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## THE IGBO TRADITION IN THE NIGERIAN NOVEL

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**ABSTRACT** This study aims to establish the Igbo tradition in Nigerian literature through the use of English language. The language of the writers of Igbo literary tradition is an ethnic variety of Nigerian English, which is characterized essentially by lexical innovation, translation and linguistic and cultural transfer. Chinua Achebe stands out in this direction in view of his contributions to Nigerian literature through his peculiar and creative use of language. This effort is not peculiar to Achebe, but an Igbo tradition which emanates from Igbo language and culture as has been demonstrated in the works of some of the most prolific Igbo English writers, precisely John Munonye, Buchi Emecheta, Chukwuemeka Ike, Cyprian Ekwensi, Nkem Nwankwo, and Elechi Amadi. This literary tradition has become a significant stylistic device in that it grants writers the freedom to use the English language creatively.

**Key Words:** Igbo; Tradition; Novel; Linguistics; Innovation.

### INTRODUCTION

Igbo writers have so far dominated the prose literature, in Nigeria, probably as a result of the early presence and influence of the printing presses at Onitsha, the motivating influence of the successes attained by the pioneer Igbo writers of English, and more importantly, the rich linguistic and cultural resources which derive from the creative use of English by incorporating Igbo speech habits. Igbo writers are, today, some of the most prolific writers in Africa in terms of output and attention given to their novels. The implication of this development is that a study of Igbo literary tradition may have pertinent reflections on the modern African novel as a whole. Similarly, an examination of an essential aspect of an ethnic literary tradition and its continuity may offer a very important approach to the study of African literature characterized, as it is today, by linguistic diffusion and cultural diversity. With the multi-ethnic nature of Nigeria, her literature should be considered in terms of the ethnic and national literatures of which it is made up (Emenyonu, 1978; Izevbaye, 1995).

Igbo literature in English has flourished since the publication of Achebe's first novel and has contributed immensely to the development of Nigerian and African literature. This development may be attributed to the wide acceptance given to Achebe's flexible literary style in *Things Fall Apart* and his subsequent works. King (1972: 3) has rightly noted that Achebe's *Things Fall Apart* (1958), marks the beginning of the real tradition of Nigerian literature in English:

It begins a tradition not only because its influence can be detected on subsequent

Nigerian novelists, such as T.M. Aluko, but also because it was the first solid achievement upon which others could build. Achebe was the first Nigerian writer to successfully transmute the conventions of the novel, a European art form, into African literature. His craftsmanship can be seen in the way he creates a totally Nigerian texture for his fiction: Ibo idioms translated into English are used freely; European character study is subordinated to the portrayal of communal life; European economy of form is replaced by an aesthetic appropriate to the rhythms of traditional tribal life. Achebe's themes reflect the cultural traits of the Ibos, the impact of European civilization upon traditional African society, and the role of tribal values in modern urban life. (King, 1972: 3)

There is, today, the distinctiveness of Igbo English writers, which manifests itself in experimentation in language, in recreating distinct Igbo discourse in English, and in stylistic innovations. The various manifestations of this distinctiveness can be seen in the works of Chinua Achebe, Cyprian Ekwensi, Buchi Emecheta, Nkem Nwankwo, Chukwuemeka Ike, Flora Nwapa, Elechi Amadi, John Munonye and Onuorah Nzekwu. Their works demonstrate a good instance of the "Igbonization of English" (Igboanusi, 1995). With this "stylistic sensitivity and pragmatism" (Kachru, 1995) common to these writers, they have thus established an Igbo identity in style, culture and linguistic experimentation. Their works represent an ethnic variety of Nigerian English based on local experiences, needs, and situations. In investigating one aspect of Igbo literary tradition—the written literature, it is pertinent to point out that the Igbo written literature derives from the oral tradition. Igbo oral literature embodies the literary aspects of Igbo oral performances such as folktales, folksongs, proverbs, riddles, incantations, anecdotes, myths, legends, tongue twisters, drama, and festivals. Igbo life, culture and world view are usually reflected in oral literature. Contemporary Igbo literature is the extension of Igbo oral literature. Igbo literary tradition can be said to be rooted in the language and culture of the Igbo. The contemporary Igbo writers write in the tradition of Igbo literature because of their general indebtedness to a unique oral literary heritage and the circumstances, which have made English their language of expression.

Past studies have made insightful observations about lexical innovation in Nigerian English (NE). While Bokamba (1982: 134) classified lexico-semantic variation in terms of semantic deviation, Bamgbose (1998) classified innovation as an acceptable variant. Bamgbose has posited further that innovations in non-native Englishes should be judged for what they are or their function within the varieties in which they occur and not according to how they stand in relation to the norms of native Englishes. Bokamba has also observed that lexical items in African English may be created in four principal ways: by semantic extension, semantic shift, semantic transfer, and coinage. Similarly, Bamiro (1994) suggested that lexico-semantic variations in NE are classifiable under the following ten linguistic categories: loan shift, semantic under differentiation, lexico-semantic duplication and redundancy, ellipsis, conversion, clipping, acronyms, translation equivalents, analogical creation and coinage. However, I have adopted linguistic categories, which are stylistically significant in the novels: semantic extension, coinage, and translation equivalent, and these have been supplemented in this investigation by loanwords, loan-blends, collocational extension and colloquialisms. Bokamba's idea of

semantic transfer is covered in the present study by translation equivalent.

Previous research (e.g. Jowitt, 1991; Schmied, 1991; Bamiro, 1991: 1994; Awonusi, 1994; Simo B. 1994; Emenyonu, 1995; Igboanusi, 1998; Bamgbose, 1998) has shown that lexical innovation in African Englishes illustrates certain aspects of linguistic behaviour among African users of English. The present study goes further by establishing lexico-semantic innovation in Igbo English literature as a stylistic device, which has become part of the Igbo literary tradition. In other words, I describe ways in which the language used by the authors studied here exemplifies the linguistic features of Igbo ethnic variety of NE.

## IGBO WRITERS IN ENGLISH

The study of an African writer who writes in English should be understood as a study of a writer who uses English as a second language. His use of English cannot but be quite different from what obtains when writers from Britain and America, for instance, write in English. The acquisition of a particular language is not restricted to the acquisition of the communication technique of the speech community but extends to include the habits, which the language carries along with it. It has been established that when speakers of one language learn a second language, the tendency is that they transfer some of the linguistic behaviours of their first language to their second language performance. This is often unconscious. However, when writers who are Igbo, for example, write in English, they may have two classes of audience in mind—the Igbo or African audience and the European audience. Consequently, they try not to distance themselves from any of their two groups of readers. They use the English language which is European in such a way that they incorporate the idiom and language resources of Igbo while ensuring that the English language grammar is not terribly distorted. This effort may be conscious. The problem with the use of English in creative writing by African writers is largely a problem of culture. It is, no doubt, a fact that a society's language is an aspect of its culture. African writers carry and transfer some of the cultural nuances of the indigenous African people into English. To be able to play this role effectively, the structure of native-speaker English has to be adjusted. It is on the basis of this postulation that this work supports Onwubu's (1976) view that for the English language to express, adequately, the way of life of a different culture, it must endure some internal structural changes. Achebe (1965) has earlier advocated that the real African creative writer must alter the English language to suit African surroundings. The English that emerges from this consideration must be "new" in the sense that it can "carry the weight" of the African writer's experience. Nigerian writers who use English as their creative medium do so in the consciousness of the fact that they are presenting a Nigerian experience, and most of them reveal in their works a specific mode of imagination which derives from the Nigerian background (Taiwo, 1979: 55). This is particularly true since these writers grew up within the Nigerian environment and acquired a Nigerian indigenous language in which they also think. The very fact that these writers now write in English either because they cannot write in Igbo or to reach a wider readership does not make them English. In support of this

premise, Shelton (1969) correctly has pointed out that:

...the somewhat Europeanized Igbo writer is never so European that he is no longer Igbo. This means, precisely, that from an Igbo background one develops knowledge of and habits in the verbal arts which carry over into one's verbalizing abilities when one is using an alien language ... It is the English language which gives way to Igbo thinking and not Igbo thinking conforming neatly and exactly to the alien language (Shelton, 1969).

It is on the basis of Shelton's assertion above I analyze the works of seven Igbo writers—Europeanized Igbo writers whose thoughts in Igbo (their mother tongue) influence their use of English, in which they write. The literature of these authors emanates principally from Igbo life and language. In exploring the Igbo life, they have had to “alter” the English language so as to incorporate Igbo language features and thought processes, which constitute the linguistic characteristics of Igbo English bilinguals.

Examples for this study are drawn from the works of seven Igbo English prose writers. I have deliberately chosen prose texts from highly educated and most renowned writers of Igbo origin (male and female, and young and old) for proper contextualization and comprehensive analysis. The inclusion of Ekwensi (whose style seems to deviate from the style of traditional Igbo English writers) is important because it helps to depict the full significance and uniqueness of the writers of the Igbo literary tradition. I have also included writers from the peripheral dialects of Igbo (i.e. Emecheta from Delta State and Amadi from Rivers State) in order to prove that the literary tradition cuts across all the linguistic and cultural areas of Igboland. The examples for analysis are drawn from two levels: the linguistic performance of the authors themselves and the linguistic performance of the characters of the novels. These two levels are inter-related in that the author is both the writer of the narrative and the dialogue of his characters.

## THE IGBO TRADITION IN NIGERIAN PROSE FICTION

The Igbo tradition is an English based Igbo literary culture. This tradition is part of Igbo heritage resulting from its historical circumstances. Ethnic experiences are here expressed in a heritage language. Literature is often an expression of a culture's perception of its problems and of the solutions to these problems (Izevbaye, 1995: 323). The writer's sources of creativity are his traditions. His mode of expression is English. Achebe initiated this literary tradition and has, therefore, provided a foothold to which other Igbo writers can relate and a model for them to build on. By implication, the development of the Igbo tradition through Achebe to others shows a great degree of continuity, consistency and creativity. It builds on a strategy, which involves linguistic and cultural translation.

Based primarily on the examples from the novels of seven prominent Igbo authors, this study seeks to show that the Igbo tradition is characterized by linguistic innovation which can be classified under the following seven categories: loan-

words, coinages, loan-blends, translation equivalents, semantic extension, collocational extension, and colloquialisms. However, there may be considerable overlaps among certain members of these categories since “typologies are never foolproof” (Adegbija, 1989: 171). For instance, some other persons may see some of the examples illustrated under loan-blends as instances of coinages. Some examples may be seen as instances of Nigerian English and are today used also by non-Igbo speakers, but their sources or origin can be traced to the Igbo language and culture. It is not surprising that some of the usages under discussion are well known to other Nigerians because they read the works of popular Igbo writers and also share the same environment with Igbo speakers. Igbo authors more frequently use this style of writing than non-Igbo writers. In fact, most Igbo writers have come to accept this style as a tradition, which they all use.

As will be illustrated in the section that follows, some of the linguistic processes of innovation found in the novels are very closely related to one another. For instance, the processes of lexical creation discussed under loan-words, coinages and loan-blends involve the retention of meaning. The difference, however, is that while loan-words retain their Igbo meaning and form, coinages retain their Igbo meaning but English form. In a similar manner, loan-blend retains an Igbo form, which modifies an English form, resulting in retention of the Igbo meaning and an additional meaning. Translation equivalent is slightly related to the three mentioned processes to the extent that they are a result of interference. But while there is a transfer of form (as in the case of loan-words and loan-blends) and a transfer of meaning (as in the case of loan-words, coinages and loan-blends), translation equivalent results from literal translation. On the other hand, while the basic meaning is extended in the process of semantic extension, different collocates are extended in collocational extension. In the same vein, colloquialism relates to register and context.

### I. Loan-Words

Previous works (e.g. Odumuh, 1987; Jowitt, 1991) have dealt with various aspects of borrowing as a process of lexical innovation in NE, particularly from major Nigerian indigenous languages and Pidgin. But we have such an impressive number of loan-words from Igbo in the novels that calls for further attention and analysis. The loan-words which may be regarded as “lexical variants” (Jowitt, 1991: 63) reflect titles, food, religion and traditional customs. The fore-grounded features and the abbreviated titles are italicized. Explanations, translations and British English equivalents are provided in brackets under each example. The novels used in our analysis and discussion are identified as follows:

BG = Burning Grass (Ekwensi, 1962); POC = People of the City (Ekwensi, 1963); TFA = Things Fall Apart (Achebe, 1958); AOG = Arrow of God (Achebe, 1964); Concubine = The Concubine (Amadi, 1966); Estrangement = Estrangement (Amadi, 1986); HAW = Head Above Water (Emecheta, 1986); TSG = The Slave Girl (Emecheta, 1977); TFS = Toads for Supper (Ike, 1965); TPW = The Potter's Wheel (Ike, 1973); TOS = The Only Son (Munonye, 1966); BW = Bridge to a Wedding (Munonye, 1978); Danda = Danda (Nwankwo, 1964); MM = My Mercedes is bigger

than yours (Nwankwo, 1975).

- (1) “You have probably heard that music: the nervous agony of the *ekwe*, the poignant melancholy of the *oja*, the clamorous swell of the drums and the plaintive ness of the *ogene*...” (*Danda*, p. 20).  
(The italicized items are musical instruments popular among the Igbo.)
- (2) a. “It is an *ozo* dance...” (*TFA*, p. 41).  
b. “For it was in this section that the chieftain of Amocha and most of the *ozo* men sat” (*Danda*, p. 21).  
 (“Ozo” is a loan-word for Igbo social rank, i.e. a titleholder.)
- (3) “It is my misfortune... I have a weak *ikenga*, I think” (*Danda*, p. 26).  
 (“Ikenga” stands for a symbol of strength.)
- (4) a. “He called his son, Nwoye, to sit with him in his *obi*” (*TFA*, p. 44).  
b. “Mazi Laza retired to his *obi*” (*TPW*, p. 57).  
 (“Obi” is a loan-word meaning house for the head of the family, or that part of his house in which he receives his guests.)
- (5) a. “Your *ogbanje*, this visitor, looks as if she is staying this time” (*TSG*, p. 19).  
b. “On the advice of Nwakuku, that woman who had such ill luck with *ogbanje* children...” (*TPW*, p. 43).  
 (“Ogbanje” is a loan-word for a child believed to be capable of being born over and over again, to the same parents or to different parents through reincarnation.)
- (6) “Use some *utazi* and cook it so that I’ll have plenty of pottage water to drink” (*TPW*, p. 106).  
 (“Utazi” is a loan-word for a particular vegetable used in making soup.)
- (7) a. “All the *umunna* were invited to the feast, all the descendants of Okolo, who had lived about two hundred years before” (*TFA*, p. 117).  
b. “A few days after Chiaku had arrived, Oji invited all the *umunna* to his house” (*TOS*, p. 18).  
 (“Umunna” refers to a group of men who are related.)
- (8) a. “It was the full gathering of *umuada*, in the same way as they would meet if a death occurred in the family” (*TFA*, p. 93).  
b. “Then the *umuada*, direct female descendants of Ojemba, sent word that they would come and open the new house” (*TOS*, p. 19).  
 (“Umuada” refers to a group of women who are related.)
- (9) “He will be here on the next *afo* day” (*TOS*, p. 135).  
 (“Afo” is one of the market days in the Igbo week system.)
- (10) “I have come to ask you to plait my hair next *Eke*” (*Concubine*, p. 11).  
 (“Eke” is one of the market days in the Igbo week system.)
- (11) a. “*Dede*, should they pick before me?” (*Estrangement*, p. 30).  
b. “*Dede*, you are hurt” (*Concubine*, p. 57).  
 (“Dede” stands for a title of respect, which a younger person uses to address an older person.)
- (12) “May the spirits of our fathers prevail!” “*Ofo!*” (*TOS*, p. 77).  
 (“Ofo” is a ritualistic interjection loosely equivalent to “amen!”)

- (13) a. “Your *chi* is very much awake, my friend” (*TFA*, p. 34).  
 b. “Chiaku had adopted this plant as the abode of her *chi*” (*TOS*, p. 30).  
 (“Chi” stands for one’s own personal god.)
- (14) “... He would build up the homestead and keep the *ama*—the approach of the homestead—open and broad...” (*TOS*, p. 63).  
 (“Ama” may mean a homestead, the approach to a homestead or a village square.)
- (15) a. “Don’t you see beyond the top of *ukwa* tree?” (*AOG*, p. 2).  
 b. “Giant *ukwa*, fried without being burnt, and nicely shelled ready for the mouth” (*TPW*, p. 126).  
 (“Ukwa” refers to the seeds of a variety of the breadfruit tree.)
- (16) “Samuel spewed moist earth as a *dibia* sprays masticated alligator pepper on a patient” (*TPW*, p. 132).  
 (“Dibia” may stand for an herbalist, a diviner or a “native doctor”.)
- (17) “That fan contained a powerful *ogwu* without which the *izaga* would be blown off his swindle legs and come crashing to the earth” (*Danda*, p. 18).  
 (“Ogwu” may stand for “poison”, “charm” or “drugs”.)

Examples (1) to (11) may have been transferred to fill lexical gaps in that these words have no direct lexical equivalents in English. Similarly, (12) to (17) are instances of borrowing where some Igbo words have partial equivalents in English, but their equivalents may not accommodate all the social and semantic nuances of the Igbo language items. Although an English reader may not understand the full meanings of the loan-words, the contexts in which they are used may give some insight into their meanings.

## II. Coinages

Coinages are newly coined words resulting from the prevailing socio-linguistic factors in Igboland, in particular, and Nigeria, in general. Most of these coinages appear in the form of compound English words, which merely paraphrase the Igbo concepts. As in other varieties of English, coinages are the most productive process in the creation of the variety of English found in these novels. Like in loan-words, the meanings of the coined words and phrases are given in brackets under each example.

- (18) “They took turns in laying out the face water and *chewing stick* for the Teacher” (*TPW*, p. 110).  
 (“Chewing-stick” refers to a fibrous piece of wood used in cleaning the teeth.)
- (19) a. “His mother could give him no money, because her brother’s *second burial* ceremony had cleaned her out” (*Concubine*, p. 28).  
 b. “He had a *long throat* which he could not control, and they put “*small cough*” in a cup of wine which he drank at somebody’s *second burial*” (*TFS*, p. 44).  
 c. “Those old men with *long throats* are now impatient...” (*Concubine*, p.



- 32).  
 (“Long-throat” denotes “covetousness” or “greed”; “small cough” denotes “tuberculosis”; and “second burial” is a traditional practice whereby the funeral rites of the dead are more elaborately performed and celebrated.)
- (20) “Even if he goes to England and returns home, he must eat my *bitterleaf soup*” (*TFS*, p. 37).  
 (“Bitterleaf” is a bitter vegetable used in making soup.)
- (21) “... the two-gallon pots of special palm wine, tapped from the oil palm and usually described as “*up wine*” to differentiate it from the cheaper and more watery palm wine tapped from the raffia palm” (*TFS*, p. 52).  
 (“Up wine” is a brand of alcoholic drink known as palmwine.)
- (22) “Fetch the *palm wine*” (*Estrangement*, p. 3).  
 (“Palm wine” is an alcoholic drink made from the palm tree.)
- (23) “It took him two *market weeks* to recover completely” (*Danda*, p. 109).  
 (The Igbo differentiates “weeks” from the four-day “market week”.)
- (24) “The part went through forests and swamps and there was no knowing when and where *head-hunters* would strike” (*Concubine*, p. 14).  
 (“Head-hunters” refer to a group of people who hunt for human heads either for the purpose of burying an important personality or for rituals. This coinage has been borrowed into general English.)
- (25) a. “After them, your husband’s *age-group*, then your old men” (*Concubine*, p. 31).  
 b. “This year’s Akwu Nro was to have an added interest because Obika’s *age group* would present a new ancestral Mask to the village” (*AOG*, p. 194).  
 (“Age-group” describes a group of people of about the same age that often forms a socio-cultural group.)
- (26) “Please let me have some *cold water*”, “he begged” (*Concubine*, p. 57).  
 (“Cold water” refers to water that is stored in the fridge.)
- (27) a. “Ihuoma, I want to pay some *bride price* on you”, Ekwueme said calmly, steadily” (*Concubine*, p. 89).  
 b. “Although he protested to the girl’s parents that he could not afford the *bride price...*” (*TSG*, p. 102).  
 (“Bride price” is a coinage for “dowry” or money, which a man pays to the parents of a girl whom he wishes to marry.)
- (28) “... but then they would add the type of heavy *headtie* that went with native *lappas...*” (*TSG*, pp. 125-126).  
 (“Headtie” denotes “scarf” or “head-gear”; “lappa” denotes a “waist-cloth”.)
- (29) “... a fat man with a very large belly and curious *tribal marks* cut on his face” (*TSG*, p. 171).  
 (“Tribal marks” refer to face marks usually given at birth as an identity for membership of an ethnic group.)
- (30) “It was quite a heavy downpour, the type that would stop in less than an hour, though to wait for it to stop would mean missing his *mammy-wagon*” (*TSG*, p. 209).

- (“Mammy wagon” refers to a kind of lorry used in carrying passengers.)
- (31) “Perhaps that is why they don’t bring their wives to these shores, and instead make our girls have children the color of unripe *palm fruits*” (*TSG*, p. 124).  
 (“Palm fruits” are the red fruits of the palm tree.)
- (32) “I found the store already filled with food: *stockfish*, yams, garri, oil” (*Estrangement*, p. 17).  
 (“Stockfish” is coinage for a special brand of dried fish believed to be imported from Scotland.)
- (33) “She served him a warm bath and later a meal of *pounded yam* with snail and okazi soup” (*Estrangement*, p. 189).  
 (“Pounded yam” is yam pounded to be eaten.)
- (34) “And some *jollof rice*?” (*Estrangement*, p. 200).  
 (“Jollof rice” refers to rice porridge.)
- (35) “When the CO arrived at that point he found Dansuku’s men holding two rebel soldiers who were about to detonate an *ogbunigwe*” (*Estrangement*, p. 216).  
 (“Ogbunigwe” refers to a locally made bomb used by Biafra during the Nigerian civil war.)
- (36) “... she held a corner of her *wrapper* over her pubic hair” (*Estrangement*, p. 9).  
 (“Wrapper” refers to “waist wrap” or “waist cloth”, i.e. one or two-piece cloth used mainly by women.)
- (37) “All this topped the kind of *george* material that had never before been seen in Ibuza...” (*TSG*, p. 99).  
 (“George” is coinage for a two-piece cloth material tied around the waist by women. It is made of cotton, or sometimes silk material, often patterned with brightly coloured checks.)
- (38) “They lacked *hometraining*” (*POC*, p. 16).  
 (This sentence is equivalent to BE “They haven’t been brought up well”.)

Note that words and expressions are coined in these novels to reflect the Igbo experience and worldview.

### III. Loan-Blends

Loan-blend combines items from English and Igbo to form new meanings. In loan-blend, the item from the source language and its partial equivalent from the target language are placed side-by-side to form a nominal group. In the nominal group, the English word functions as the headword while the Igbo item functions as the modifier. The English items help the reader to understand the meaning of the Igbo items. Loan-blends provide a good source of the Igbo tradition in the Igbo English novel. Consider the following examples.

- (40) “Then sit down and sing your *inu song* once more” (*HAW*, p. 7).
- (41) “Curiosity got the better of me and I followed gingerly and stood there by

- her little door as she took her pestle *odo handle* and cracked to pieces those extensive tusk ornaments” (*HAW*, p. 8).
- (42) “Some kinsmen ate it with *egusi soup* and others with bitterleaf soup” (*TFA*, p. 117).
- (43) “Finally came the mouth-watering aroma of overnight *ogbono soup* as it warmed over the fire” (*Estrangement*, p. 23).
- (44) “Oti’s father recognised the importance of their work and brought home for his son the trunk of an *okwe tree*, excellent for making wheels strong enough to carry human beings” (*TPW*, p. 29).
- (45) “... that was after she had nearly bitten off the finger of a schoolmate during a scuffle over one *udala fruit*” (*TPW*, p. 76).
- (46) “Mama Oti helped Mama Obu in shelling a plate of *egusi seeds* which she would use in making Obu’s delicacy...” (*TPW*, p. 84).
- (47) “His son, Oti seems to be following his footsteps; the way he convulsed his face the other day when I gave him *okro soup*, ...” (*TPW*, p. 84).
- (48) “... people set up crossbars on two side posts at the approach to the compounds and hung up the sacred *Umune leaf* there” (*TOS*, p. 66).
- (49) “She would go to Umudiobia market on coming *oye day* (in three days’ time), and she would take a heavy basket” (*TOS*, p. 102).
- (50) “They had imagined how he would get all the money that went to those merciless and greedy doctors who came from Onitsha every *afọ market day*” (*TFS*, p. 18).
- (51) “Some threatened to flog him till he bled if he made the mistake of coming home during the *ikeji festival*” (*TFS*, p. 60).
- (52) “As if Joshua who wears the *Odo mask* is not the son of a churchwarden!” (*TFS*, p. 60).
- (53) “... a much respected member of the society who, in his youth, had carried the huge *mgbedike mask*...” (*TFS*, p. 61).
- (54) “Ezenagu did not intend to let this opportunity slip through his fingers like *agbono soup*” (*TFS*, p. 97).
- (55) “They were logs of the time-honoured *orepe tree* which could glow continuously until the very last bit had been burnt” (*Concubine*, p. 7).

#### IV. Translation Equivalents

Translation equivalent results from certain linguistic processes operating in the Igbo society. Such linguistic processes include: (i) the interference of Igbo patterns on English (ii) the translation or transliteration of Igbo speech habits into English (iii) the method and context of the teaching and learning of English, and (iv) the faulty language habits acquired in the primary school, or what Bamiro (1994: 54) calls “the inadequate exposure of many Nigerians to the English language.” It is, therefore, a tradition for most Igbo English writers to use translation equivalents in their works. For the sake of convenience and for a more comprehensive analysis, I have categorized translation equivalents under three subtitles: Igboisms, proverbs, and imagery. As a result, I have identified two forms of translation equivalents in this study: the word or phrase-translation equivalent (as in the case of Igboisms),

and the sentence-translation equivalent (as in the case of proverbs and imagery).

(i) Igboisms

Translation equivalents frequently occur when the authors are using expressions, which may be termed “Igboisms.” Igboisms are usages that reflect traditional Igbo life and cultural habits. These expressions are easily understood in Igbo but are either lacking in English contexts or are used in ways different from the English forms. Igboisms are clearly different from coinages. Although words are coined to reflect Igbo experience, coinages may be formed through paraphrase but not through literal translation, as is the case with Igboisms. See the translations and BE equivalents under each example.

- (56) “I think it was *lock-chest*”. “But what brought about the *lock-chest*?” (*Concubine*, p. 21).  
 (“Lock-chest” translates in Igbo as “mkpochi obi” which is equivalent to BE “heart failure”.)
- (57) “On the evening of the *brother of tomorrow*” (*Concubine*, p. 63).  
 (“Brother of tomorrow” translates in Igbo as “nwanne echi”, which is equivalent to BE “the day after tomorrow”.)
- (58) “You really have a *lucky face*” (*Concubine*, p. 204).  
 (“Lucky face” translates in Igbo as “ihu oma”, which is equivalent to BE “good luck”.)
- (59) “Who will drink the dregs?” he asked. “Whoever has a *job in hand...*” (*TFA*, p.15).  
 (“To have a job in hand” translates in Igbo as “iji oru n’aka”, which is equivalent to BE “a newly married man”.)
- (60) “Who will prepare my afternoon meal?” (*Concubine*, p. 78).  
 (“Afternoon meal” translates in Igbo as “nri ehie”, equivalent to BE “lunch”.)
- (61) “You can now see, *son of our daughter*, that we cannot get our elders together before tomorrow” (*AOG*, p. 23).  
 (“Son of our daughter” translates in Igbo as “nwa ada anyi”, equivalent to BE “our son-in-law”.)
- (62) “If war came suddenly to our town, how do you call your men together, *father of my mother*?” (*AOG*, p. 23).  
 (“Father of my mother” translates in Igbo as “nna nne m”, equivalent to BE “my grandfather”.)
- (63) “If his father and his *father’s father* and all the others before them were not jealous of my fathers why should he be of me?” (*AOG*, p. 130).  
 (“Father’s father” translates in Igbo as “nna nna”, equivalent to BE “grandfather”.)
- (64) “Oboka who is his *father’s sister*?” (*TOS*, p. 13).  
 (“Father’s sister” translates in Igbo as “nwanne nna”, equivalent to BE “aunt”.)
- (65) “Don’t forget that he is your late *brother’s son...*” (*TOS*, p. 9).  
 (“Brother’s son” translates in Igbo as “nwanne nwanne” equivalent to BE

- “nephew”.)
- (66) “Fetch one or two more pots for your *son’s wife*” (*TOS*, p. 15).  
 (“Son’s wife” translates in Igbo as “nwunye nwa”, equivalent to BE “daughter-in-law”.)
- (67) “In addition, you are my *husband’s father* come to life” (*TOS*, p. 170).  
 (“Husband’s father” translates in Igbo as “nna di”, equivalent to BE “father-in-law”.)
- (68) a. “Madume had one fault most villagers disliked. He was *big-eyed*...”  
 (*Concubine*, p. 4).  
 b. “Madume’s *big eye* may cost him his life eventually” (*Concubine*, p. 16).  
 (“Big eye” is equivalent to BE “greed”.)
- (69) “Still Kewanee and his people will be coming on Eke *to knock at my door* on your behalf” (*Concubine*, p. 96).  
 (The italicized phrase denotes coming to inform one of an intention to marry one’s daughter.)
- (70) “If the Soakage age group chose to bring out a new Mask without first *boiling themselves hard* it was their own fault” (*AOG*, p. 197).  
 (The italicized phrase is equivalent to BE “having a protective charm”.)
- (71) “She is tired, son, and her *time* is very near” (*TSG*, p. 14).  
 (“Time” is equivalent to BE “menstruation”.)
- (72) “... And some still immigrated to what was known as “old oyibo”, *white men’s work*” (*TSG*, p. 97).  
 (“White men’s work” is equivalent to BE “civil service” or “public service”.)
- (73) “*I am hearing you*” (BG).  
 (This sentence is equivalent to BE “I am listening to you”.)

A closer look at the examples above shows that, in most cases, authentic Igbo idiom is translated into English in such a way as to reflect the mood of the situation. Although the words used are English words, the idiom is distinctly Igbo and what we have is a translation of what would have been said into Igbo-like English. Sometimes, BE speakers may use such collocations as “father’s father”, “father’s sister”, “brother’s son”, etc. to describe kinship relations. They are only used to give extra emphasis, but not as translation equivalents, as used in these novels.

#### (ii) Proverbs

It is a common practice for Igbo writers of English to translate Igbo proverbs into English, so that what we find are statements, which follow the pattern and style of Igbo thought rendered into English. The frequency with which these writers employ proverbs in their works may partly be as a result of the influence of Igbo oral tradition, and largely because of the literary significance of proverbs. Consider the following examples:

- (74) “He who brings kola brings life” (*TFA*, p. 5).  
 (75) “Our elders say that the sun will shine on those who stand before it shines on those who kneel under them” (*TFA*, p. 6).

- (76) “As the elders said, if a child washed his hands he could eat with kings” (*TFA*, p. 6).
- (77) “A chick that will grow into a cock can be spotted the very day it hatches” (*TFA*, p. 46).
- (78) “A baby on its mother’s back does not know that the way is long” (*TFA*, p. 71).
- (79) “When a handshake goes beyond the elbow we know it has turned to another thing” (*AOG*, p. 13).
- (80) “The fly that has no one to advice it follows the corpse into the grave” (*AOG*, p. 27).
- (81) “Unless the wind blows we do not see the fowls rump” (*AOG*, p. 59).
- (82) “When hunting day comes we shall hunt in the backyard of the grass-cutter” (*AOG*, p. 142).
- (83) “Did not our elders tell us that as soon as we shake hands with a leper he will want an embrace?” (*AOG*, p. 143).
- (84) “An adult does not sit and watch while the she-goat suffers the pain of childbirth tied to a post” (*AOG*, p. 206).
- (85) “Like a chicken transported to a strange environment, you should stand on one leg till you are sure of your ground” (*TFS*, p. 9).
- (86) “Why lick your fingers in a hurry, are you going to hang them in the ceiling?” (*TFS*, p. 56).
- (87) “Is it that the razor is not sharp or that Mgbeke does not know how to shave with it?” (*TFS*, p. 95).
- (88) “Had he like the doomed dog lost the sense of smell?” (*TFS*, p. 163).
- (89) “Our people say that the bulge of pregnancy cannot be concealed for long” (*TOS*, p. 85).
- (90) “Our people say that nobody is another’s chi” (*TOS*, p. 112).
- (91) “Where the runner reaches, there the walker will reach eventually” (*Danda*, p. 42).
- (92) “... that which is in the pot should be in the belly” (*Danda*, p. 123).
- (93) “The man who is murdered by his kinsmen does not bleed” (*TPW*, p. 81).
- (94) “The bread fruit which chooses to fall on the day of festivity has not fallen early enough” (*TPW*, p. 146).

The above proverbs are contextually relevant traditional Igbo proverbs. Though they have been rendered into English, they retain the vivid imagery and culture of the Igbo language. The preponderance of Igbo proverbs in the works of Igbo English writers attests to the continuity of the oral tradition in Igbo literature.

### (iii) Imagery

Images are adopted in speeches or narratives in order to convey specialized kinds of information. As a speech device, images express specific meanings, which derive from the socio-cultural contexts of the speech community. Their meanings can be interpreted on two levels—the literal and the metaphorical (Ugwu, 1990). The literal meaning is deduced from a combination of word meaning and sentence meaning. The metaphorical meaning, on the other hand, is derived from a consideration of

some extra-linguistic factors such as pre-suppositions, socio-cultural contexts and attitude of speakers, which may influence the overall meaning of the utterance. Igbo English writers frequently draw images (particularly through metaphors and similes) from the indigenous cultures of the Igbo and have incorporated them into English through translation. Images, like proverbs, are important aspects of Igbo literary device. But while proverbs are well-known statements that “enable the speaker to display his wit, wisdom, and his distinctive ability to manipulate the language” (Emenyonu, 1978: 157); images adopt imaginative comparisons to convey a meaning. The BE equivalent of the images identified in the novels are provided in brackets under every example.

- (95) “The big men say that death is a bad reaper; it is not always after the ripe fruit” (*Concubine*, p. 22).  
(Equivalent to BE “Death is irrational”.)
- (96) “So he sang on like a man who had eaten maize” (*Concubine*, p. 45).  
(Equivalent to BE “She sang in a rough voice”.)
- (97) “Listen my son, you should not be like the caterpillar that holds fast to tree branches when small but loses its grip and falls to its death when much older” (*Concubine*, p. 107).  
(Equivalent to BE “You should not be successful at a younger age and become a failure at an older age”.)
- (98) “No, mother, she is the quiet dog that eats up the hen’s eggs without a bark” (*Concubine*, p. 157).  
(Equivalent to BE “She is dangerous”.)
- (99) “In the end Okonkwo threw the Cat” (*TFA*, p. 3).  
(Reference to the “cat” suggests that the back of the cat hardly touches the ground.)
- (100) “That was many years ago, twenty years or more, and during this time Okonkwo’s fame had grown like a bush-fire in the harmattan” (*TFA*, p. 3).  
(The reference to “a bush-fire in the harmattan” means that Okonkwo’s fame had grown rapidly. “Bush fire” often substitutes for BE “wild fire” in Nigerian English expressions.)
- (101) “Go home and work like a man” (*TFA*, p. 13).  
(Equivalent to BE “Go home and work hard”.)
- (102) “I am evil Forest, I am Dry-meat-that-fills-the-mouth, and I am Fire-that-burns-without-faggots” (*TFA*, p. 66).  
(Equivalent to BE “I am dangerous”.)
- (103) “Wisdom is like a goatskin bag; every man carries his own” (*AOG*, p. 16).  
(Equivalent to BE “Every man has a relative degree of wisdom”.)
- (104) “That is why I am known and at the same time Unknowable” (*AOG*, p. 132).  
(Equivalent to BE “That is why I am unpredictable”.)
- (105) “I am the tortoise who was trapped in a pit of excrement for two whole markets; but when helpers came to haul him out of the eighth day he cried! Quick. I cannot stand the stench” (*AOG*, p. 181).  
(Equivalent to BE “I am impatient”.)

- (106) “You have come like a man” (*Danda*, p. 123).  
(Equivalent to BE “You have exhibited an act of bravery”.)
- (107) “Now you pant like a lizard that has just dropped from a high wall” (*TOS*, p. 29).  
(Equivalent to BE “You are breathing very profusely”.)
- (108) “Women are fire coals which a man open-eyedly heaps on his head” (*Danda*, p. 132).  
(Equivalent to BE “Women are an unavoidable evil”.)
- (109) “Tell us, strong one, the dried meat that fills the mouth” (*Danda*, p. 116).  
(Equivalent to BE “You, though small but a mighty one, tell us”.)
- (110) “I am two bodies” (*TOS*, p. 172).  
(Equivalent to BE “I am pregnant”.)
- (111) “This is a bad wind which has come into our land” (*TOS*, p. 120).  
(Equivalent to BE “This is a bad omen for our town”.)

## V. Semantic Extension

In semantic extension, English words are made to acquire extended meanings. Igbo English writers often reflect Igbo contexts in their use of certain English items so that such items now acquire extended meanings in the novels. Semantic extension is, therefore, a good source of the Igbo tradition in the Nigerian novel. All the instances of interference in this work are as a result of interference from Igbo. The meaning of the items is provided under the examples.

- (112) “Most of the events that happened before I was born had to be told to me by my mothers” (*HAW*, p. 6).
- (113) “Have you greeted your *mothers*?” (*TOS*, p. 18).  
(“Mother” is used in the Igbo context to include one’s mother’s female friends or relations.)
- (114) “Anyway that boy never looked as if he was going to be *something* in life” (*TOS*, p. 56).  
(“Something” which translates “ihe” in Igbo is often extended to mean, “being useful”. “Something” may also be understood in BE in this sense, but the context of its use in the novel suggests a translation of the Igbo form.)
- (115) “Who should divide the *thing* in the soup?” (*TOS*, p. 59).
- (116) “Are you in doubt about who should share the *thing* in the soup?” (*TOS*, p. 59).  
(“Thing” which also translates “ihe” in Igbo is often extended to mean “meat”.)

## VI. Collocational Extension

Igbo writers of English sometimes use some English verbs to collocate with new nouns so that they now acquire new or extended meanings. This is also a reflection of Igbo structure, which has merely been translated into English. Semantic extension



and collocational extension are very closely related in that they are created through the same process of translation and they both result in new or extended meanings. However, while meanings of individual items are extended under semantic extension, new meanings result from the association of different collocates under collocational extension. See the BE equivalents under every example.

- (117) “Do you *know book*?” (*MM*, p. 137).  
(This is equivalent to BE “Are you educated?” or “Are you intelligent?”)
- (118) “You *eat the world*” (*Danda*, p. 102).  
(This sentence is equivalent to BE “You are enjoying yourself”.)
- (119) “For long, they have been *eating my money*” (*Danda*, p. 110).  
(“Eating” is here used where BE would prefer “extorting”.)
- (120) “A man’s *heart eats* many sad things” (*TOS*, p. 121).  
(“Eats” is here used where BE would use “endures”.)
- (121) “Please get a good priest-doctor to *look into his head*” (*TOS*, p. 9).  
(“Look” is used for BE “observe”.)
- (122) “*Yams will do well* this year” (*Concubine*, p.16).  
(This sentence will be equivalent to BE “There will be very good yam harvest this year”.)

## VII. Colloquialisms

Colloquialisms are styles of usage that are only suitable for ordinary or informal conversation. The Igbo usually have colloquial contexts. The writers through translation have fused these contexts, reflecting the style of Igbo life, into English expression. Colloquialisms in the following examples have been identified in terms of their semantic interpretation, the collocation of their lexical items and the informality associated with their use. Explanations are provided under the examples.

- (123) “But I will not *see with these eyes* of mine his priest making himself lord over us” (*AOG*, p. 28).  
(The collocation of “see” (verb) and “eyes” (noun) makes it colloquial.)
- (124) “I have been to the fountainhead of this new religion and *seen with my own eyes* the white people who brought it” (*AOG*, p. 49).  
(Note the collocation of “seen” (verb) and “eyes” (noun). The expression “seen with my own eyes” is only idiomatically used in BE.)
- (125) “Since you began to *speak* I have been listening very hard to hear one thing from your *mouth*, but I have not heard it” (*AOG*, p. 63).  
(The informal repetition of “speak” (verb) and “mouth” (noun) provides the colloquialism in this case.)
- (126) “The other people were released, but even now they have not found the *mouth* with which to *tell* of their suffering” (*TFA*, p. 125).  
(Observe the informal repetition of “mouth” (noun) and “tell” (verb).)
- (127) “Any evil which you might have *seen with your eyes*, or *spoken with your mouth*, or *heard with your ears* or *trodden with your feet*...” (*AOG*, p. 119).  
(The colloquialism here lies in the informal repetition of “seen” (verb) and

- “eyes” (noun), “spoken” (verb) and “mouth” (noun), “heard” (verb) and “ears” (noun), and “trodden” (verb) and “feet” (noun).)
- (128) “I know some people who *breathe alu out of their nostrils, speak alu with their mouth, look alu with their eyes*” (*Danda*, p. 122).  
(Note the informal repetition of the lexical items “breathe” (verb) and “nostril” (noun); “speak” (verb) and “mouth” (noun); and “look” (verb) and “eyes” (noun).)
- (129) “You have refused to *hear with your ears*” (*TOS*, p. 126).  
(Note also the informal repetition of the use of the lexical items “hear” (verb) and “ears” (noun).)
- (130) “Go home straight and *think yourself* to death” (*TOS*, P. 124).  
(The verbal item “think” is used reflexively, a direct influence from Igbo colloquial structure.)
- (131) “*Your brother Oji* knows nothing about it” (*TOS*, p. 21).  
(The colloquialism here lies in the use of the italicized phrase for the first person pronoun “I”.)
- (132) “The way you women behave at times surprises *Oji*” (*TOS*, p. 21).  
(The personal name “Oji” is used instead of the pronoun “me”.)
- (133) “Let *Chiaku* rest” (*TOS*, p. 23).  
(The personal name “Chiaku” replaces the pronoun “me”.)
- (134) “What they find in this place *Ejimadu’s son* does not know” (*TOS*, p. 100).  
(The italicized phrase is used in place of the pronoun “I”.)
- (135) “Don’t ask *your sister*” (*TOS*, p. 144).  
(“Your sister” replaces “me” in the complement position.)

Examples (123) to (129) are common collocations in the Bible. In BE, where they occur, they are not so much colloquial as actually poetic and archaic. They often occur in Igbo in colloquial contexts, and what we find in the examples above are translations from the Igbo speech style. Note that the colloquialism in examples (131) to (135) lies in the de-personalization of the utterances, which is also a direct influence from Igbo. De-personalization of utterance or speech is a device whereby a speaker mentions his or her personal name instead of using the first person pronoun to refer to him or herself. This device reflects the peculiar colloquial speech habits of the Igbo speakers. Any attempt at interpreting their structures in isolation of their contexts will lead to misinterpretation of meaning. The translation of the colloquial structures into English is an effective source of the Igbo tradition in literature.

## CONCLUSION

This study examines the Igbo tradition in the Nigerian novel through the use of language. Although the Igbo writer writes in English, his environment and sources of creativity are entirely Igbo. Igbo elements and speech habits are easily observed in these novels. Patterns of identification regularly relate to:

- (a) The translation of proverbs, idioms, images and culturally rich expressions

from Igbo into English.

(b) The transfer of Igbo words and expressions into English.

Through the linguistic processes of transfer and translation, the following seven linguistic categories — loan-words, coinages, loan-blends, translation equivalents, semantic extension, collocational extension, and colloquialisms — have been identified as the sources of Igbo literary tradition. The fact that all the seven writers used in this investigation use these processes in their novels shows that the Igbo tradition is not restricted to Achebe. Instead, the development of this tradition through Achebe to other writers shows some degree of continuity and distinctness.

A look at the data may suggest instances of Nigerian English rather than typically Igbo. This is because it is often difficult to draw a line between what is Nigerian and what is Igbo since the environment is essentially the same. Even more is the fact that NE usage results from the influence of ethnic languages, and there is yet no single unified standard. Although some of the usages in the examples above are today shared with other Nigerians, their sources are easily traceable to Igbo speech patterns, which have been rendered into English via translation. Igbo writers who have accepted and manifested this style as a tradition of writing have also popularized them. Some of the linguistic categories for creating the Igbo tradition are not unique to Igbo literature, but have been found in other ethnic Nigerian literatures in English, as well. For example, a close reading of the works of some Yoruba writers such as Amos Tutuola and Kole Omotoso, and some Hausa writers such as Zaynab Alkali indicates the use of coinages, semantic extension and the translation of idioms. What this development shows is that writers of English in non-native situations employ various linguistic processes in creating their various literary traditions. The distinctiveness of the Igbo tradition manifests in linguistic experimentation and stylistic innovation. It is this distinctiveness that one sees in Achebe, Amadi, and other Igbo writers who have established local idioms in style, in culture, and in linguistic flexibility. It is a tradition that stems from ingenious, innovative and highly skillful imaginative usage, which relies on the traditions of the past and seeks to indigenize English as a literary medium. Many of the linguistic features identified in this study occur in the language use in both the “outer frame” (i.e. language which serves as direct communication between author and readers), and the “inner frame” (i.e. language which involves the protagonists and characters of the narrative communicating directly with one another in reported speech). The fact that the authors who are internationally renowned writers of English and their characters use these expressions consciously and unconsciously, respectively, shows that the language of the Igbo literary tradition cuts across various educational and socio-economic strata.

Igbo English literature emanates from Igbo life and language. In portraying Igbo life, writers use the English language, which is essentially Igbo in idiom and content since the origin of this literature is the Igbo culture. Writers simply create and develop their own linguistic resources appropriate to the Igbo cultural and sociolinguistic environment.

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