, stating a traditionally held belief, and on the other hand expressive, justifying the act of borrowing and consoling the adherents. Thus, it is not surprising that the proverb produces the perlocutionary effect of convincing Chira to borrow again notwithstanding her other unpaid debts.

9. *‘One shouldn’t reject a meal one is served in a covered dish without first uncovering the dish to see what is inside’ (242).*

Proverb 9 is uttered by Ogom to Chira as advice regarding Maks’s marriage proposal to the latter. Chira’s relentless struggles are targeted at working and saving enough money that will enable her to acquire sound education which will guarantee her a better future. However, her mother sees her lofty ambition as folly believing instead that getting her married to Maks, a very rich suitor, will end their tale of woe. Ogom who is also getting married, though quite excitedly, wants Chira to give Maks a chance with the hope that a closer acquaintance with him may change Chira’s disposition to marriage. Thus, the ‘meal’ is a metaphor for the marriage proposal; the imagery of ‘a covered dish’ underscores the fact that the hearer does not yet have a clear impression of the person of the suitor – metaphorically ‘the dish’ – necessitating the solicited ‘uncovering’. Thus, all the imageries are functional accompaniments driving the directive speech act of advising Chira not to be hasty in turning down the marriage proposal.

10. *‘No one tells a deaf person that a war has broken out’ (p.253).*

Having given in to the perlocutionary effect of Ogom’s advice, Chira opens up to get more acquainted with Maks, but her impatient mother wants no further delay. She harps on about Chira giving Maks an immediate, positive answer. Chira who does not want to make a grievous mistake pleads with her mother for more time to study Maks. Aggrieved by Chira’s refusal to give Maks any answer in haste, her mother in a belligerent manner utters the proverb as she vows not to ever speak to Chira until she accepts Maks’s proposal. Using the imagery of a deaf person and war, Chira’s mother threatens that Chira’s defiance can only be quelled by her ‘cold war’. The utterance is polyfunctional as it finds relevance in the assertive, directive and expressive speech acts. However, it is principally a directive indirect speech act threatening and trying to intimidate Chira with a view to making her submissive.

## Conclusion

The findings show how proverbs function as speech act in different contexts. The relevant speech acts in the analysis are mostly the assertives, the directives and the expressives. It is oftentimes difficult to classify the proverbs under a specific speech act category because some of the proverbs are polyfunctional and thus semantically ambiguous. However, context helps to modulate the variegated speech acts to converge on the communicative meaning. This observation supports Mieder's (2004) view that although proverbs are usually employed to disambiguate complex situations and events, they are paradoxically ambiguous given that their meaning depends on analogy (p.132). Thus, the meaning and purpose of proverbs are best revealed by actual usage in social situations, making contextualization sacrosanct to the semantics of proverbial utterances.

The analysed proverbs express the values and norms that form part of the socio-cultural background of the participants in the proverbial exchange. The wisdom embedded in the proverbs are foregrounded using such stylistic devices as imageries, simile, metaphor, repetition, parallelism and alliteration. However, the expressive potential of proverbs and the inherent stylistic devices in proverbial texts, are shown to be functional accompaniments that hammer home the illocutionary force of the utterances. In line with the leanings of Systemic Functional Linguistics, which hold that the entire architecture of language revolves around its functionality making functionality intrinsic to language (Halliday & Matthiessen, 2004), the study concludes that the entire stylistic architecture of proverbs in *The Fourth World* is a functional-pragmatic factor targeted at performing context-modulated illocutionary goals. Thus, Okoye's stylistic dexterity in proverbial-text construction is ultimately a means to a pragmatic end.

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