Language and Identity in Postcolonial African Literature:

A Case Study of Chinua Achebe's *Things Fall Apart*

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“Until the lions produce their own historians, the story of the hunt will glorify only the hunter.”

Chinua Achebe, *Home and Exile*

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Introduction

Understanding Chinua Achebe and the Cultural, Literary, and Linguistic Transcendence of *Things Fall Apart*

Nigerian author Chinua Achebe once wrote that the time and place in which he was raised was "a strongly multiethnic, multilingual, multireligious, somewhat chaotic colonial situation" (*Education* 39). No better words could describe the Nigeria from the end of the 19th century to today's 21st. Achebe was born on the 15th of November in the small town of Ogidi in Eastern Nigeria, one town amidst the thousand provinces that make up the land of the Igbo-speaking tribes. The Igbo people pride themselves on autonomy; thus, the thousand towns that construct "Igboland" feel no need to meddle in the business of the other Igbos. Self-government, both pre and post colonization, remains both an ideal aim and a source of cultural pride. Perhaps it is this ancestral strength that prompts critics of Igboland to claim that the Igbo speakers are "a curious nation. They have been called names like "stateless" or "acephalous" by anthropologists; "argumentative" by those sent to administer them" (*Education* 40). Igboland's tumultuous relationship with the British, one such administrative host, has been complicated to say the least. This thesis explores the relationship between the Igbo and the British worlds as displayed through the linguistic structures of Chinua Achebe's *Things Fall Apart*.

The nuances of the world's languages capture the adaptability of man and prove that language is essentially an intricate form of expression that is in a constant state of metamorphosis. Language has an infinite number of possibilities (Chomsky 16). Like Kafka's character, Gregor Samsa, who turns into a bug, language finds itself constantly restructuring itself, adapting to changes, facing rebirth in a new land, or suffering the extinction of a lost tongue. Salikoko Mufwene, a world-renowned linguist, has defined language as a complex and

adaptive system of communication (*Ecology* 156), ensuring speakers that language is and always will be primarily adaptive and reactive. Language changes as the world and its cultures change, and that change, whether it is the life, death, or transfiguration of language, happens not through fate, as some would argue, but through the individual choices made by the speakers of that language.

The speakers of the world's languages determine the potency of their tongues, and the study of crucial speakers within a society will reveal what they think of their language, as well as how they act towards the speakers of other surrounding languages. One can trace the evolution of a language through the way that the individual speakers communicate with each other and with surrounding speech communities. Linguist Steven Pinker argues that communication is "rooted in our development as individuals, but also in the history of our language community" (24). There is much to learn from speakers who individually choose to take an adaptive complexity like language and twist it into a subconscious method of expression for an entire speech community. This thesis is a powerful study of one such speaker, a speaker from a Nigerian tribe enmeshed in the heart Africa, and a speaker whose decisions about his language have helped shape the outcome of two world languages. However, the analysis of this speaker's decisions must come from a close reading of a written text rather than a perusal of oral statements, because Achebe has chosen the written word as his medium for linguistic and social reform.

The written word has been severely degraded in recent years as intellectuals have battled for the validity of the text and the death of the author[1]. Achebe is one writer who leaves no room for such an argument: he writes with intentionality and deliberateness, and he is not afraid to state his purposes. In reference to a second novel entitled *A Man of the People* Achebe clearly

[1] See Roland Barthes, Peter Rabinowitz, and Reed Way Dasenbrock for a glimpse at the 21st century confusion surrounding the roles of the author and reader in today's literary canons/texts.

states: “I wanted the novel to be a denunciation of the kind of independence we were experiencing in postcolonial Nigeria and many other countries in the 1960s, and I intended it to scare my countrymen into good behavior with a frightening cautionary tale” (*Education* 43). Achebe admits that his literature is a deliberate attempt to engage his culture and his international audience, and he brings this same stubborn determination to the writing of *Things Fall Apart*. Achebe establishes himself as a postcolonial author who chooses to wound his countrymen with his pen before he allows them to sink into apathy or stupidity.

The deliberate manner in which Achebe writes has earned him a transcendental position in two literary canons: both the Western (read: English) and the African literary canons. Achebe’s first novel, *Things Fall Apart*, speaks truth about Africa and Africa’s response to British imperialism with clarity of language that brings Achebe both acclaim and criticism. Many literary critics agree that *Things Fall Apart* “describes the effect of British missionaries and administrators on a typical village tribal society; the dislocation that change, religious and educational, brings to historic certainties” (Povey 254), and that it does so with great strength and a “tragic objectivity” (Ravenscroft 9). Readers appreciate the novel for its realistic depiction of Igboland, its rich depth of imagery, symbolism, and metaphor, and its profound lessons about community and the convergence of cultures.

The reason for the caustic criticism of Achebe’s work arises from the fact that Achebe’s dedication to objectivity and realism lead him to the critical decision to write *Things Fall Apart* in the usurping British tongue. But rather than try to paint his novel in anti-African hues (think Olaudah Equiano), Achebe keeps a wholly African perspective on the English novel, retaining a leitmotif of African tribalism and utilizing his own multilingual abilities through an extensive vocabulary of the Igbo language.

This decision to write in the English language has sparked innumerable debates, both in African and non-African circles, over Achebe's allegiance to his homeland and his beliefs about colonialism. An analysis of Achebe's language can reveal to the reader Achebe's personal language attitude as seen through *Things Fall Apart*, and how the study of his language attitudes can temper the residual tension over his choice to write in the hegemonic British tongue. This thesis uses Chinua Achebe's *Things Fall Apart* as a case study for language attitudes. Achebe's language attitudes reveal to the reader how one author's linguistic stereotypes affect both the writing and the acceptance of his literature. Nikolas Coupland and Adam Jaworski claim that "our beliefs may be the factor motivating our behaviors, whatever the objective truth is" (267). The combined literary and linguistic approach challenges readers to think about culture, dialects, language identity, and the importance of language attitudes on the writing process. A joint research enhances the understanding of pre-existing interpretations about Achebe and *Things Fall Apart* and introduces the reader to a new, unexplored level of Achebe's work: the level of linguistic stereotyping and the parallelism between language and literature. This thesis argues that a great novel has the capability of displaying the author's intentional and subconscious language attitudes within the discourse of the text, and that with an understanding of the role of language attitudes in literature the reader can better appreciate both the literary and the linguistic disciplines.

Chapter one, "Understanding Africa: Confronting the Postcolonial Melee with an Interdisciplinary Approach," establishes the challenges facing postcolonial African writers. This first chapter will explain a linguistic definition of language stereotypes, the social motivations for those stereotypes, and how certain linguistic stereotypes have been shaped within Nigeria, specifically. A linguistic stereotype is the conscious and/or subconscious biases that shape

cultural beliefs and behavior. One stereotype argues that post-colonial African writers should write only in their African tongues, while the opposing language stereotype encourages the incorporation of English within Africa. This chapter will explain how these opinions arise from cognitive biases. It explains the definition of language stereotypes and their effects upon pre and postcolonial African literature, and how Achebe's language attitude specifically affects his life and novel.

Chapter two, "Achebe and Authorial Intention: Professing a Language Attitude through a Literary Text", begins a close analysis of Achebe's novel. Achebe's fictional tale follows the life and death of Okonkwo, an Igbo speaker, and the societal changes that he experiences. This chapter will explain how Achebe's style of writing and the themes of the story capture an image of pre-colonial Igbo community. It will analyze the events of the plot as a sociocultural reflection of the familial side of African life. Achebe provides stories of Igbo history, culture, and belief systems that succeed in captivating his audience because of his own personal and integral development within the Nigerian lifestyle. The characters of Umuofia, Okonkwo, and Nwoye are used as deliberate plot devices to portray Achebe's overt language biases. Umuofia represents the real life African situation, Nwoye serves as the African who moves away from tradition, and Okonkwo stays loyal to his country until the end, but cannot find the strength to change with the tide.

Chapter two is a literary analysis of *Things Fall Apart*, a necessary step towards fully understanding Achebe's language attitude. It lays out the first parallel structures that can be seen in both the literary and the linguistic portions of this research, and shows how Achebe's plot, use of metaphor, and a rich African narrative exemplify the themes of dislocation and change. This

chapter defends Achebe's conscious and subconscious attitudes towards the English and Igbo cultures.

The last chapter, entitled "In Defense of Igbo: Achebe's Language Attitude as Displayed within the Linguistic Structure of *Things Fall Apart*", argues that Achebe's novel reveals a paradoxical linguistic situation. Achebe's language attitude seems to encourage him to accept the English language without hesitation, and he adopts it as a practical way to enhance his African story rather than annihilate it (as Okonkwo ends up doing). The third chapter will use an original analysis of Achebe's lexicon and his use of different languages within *Things Fall Apart*. The lexical (textual) analysis demonstrates how Achebe uses multiple languages within his story, and provides examples of words that are used in specific and predictable situations. The third chapter examines the levels of Achebe's linguistic stereotype that subconsciously affect the story and further illustrate his language biases. This chapter uses a Creole continuum that can be seen within the story to better examine Achebe's personal stereotypes to see how they influence the discourse and semantic level of *Things Fall Apart*. A Creole is a language that develops when two or more speech communities collide. In Achebe's Creole continuum, there are four languages warring for dominance, but only the two strongest languages achieve a prominent position within the novel.

The third and final chapter shows the reader the critical importance of building an academic bridge between linguistics and literature. The combination of these two fields of study reveals the value of interdisciplinary study and the endless possibilities for research. The linguistic analysis in this chapter describes Achebe's own use of language, explains how language shaped his life and his first novel, and provides an original overview of the language

use within *Things Fall Apart*. The linguistic analysis shows the reader the unique position that Achebe is in, and how his novel has and will continue to influence readers around the world.

Chapter One

Understanding Africa: Confronting the Postcolonial Melee with an Interdisciplinary Approach

What makes good literature? How does good literature affect readers? What role, if any, does language play in the creation and appreciation of literature? These questions have been debated for decades, the bane of literary critics, professors, and linguistic researchers. Literature has shown itself to be a fundamental pillar of human civilization, but defining the parameters of literature and its role in society remains a troublesome topic. Recent discourse on the relationship between language and literature has faded into uncertainty and subjectivity. A portion of concerned citizens blame a shrinking print medium for the lack of interest in literary fields, others doubt that language, either of the text or from the author, deserves to be studied as part of literary criticism. This thesis probes these troubling questions concerning language's influence over literature. An objective analysis of a fundamental piece of world literature reveals that language influences the creation of good literature, and thus that language has the power to change the readers of the world.

Author and literary critic Daniel R. Schwarz argues that readers should value communal pasts and use shared literary history in the development of current reading theory. He compares readers of world literature to Odysseus, and a reader's journey through life, and thus literature, as a demanding but rewarding odyssey that will influence every aspect of their lives. Schwarz argues that individuals should accept ancestral heritage and their unique forms of cultural literature. Pulling from individual histories allows readers to use literature as an advocate for humanity, cultural canons, and world literatures.

While Schwarz defends the appreciation of cultural literature, he unfortunately glosses over the issues that many cultures face in the development of national literatures. African readers

and writers, for example, do not have a simple definition for African literature. While most cultural writers write for a hypothetical audience, a disembodied, faceless reader whom the writer will likely never meet, most African authors write to their countrymen, to the citizens of their village or city, to the mothers and fathers and sons and daughters who have lived through the same cultural past and who look forward to the same collective future. The African writer is concerned with the applicability of literature to the tangible reader. Eldred Jones captures an example of this with his book *The Writing of Wole Soyinka*. Nigerian writer Wole Soyinka was born July 13, 1934 to a Yoruban (of similar acclaim but separate ethnic group from the Igbo citizens) culture. He attended Ibadan government college and university like Achebe, and won the Nobel Peace prize in 1986. He was very politically active, and even spent time in jail for his outspoken nature. Soyinka's beliefs often made their way into his impassioned works. Jones goes so far as to say that "Soyinka's life is inseparable from his work, much of which arises from a passionate, almost desperate, concern for his society" (11). Soyinka, like Achebe, was concerned with the preservation of his society. He translated the Yoruba text *Ogboju oke ninu Irunmale* (*The Forest of a Thousand Daemons*), which was one of the first novels to be written in an African language. Jones captures the fundamental essence of Soyinka's literary goals by saying:

> All Yoruba culture is enshrined in the language, a highly tonal and musical language which gives the impression of being chanted rather than spoken. These rhythmic and tonal qualities do not come over into English, which is a language of a very different type. What does flow over into Soyinka's English is the wealth of imagery and proverbial formulas which he uses with remarkable effect. (8)

Achebe and Soyinka are two authors who work towards a common goal. They each exhibit a wealth of knowledge and a driving passion, and they each construct works of literature that depict the life and structure (even a changing structure) of their particular societies.

African Literature and Canonicity

Yet despite the unification of these two "pillars" of African literature, the majority of texts coming out of Africa have been conflicted, due in large part to pre and postcolonial Africa, and the effects of cultural diversity on African authors. Twenty-first century Africa is currently a continent of alienated villages, diverse people groups, and warring governments. Bureaucratic groups attempt to control most African nations, slowly and deliberately shaking off the cloudy remnants of British imperialism. Simple environmental factors keep literature from uniting across the continent. Millions of Africans remain illiterate, unable to create or enjoy the advancing written literature in the world. Regionalism and separated ethnic communities are a maintained reality. Hundreds of spoken languages further divide the African states, with an inability to communicate with members outside of the native speech community negatively affecting the sense of nationhood and belonging. It is into this convoluted mix of cultures and languages that the dilemma of African literature written in English first appears. Those who do produce written literature must decide if they wish to write in their native tongues or in the hegemonic language of English, whose literary allure writer Joanna Sullivan captures quite succinctly when she says: "[a]uthors choose to write in English not only to secure publication, but to further their social prestige through international recognition" (75). The choice is forced upon the African writer: to write in a language not one's own, and thus to risk the heart and soul of his literature, or to write in the language of his people, and possibly never reach beyond the

borders of his diminishing region due to ethnic incommunicability. A good writer may never be read if he is limited to a local dialect.

An example of one writer who has been lost in the melee of postcolonial literature is the writer Tanganyika. Tanganyika has been heralded as one of the great chroniclers of African life, but his works are hardly read due to his insistence on writing in the Swahili language. This choice to retain his native language has cost Tanganyika both a transcontinental audience and a majority of African audiences. In 1960 Tanganyika gave to Achebe one of his books that, although treasured by Achebe remains unread to this day due to Achebe's inability to read the Swahili language. Achebe publicly shares his sadness over this lost communication between African brothers and writers, concluding that until he learns Swahili, he will never be able to fully know his African compatriot (*English and the African Writer* 28).

There is a disconnect that has plagued modern African literature. Before colonialism there were interethnic wars and a variety of mutually unintelligible language groups. The entrance of European linguistic hegemony (language wars) brought a more conscious and pronounced feeling of linguistic separatism. Heidi Grunebaum-Ralph suggests creating community-building projects to unite postcolonial Africa, arguing that the more access Africans have to stories about their collective pasts, the more citizens can embrace a united literature. She says that, with shared stories "the individual becomes metonymy for the collective" (199). Grunebaum-Ralph despises the postcolonial politics that have made African memorials and historical grounds into tourist venues and forgotten legends. She values community-run ventures rather than state ones, advocating such literary ventures as the Western Cape Action Tour Project, which educates African citizens in ethnic history and allows participants to "recount the stories of their lives and their communities" (203). For Grunebaum-Ralph, the communal aspect

of literature is valued more than the individual author or reader, and far more than the bureaucracies of academicians and their canon-making politics[2]. This belief is prompted by an appreciation for the literary nature of the African past, specifically the rich oral traditions that have dominated Africa as a whole. Grunebaum-Ralph values the rich oral and tribal narratives from the pre-colonial time and encourages that postcolonial African use the gift of writing and written literature to capture and carry on the same oral traditions of the past, only now in written form as well.

This approach to African literature focuses not on specific criticisms in African literature, but on the holistic need for African people to embrace the past and present literary traditions and to work together to produce and teach good works of written literature that defend the African community. However, postcolonial African literature and the development of a cohesive African canon is not a simple issue. Like any continent's approach to forming a canon, there are certain problematic questions that must be asked. How, in a practical manner, does Africa, in its dissimilated postcolonial state, assemble a national identity and agree on a cohesive literary canon? Is it even possible? How does a nation who suffers the alienation of languages and polities unite under one canon of cultural identity? Sullivan offers a solution to the African people. She pleads with African writers, specifically those in her native Nigerian nation, to devote themselves to writing literature "about Nigeria, or a problem that concerns the entire nation" (77). This, Sullivan argues, is the capstone for successful African literature. There is truth in both oral and written literature. This truth transcends the borders of African regionalism and divisions of postcolonial bureaucracy. By writing to Africa as a continent rather than to a smaller, more egocentric ethnic region, the author of a text can encourage identity and meaning for a more universal audience. In an argument concerning the creation of Holocaust literature,

[2] For a full discussion on the politics of establishing a canon, see Gates, Guillory, and Tompkins.

Schwarz says that it is “when abstractions and numbers give way to human drama that the distance between us and the victims closes” (70). Thus, Schwarz and Sullivan agree that the power of good cultural literature transcends borderlines and ethnical divisions. The field of ethnic literature, then, is significant for today’s research. By studying literature surrounding Africa and the African people, the researcher sheds light on certain literary obscurities. The authors of these ethnic texts hold the power to influence Africa and the African literary development, and the author who sacrifices himself to his work and for his nation deserves to be examined, for it is this type of author who writes with intentionality, deliberately shaping his work for the purpose of nationhood and unity.

The Analytical Approach

The study of African literature and African writers cannot be complete without the study of the ideology behind a text. Literary critics analyze literature and the authors of good literature in hopes of finding truths about the world and the writers in the world. With such an intense literary background, many critics believe that the discipline has adequately exhausted the depths of biographical and historical analysis. For this reason, this particular research is not another attempt at autobiographical criticism or new historicism. It is in fact a deliberate step *away* from literary criticism and *towards* the scientific analysis of fictional text. This thesis works with the foundational belief that the words used in a text are placed with deliberateness and authorial intent. This thesis takes a step towards an interdisciplinary analysis, using the field of linguistics as the primary method of research.

The rationale for this linguistic analysis of African literature is twofold. First, the scientific nature of linguistics allows a fresh perspective into the field of literary criticism. Man uses language to dissect behavior and to communicate ideas. A linguistic analysis of literature

allows the researcher to examine these things as they relate to an author and the author's text. Secondly, the branch of sociolinguistics studies the development of language attitudes, and when the research of language attitudes is applied to literature, it offers a new approach to literary criticism and, in particular, the African literary dilemma.

The linguistic analysis in this research remains fixed on Chinua Achebe and his use of language within *Things Fall Apart*. It assumes the authority and intentionality of the author, and works to uncover the linguistic methods and stereotypes that Achebe uses within the literature. Thus, rather than a theoretical approach to the language, this thesis uses the methodology behind sociolinguists in order to capture the concrete, practical use of language.

The Literary-Linguistic Perspective

Sociolinguistics, according to John Edwards, is that area of research which is essentially focused on human behavior and linguistic identity (*Language, Society, and Identity* 3). A feeling of self-identification and/or assumed identities of others is what sociolinguists call a language attitude. A language attitude is a person's cognitive, emotional, and even physical representation of the way he or she feels about language and surrounding linguistic communities. Sociolinguist Tore Kristiansen defines language attitudes as "complex psychological entities which involve knowledge and feeling as well as behavior, and are sensitive to situational factors" (291). An attitude about language can be directed inward, as an egocentric view of native language acquisition or certain beliefs about fellow native language speakers, or outward, towards alien speech environments and the 'other' speakers of the world. Thus, stereotypes can derive from anything: age, ethnicity, gender, dialects, etc.

Linguists typically define attitudes (used interchangeably here with linguistic stereotypes) as positive, negative, or neutral. The positive language attitude welcomes other speakers and

shows no biased stereotypes, while the negative one has marked behaviors that oppose the outside language speakers. Neutral stereotypes are ambivalent and often do not affect a person's behavior, but all language stereotypes can be found in human interaction and, while not always conscious of it, all individuals hold beliefs, biases, and convictions about the linguistic world around them. An individual can create a personal bias or acquire a stereotype from an outside influence. Linguist John Edwards claims that a person's "reactions to language varieties can reveal their perceptions of the *speakers*; in this way, language attitudes are linked to views of identity" (146). Humans naturally associate the language a person speaks with a specific culture, thus it is natural for a person to associate language with identity. Thus, to study a person's stereotypes and linguistic reactions to other speakers is to reveal a person's beliefs, identity, and presuppositions of his or her environment.

The academic study of these three linguistic stereotypes has often been achieved through the use of surveys and sociohistorical analysis. Linguistic surveys are tailored questionnaires that, upon completion, are able to tell the researcher what patterned stereotypes an individual is exhibiting. These surveys are best used on target populations. Researcher Tore Kristiansen claims that "the best way of detecting 'real' attitudes is to register behavioral reactions to language in real-life situations" (292)[3]. Surveys attempt to elicit behavioral reactions from an audience, and these reactions are then used as determiners for language attitudes and stereotypes.

There are, however, several concerns with using surveys to determine language attitudes. Many critics doubt that a survey, no matter how significant of a pattern may emerge, can never truly grasp the true bias of an individual (see Kristiansen 291). If an individual experiences

[3] Kristiansen found that five consecutive target audiences in a Danish cinema discriminated against movie actors based on their accents. Surveys revealed a distinct preference for actors who used more standardized accents as opposed to dialectal variations, or accents unknown by the target audience. Kristiansen's survey proved certain behavioral traits and linguistic stereotypes that the Danish people carry with them and use to analyze the world around them.

pressure to complete a survey, he or she may rush through the questionnaire without fully reading the material or answering the questions to the best of his/her ability. And even when completed, how can the researcher determine which surveys reflect a language attitude and which are naively motivated by upbringing, environment, or personality preferences? As analysts of language attitudes, Anne Gere and Eugene Smith argue in their book *Attitudes, Language, and Change* that "[o]ur professed attitudes may appear enlightened, but they often differ from the subconscious attitudes which inevitably govern our judgments and behavior" (3). Thus, with a survey that purposefully elicits one of these professed language attitudes, how is a linguist able to quantifiably determine that subconscious part of a person's language attitude and linguistic stereotype with only a short questionnaire or survey?

A second common method for determining a person's linguistic stereotype draws its conclusions from social and historical factors. This approach uses a broad sociological analysis to draw conclusions of gender studies, ethnicities, and nationalities. The matched guise technique is a method in which actors are taped speaking in the 'correct' standard variety of English, then again in the variety that matches the target population[4]. This approach often serves as a concrete, statistical way of proving how one or two different speech communities subconsciously stereotype others. The matched guise technique, however, has a critical limitation. It fails to adequately determine sociological distinctions when the two parties being examined are from the

[4] Author and researcher Reid Luhman conducted a study on language stereotypes toward Appalachian English and Standard English users (each group stereotyping the other). Luhman compiled past known stereotypes with current social statistics (i.e. demographics, literary rates, educational levels, etc.) to determine how members of both speech communities react towards the binary language speaker. Luhman utilized the matched guise method for determining subconscious behaviorisms and stereotypes. For Luhman's research he recorded actors whose second variety was of a southern Kentucky individual with marked Kentuckian dialect and phonological patterns. After presenting the recorded surveys to his mixed audience, Luhman's results of the matched guise technique revealed that individuals overwhelmingly concluded that the Kentucky accented individuals were less educated and/or members of lower economical and educational communities. The audience members from Kentucky concluded that the Kentucky accents were less standard and more informal, although they refrained from giving/drawing conclusive responses that labeled the speaker as incapable of learning, or less educated than the speaker of Standard English.

same speech community or nationality. For instance, if a linguist wishes to study speakers of African nations, the matched guise technique cannot serve as a stable determiner of language stereotypes if the speakers are from the same linguistic or sociological background.

African Language Attitudes

The limitations that face language attitude research have prompted a new approach to the study of language behaviors and stereotypes. Linguists are too limited in the study of linguistic stereotypes, even when they have access to authentic speech and speech communities, and the current methods of study do not provide enough accurate data to truly predict a person's conscious and subconscious attitudes towards another speaker. A new methodology must be proposed, and this thesis suggests a revised (and necessary) approach to the study of linguistic stereotypes using an interdisciplinary analysis. To use fictional literature as a source of ethnic discourse provides what surveys and other methods of linguistic analysis cannot, namely an unhindered and natural flow of language which reveals both professed and subconscious language presuppositions. Linguists can use fictional texts to set new parameters for linguistic data. Authors who write with authorial intent, who compose literature for specific purposes and from a deliberate ideological standpoint, present to the linguist an irrefutable linguistic discourse, ready to be analyzed and unquestionably a unique representation of the author's language attitude. This thesis uses the novel *Things Fall Apart* by Chinua Achebe as a case study for this revised approach to the study of language attitudes (in Africa).

The use of textual analysis as a form of authorial discourse is not an original idea. The study of language attitudes in Africa is not simply a sociolinguistic concern. Africans have been defining language attitudes in literature and society for decades, but the approach or focus that they have taken only labels a person's stereotype based on the language they use, not the

underlying beliefs they have about language. The reader will recall that Joanna Sullivan highlights the language-dilemma that African authors face when writing: to write in their disintegrated native languages or to bow to the hegemonic language of English. Thus, when writers like Ngugi Wa Thiong'o see other authors choosing to write in the English language, they label these people as contributors and advocates of European culture. In the depths of his disappointment towards such "betrayers," Wa Thiong'o states that: "[i]t is the final triumph of a system of domination when the dominated start singing its virtues" (20), and later that "by our continuing to write in foreign languages, paying homage to them, are we not on the cultural level continuing that neo-colonial slavish and cringing spirit?" (26). Many African writers today do in fact write in the English language, but the journey has not been an easy one, and a quick overview of that linguistic situation uncovers the state of language attitudes in Africa today. Wa Thiong'o's strict division between language use and the beliefs about language are mistaken, and this thesis shows how Achebe's use of Igbo and English within his novel adds a unique language attitude to the African canon.

One of the most prevalent African *lingua francas* is the language of Igbo. It is spoken extensively (both pre and post colonization) in the country of Nigeria, boasting between eighteen and twenty-five million speakers, and it is one of the few major languages in the Benue-Congo language family. Igbo, sometimes spelled Ibo, is one of the national languages of Nigeria and is most commonly used for commerce, multi-tribal communication, and politics. Igbo first received global attention during the British colonial expansion. At first, Igbo members welcomed the British because the Europeans brought good trading business. In 1900, however, Britain officially declared Igboland to be a province of Europe and thus subject to colonization. The passive Igbo citizens began to resent European control. Writer Don Ohadike says that "many

Western Igbo towns had suffered economic, military, and political decline as a result of the combined activities of British traders, imperial agents, and Christian missionaries. This may well explain why the earliest and the fiercest military clashes took place in Western Igboland" (253). Once European explorers and missionaries entered the African continent, the language dynamics began to change in two significant ways, first in a linguistic way and second through the literature of post colonialism.

Africa in the time of British imperialism exemplifies a land of convoluted language systems. Salikoko Mufwene explains that "[l]anguages are complex adaptive systems" (*Ecology* 156). As such, they can be manipulated and they can change based on how the speakers choose to use their systems. The responsibility of a language's life, death, and power will always rest, then, with the decisions of its speakers. The British used Africans as interpreters and messengers, but with the diversity of languages and dialects, the African translators often relied on *lingua francas* and a mix of the regional languages to communicate with the general population. This postcolonial environment quickly influenced the production of literature. The world began to shrink as trade increased and Europeans began to live freely in Africa, but the use of languages only became more adaptive and, in some cases, more fractured.

The shifting tide of language dynamics was one of the primary catalysts for mid twentieth century debates over language attitudes. As colonialism restructured the nation, African writers picked up their pens and began to fight fervidly for African rights and culture. Many Africans wanted literature to remain purely African, written in African tongues and for the African people. But a percentage of the population decided to write African stories in the English language. Ngugi Wa Thiong'o at first seemed open to the use of English as a writing medium, but later formed his decision that a "choice of language and the use to which language is put is central to a

people's definition of themselves in relation to their natural and social environment . . . [h]ence language has always been at the heart of the two contending social forces in the Africa of the twentieth century" (4). Wa Thiong'o's claim is essential to the understanding of Achebe's criticism and modern African literature's attempt to regain community and reestablish ethnic literature. Wa Thiong'o claims that the language through which an author chooses to communicate is the culture to which he chooses to adhere. He later claims: "[l]anguage, any language, has a dual character: it is both a means of communication and a carrier of culture" (13). For Wa Thiong'o, and for many Africans who followed his claims, the English of Europe was an invasive beast, attacking their culture and their homes at will. It was to be avoided as a medium for literary messages, and many of those who chose to write in it were frowned upon as betrayers of a Pan-African ideal.

Chinua Achebe and Things Fall Apart

While many Africans felt attacked by the presence of Europeans within the borders of their homeland, Nigerian author Chinua Achebe recognized that English was a powerful presence in his Nigerian society and chose to implement it as the primary language within his literature. When scorned by Wa Thiong'o and his compatriots, Achebe stoutly affirms: "I feel that the English language will be able to carry the weight of my African experience. But it will have to be a new English, still in full communion with its ancestral home but altered to suit its new African surroundings" ("The African Writer and the English Language" 30). Achebe does what many others saw as a shocking – even appalling – betrayal of his African heritage. In one of the most acclaimed African novels, *Things Fall Apart*, Chinua Achebe writes the story of Okonkwo and Okonkwo's Nigerian tribe primarily in the English language. His choice to write

in English appalls African purists, and he has since been criticized for betraying his African identity.

The story of *Things Fall Apart* is one that has united African literature, arguably more than any other work of African fiction. The influence of the novel has been discussed recently by two African writers, Adebayo Williams and Olaniyan Tejumola. Williams contrasts the character and success of Achebe to the more bitter and caustic author, V.S. Naipaul. According to Williams, Naipaul fails where Achebe succeeds, for Naipaul cannot let go of his bitterness and accept that Africa has been changed by colonialism. He writes to his society but cannot transcend outside of it. Achebe, on the other hand, realized that the colonial presence in Africa would be lasting. In a historical act of prophetic humility, Achebe chose to write to Africans, but he wrote in English so that the world could take part in the African narrative. Williams defends this foresight as an embracing humility that Naipaul could not bring himself to repeat. Naipaul, in a consistently pessimistic mindset, "abolishes the novel as a viable art form in the coming epoch" (19) and vows that the African author and reader will have no place in the twenty-first century. Chinua Achebe, conversely, looks to the unification of African storytellers and the collective efforts of African people to produce African literature.

Tejumola Olaniyan takes a reader-centered approach to Achebe's success. He argues that Achebe's writings can be reinterpreted by twenty-first century readers and for a twenty-first century audience. For example, Olaniyan cites a passage in Achebe's *Arrow of god* as being an anti-religious and specifically anti-Christian statement. Olaniyan argues that "Christianity, unlike Igbo religions, is monotheistic and therefore selfish, jealous, violent (its military arm is the colonial administration), absolutist, tyrannical and univocal" (24). Not only is Olaniyan's scathing report wildly subjective and bitterly constructed, but he neither provides backup for his

claim, nor does he mention Achebe's personal interactions with Christianity from his early years in a missionary school, an important fact that could discredit Olaniyan's carefully constructed attack. Olaniyan interprets the novels as he wishes, but when faced with religious or political ambiguities in the plot, Olaniyan blames Christianity and European colonialism. He says of *Arrow of God* that the two main characters are "consumed by colonialism and its Christianity whose main distinguishing feature is systemic parochialism" (27). Olaniyan rails against the postcolonial state and laments the loss of pure African literature. He heralds Achebe as an "indefatigable and visionary" prophet (28), a literary sage who saw the coming doom of African life and literature, and who sought to warn his readers of the encroaching darkness. Olaniyan's interpretation of Achebe and of Achebe's novels presents a clear picture to the twenty-first century reader. Olaniyan would have his reader believe that Achebe resisted all tenants of colonialism, and sought to devalue postcolonial ideologies and religions. The reader who accepts Olaniyan's article without any further biographical or historical analysis will find himself surprised to find that Achebe did in fact value much of colonial influence, and heralded the English language as a gift to African literature[5]. Olaniyan's egocentric reading theory is a dangerous extension to Daniel Schwarz's idea of the reader's Odyssean journey. Whereas Schwarz values the reader's personal experience with a text, Olaniyan focuses on only the elements of literature that benefit his subjective opinions, and discredits the role of objectivity and authorial intent. Such an approach narrows both Achebe's effectiveness as an author in the African canon, and Olaniyan's influence as a modern African literary critic.

Williams and Olaniyan share a passion that views fiction as a door through which readers enter into the realm of unknown African literature. They place Achebe as a monumental figure in the current African literary discipline, although their approaches to reading Achebe are

[5] See Ravenscroft (1969) and Achebe (1965).

fundamentally opposed. Williams values the power of authorial intent and biographical influence over literature. His reading theory encourages the audience to appreciate authorial constructions, while Olaniyan conversely argues for the reader as the interpreter of meaning. Sullivan says that a novel "that reflects or mirrors the unique characters and experiences of the nation would then represent an example of national literature," and that "national literature demonstrate what is unique and special about one nation to its own citizens and concomitantly to the outside world" (74). This is the heart of African literary potential. It is Achebe's success both as an author and as a member of the struggling African canon that has earned him the place as a father of African literature, as well as a pillar of world literature.

Chapter 2

Achebe and Authorial Intention: Professing a Language Attitude through a Literary Text

The unique blend of literary and linguistic analyses of Achebe's text allows the reader to see an emerging parallel structure. Achebe dives into the melee of postcolonial literature with the purposeful intent of re-establishing a broken African image. He rectifies the broken image by building it upon a foundation of literary and linguistic elements. Yet it is the state of brokenness that must be appreciated before Achebe's response can be fully appreciated.

Many European authors played a role in the 20th century development of the Western mindset about Africa. One such writer is Joseph Conrad, whose books have captivated readers and ignited transcontinental debates over his depiction of the African continent. Some writers view Joseph Conrad's *Heart of Darkness* as a satirization of Africa and its people, others accept it as a realistic depiction of the region. Regardless, critic Martin Tucker captures the influence of Conrad with this statement:

> It was after the novel *Heart of Darkness* (London, 1903), by Joseph Conrad, that English fiction about Africa changed its direction. Hitherto, both English and foreign novelists had utilized Africa as a school for moral instruction; the Germans, particularly, saw Africa as a testing-ground for their superior moral qualities. Conrad, to the contrary, introduced Africa from a psychological standpoint; his "exploration" of the continent signified a state of compulsion. [. . .]. It is this obsessive belief that the deep hinterland of Africa will open the door to the illumination of self that characterizes the writing of Conrad, Gide, Graham Greene, the German writer Kurt Heuser, Thomas Hinde, and a host of other novelists. (12-13)

Tucker argues that the European authors viewed Africa as a chance to delve into the world of psychoanalytic literature, and he suggests that, at least for Conrad, the African world was one of mystery, of intrigue, and of danger. The Western world began to construct a Conrad-inspired image of Africa. The discovery of self that Tucker mentions was the sense of self-worth and cultural esteem that the European discovered when faced with the "barbaric" African. Some Western literature viewed Africa as the lesser otherworld, and for native writers of African literature this hindering image of Africa did not bolster strong allegiance to Europe.

Achebe disagrees with Conrad's portrayal. Achebe struggles with Conrad's portrayal of Africa, because it leaves the reader with the assumption that either all Africans are "dumb brutes", or ignorant children who should remain in their place and not taint the European mind (*Image* 327-8). It is for this image of Africa that Chinua Achebe writes his first novel. Achebe chooses to write as the antithesis to Joseph Conrad's view of the world, in opposition to those whose "residue of antipathy to black people" (*Image* 329) has cost the African people a chance to prove themselves in pre and post-colonial life and literature.

This chapter is an overview of some of the most important literary themes and elements within Achebe's classic novel. It will begin by painting for the reader a broad picture of Igbo life and culture within the novel, before moving more specifically into a deeper character analysis of two of the most important characters in the book. This literary analysis will show the lessons about African life and the convergence of culture as interpreted and passed down by Chinua Achebe. A close reading of *Things Fall Apart* reveals the way in which the characters find strength and dignity when faced with colonialism, and how that same struggle forms Chinua Achebe's own language attitude.

Umuofian Life Within the Novel

For Achebe, writing *Things Fall Apart* is an opportunity to provide a description of his home and culture that is more complete and realistic than Conrad and his followers. The novel is first and foremost about the Igbo tradition, and Achebe does not hesitate to fill the pages with a descriptive writing style that encapsulates the life (and his own experience) in Africa and Nigeria. The village of Umuofia is the primary setting for the novel. It is a small village in the heart of Igboland, untouched at the beginning of the novel by Europeans or colonial imperialism. Umuofia is run by the men of the village and by the deities. A man rules with the respect he earns through the strength of his arm or the words of his mouth, a foreign concept to the British imperialists who "could not comprehend the democratic genius of Igbo political organization, and felt more comfortable with the familiar hierarchies of kingdoms and empires" (Ohadike 255). Pre-colonial Igbo life exists through community, and it is through community that the individual experiences life. Achebe begins to build this image for the reader in the first paragraph of the novel when he opens with a discussion about Okonkwo's wrestling match with Amalinze the Cat. Achebe describes the frenzied passion with which the tribesmen watch the fight: "[t]he drums beat and the flutes sang and the spectators held their breath . . ." (3). From the outset, the villagers are presented as partakers of Okonkwo's life. What he does affects Umuofia, and vice versa, or in the words of critic Emmanuel Obiechina, this scene shows us the "intimate relationship between the individual and the community" (40). The appreciative reader may see in this not only a story about the life of one man, but how one man is an integral part of a community.

An integral part of the communal life of Igbo societies in pre-colonial Africa was the adherence to deities and spirits. The Nigerian community in pre-colonial Africa was replete with ancestral gods and other mystical entities, a pluralistic society (according to Achebe) to which

Achebe does not hesitate to give a figurative nod. The people in Umuofia serve gods of the earth and sky, as well as human oracles who serve their respective deities. Igboland also, according to researchers such as Ohadike, follows the ideology of reincarnation and the ability for people to be possessed by spirits. The gods bless or curse the land in the Igbo village. Good land is distributed based on how many people a man has living on his compound. Neighbors help each other build compounds, houses, fences, and barns. The land is used for farming. The planting and harvesting of yams is heavily prevalent in the novel. The cursed land is abandoned by the Igbo villagers, but later is given to the invading Europeans in the latter half of *Things Fall Apart*. A man's crop is his livelihood, and if a man cannot succeed at home, it is unlikely that he will find a place of authority within the tribe.

The village of Umuofia is an agricultural village. A man does not only receive his livelihood from his crop, but his crop in fact defines him. The reader can see this displayed throughout the novel as Achebe repeatedly writes about the importance of the yam. The yam is to the village one of the primary sources of income. Many of the prayers offered to the gods of the earth and sky are prayed for the blessing of the harvest and the good growth of the crops. When prayers are answered and a family receives a large crop of yams, the village rejoices together with a feast of yams. The yam is personified as "the king of crops, [who] was a very exacting king. For three or four moons it demanded hard work and constant attention from cock-crow till the chickens went back to roost" (21-22). When the outsider Ikemefuna arrives in the village and begins to live with Okonkwo and his family, the narrator says that Ikemefuna "grew rapidly like a yam tendril in the rainy season, and was full of the sap of life. He had become wholly absorbed into his new family" (32). The yam is a metaphor for life, and the growing of yams often determines a man's reputation. Okonkwo's father, Unoka, was a man who was too lazy and foolish to grow a good

crop of yams. He often lived indebted to other Umuofian villagers, and because he could not work the land he died with no title and without honor. Fortunately, Okonkwo is not condemned to his father's reputation, for "among these people a man was judged according to his worth and not according to the worth of his father" (7). The Igbo society is one that values hard work, discipline, and authority. Once earned, authority is hard to lose.

Umuofian society is one that encourages the growth of families. Familial relationships and the success of the family rely heavily on gender roles. The woman is meant to be the caretaker, the cook, and the wife. She fulfills her duties at home and to her husband, living on her husband's compound and raising her children among her husband's other wives. She is usually uneducated and unheard. She does not often speak up at public gatherings, but she can socialize and walk freely within the town and with her friends. Some Igbo women receive the honor of becoming oracles or priestesses for certain Igbo deities because the female is believed to possess more spiritual prowess (Ohadike 241). These women devote their lives to serving the deity and proclaiming the will of the god(s). The man is the provider and the head of the home. He chooses his wives as he pleases, but often (and as with the case of Okonkwo) he considers one wife to be in some manner superior to the others. He works hard to establish his home, and as such he expects to be fed, loved, and supported when at home. Young children are not overworked, but they learn at an early age to obey their father and help their mother. Girls help with cooking and cleaning, while the boys are brought up to be warriors and yam growers.

Readers should use caution when interpreting the gender statuses within the novel. As author David Carroll suggests:

> It would be quite wrong, however, to give the impression that the tribal society of *Things Fall Apart* is formidably monolithic. This is far from Achebe's intention.

> He is anxious to display the flexibility of the social structure, for only by understanding this can we understand the life and death of the central character, Okonkwo. What at first sight appear to be rigid conventions invariably turn out to be the ritual framework within which debate and questioning can be carried on. (389)

Carroll mentions something in passing that lies at the heart of Igbo society. The people in Umuofia obey authority and respect one who is worthy of respect, but they also possess minds and intellects that give strength and dignity to the culture. Achebe values both male and female roles, both young and old characters alike. The Igbo society welcomes diverse roles and responsibilities, and only asks that each member works for the good of the community at large.

Things Fall Apart takes a turn in plot when Igboland suddenly becomes a target of cultural and political imperialism. Thus far, Achebe has focused on a descriptive identification of the African lifestyle and the lives of one village, Umuofia. When Umuofia encounters the white man, the novel begins to reflect the convergence of cultures and the outcome of a societal clash. The village of Umuofia has its first interaction with the white man when missionaries come from Europe and make their way into the heart of Igboland. Achebe again works in the Igbo's historical pre-colonialism with his current state of post-colonialism. The first Europeans enter Nigeria and begin to establish education and trade. The British move into Igboland with the goal of consolidating what they see as small, fragmented groups of polities, and forming hierarchical political structures and governments. Some communities never saw much of the British citizens; other towns and provinces were overwhelmed by them. Achebe captures this social change through the introduction of outside characters, specifically Mr. Brown and his interpreters. When the white man enters into Mbanta, another Igbo village in Nigeria, they bring with them several

Igbo translators who, although capable of speaking the language, come from a different dialect and are thus perceived as outsiders by the Mbantan villagers. The Mbantans are unsure of how to deal with the appearance of the white man and the strange allegiance that some of their fellow African brethren have for the white strangers. At first, Mbanta attempts to ignore the influence of the Europeans. The village elders assure the people that the white man and his religious ideology will not last, and that to wait for them to leave is the best way to handle their trouble. As time passes, however, the Igbo speakers realize that these people have settled in. Soon the white missionaries approach the Igbo villagers and ask for land on which they may build a church. The Nigerians provide the white men with the Evil Forest, the cursed plot of land reserved for the unburied dead. As the missionaries begin to establish their church on the Evil Forest, the Mbantans wait expectantly for the gods to destroy the sacrilegious white man, but "[t]he first day passed and the second and third and fourth, and none of them died. Everyone was puzzled. And then it became known that the white man's fetish had unbelievable power" (86). It is at this point, after the white man has successfully defied the gods and lived, that the citizens of Igboland begin to question the truth behind the white man's ways.

The entrance of the white missionaries threatens the proud Igbo villagers, whose lifestyle and customs have always relied on communal strength and dignity. Achebe's explanation of the Igbo mindset helps to clarify the strange relationship that Igboland and Britain shared during the early homestead years, or the period in which the British slowly took up residence in the African nations. Achebe explains that the "Igbo insist that any presence which is ignored, denigrated, denied acknowledgment and celebration, can become a focus for anxiety and disruption" (*Education* 110). It is this belief that governs the Igbo's response to the British presence, even as elders of the longstanding community begin to leave the shelter of the village and cross into the

forbidden realm of the white man. After the establishment of the church, one prominent Igbo tribesman named Ogbuefi Ugonna cuts ties with his village and casts away his two titles, turning instead to the Christians and becoming a member of the established church. This switch evokes two significant changes in Igboland. It encourages the missionaries in their goal, for

> The white missionary was very proud of him and he was one of the first men in Umuofia to receive the sacrament of Holy Communion, or Holy Feast as it was called in Ibo. Ogbuefi Ugonna had thought of the Feast in terms of eating and drinking, only more holy than the village variety. (99)

The missionaries achieve something significant here, for not only is their newest convert a man and a member of the community, but he is a man who has earned honor and titles within Umuofia and has given them up for the sake of the church. But this conversion also shows that the Umuofians have become divided. They were once a village that pulled its source of strength from the pot of shared beliefs. Umuofians once prided themselves on being united, on maintaining the same rituals, the same beliefs, the same gods, and the same way of life for their whole lives. Now, however, the winds of change have swept in and shaken what was once a united front. Because they respect life, hard work, and new potential, the Igbo rest confident that the white men will prove their worth or be destroyed, but that either way the fate will be decided and Africa will, essentially, have its own way. But the missionaries do not die, and the converts begin to grow. Soon the acceptance of the white man's influence causes a disruption in the typical Igbo ideology. Men and women begin to question their status, and some begin to see a benefit to changing over to a new regime.

If Umuofia has one constant reaction towards the presence of the white man in its society it is that Umuofia attempts to adapt to change rather than refute it. Obiechina reminds the reader

that Umuofia "is a society that appreciates personal success and recognizes the individuality of its members" (41). This is both a good and bad trait. For Okonkwo, the society's openness to personal achievement allows him to move beyond his father's shameful reputation. Okonkwo can build a name for himself because the Umuofian society allows him to be an individual, to stand apart from his father's shadow. However, this same openness and respect transfers over, in a way, to the appearance of white man. Achebe claims that the openness of the Igbos can oftentimes work to their detriment. He says that "[w]hen the Igbo encounter human conflict, their first impulse is not to determine who is right but quickly to restore harmony" (6). The desire for harmony is what ultimately brings Umuofia to its colonized state.

The Igbos expect the white man to come into their village and to build their church on evil ground, and to eventually be washed away by the gods and by Africa. When the white man's stubbornness keeps him from abandoning his colonial venture, Umuofia by habit remains aloof, waiting to see if the white man can make a solid reputation for himself. Umuofia adapts to the British presence in Igboland, remaining divided on the effectiveness and influence of the governments and schools. The situation never gets resolved within the novel, for the book ends with Umuofia in crisis, attempting to decide what to do about the white man's treason (against Okonkwo and the leaders of the tribe), but Okonkwo kills himself because he can only see one option before the village: the choice to submit to the European influence and become subjects of the British crown. The novel ends here, with Okonkwo's tragic suicide, but the implications allow the reader to see that cultural apathy and linguistic atrophy help to bring the once proud village to its knees.

The Character of Nwoye

There are two characters in *Things Fall Apart* who deal in very different ways with the themes of strength and dignity: Nwoye and Okonkwo. Nwoye is Okonkwo's firstborn son. He is first introduced in Chapter Two as a "sad-faced youth" (10). His father sees Nwoye as a lazy boy, more effeminate in nature than a boy should be. Okonkwo attempts to teach Nwoye (his firstborn son) how to grow yams and act as a man should, but Nwoye struggles to follow in his father's footsteps. Nwoye's life experiences a shift when Ikemefuna is brought to Okonkwo's compound. Ikemefuna is two years older than Nwoye, and the two quickly form a lasting friendship. The time Nwoye spends with Ikemefuna in Umuofia is one that "Nwoye remembered [. . .] very vividly till the end of his life" (22). Nwoye challenges Okonkwo's traditional mold of a son. He lacks the masculine behavior that Okonkwo values, and Okonkwo struggles to teach him how to be what he considers a proud, stoic, and unemotional man. Nwoye is the character within *Things Fall Apart* who finds strength and dignity, not in the work of his hands or the strength of arm, but in the relationships he forms with those he loves. His relationship with Ikemefuna is sadly cut short at the hand of his father. Ikemefuna is sacrificed to one of the Igbo gods, and Okonkwo is the one to kill his adopted son. Before the death of Ikemefuna Nwoye "knew that it was right to be masculine and to be violent, but somehow he still preferred the stories that his mother used to tell" (33). Nwoye and Ikemefuna would listen together, first to Nwoye's mother and later to Okonkwo's tales of war and violence. The two brothers shared their own stories when they were alone, relishing in a close friendship that no other characters in the novel are able to share. With Ikemefuna's tragic death, Nwoye is thrown into a state of confusion and despair: "something had given way inside him. It descended on him again, this feeling, when his father walked in, that night after killing Ikemefuna" (38). The death of his brother and the despair that he experiences open Nwoye up to European influence.

European influence has a powerful effect on Nwoye. While Umuofia remains undecided concerning the foreign intruders, Nwoye risks the status quo and comes to his own conclusion about the white men. Nwoye is one of the characters who sees the coming of the white man as a benefit to his society. The reader will remember that Nwoye is a young man who finds value and self-worth in interpersonal relationships. However, growing up under Okonkwo's strict hand does not offer Nwoye the relationship he craves. Nwoye first hears the white missionary when he and his father are in Mbanta. They stand and hear the missionary speak through the Igbo interpreters about the love of God and of the Holy Spirit. Okonkwo and Nwoye, in predictable opposition, react in two very different ways. Okonkwo is "fully convinced that the man was mad. He shrugged his shoulders and went away to tap his afternoon palm-wine" (85). But Nwoye finds himself captivated with the ideology of the white man. Achebe describes Nwoye's response to the Christian ideology with poignant clarity:

> It was the poetry of the new religion, something felt in the marrow. The hymn about brothers who sat in darkness and fear seemed to answer a vague and persistent question that haunted his young soul – the question of the twins crying in the bush and the question of Ikemefuna who was killed. He felt a relief within as the hymns poured into his parched soul. (85)

For Nwoye, the new religion introduces him to a filial side of life that he has never known. Nwoye has always craved the kindness of a father and the gentleness of a mother, but he never found himself satisfied with the relationship he had with Okonkwo. This new religion offers something new to Nwoye; it offers a community with a fresh start, and it does not ask him to be more manly or strong. It accepts him as he is, which is something his father could never do.

Nwoye's movement towards the white man's religion begins with quiet interest, but it quickly begins to grow within him. The young man begins to sneak out of his father's house, determined to hear more about the European God. When the missionaries gather in the public square or preach in the open marketplace, Nwoye finds himself standing nearby and listening to the words. He listens outside the thatch hut that serves as the Christian church as they sing praises and worship together. Eventually, he moves into the inner circle and he begins to sit under the tutelage of the British teacher, Mr. Kiaga, and other missionaries in Mbanta.

Trouble soon catches up to him, however, when Okonkwo learns of what Nwoye has been doing. After finding out about Nwoye's visits to the missionaries, Okonkwo explodes in anger and beats his firstborn with a stick. Nwoye takes the beating without a word, then turns his back on his father and leaves his family and culture behind. He walks to the church and informs Mr. Kiaga that he wants to go to the white man's school, for "he was happy to leave his father. He would return later to his mother and his brothers and sisters and convert them to the new faith" (88). It is at this moment that Nwoye's transition is complete. He leaves his father's compound, the place a young man was to stay until married, and moves into the white man's compound, a culturally unfamiliar place. Nwoye's abandonment of his father marks a definitive point in Nigerian culture. For Nwoye to leave his father's house and accept the teaching of the white man is to trade abuse for love. The reader sympathizes with Nwoye, realizing that the white man offers to Nwoye something that Okonkwo's stubbornness never can. Nwoye craves relationships and a sense of belonging. For this son of Umuofia, the white man can offer those two desires.

Achebe uses Nwoye as archetypal figure for those Africans who decidedly embraced European culture and ideology. In Diana Akers Rhoads' article, she examines the movement of

Igbos towards European culture. Rhoads implies that the first converts to Christianity are those who have been victimized by the Igbo society:

> Those who initially convert to Christianity are members of the clan who have not been fully incorporated into clan life. The first woman convert in Mbanta has had four sets of twins who have been thrown away. Once the *osu*, the outcasts, see that the church accepts twins and other matters seen by the class as abominations, they join the new church. (69)

Nwoye, like the mother of the slaughtered twins, finds peace in the Christian ideology. The death of Ikemefuna weighs heavily on Nwoye's mind, for he cannot understand why his adopted brother would be killed for sake of the Igbo deities. A lifetime of discrimination from his father makes Nwoye feel like an *osu* and pushes Nwoye towards the white man. While Okonkwo wants Nwoye "to grow into a tough young man capable of ruling his father's household" (32), Nwoye finds worth and self-confidence in interpersonal relationships, the same relationships that Ikemefuna once filled, and the role that the white man now provide for his aching soul.

After leaving his father and converting to Christianity, Nwoye takes the name of Isaac as a sign of his Christian faith and the turning from his Igbo religion. Literary critic Austin J. Shelton argues that this is a Biblical allusion to the Isaac of the Bible. Nwoye sees his father as having failed in his role of fatherhood, having totally and irrevocably sacrificed his sons and the love of family for pride and the appearance of strength. The symbolism is striking, especially if one sees Okonkwo as the hero of the novel, for Achebe risks displeasing his African audience by sympathizing with Nwoye's betrayal of Igbo society and condemning Okonkwo for a misplaced strength and dignity.

Nwoye is Umuofia's antithesis. Africa/Umuofia has two choices: to adapt as best as possible to the European existence in Africa, or to abandon cultural ties, turning from the African tradition and converting to the European ideology. Nwoye chooses the latter, abandoning all aspects of Igbo traditions: he turns to British education, the Christian monotheistic faith, and even submits to his rechristening name, Isaac (again, a parallel image to Achebe's own father). Achebe's tone remains objective when telling of Nwoye's transition, but the critical reader cannot help but conclude that the author is writing a sad farewell to a potential Igbo character. Achebe's tone is sympathetic for Nwoye, especially when describing the yearning that Nwoye has for acceptance and love, but after bowing to complete European control, Achebe denies Nwoye a conclusive end; he is sent off to his British career without his country's acceptance or blessing. Any voice that Nwoye had before his conversion is silenced once he turns from Africa and submits to the European influence.

Okonkwo's Role within the Novel

The reader must now understand a fundamental distinction between Nwoye and his father, Okonkwo. Okonkwo differs in every way possible from his firstborn son. He is a proud man, proud of what he has accomplished in life and proud of who he is as an Igbo authority figure. At the beginning of the story, Okonkwo is well established in the village and at home. He has multiple wives and children, and a favorite daughter whom he loves as much as he loves himself. He has earned the respect of the villagers through his strength in the arena and with his spear. Because the novel opens with the wrestling match between Okonkwo and Amalinze, the reader immediately begins to see Okonkwo as a central character within the play. The match for Okonkwo is more than a test of physical endurance. His life is built on strength and dignity. He

exerts the same determination and will towards a wrestling match as he does the building of his home and the retaining of authority within Umuofia.

Things Fall Apart establishes a tension with Okonkwo early in the novel. The opening chapter introduces the reader to the fight between Okonkwo and Amalinze, taking the reader into the fight along with all the Umuofians and Okonkwo. The reader essentially becomes a member of Okonkwo's village, waiting expectantly to see the outcome of the fight, and of the story. Yet for all of Okonkwo's strength and willpower, there is a weakness within him, for he is driven by a need to rebel against his father's tainted legacy. Okonkwo is ashamed of Unoka because Unoka lacked both titles and the respect of the town. Spurred by shame, Okonkwo works daily to grow his yams and retain a place of authority within Umuofia. The narrator says of Okonkwo that:

> in spite of these disadvantages, he had begun even in his father's lifetime to lay the foundations of a prosperous future. It was slow and painful. But he threw himself into it like one possessed. And indeed he was possessed by the fear of his father's contemptible life and shameful death. (13)

In his need to defy the weaknesses of his father, Okonkwo disassociates himself with anything and everything that may challenge his view of strength and dignity, including his own emotions. Okonkwo fears revealing a weakness that may threaten his hard-earned position in life. Achebe writes: "Okonkwo never showed any emotion openly, unless it be the emotion of anger. To show affection was a sign of weakness; the only thing worth demonstrating was strength" (18). This obsession drives Okonkwo into a corner, and as the novel progresses the reader finds his tenuous hold on strength and dignity begin to slip.

The foreshadowing of this fall can be seen in one small example of Okonkwo's actions towards another Igbo member. In Chapter Four of the novel an old man expresses concern over

the harsh way in which Okonkwo deals with men that he sees as unsuccessful, or who are not living up to their potential. The old man recalls the following events:

> Only a week ago a man had contradicted him [Okonkwo] at a kindred meeting which they held to discuss the next ancestral feast. Without looking at the man Okonkwo had said: "This meeting is for men." The man who had contradicted him had no titles. That was why he [Okonkwo] had called him a woman. Okonkwo knew how to kill a man's spirit. Everybody at the kindred meeting took sides with Osugo when Okonkwo called him a woman. (17)

Okonkwo has no reason to react in this manner towards Osugo. The meeting is being held in order to discuss an upcoming feast; it is not on matters of war, business, or trade, or any other weighty subject. Yet Okonkwo chooses to crush Osugo publicly in order to portray his dislike of the man whom he deems unworthy of name or title. Okonkwo's character leaves much to be desired.

Another way that Okonkwo distances himself from his emotions is by ruling his wives and his children with a heavy hand. During the first few chapters of the novel, the village of Umuofia receives a young boy into their midst. Ikemefuna is sent to live with Okonkwo and becomes like a son to him. Although the narrator tells the reader that Okonkwo feels affection for Ikemefuna (18), his proud nature is challenged when the gods of Umuofia demand that Okonkwo sacrifice his adopted son to appease the gods. Never one to back down from a challenge, Okonkwo murders Ikemefuna, ineradicably silencing the love he had for the boy and driving a dangerous wedge between himself and Nwoye. The narrator defends Okonkwo's brusque exterior with a powerful description of Okonkwo's fear:

> Perhaps down in his heart Okonkwo was not a cruel man. But his whole life was dominated by fear, the fear of failure and of weakness. It was deeper and more intimate than the fear of evil and capricious gods and of magic, the fear of the forest, and of the forces of nature, malevolent, red in tooth and claw. Okonkwo's fear was greater than these. It was not external but lay deep within himself. It was the fear of himself, lest he should be found to resemble his father. (10)

Okonkwo serves the purpose of being a complex archetypal figure within the novel. If *Things Fall Apart* is a novel about Nigeria and the reactions over converging cultures, then Okonkwo is the man, every man, who is caught in the maelstrom of cultural dissonance and has to choose which path he will follow out of the proverbial storm. Okonkwo is the realistic Igbo character, the African literary figure through which Igbos, and many Africans, could relate and sympathize, for they as a nation were faced with a similar destruction of pride, loss of homeland, and death of culture.

For Okonkwo, Nwoye's leaving is an unforgivable act of cowardice and defiance. After his son leaves the compound, Okonkwo considers the differences between Nwoye and himself:

> How then could he have begotten a son like Nwoye, degenerate and effeminate? Perhaps he was not his son. No! he could not be . . . [b]ut Nwoye resembled his grandfather, Unoka, who was Okonkwo's father. He pushed the thought out of his mind. He, Okonkwo, was called a flaming fire. How could he have begotten a woman for a son? [. . .] And immediately Okonkwo's eyes were opened and he saw the whole matter clearly. Living fire begets cold, impotent ash. (88-9)

The association that Okonkwo makes between Nwoye and Unoka reveals the amount of shame and pain he feels over the loss of his son. Okonkwo wanted Nwoye to grow up a certain way,

and Okonkwo feels threatened and vulnerable when his plans begin to fail him. Before Nwoye's betrayal, Okonkwo had regarded the appearance of the white man as an insignificant annoyance, at most an imposition on his normal routine and way of life. He had chosen to ignore the white men as his village members had done. Before Nwoye's betrayal, the white men had not crossed Okonkwo or slighted his honor. Now, with Nwoye's leaving, Okonkwo's rage is ignited. He is determined to re-establish his honor and his sense of self-worth, and the best way for him to do this is to return to his homeland of Umuofia and present himself once more as an authoritative figure before his kinsmen. The narrator says of Okonkwo's zeal that he "was determined that his return should be marked by his people. He would return with a flourish, and regain the seven wasted years" (97). Okonkwo approaches his magnificent return with the same tenacity and perseverance in which he first became an established Umuofian villager, when he had to prove himself against the unfortunate reputation of his father. Now, Okonkwo is determined to once again establish his name within the village marketplace.

The Umuofia that Okonkwo and his family return to is not the same one that they left. He returns home to find a church where there was none, a new government being advocated by a District Commissioner and court messengers, and Africans who follow the white man's ideology and who view those not loyal to the British as uncivilized and lesser beings. Several once respected men from Okonkwo's village are in prison for slighting the British loyalists, and the Umuofians who are still free are teetering at the edge of apathy. Okonkwo is dismayed by these discoveries, and for the first time he voices a complaint to his friend about the state of affairs in Umuofia: "But I cannot understand these things you tell me. What is it that has happened to our people? Why have they lost the power to fight?" (99). Okonkwo cannot understand why his culture, once run by honor and respect, has allowed the white men to encroach upon its

established system. On the heels of Nwoye's abandonment, Umuofia's apathy causes anger to build in Okonkwo that has no outlet or respite.

Patrick C. Nnoromele, an Igbo member and literary critic, writes about Okonkwo's suffering from a fellow Igbo's perspective. Nnoromele argues that it is not Okonkwo's weakness that causes him to eventually rebel against the Umuofian society, but rather the choice Igbo speakers *should* have made. He writes that

> the Igbo clan (of which I am a member) is a group of African people with a complex, vigorous, and self-sufficient way of life . . . Okonkwo refused to endorse the [British] appeal. He recognized that accepting the invitation is done at the expense of the things that comprised his identity and defined his values. (147)

Nnoromele claims that it is a sign of strength, not of weakness, that Okonkwo refuses the British influence and remains separated from the failure of his people. This argument assumes that the refusal to conform (i.e. the acts that lead to Okonkwo's suicide) led Okonkwo to make the ultimate decision, the decision to give his life to remain separate. However, Nnoromele does not take into account the consistent manner of deliberate separation that Okonkwo has already created throughout the course of the novel. For example, Okonkwo beats his wife in the sacred week of peace (19), he kills Ikemefuna, who was like a son to him (38), and he sheds the blood of an innocent teenage boy (74), which ultimately sends him into exile in Mbanta for seven years, forbidden to return to his homeland in payment for his sin. All four of these traumatic events are also causes for separation between Okonkwo and his tribe. Thus, the eventual downfall of Okonkwo has been looming ever since Ikemefuna entered Igboland, for Ikemefuna was the very first wind of change that blew across Okonkwo's path and eventually brought him to his death.

Umuofia acts as the proverbial straw that breaks Okonkwo's back. The main character has endured exile, forfeited his titles, killed his adopted son, lost Nwoye, and faced humiliation at the hands of the British. Okonkwo cannot bear it when Umuofia fails to fight against the European invaders. The climax of *Things Fall Apart* builds quickly after Okonkwo returns to Umuofia. He begins to grumble against the changes wrought within Umuofia, and several members of the Igbo tribe find themselves discussing the future of Umuofia. Before anything can be done, the Reverend James Smith enters Umuofia. Smith comes in as a replacement for Mr. Brown. Whereas Brown was kind and spoke of God's love for the Igbo people, the Reverend "condemned openly Mr. Brown's policy of compromise and accommodation" (104). Smith views the Umuofian society as children to be disciplined.

Smith's stringent attitude and presence in Umuofia lights the anger of the *egwugwu*. In a startling revolt against the colonial influence, the *egwugwu* attack the Reverend's church gathering and burn the holy place of worship to the ground, an action that for the first time since his return to Umuofia brings Okonkwo insatiable happiness (108). Unfortunately, it is this riotous action that brings trouble on Umuofia and Okonkwo. The angry Reverend Smith meets with the leading District Commissioner over Umuofia, a title assigned by the British hierarchy that allows the District Commissioner to imprison Umuofian citizens and establish order in the "uncivilized" territory. In his attempt to capture the brutish confidence of the European official, Lloyd Brown's analysis states:

> The District Commissioner is an archetype of those numerous Europeans, particularly missionaries and administrators, whose instant expertise on Africa has contributed to the Westerner's profound ignorance of the continent. (27)

Brown's statement here is profound, and part of the reason why Umuofia and Okonkwo make their respective decisions about colonialism and the future of Nigeria. The Commissioner establishes himself as an authority figure. In a satirization of the stereotypical Western character, Achebe uses the Commissioner to mock the European's refusal to learn the culture, assuming only that all African natives need to be bent to the European ways.

When informed of the *egwugwu*'s riot against the established church, the Commissioner invites Okonkwo and five other prominent Umuofian leaders to a political meeting. He proceeds by locking the men up, forcing them to remain shackled without food or humane treatment, and beats them for days until the village pays for their release. During this time, the six Umuofian leaders have their heads shaved, a humiliating sign of defeat and submission. It is at this moment that Okonkwo becomes "choked with hate" (110). After being released from their prison, the six men return home to their families, never speaking a word to each other. The climactic moment has come, the moment either to repay the insult or to allow the white man's horror to continue. Okonkwo comes to a resolution: "he thought about the treatment he had received in the white man's court, and he swore vengeance. If Umuofia decided on war, all would be well. But if they chose to be cowards he would go out and avenge himself" (112-113). The citizens of Umuofia gather together to discuss the fate of the white man in Igboland. As the tribe considers what should be done, the African messengers who serve the Commissioner arrive. Enraged, Okonkwo confronts and kills the man for attempting to dissuade the Umuofians. But even as he cuts down the messenger, Okonkwo knows that he has lost his voice among his people. The white ideology has swayed too many hearts and minds, and too few Umuofians are prepared to fight for what once was. In his tragic last thoughts, the narrator reveals to the reader Okonkwo's moment of brokenness:

> Okonkwo stood looking at the dead man. He knew that Umuofia would not go to war. He knew because they had let the other messengers escape. They had broken into tumult instead of action. He discerned fright in that tumult. He heard voices asking: "Why did he do it?" He wiped his matchet on the sand and went away. (116)

The inaction of his people breaks the proud hero. Okonkwo realizes that the winds of change have blown through his village and have taken away any possibility of returning what once was. The final chapter of *Things Fall Apart* forces the reader to watch Okonkwo's breaking point. After being denied the passionate fight that he so desires, Okonkwo lays down his weapon and returns to his compound. Broken, he hangs himself from a tree behind the land that he has just rebuilt. The hero of the story can neither embrace the totality of European culture, nor sit idly by while the world changes around him. His only other choice is to kill himself, effectively ending his long struggle.

Achebe's Context and The Novel's Hidden Irony

It is clear with a close reading of *Things Fall Apart* that Achebe chooses to write a novel in response to his African context and its rich oral and literary history. Many previous texts establish Africa and the civilization of its people as the "white man's burden." In his unique objectivity and clever plot construction, Achebe carefully constructs a communal and political society in *Things Fall Apart* that, while still retaining certain pan-African and Igbo tribal qualities, is structured and organized and, dare he say it, even civilized. Achebe's clever writing style and honest tone counters the mythical ideas surrounding the European-inspired image of Africa. To show the effects of colonialism on the Igbo society, Achebe develops a bond with the reader, a bond that encourages a sympathetic and respectful opinion of Igboland and of Umuofia.

The latter half of the novel wreaks havoc on that bond, which allows the reader to take part in the loss of Umuofia's peace. Achebe creation reveals both conscious and subconscious attitudes that the author establishes in his text.

Povey's claim that *Things Fall Apart* "describes the effect of British missionaries and administrators on a typical village tribal society; the dislocation that change, religious and educational, brings to historic certainties" (254) reveals two key concepts about Achebe's literary masterpiece and the direct role it played on his personal language stereotypes. The first key concept that Povey so adequately describes is the word 'typical.' Achebe purposefully responds to Conrad and other writers with an image of Africa that is more detailed and real and humane than any European authors could have previously dreamed. Povey is right to assume that Achebe's work reveals a typical village tribal society, for that is precisely what Achebe wants to introduce to his world of naïve readers.

The second key concept captured by Povey is that all three characters described above, that is, Umuofia, Nwoye, and Okonkwo, experience elements of change and dislocation that can be clearly traced within the novel, and the three react differently to these changes based on their individual sources of strength and dignity. In the span of the novel Achebe manages to capture all of the archetypal African responses to colonialism. Umuofia adapts to the white man's way, Nwoye embraces it, and Okonkwo rejects it. The three reactions show a range of acceptance, and all of the individual choices bring certain consequences to the Nigerian society. When Umuofia remains apathetic to imperialism, it ends up being overcome by white ambition. Although Achebe does not write Umuofia as a weak society, it does end up submitting to outside influences, allowing (at least for the time in the novel) the Europeans to affect the course of the country's future.

The purpose of this chapter thus far has been to familiarize the reader with the primary characters within the story and to reveal how Achebe uses these characters to express his overt and subconscious language attitudes. The overt language attitude has been seen in Achebe's response to the European challenge. For the subconscious language attitude, a synthesis of the literary tools that Achebe uses in this chapter reveals four subconscious influences that affect Achebe's linguistic stereotypes towards the English and Igbo cultures. The four influencers are mental, social, spiritual, and physical.

In *Things Fall Apart,* Umuofia is representative of Africa. Achebe writes the novel in the tumultuous time of postcolonial Africa. Western literature at this time has not been friendly towards the African nations. European arrogance and unfamiliar African mythologies and religions create stereotypical ideas about the Sub-Saharan cultures and lifestyles. Joseph Conrad's revolutionary novel in 1902 specifically aids in the Western mindset about Africa. Conrad's aim, although perhaps not primarily meant to degrade Africa, nevertheless paints a picture of African citizens and cultures in a light that Achebe cannot accept[6]. In a conscious effort to counter the influence of novels like *Heart of Darkness,* Achebe decides to write *Things Fall Apart* as an attempt to show both sides of the culture continuum. On one hand, Achebe shows the advancement of European culture and government. On the other hand, he shows the communal benefits of the Igbo culture. Umuofia in the novel reacts as the historical Africa reacted to colonialism. It is a unique argument wrapped carefully in deliberate objectivity. The mental processes it takes to recount the story of a culture, and with so much care and deliberateness, is what still makes *Things Fall Apart* great to this day.

[6] For a full analysis of the representations of Africa in Conrad and Achebe, see Clement Abiaziem Okafor's article on the differences between the two authors' depictions of Africa and its people.

In Achebe's story, Umuofia is overwhelmed by a force it does not anticipate. By the time the Europeans enter the novel, Achebe has established a bond between the reader and the village people. The reader respects Umuofia for its community and heritage, but Umuofia is (to a fault) open to the idea of a new culture. Umuofia's value of personal achievement and hard work eventually brings the downfall of the town. Because the first white men do not attack the citizens, but rather work hard to establish themselves in the community, Umuofia sees no reason to expel them from the village grounds. In this way, it is possible to see how Africa and Umuofia allowed their cultures to be victimized, however unknowingly, by the outside influencers. There is no shame for Umuofia at the end of the novel. Achebe neither applauds nor condemns their lack of resistance against the Commissioner and his followers. In a subconscious way that mirrors the action of the story Achebe allows his reader to come to the conclusion that change is inevitable. The forces of European colonialism were not to be stopped, and to fight it would have destroyed Umuofia. Achebe remains realistic, but not defeated.

Nwoye's betrayal in the novel is the same level of betrayal that Achebe is condemned with in his lifetime. African literary theorists who vie for the purity of African literature for African languages defy Achebe as a European traitor, writing his stories with his back turned to his native homeland. Yet this thesis argues for a reevaluation of that criticism. Achebe does not in fact deny his beliefs, his country, or his heritage. He rather aligns himself in a tragically ironic way with the hero of *Things Fall Apart*. Achebe writes his own struggle with colonialism into the life and death of Okonkwo.

It is interesting to note that Achebe's father was in many ways very similar to Nwoye. His father, Isaiah Achebe, was orphaned early in life and spent most of his childhood with his uncle, Udoh. Udoh was a man of the land; he prided himself on tradition and leadership. Chinua

writes in his essay, “My Dad and Me,” that the differences between Isaiah and Udoh were seen early through the eyes of Chinua, a questioning child who was placed in the middle of two clashing religious cultures. Chinua writes: “Udoh stood fast in what he knew, but he left room also for his nephew to seek other answers. The answer my father found in the Christian faith solved many problems, but by no means all” (*Education* 37). It is interesting that Isaiah found in the Christian culture a sense of meaning. After becoming a Christian at the turn of the 19th century, Isaiah dedicated the next four decades of his life to British education, missionary training, and evangelism. But while Isaiah and Nwoye both accept the Christian teaching and devote their lives to the proclamation of the Christian faith, their voices remain only a quiet murmur in the life of Achebe and in his novel. Thoughts of his father certainly entered Achebe’s mind when writing his novel. His father’s unequivocal acceptance of the European language and culture hold no place in Achebe’s personal beliefs, but the beliefs that Achebe’s father held concerning English and the British culture had a significant impact on Achebe’s literary voice.

Achebe ultimately faces the same choice as Okonkwo, and just as Okonkwo’s physical decisions had repercussions, so do Achebe’s. Achebe can embrace the world of post colonialism, become a model for European culture, and write for the future of African literature. Or he can sit on the sidelines, never applying himself as an author or African intellectual, content to let the change happen around him and adapt as need be. In a bold move, and in a discerning moment of cultural awareness, Achebe makes his own drastic decision. He does not give up, as Okonkwo does. He does not lay aside his struggle and put on the blind lens of ignorance. Although he does not have all of the answers, he creates literature as a vehicle to issue challenges on social reforms and to inspire his people towards unification. He chooses life, a life of writing literature that recounts the African experiences, both good and bad, in the language of English.

Chinua Achebe is proactive; he makes the hard choice that Okonkwo cannot. Achebe chooses to put aside his first language and write in a language that will allow his story to teach universal truth to a needy audience. Achebe's choice to write in the English language has brought him harsh criticism. He has chosen, in essence, to sacrifice his African reputation for the chance to write in English. This choice captures his subconscious language attitude towards English, for his choice proves the weight that he places on the language. But his language attitude does not end with the decision to write in English, and it is certainly not limited by the use of literary characters and plotlines. Chapter three shows a deeper layer of complexity to Achebe's linguistic stereotype, one that cannot be seen by a literary analysis alone.

Chapter 3

In Defense of Igbo: Achebe's Language Attitude as Displayed within the Linguistic Structure of *Things Fall Apart*

Achebe's creation of *Things Fall Apart* shows a desire to capture the true life of the African people, to validate the African man as an intelligent human being. His literary endeavor uses characters and themes within the story to achieve this end. But another challenge faces Achebe, one that demands a further development of his writing skills. Certain African writers feel that to use English extensively in African literature is to cave in to hegemonic pressures. Ngugi Wa Thiong'o is one such author. Wa Thiong'o is disappointed with the African acceptance of English. He writes that "[i]t is the final triumph of a system of domination when the dominated start singing its virtues" (20). English for Wa Thiong'o is that triumphing force that invaded and plundered his homeland of the best riches of African literature, both oral and written. He believes that language is the driving force, the spirit behind a people, and the "carrier of culture" (13). Thus, when Wa Thiong'o sees Achebe write his novel in English, he mourns the loss of culture and the African identity that goes with it. *Things Fall Apart* proves that Wa Thiong'o's concerns are unfounded, and that it is possible for an author to write in English for practical purposes while still retaining the belief that Igbo is the true carrier of his Nigerian culture.

Achebe is the one who establishes this hypothesis, although he does so without realizing the effects his language use would have on his hypothesis. In his book *Home and Exile*, Achebe recounts a parable about a lion that he heard from a friend. Achebe writes his interpretation of the parable like this: "Until the lions produce their own historians, the story of the hunt will glorify only the hunter" (73). The power of this statement is what truly drives Achebe's

conscious and subconscious language attitude. This idea is central to the understanding of Achebe's life and work. Achebe is the historian. Igboland – including all of its citizens – is the lion, and the lion is limited in its ability to speak for itself. The lion can only display an awesome strength and power, but it cannot truly express its deepest desires, its hurts and cares. Achebe is a self-elected historian, and he takes his job seriously enough to write entire works of literature in his L2, or his second language. This chapter explains the conscious and subconscious ways in which Achebe responds to the linguistic biases within his culture, and how he does so by establishing crucial linguistic tools within the novel.

Before assessing the state of the African linguistic situation and Achebe's linguistic stereotype, the definition and understanding of language must be established. Language is the "learned responses to stimuli" (Fromkin, Rodman, and Hyams 8), the oral, written, or signed system that people acquire, with time, and use to create and interpret meaningful communication. The possible construction of meaningful sentences in a fully developed language is endless. Linguistics, as the study of language, and the analysis of linguistics situations "is concerned primarily with an ideal speaker-listener, in a completely homogeneous speech-community, who knows its language perfectly and is unaffected by such grammatically irrelevant conditions as memory limitations, distractions, shifts of attention and interest, and errors" (Chomsky 3). Achebe, as a fluent speaker of both African an English languages, is an ideal candidate for this linguistic study. He is linguistically competent (or knowledgeable) and he can use both African and English languages in both spoken and written mediums.

The Linguistic Situation in Africa

The linguistic situation in Africa and in African literature is certainly a complex one. According to most literary critics, African literature can include a writer of African *or* non-

African origin; the only requirement is that the literature be either about Africa – and thus can be written by any outsider – or it can be written by an African, but in any language the writer chooses[7]. This obscurity in defining who a writer of African literature is has encouraged writers to produce stories which reflect the little (if any) knowledge that the writers have about the land, its nations, and its people groups. On the other hand, the African purists vie for continued nativization of the African tongues and African literature strictly for African speakers and readers. African purists like Wa Thiong'o are angered by the effects of English on African literature, and Wa Thiong'o argues that authors who choose to write in English are forsaking their first language for the gross elitist language that is English. Men like Wa Thiong'o challenge other African authors to return to the idyllic beliefs of Pan-African nativism and ethnocentrism.

Achebe is an author who attacks both Conrad's view of Africa and the African purists' expectations with a more welcoming philosophy, a philosophy which opens the door to English and vows to use it as a tool for expressing the African culture. Achebe sees himself as an African writer who uses the English language for the enhancement of African art. This use of English as a means to an end allows Achebe to reach a broader audience. But more than that, Achebe's positive attitude towards English challenges him to expand his methods of expression, his purposeful use of literary devices, and his multi-layered themes that can be subtly buried beneath the pages of his text. Achebe explains his use of English as a type of linguistic advancement. He says, "I feel that the English language will be able to carry the weight of my African experience. But it will have to be a new English, still in full communion with its ancestral home but altered to suit its new African surroundings" ("The African Writer and the English Language" 30). Achebe laments when writers like Tanganyika or Wa Thiong'o choose to write only in Swahili

[7] See Tucker's *Africa in Modern Literature* to see his classification of African literature and its writers.

or Yoruba, or only for a purely African audience because, for Achebe and other hopeful authors, English can be a tool of preservation for the African society.

Of course, many African novelists and writers condemned Achebe for his insistence that English should be used in the writing of African literature. To these critics Achebe says quite succinctly: “I have indicated somewhat off-handedly that the national literature of Nigeria and of many other countries of Africa is, or will be, written in English. This may sound like a controversial statement, but it isn’t. All I have done has been to look at the reality of present-day Africa” (“English and the African Writer” 18). Achebe argues that those African purists who would see African literature written only by Africans and for Africans are fighting a losing battle against the linguistic reality in Africa, namely that the English language is a hegemonic force within the nation and cannot (perhaps should not) be stopped.

This chapter explores the choices Achebe makes when writing his novel, his use of language within the novel, and ultimately the linguistic factors that he creates and contributes to as he writes his African story in the English language. Achebe recognized that English was a powerful presence in his Nigerian society. He could see the changes it was causing in Africa, and he decided to use it in his novel as a practical means of expression. The previous chapter in this thesis shows the reader Achebe’s deliberate construction of characters, plot, and themes to parallel the African situation and the convergence of cultures in Africa. Achebe’s plot construction is the extrinsic structure by which he displays the various responses to English and European influence in Africa. What follows in this chapter is an analysis of the intrinsic structure, the ways in which Achebe captures the African situation through language.

Achebe realized in the late 1950s that to produce a novel in Africa, by an African, in the English language would be risky. But despite this, Achebe writes *Things Fall Apart* with

authorial intention, as a work of fiction that is representative of the entire African culture but that allows the Western reader to be both partaker and reveler in the African language and lifestyle. What follows is Achebe's use of language to achieve this authorial aim.

Functional Language in Things Fall Apart

1. The Role of the Narrator

Sociolinguistics devotes a large portion of time and study to the analysis of ethnographic communication in the world, but few focus on the dearth of linguistic data that can be found in ethnographic literature[8]. This section analyzes Achebe's literature and reveals how a cultural and emblematic use of language allows the reader to see *Things Fall Apart* in a more profound way. Linguist Muriel Saville-Troike extends Noam Chomsky's idea of the value of native grammar and introspection, insisting that a self-examining grammarian can view himself to be as "the member of the society as the repository of cultural knowledge" (127). Achebe is the repository of Igbo culture, and as a native speaker he is the best resource for a linguistics study. Cultural members know the language, and they know what the tools are to study that language (Chomsky 4). Chinua Achebe, as an educated man with self-reflective tendencies, wields the language with calculated deliberateness.

The narrator in *Things Fall Apart* is one of the most potent tools Achebe uses to express the African identity and reality. Achebe as an author is concerned with the proper representation of Africa and Africans. This concern arises in part from Achebe's negative interpretation of the twentieth century literature which addresses the African image. If the reader will indulge a second glance at Conrad, he will find that Achebe not only did not support Conrad's reflection of the African nation, but that Achebe considered Conrad to be "a bloody racist" (*An Image of*

[8] Coupland and Jaworski (1997) dedicate an entire section of their reader to ethnographic linguistics and the role of language in culture.

Africa 328). Conrad, says Achebe, "chose the role of purveyor of comforting myths" (*An Image of Africa* 325), feeding the European stereotypes that existed in the early twentieth century rather than writing an appropriate representation of Africa and its people. Achebe views *Heart of Darkness* as a personal challenge, and he accepts the responsibility as an African and an author to write a story that captures what he sees as an appropriate image of the county. Achebe chooses to counter Conrad's use of language and linguistic structure through the use of a narrator who relates to the reader the events of the African story. The narrator in *Things Fall Apart* is responsible for breathing life into Africa, and by doing so in an omniscient but objective way he encourages the readers of the novel to come to their own opinions about the African story.

The narrator begins the story as an insider of the Igbo community, capturing the Nigerian lifestyle with a personal, omniscient perspective. Because the narrator will serve as the chronicler of the disintegrating culture, Achebe establishes the narrator's insider status from the outset, allowing the narrator to reveal personal observations about the Igbo lives and lifestyle. For example, in Chapter One the narrator recounts Okonkwo's triumph over Amalinze the Cat, following the summary with the phrase, "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. He was tall and huge, and his bushy eyebrows and wide nose gave him a very severe look" (3). This observation captures not only the developing lifespan of twenty years – or the intrinsic element of fame that Okonkwo has developed – but also the physical changes that Okonkwo has undergone in that time, both of which are intimate details that establish the narrator as a familiar insider, and therefore a reliable spokesman for Okonkwo and his tribe.

The narrator also captures the details of Igbo food and religion that no outsider would know. When speaking of the Igbo traditions, the narrator establishes the importance of yam-eating. The narrative style used here is distinctly African:

> Yam foo-foo and vegetable soup was the chief food in the celebration. So much of it was cooked that, no matter how heavily the family ate or how many friends and relations they invited from neighboring villages, there was always a huge quantity of food left over at the end of the day. The story was always told of a wealthy man who set before his guests a mound of foo-foo so high that those who sat on one side could not see what was happening on the other, and it was not until late in the evening that one of them saw for the first time his in-law who had arrived during the course of the meal and had fallen to on the opposite side. (23)

The details about yam foo-foo allow the reader to envisage a realistic African celebration. But Achebe also uses the phrase "the story was told," which serves as a deliberate nod to African oral traditions and the importance of storytelling in Igboland.

What Achebe instills within the narrative voice in this passage is an African appreciation for words, for metaphor, and for figurative language. The African culture is not one to mince words. The tribal communities to this day still rely heavily on the spoken word, passing down oral traditions as the historicity of Africa. Achebe captures the importance of the oral tradition in this passage, for the narrator speaks as a wise sage would speak to her young pupils, instructing them of the importance of food and relationships within the community.

A discussion of the narrator's power would not be complete without crediting him for the use of gender-specific language. The feminine language enters the novel with Okonkwo's wives and his daughter Ezinma. At first glance, the narrator's voice only addresses Okonkwo's heavy-

handed treatment towards his wives, as exemplified when he beats Ojiugo for returning home late (19). But a softer voice emerges when the narrator describes Ekwefi (Okonkwo's favorite wife) or Ezinma, Ekwefi's daughter. Ezinma is taken one night into the depths of an oracle's cave. A distraught Ekwefi follows her daughter through the forest and waits, desperate to know whether her daughter will return alive and unharmed. Okonkwo, in an unusual display of sympathy, follows his wife and waits with her outside of the cave, a moment through which the narrator captures one of only a few verbal repartees between Okonkwo and his wife:

> Tears of gratitude filled her eyes. She knew her daughter was safe. "Go home and sleep," said Okonkwo. "I shall wait here."
>
> "I shall wait too. It is almost dawn. The first cock has crowed."
>
> As they stood there together, Ekwefi's mind went back to the days when they were young. She had married Anene because Okonkwo was too poor then to marry. Two years after her marriage to Anene she could bear it no longer and she ran away to Okonkwo. (65)

The narrator's voice captures an intimate display of vulnerability here, and with it a display of African humanity that twentieth century Europeans had not yet seen. Not only does this passage reveal how deeply Ekwefi trusts her husband, but it reveals a personal history between the two, as well as a very *human*, passionate response to loneliness and fear. Ekwefi had trusted Okonkwo two years earlier with her life and her sexuality. She proves now that she trusts him again in her current situation, with the life of her daughter. The dialogue between the two captures a soft side of Okonkwo that is not displayed anywhere else in the novel. Only with Ekwefi does Okonkwo speak quietly and without an attempt to prove himself as a strong warrior. With his wife, Okonkwo is simply a man, a caring husband and a father who wishes to protect

his daughter. He not only pursues his wife and tries to persuade her to return home to safety, but he allows her to defy his suggestion and stay by his side, a similar act of defiance that once brought a beating to Ojiugo but now encourages respect for Ekwefi.

The intimacy that Okonkwo shows for Ezinma in this portion of the novel extends itself later, when Okonkwo and Ezinma begin to interact more at home. Not only does the narrator capture Okonkwo's concern for his daughter, but he also highlights the value that Okonkwo places on her as an African individual. Okonkwo develops a soft spot for his daughter. During his seven years of exile, the narrator states that Ezinma matures in beauty and character and begins to receive attention from the men in Mbanta. Part of Okonkwo is sad to see this, for "[h]e never stopped regretting that Ezinma was a girl. Of all his children she alone understood his every mood. A bond of sympathy had grown between them as the years had passed" (98). This vulnerability is important, because it takes a deeper look into the softer side of the main character, a side that only the narrator (and thus audience) is privy to. The narrator is able to capture the humanity of the African culture and establish the African citizens as people with a voice.

The role of the narrator and the establishment of these two voices are a stumbling block for many scholars. The postmodern world doubts the role of the author and fights against any ties to authorial intention, and, of course, not all critics are so accepting of this ethnographic narrator. A postmodern scholar would argue that Achebe is not reflected in his work, and that the establishment of these narrative devices is an aspect of accidental, or at least unintentional language use. Literary critic Carey Snyder counters this dilemma, arguing that the shifting narrator "from the most credulous believer to the skeptic or cultural outsider . . . replicates the dynamic positioning of the native anthropologist – at once part of Igbo culture and apart from it"

(168). Snyder warns the reader of *Things Fall Apart* not to equate Achebe with his language, but to allow for the acceptance of authorial intention on the grounds of an anthropological agenda. The reader must accept that Achebe is an *insider* and can write with authority on the life and culture of Igboland, but that he also, as an author, develops a skillful craftsmanship that presents the Nigerian world with objectivity and grace through his particular narrative devices.

The narrator in *Things Fall Apart* acts as a crucial element to the understanding of the novel and the African image it portrays. Without the narrator the reader would be left in one of two undesirable positions. Either Achebe would be forced to write a novel from a more personal perspective, and thus risk being too esoteric in his approach, alienating his European audience or, secondly, the novel could take on the objectified and critical perspective that Achebe so desperately wants to avoid, the criticalness of his contemporary Conrad. Achebe wishes to portray the African as a relatable and *human* entity. The narrator, with his familiar position within Igbo society and his ability to look into the thoughts and actions of the characters, provides Achebe with the tool he needs to construct a delicate writing style, a style that is artistic, familiar, objective, and understanding.

The narrative devices shown here capture Achebe's deliberate intent to establish a new African image. The language that the narrator uses is appropriately objective. It captures the events of the plot and the hidden observations of the characters, but it remains aloof, allowing the reader to establish his or her own interpretation of the characters. Hilary Dannenberg praises Achebe for his skillful use of the objective narrator, saying that:

> It is Achebe's ability to endow his narrative with a post-binary and thus a truly postcolonial complexity which lies at the heart of the groundbreaking nature of *Things Fall Apart*. Achebe's narrator is so nimble and mercurial that he subverts

> all binaries. This narratorial and ideological mercuriality is achieved through the inclusion of many layers of voice, perspective and culture in the text. (176)

Two key words in this quote are "postcolonial complexity." Achebe does not try to solve the problems in his linguistic society. He offers no solutions, he only depicts the torrid state of affairs with simplicity and realism. It is this focused and detailed description that allows European and African readers to appreciate his narrative style.

2. The Voices of Culture: The Egwugwu and the District Commissioner

The last example of the narrator's analytical work can be seen in the establishment of two binary forces within the novel: the voices of the *egwugwu* and the District Commissioner. The *egwugwu* are the masked spirits of Umuofia; the District Commissioner is the face of the European government within Umuofia and the surrounding villages. The irony that Achebe emphasizes here is important. Both characters (for the *egwugwu* act as one character or entity) are only seen in a handful of scenes in *Things Fall Apart*. The *egwugwu* first appear when the narrator is describing the African village life. The *egwugwu* are crucial to the pre-colonial order within Umuofia; they act as judges and intimidators, bringing order to village disputes and establishing a mythological chain of command. The Igbo villagers obey because the *egwugwu* are a comfortable mixture of the familiar and the unknown. They have faces that are recognizable (i.e., familiar), but they possess certain strange supernatural abilities that enable them to produce smoke, to transport themselves, and to kill or serve justice as they see fit. This delicate balance between the familiar and the unfamiliar allows the *egwugwu* to rule certain aspects of Umuofian life with respect and fear.

The *egwugwu* are harbingers of life. The narrator first describes them in chapter one as the "dancing" *egwugwu*. Communication with these spirits is "guttural" and "awesome", and the

egwugwu speak to the Umuofians in an "esoteric language" (53). However, the narrator does temper acceptance of the spirits the by pointing out that the awe-inspiring masks are in fact limited, human men. The narrator writes:

> Okonkwo's wives, and perhaps other women as well, might have noticed that the second *egwugwu* had the springy walk of Okonkwo. And they might also have noticed that Okonkwo was not among the titled men and elders who sat behind the row of *egwugwu*. But if they thought these things they kept them within themselves. The *egwugwu* with the springy walk was one of the dead fathers of the clan. (54)

The dubiousness of the narrator cannot be overlooked. Achebe purposefully wields the narrator here as a tempering weight for the African culture. He admits freely that while these *egwugwu* hold an undeniable position in the society of pre-colonial Umuofia, there is a rational and cultural caveat, one that carefully offers the reader an alternative interpretation for the mystical spirits, an interpretation that explains Okonkwo's missing presence and the *egwugwu*'s matching "springy walk". The pre-colonial tribe is listening to a group of men, an alliance of masked Igbo leaders who speak with authority but who are limited in voice and omnipotence.

The district commissioner receives a similar treatment from the narrator, but while the district commissioner utilizes the same methods as the *egwugwu*, the Igbo villagers respond to him in an entirely different way. The commissioner, like the *egwugwu*, desires to rule the Igbo people with authority and respect. The commissioner invades the African society with a posse of European bureaucrats, well-meaning Christians, and greedy African labor. What authority he gains is similarly tempered through the use of the narrator's cautioning words. The narrator reveals the commissioner to be a dangerous man, for he acts rashly and apologizes to no one.

The narrator observes two things about the commissioner: the first is that that, although he professes to be wise, the Commissioner builds a courthouse where the "District Commissioner judged in ignorance" (99). The voice that judges the Igbo members is that of an ignorant outsider, and the knowing voice of the narrator cannot credit him with unbiased wisdom, no matter how wise or familiar the commissioner attempts to be. The second thing that the narrator testifies to is a duplicitous nature in the white man. The *egwugwu* hide their physical faces, but their intentions are always clear and honorable before the Igbo people whom they serve. The district commissioner, however, is the opposite. He smiles and faces the Igbo villagers unmasked, but his actions are veiled and his motives selfish. He tricks the Umuofian leaders into coming to a meeting, during which they are taken captive and forced to endure humiliating treatment at the hands of the British and their African enforcers.

Achebe's Context: Understanding The Language Continuum

Achebe's welcome of the English language in African literature is due in part to his early relationship with English and Europeans. Chinua Achebe was born on November 15, 1930 in Eastern Nigeria. A son of African parents with a father who taught at the missionary school in the village, Achebe acquired Igbo, his mother tongue, and English, his second language, at an early age. He was baptized Albert Chinualumogu. The name is a multicultural reference to Queen Victoria's husband and to his African heritage, but Achebe later decided to shorten both allegiances and simply use the name Chinua Achebe. As a child, he attended a missionary school before leaving in 1944 for the Government College in Umuahia. He continued from there and graduated from the University College in Ibadan in 1953, just before he started working as a producer at the Nigerian Broadcasting Service in 1954. His skills and hard work in the corporate realm soon paid off and eventually helped him to gain a directing position. It was during his stay

at the Nigerian Broadcasting Service that Achebe published *Things Fall Apart*, his first novel, in 1958.

Writing *Things Fall Apart* marked a milestone in the life of Chinua Achebe. It has since catapulted this man from a humble Nigerian author to one of the most widely read African writers of the modern world and of the African (and even English) canon. Readers and intellectuals from Africa and beyond applaud Achebe for his use of literary devices, some going so far as to call *Things Fall Apart* the "inaugural moment of African literary history" (Gikandi 5). Achebe stands apart from African purists in that he sees himself as a citizen of Africa even though he chooses to write a novel in the dominating language of English.

Because Achebe knows that he will face criticism, from the doubtful Europeans as well as from the cynical African purists, he must develop the linguistic aspects of his novel in a capable manner, and he does so with grace. The narrative structure is just one method Achebe uses to display his linguistic artistry. Another linguistic tool that he uses is that of metaphoric phrasal constructions. Achebe is trying to portray an Igbo society, with its decades of Igbo culture, traditions, and stories in a second language. Not only does he construct a narrative form that captures the essence of his African ancestry, but Achebe also captures the figurative language that describes the richness of Igbo life in English. For example, Achebe writes a passage in Chapter One that envisages a gathering of men in one of the Igbo homes:

> "Having spoken plainly so far, Okoye said the next half a dozen sentences in proverbs. Among the Ibo the art of conversation is regarded very highly, and proverbs are the palm-oil with which words are eaten. Okoye was a great talker and he spoke for a long time, skirting round the subject and then hitting it finally." (6)

This passage is a remarkable display of Achebe's grasp on the English language. He begins by establishing a foundation of Igbo society, which is the reliance and dependence upon the use of proverbs. Achebe then informs the audience (many of whom would be unfamiliar European readers) that *proverbs are the palm-oil with which words are eaten*. Such a well-crafted metaphor captures the attention of African and non-African readers alike, for the precise wording creates an unforgettable picture in the mind. African critic R. N. Egudu explains the importance of proverbs and metaphors in an article entitled "Achebe and the Igbo Narrative Tradition". In this article, Egudu says of African writing that it "is, therefore, anecdotes with such other devices as striking descriptive images and names that more than any other factor make for effectiveness in storytelling in Igboland" (44). The best writers of African literature are those, like Achebe, who capture the importance of imagery and words within the African community. Achebe carefully and deliberately chooses each word in his phrasal constructions to reach this desired end.

With this description of Achebe's narrative and emblematic writing style fully defined, the analysis of Achebe's language use within *Things Fall Apart* can shift now to a deeper level, a level that few have noticed in previous studies of Achebe's work. The figurative and narrative use of language within the novel is impressive, but emphasis shifts now to the more concrete level of language that Achebe uses to enhance the potency of the story. Achebe uses specific languages to create a unique linguistic environment that no European or non-native writer of African literature can replicate.

Achebe was raised in a converging culture similar to the one he captures so powerfully within the novel. Achebe learned Igbo as his L1 (first language), but his father encouraged him to learn English as an L2 (second language), for his father was one of the teachers at the local

primary school. The country of Nigeria during Achebe's childhood experienced the same clashing languages that Achebe shows in his novel. The Nigerians maintained an eclectic language variety throughout the period of colonization, and because of this Achebe has been able to learn both Pidgin and Nigerian English Creole varieties. Areas rich in linguistic diversity naturally began to divide speech communities and place certain stereotypes upon speakers of those various communities, and because speakers of African languages are fluent in multiple languages because of the linguistic history and current language diversity, prost-colonial languages were as diverse and extensive as the pre-colonial African tongues had been. While multilingualism is oftentimes extremely profitable, in some cases the diversity of speakers leads to the fracturing of languages. This fracturing of language began early in Nigeria and has been defined as the process of Creolization.

In the cases of Igbo and English alike, there are dozens of varieties due to the increasing number of speech communities. Because of this, Igbo and many other languages in the world have begun to direct their attention towards forming a standardized usage. The Igbo dialects today are numerous and diverse, some so much so that various linguists have considered classifying them as distinct and individual languages rather than sub varieties. The earliest attempts at standardization, as documented by Margaret Green, were spearheaded under the name of Union Ibo and began as early as the middle of the nineteenth century. Unfortunately, that attempt did not succeed due to intertribal disunity (510). As the power of English spread in the 18th and 19th centuries, many Africans took notice of English as a rising global language and chose to implement it as a lingua franca. Some, because of early European settlers, became employed as interpreters, clerks, or teachers in English-speaking schools. Eventually English spread throughout parts of Africa and began to affect writing and literature. This is the moment

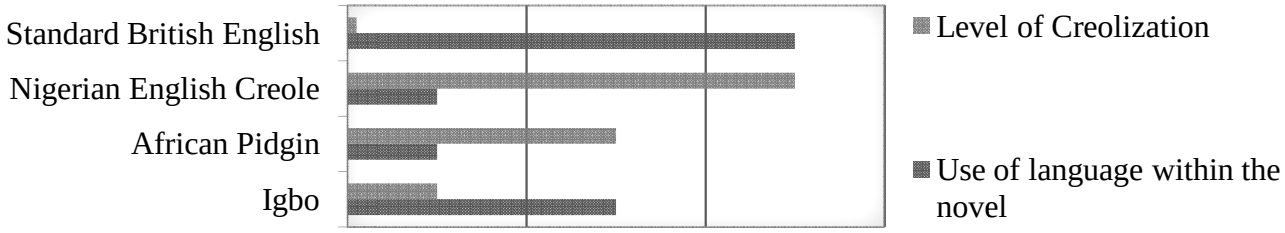
that Achebe experiences, for as a young child he is privy to the development of two crucial languages: that of Standardized British English and Nigerian English.

With the entrance of Standard British English, the parameters of languages within Igboland began to change. Europe and Igboland collided, and the cultures changed as much as the languages did. Where once two dominant languages ruled, four languages soon shared the stage. In addition to Standard British English and the language of Igbo, two middle ground tongues arose: Nigerian Pidgin English and the more dominant Nigerian English Creole[9]. Standardized British English is the style of English enforced by the Europeans and used in schools, administration. Nigerian English is an African Creole that is used throughout Nigeria as a lingua franca.

The linguistic change that has happened in Africa is due in large part to the development of Creoles. A Creole is a language that develops out of two or more converging languages. It develops much in the same way as any other language, with speakers who agree on semantic meaning and who begin using words in order to share aural and verbal communication. However, there is a modern myth that suggests Creoles are extensions of pidgin languages, that pidgins existed first, and over time the pidgin developed into a "better" or more evolved language, or Creole. Leading expert on creolization Salikoko Mufwene challenges this presupposition in his two books *Language Evolution: Contact, Competition and Change* (2008) and *The Ecology of Language Evolution* (2011). Mufwene's books not only explain the differences between a pidgin and a Creole, but they also show how the language choices made by the speakers of a language will undoubtedly and ineradicably restructure that language.

[9] Robert Blench has composed an entire Nigerian English Creole dictionary for readers to understand the syntactical construction and diverse lexicon of the speakers.

The reader will remember that languages capture the adaptability of man and prove that human communication is essentially an intricate form of expression that is in a constant state of metamorphosis. The chart below shows the Achebe's linguistic environment in postcolonial Nigeria.



This chart has been created to show the depth of creolization and language use within the novel. Standard British English is the least creolized language. It was brought into Nigeria and remained relatively unchanged by the development of pidgins and creoles. It is still used today in Nigeria, especially for business and media purposes. The pidgin shown in the chart is the pidgin language that developed in Nigeria during the initial 19th century colonization. Mufwene defines pidgin languages "as reduced linguistic systems which are used for specific communicative functions, typically in trade between speakers of different, mutually unintelligible languages" (*Ecology* 7). While Achebe only briefly mentions the pidgins and Creoles in *Things Fall Apart*, the historical development of these language types are crucial to the understanding of Achebe's linguistic context.

If at any time two different cultures find themselves sharing an environment, the need for mutual understanding will arise. Europeans wanted to understand the Igbo speakers in order to achieve better business and trade. The two languages experience an increasing desire for communication, and out of this desire a pidgin is born. The pidgin language is often a simplified version of two languages, a merging of two tongues for simple understanding and the most basic

interpersonal communication. The only aim is mutual intelligibility. There is no grammar to adhere to, and pidgins are never passed down as vernaculars or L1s. Because its purpose is so focused and deliberate, many people accuse pidgins of being simplified baby talk, or a degenerate product of two pure languages. Even if speakers of pidgins bear the language no ill will, they often tend to agree that the language is simpler than others, or, because of its mixed state, less pure than their first language or the mother tongue of the other language variant. Thus, simply put, Nigerian English pidgin speakers can communicate with members of either Igbo or Standard British English, but will tend to appreciate more the communication that comes with their first language, whether the speaker is European or Igbo.

The pidgin in the chart above is the pidgin that Achebe briefly mentions in *Things Fall Apart* when he introduces the African interpreters. These interpreters are not from Umuofia, and they are mocked for their strange "mixed" tongues. The Umuofians hated these mixed African speakers "because they were foreigners and also arrogant and high-handed. They were called *kotma*, and because of their ash-coloured shorts they earned the additional name of Ashy-Buttocks" (99). However ill-received these *kotma* were at first, they eventually were the ones responsible for the development of Nigerian English Creole. The Nigerian English Creole is a fully developed language with its own grammar system and body of second and third generation learners. One major distinction between a pidgin and a Creole is that pidgins almost always remain limited to one generation of language learners. A pidgin is used in an emergency situation for the specific use of conveying meaning between two mutually unintelligible speech communities. Because of this specific use, the pidgin is often a transient and flexible form of communication, and it is not needed once interpreters or secondary means of communication are established. The pidgin is not taught to younger generations because it is either no longer

necessary or not deemed worthy of being taught in a formal setting. Creoles are often considered by some to be expanded pidgins. The Nigerian Creole, according to Mufwene, is based on the Standard British English (*Evolution* 299). It is formed, as most Creoles are, out of a traumatic linguistic environment. In Nigeria, the consolidation of languages became an increasing issue after the start of the 20th century. The slave trade was progressing at higher rates and many Africans faced linguistic displacement. Nigerians began to interact more with the Europeans while simultaneously losing touch with the original members of their smaller ethnic group. A pressure grew out of this linguistic stage, a pressure to find a way to communicate with the masses. Many African languages did not survive colonization, not because English was overtly attempting to destroy them, but because the disintegrated speakers of smaller varieties had no familiar speakers with whom to interact; isolate speakers were forced to adopt the Standard British English (*Ecology* 154). Others created what is now known as the Nigerian Creole.

Language is a malleable entity. It can be twisted to meet a variety of needs or wants. The process of making a Creole language a reality demonstrates the flexibility of language and the power that individual speakers have in the ecology of language. The Creolization process is one that is synchronic. The process begins in a high stress linguistic environment, where speakers are forced to make important language-altering decisions in a short amount of time. According to Mufwene, the choices that led to the making of Nigerian English Creole were in many ways responsible for the death of many smaller tribal languages. Mufwene writes: “it was pressure to assimilate to, or be integrated in, slave communities (in which the Creoles and seasoned slaves set the norms of conduct) that led to the loss of African languages. The pressure then came more from within the slave community itself than from the European master” (198). For example, as Nigerian Creole speakers felt the need to assimilate to a changing language community they

began to adopt a Creole that relied heavily on English content words rather than the Igbo words. This was the first step towards permanent change in Africa.

The Creoles are complex examples of the flexible systems of language. They are complex because they develop and are influenced by intense interaction with the target language. Mufwene explains that "[r]egular interaction with a particular community is a critical factor in the potential for language to influence another" (179). The Creole is essentially a linguistic relationship between two languages. It takes the function words and grammar systems of one of the languages and infuses it with the content words of the second.

The function words of a language are the words that act as textual or grammatical glue. They hold the language together as a unified structure. Thus, in English, the function words are those grammatical units like determiners, conjunctions, etc. that do not carry intrinsic meaning, but are responsible for making the language coherent and logical. The content words are the carriers of meaning within language. Content words "have meaning in that they refer to concrete objects and abstract concepts; are marked as characteristic of particular social, ethnic, and regional dialects and of particular context; and convey information about the feelings and attitudes of speakers" (Finegan 193). They are the words that people use to convey a mental picture, like 'cow' for the 'one who swats at flies'. Most languages use nouns (in addition to adjectives, adverbs, and verbs) as significant carriers of content and semantics, and they will be the source of focus in this chapter.

Achebe learns English, Igbo, Pidgin, and Nigerian English Creole as a member of the Nigerian society, but only the two strongest languages (according to Achebe) earn a prominent place within the novel. Achebe's use of these languages creates what Salikoko Mufwene has identified as an African Creole Continuum. On one end of this continuum lurks the advancing

English language. Okonkwo, like Achebe, must cope with the mounting language tension and decide to what extent he will participate with the English language. Where Okonkwo caves in under the linguistic weight, Achebe emerges as a successful negotiator for the Igbo people. The other end of the continuum reflects the highly creolized and/or more African influenced languages. Okonkwo and the Igbo tribes are surrounded by multiple speech communities and under pressure from the two ends of the Creole continuum. Previous literary criticism has not fully identified Achebe's language attitude, and the linguistic analysis of chapter three shows that Achebe's language attitude is innately embedded within the language and discourse scheme of *Things Fall Apart*, a subconscious representation of his inner stereotypes. Achebe uses the Creole continuum in a purposeful, and oftentimes predictable, way. For example, the languages that are more creolized are often used in specific situations that are defined by social stereotypes and cultural sensitivity, whereas the Igbo is often used in semantic-dependent situations. Achebe's use of the Creole continuum is a further revelation of his cognitive biases (or stereotypes), and these stereotypes that he possesses concerning the different languages are subconsciously revealed within *Things Fall Apart*.

The Creolization Paradox and Achebe's Subconscious Language Attitude

Achebe is a Creole speaker who is writing a novel from a position intertwined with language developments and with characters that experience a conglomerate of language mixing. Achebe is a unique writer because he is a speaker of four unique speech communities. He speaks Standard British English, the pidgin and Creole varieties, and his initial Igbo language. What is important to note is that *Things Fall Apart* is written significantly in the Standard British English, with elements of the Creole and Igbo languages used extensively throughout the text.

By choosing the languages through which to express his story, Achebe commits himself to a paradoxical creolization process.

Achebe experiences a creolization process common to speakers enmeshed within these language changes. A person experiencing a creolization process goes through a predictable pattern of language change. Creole expert John H. McWhorter captures this prediction in his book *Defining Creole*. McWhorter states that: "[i]n mixed languages, more usefully designated "intertwined languages" by Bakker and Muysken (1995), inflectional morphology and grammar from one language is used with lexicon from another" (247). This means that a typical speaker who learns a Creole will take the function words of one language and infuse it with the content words of the second language. Nigerian English Creoles are examples of this linguistic process. When the Igbo speakers began developing the African Creoles, they made several important decisions, namely to retain the Igbo structure and complement that structure with the vocabulary of English. This decision is decidedly more complex than the function of pidgin languages. Mufwene (2008) defends this by writing:

> Structural similarities between expanded pidgins and creoles reflect the fact that they were developed largely by linguistic adults interacting regularly among themselves, using materials from typologically related European and/or substrate languages with diverse and complex communicative needs, and thus needing complex grammatical structures. (78)

The reader should note here the importance of Mufwene's term *linguistic adults*. He is defending the validity of Creoles in comparison to pidgins. Pidgins are useful for communication, but they lack complex grammars and deliberate language use. Creoles, thus, are not to be compared with pidgins, for Creoles are invented by logical, reasoning adults who are competent in one or more

languages and who realize the importance of developing a language with grammatical competence[10]. The Nigerian English Creole is no different, and it has served Nigerian speakers with a means of communication that incorporates the syntactical and grammatical functions of Igbo with a large amount of the English lexicon.

It is important to note that, as the years advance and the Creole becomes a first language for the rising generations, speakers will subconsciously place more weight on their vocabulary and lexicon than on the grammar system. In a way, the lexical words begin to have a dominant position, for speakers express meaning through the semantic choices and vocabulary, and thus they place a large amount of importance on the words within their lexicon. This is, for Mufwene, not a sign of concern. He says that: "[w]hile it lasted, colonization had no negative impact on the indigenous languages, unless one subscribes to a purist position that is opposed to lexical borrowings and other xenolectal structural influence on their language" (229). It is natural to attribute more worth with the semantic units of the language than with the functional aspects, for the function words are the glue while the semantic units are the more substantial, meaty, parts. A Creole speaker, then, will be expected to utilize the same structure in his speech, and especially in his writing, and it is for this reason that African purists criticized writers like Achebe who wrote in Standard British English or in the African Creoles. For the purist, to speak or write in languages that have been influenced by the Europeans is to choose Europe over Africa, to betray the African tongue for the ease of a worldwide *lingua franca*.

[10] This is the view reflected by Salikoko Mufwene. Other linguists believe that Creoles are in fact evolutionary pidgin languages. Mufwene argues, though, that the evolutionary process is not valid. He claims that a language can only "evolve" into a Creole when the adults speaking the pidgins determine to advance the validity of the language and move the pidgin from an emergency type of communication to a sustainable, more complex, language system. Because this decision requires deliberate language change, Mufwene says that is more a sign of linguistic ecology than evolution.

Chinua Achebe and his novel do not fit the normal linguistic tendencies of a speaker enmeshed in colonization and who is a member of a current creolization process. Although many authors have criticized him for betraying the African nativization, Achebe works counter intuitively to promote the African story. Achebe does something extraordinary in his novel. He uses the language and the culture that has invaded his homeland and he applies it to the preservation of his culture.

Achebe's predicted creolization process hypothesizes that he will a) retain the functional words of Igbo (the semantically insignificant units of meaning) and b) he will begin supplementing the Igbo structure with words from the Standard British English lexicon. However, in a paradoxical movement Achebe, instead of taking the structure of Igbo, adopts the English syntax and grammar system as the basis for his creolization process. It is against this adoption that so many African authors have rebelled, arguing that Achebe's adoption is the outward sign of his African betrayal. But Achebe does not entirely dismiss his Igbo roots. The novel is rife with Igbo culture, from the imagery and metaphorical language discussed above, down to the use of Igbo words and sentences. Several times throughout the novel Achebe uses whole Igbo chants to promote the potency of the language. When Umuofia gathers together to hear from the gods, to determine a course of action, or to share news, the town crier lifts his voice and calls the people unto him. At times, the people sing Igbo songs as a group, first in English and, later, a song in Igbo (32, 37).

As the complexity deepens the reader will see that Achebe moves from isolated forms of speech to the creation of linguistic complexity within phrases and sentence-level constructs. Within the construction of an English sentence (perfect from its word ordering down to its use of pronouns and verb constructions) Achebe purposefully embeds the seemingly random Igbo

word. The use of *obi* for *hut*, *achi* for *tree*, or *ike* for the word *power* allows the pages to come alive with African life and culture. Achebe captures the life of his people with the implementation of Igbo and pidgin words, cementing the languages in the written word to be preserved, not just as languages, but as representatives of a pre-colonial way of life, a pillar of remembrance for the way language was before the Creoles and Englishes of the world came into the picture.

What so few readers and writers understand is the power of Achebe's language structure. With his choice to write in English with Igbo supplements, Achebe in fact reverses the natural Creolization process and counteracts the pervasive tide of English within his African homeland. There is a linguistic act present which separates Achebe from ordinary ethnographic writers, and that is the deliberate and intentional shaping of the language in *Things Fall Apart*. Edward Sapir's concept of linguistic relativism, or linguistic determinism, argues that the languages of the world affect the world-views of their speakers, and that speakers are thus shaped by their first language. Sapir writes:

> Human beings do not live in the objective world alone, nor alone in the world of social activity as ordinarily understood, but are very much at the mercy of the particular language which has become the medium of expression for their society. It is quite an illusion to imagine that one adjusts to reality essentially without the use of language and that language is merely an incidental means of solving specific problems of communication or reflections. The fact of the matter is that the 'real world' is to a large extent unconsciously built up on the language habits of the group. (qtd in Whorf, 443)

Sapir dedicated his life to the research of languages and the application of linguistics in society. He believed that linguistics could reveal patterns of behavior within society, and especially between societies[11]. One critic captures Sapir's life goal by saying that Sapir: "believed that language provided the clearest and most striking expression of man's capacity to create and internalize patterns of behavior and that analogous configurations could be observed in other forms of human activity" (Newman 356). Sapir associated languages with cultural behavior and the creation of societal norms. Sapir preached language as the causal factor in human behavior, in human speech and communication. It is by language that speakers acquire cultural beliefs, group psychology, and personal opinions.

One of Sapir's best students, Benjamin Lee Whorf, joined his teachers' efforts in anthropological linguistics, and together the two proposed the Sapir-Whorf hypothesis, which studies languages with the presupposition that culture is an extension of linguistic thought and processes. This hypothesis has influenced the development of contemporary ethnographic linguistics[12]. Sapir and Whorf argue that language shapes thought and action, and if a language changes, the culture will change along with it.

Linguist John Edward compares language change to an insurmountable force, and he argues that smaller languages will most often cave to stronger linguistic pressures. He writes: "Most minority groups are, above all, pragmatic and this usually implies a considerable assimilationist sentiment" (141). Although defined by their language, a minority group can easily be overrun by an invading tongue, especially if that tongue carries with it the weight of Europe, as Igboland experienced in the twentieth century. A small group of speakers will quickly

[11] This thesis does not explain the full rational behind the Sapir-Whorf hypothesis. This section only takes into account Sapir-Whorf's idea that culture is directly affected by language. For further information, see Pinker, Coupland, Sapir, or Whorf.

[12] Whorf's chapter entitled *The Relation of Habitual Thought and Behavior to Language* argues that the Hopi people's conditioned response to crisis is a direct result of the preparedness markers within their language.

assimilate to the larger linguistic force, either because the larger force overtakes the smaller and forces the change, or the smaller group will feel a need to assimilate with the more expansive language, and will thus give up their language for the sake of the other, more popular, tongue.

Linguistic tendencies dictate that minority languages will experience significant language change when a more weighty language begins mixing with the speakers. This is how the pidgins and Creoles mentioned previously are formed. Assimilation is expected and, in most cases, unavoidable. Salikoko Mufwene explains that the initial stages of language mixing create what is called the Founder Principle. With the initiation of the Founder Principle, the two mixing language begin to develop identities, one of which takes on the parental (or head) language and the more submissive one taking on the daughter role. The language that takes the more dominant role will be the one with the content words. This is why in most developing Creoles the speakers of the L1 language only retain their L1 language structure and substitute the vocabulary and lexicon with words from the invading, more dominant, L2. English in Africa became the dominant language, and Igbo, along with dozens of other African languages, began to submit to English and the English lexicon. By the year 2001, almost half of the entire population of Nigeria (over 1.2 million speakers from Yoruba, Igbo, and a variety of other ethnic language groups) was speaking English as a fully acquired and functional L2 (Crystal 64).

This number shows that a majority of African language speakers had begun to adopt English language structures well before the year 2001, and that the restructuring of African languages has come from the acceptance of English as a lingua franca. Mufwene writes that after this mixing begins to occur, the change cannot be reversed, and that “[t]he more regularly or intimately Europeans and non-Europeans interacted with each other during the formative periods

of the colonial vernaculars, the less evidence there is for diverging ethnic varieties" (64). Essentially, once the process of creolization begins, it is a linguistic reality.

Robert Blench echoes Crystal's findings as well. Blench studied English use in Nigeria to determine the differences between Pidgin, Creole, and Standard British English use. He found that

> Generally speaking, the newspapers, formerly a great source of NE [Nigerian English] expressions, have become closer to SE [Standard British English] since the 1980s, almost certainly due to greater exposure to SE forms through the dissemination of news magazines such as Time and Newsweek. For example, 'hotel' is commonly applied to bars and drinking places that serve food but may have no lodging and 'hotel' in the SE sense is 'guest hotel'. But modern usage is gradually replacing this so that NE is coming to conform to SE. (4)

Nigeria has moved on from pre and postcolonial times. In pre-colonial Nigeria there were hundreds of disassociated ethnic groups. Speakers lived in self-governed towns and relied on pidgins to communicate needs across ethnolinguistic borders. The entrance of English during the period of British imperialism was startling, but not shocking enough to force Africans into expelling English from the land. Because English was allowed to stay within the African borders, speakers began to form Creoles to communicate, eventually adopting whole portions of Standard English morphology, phonology, and syntax into their lexicons. Now, the presence of English is not only marginalized, but it is quickly becoming a language of unification, both in speaking and in writing.

This linguistic change is why Achebe's *Things Fall Apart* is a remarkable counter to linguistic theory. Achebe's novel fights the language molds that Edwards, Sapir, Mufwene, and

Whorf expect to see. It is counterintuitive, countercultural, and counter linguistic; however, it remains wholly African and entirely effective. Achebe was introduced to English at an early age. He grew up learning a variety of languages and using all of them in various professions. He felt no pressure to use English; and although he recognizes it as a hegemonic force in Nigeria, he neither condemns it nor shirks from its gaze. He realizes that English can advance his novel and enable him to reach a wider audience, but he does not cave to its power entirely. He decides to write a novel that demonstrates his ability to write in Standard British English, moving effortless from the construction of his narrative to the spelling varieties when writing standardized words such as *neighbours, valour,* or *minimize,* to name a few[13].

But Achebe does not submit to the English language like so many writers condemn him for. Twice in the novel he uses a Pidgin slang word. In Chapter Seven Achebe writes that "Okonkwo passed the rope, or *tie-tie* to the boys" (34), using the word *tie-tie*, which is a Nigerian Pidgin term. The second time Achebe uses a slang word is in Chapter Five when he writes that Obiageli was "making *inyanga*", or acting with a cocky attitude (28). The two Pidgin words cannot be a mistake. Everything thus far in Achebe's novel has been constructed with intention and purpose, and the use of these two Pidgin words lends to the idea that he is capable of playing with the supposedly "underdeveloped" language systems as he is with the elitist Standard British English.

But the most powerful use of words within the novel comes from Achebe's use of Igbo phrases and nouns. Achebe retains an Igbo image with the use of onomatopoeic chants and native alliterative phrases (see Appendix D). Almost a dozen times throughout the novel Achebe inserts an Igbo song, chant, or alliterative phrase to capture the tone. Achebe tells his reader that "[o]ne of the things every man learned was the language of the hollowed-out wooden

[13] See Appendix C for a variety of words used by Achebe to reflect his grasp of the Standard British English dialect.

instrument" (71). The Igbo people learn how to listen to the sounding of the drums and cannons in order to interpret messages and respond to a call for communal gatherings. The phrase *uru oyim de de de dei* in Chapter Ten captures the mournful phrase *my friend's body*, followed by a mourner's cry, a potent phrase that English could not capture for Achebe, but Igbo could.

In a novel of just twenty-five chapters Achebe uses Igbo words and phrases over two hundred times, consistently and repetitively using Igbo words in place of common European ones. This steady use allows the reader to garner a respect for the Igbo language and its place within the novel. Achebe intentionally places these words so as to add to the African identity and the validity of the Igbo language. In one side story that Achebe tells about Okonkwo's wives, he describes the scene with the wives preparing the goat meat for a soup:

> All this ant-hill activity was going smoothly when a sudden interruption came. It was a cry in the distance: *Oji odu achu ijij-o-o! (The one that uses its tail to drive flies away)* Every woman immediately abandoned whatever she was doing and rushed out in the direction of the cry. (68)

This phrase may at first glance puzzle the Western reader. But a second glance confirms that instead of using the Standard British English word 'cow', Achebe has infused the story with a distinctly Igbo piece of culture, reflecting the naming of the animal in the phrase *oji odu achu ijij-o-o*, literally and figuratively the one that swipes at flies with his tail. Using this same idea, Achebe infuses the novel with Igbo nouns, many created by him for use in the novel. There are over sixty proper nouns that Achebe creates or pulls from the Igbo culture. Names for oracles, villages, compounds, and feasts are just a few that he places throughout the chapters to bring life and meaning to the African lifestyle. For every African character Achebe creates a meaningful African name. He uses no European-influenced titles, except for the three British men at the end

of the novel. The Igbo members are given names like *Akueke*, meaning “Pride of the Python”, or Okonkwo’s daughter *Nneka*, whose name means “Mother is Supreme”[14]. Figure 2 shows just three examples of Achebe’s carefully selected names:

Figure 2

Igbo Name	Meaning	Note
Ikemefuna	"My Strength Will Abide"	Okonkwo's Adopted Son
Onwumbiko	"Death, I implore you"	Ekwefi's dead child
Uchendu	"One experienced in life"	The eldest member of Okonkwo's family

The creation of names such as these infuses the novel with authenticity and realism. Pinker claims that names are a deliberate construction of social meaning, and that the “way in which we understand “your own words” – as referring only to how you combine them, not to what they are – shows that *words are owned by a community rather than the individual*” (15, emphasis added). Achebe assigns his characters names that reflect the community of African citizens. The characters from Europe get only the bland names, such as Mr. Kiaga or the District Commissioner. Most literary critics have captured the importance of these cultural words, and attribute them to Achebe as a means for enriching the tone of the novel[15]. However few critics, if any, have captured the subconscious irony that bolsters the use of these words. Achebe’s choice to use these Igbo words and the Igbo-inspired names reveals the truest irony of the author’s personal language attitude.

[14] See Appendix A for the full list of Igbo words used throughout the novel.
[15] At least one of these proper nouns was invented by Achebe and have no historical origin in the Igbo language, although the roots are still from Igbo. Editors tend to agree that the creation of such names is a contrived effort by Achebe to fit his characters to their metaphorical actions. See Appendix B for more examples.

The linguistic irony lies in the subconscious skeleton, for the reader will remember that the narrative devices are the skeletal framework for the novel, the figurative language is the flesh, and finally now the linguistic, word-level choices are the heart and soul of *Things Fall Apart*. Mufwene and the extremism of Sapir and Whorf dictate that the speaker will either a) abandon the L1 for the content words of the L2, retaining the Igbo grammar systems but utilizing more and more the vocabulary and lexical items of the L2 (English), or b) the Igbo speaker will be so shaped by his language and its pervasive influence in his society that the speaker will be unable to synchronize his L1 with the invading L2. This is Achebe's countering force at its finest, for Achebe's use of Igbo words can be separated in two ways. There are those words that Achebe uses to promote symbolism, personification of the African tribe, and the preservation of the African image in the world. These have been discussed above. The second can only be seen through a subconscious preference for Igbo when, logically and linguistically, the English language should have been prominent.

Gere and Smith's curt analysis of the Sapir-Whorf hypothesis, essentially that "our psychological bearings are formed and regulated by our native language", dismisses the extremism and suggests a more tempered approach to culture in language. They counter linguistic determinism by stating: "Our professed attitudes may appear enlightened, but they often differ from the subconscious attitudes which inevitably govern our judgments and behavior" (3). Achebe's professed attitude is one of resigned acceptance to the use of English in Africa. He encourages his fellow authors to accept the presence of the hegemonic language and that they use it to preserve the Igbo way of life. This profession leads Achebe to write a novel that is a purposeful authorial intention buffered by subconscious linguistic loyalty.

Achebe's desire to achieve a personal African aesthetic ultimately triumphs over all of his linguistic barriers. African literary critic Carey Snyder suggests that it is Achebe's unique African *insider's perspective* that makes his literature so popular in both the African and Western worlds. Snyder's opinion is that "to Achebe, the novelist is a teacher, and educating Africans and foreigners about a heritage that has been demeaned and eroded through colonization is a viable way of fulfilling an important social mission" (159). This view, however, limits Achebe to simply a good storyteller, made famous by his nationality and leitmotifs. While Snyder does capture a large part of Achebe's cultural aesthetic, he and other African literary critics have failed to see the true power behind Achebe's works. Achebe's language is the inspirational force behind *Things Fall Apart*. In Achebe's own words:

> In learning English for most of my life, I also fell in love with it. You see, language is not an enemy – language is a tool. And I discovered that what I was doing was bringing the Igbo language into communication with English. And when two languages meet, some very interesting things happen. Sometimes, it's easy to translate an idea from Igbo to English, or vice versa. Other times, the language refuses; it says, "No, this is mine." For me, that's one of the rewards of this profession – to see languages that developed in two entirely different parts of the world communicating, holding a conversation. (Botstein, Achebe, and Morrison 152-3)

Achebe admits that a language has a sort of power over him. The language dictates to Achebe both how and where to translate an idea. Achebe's thoughts, actions, and language attitudes all revolve around this power that language has over culture. The African culture, especially, is able

to see the potential use of language, for they have developed through a rich oral tradition, and now they are emerging as capable authors and literary storytellers as well.

Achebe's language attitude in no way limits his ability as an author. His social reform, as Snyder pointed out, remains as powerful today as it was in the late 1950s. The success lies in Achebe's willingness to adopt the change that was forced upon his culture. Rather than caving to the societal pressure, like Okonkwo, or submitting to cultural stereotypes and biased assumptions about language as Conrad, Wa Thiong'o, Soyinka, and Tanganyika have done, Achebe internalizes the linguistic change and allows it to become a part of his literary discourse.

Conclusion

A cursory reading of *Things Fall Apart* is not sufficient for understanding the complexity of Chinua Achebe and the language attitude he possesses. A shallow interpretation would leave the reader assuming that Achebe's story is a tragedy; for the innocent country is invaded by hegemonic Europeans, the unity of Igboland is torn apart, and the main character commits suicide. But to stop here is to miss the rich complexity of the story. From the construction of the characters to the choice of each multilingual word, Achebe exercises an impressive amount of control, of deliberateness, and of skill. He dedicates himself to portraying his African and Nigerian reality, and it is for this reason that the complexities uncovered in this thesis have the power to reshape the way readers interpret good African literature. African literature is a complex mixture of oral and written stories. It addresses the particular African situation, and oftentimes many universal situations as well. Some authors and readers feel that African stories should be expressed in the various ethnic languages while others utilize the presence of English in Africa and around the world as a platform for proclaiming the rich Africa narrative.

Achebe's particular reality is one full of binaries and parallelism. There are two parallel cultures, the Igbo and the British, and both are portrayed within the novel with all of their attributes and defects. The British conquers unassumingly, the Igbo caves without a fight, the Christian religion preaches love in the midst of hateful actions, but the Igbo gods remain silent when they should speak for the people. *Things Fall Apart* is an incomparable cultural text.

Achebe's post-novel discourse makes it clear, however, that his interest is not in writing a story that focuses only on colonization. He writes specific statements like: "I hope nobody is dying to hear all over again the pros and cons of colonial rule. You would get *only* cons from me, anyway" (*Education* 5), and later: "In my view, it is a gross crime for anyone to impose himself

on another, to seize his land and his history, and then to compound this by making out that the victim is some kind of ward or minor requiring protection" (*Education* 7). Achebe does not *agree* with the European colonization of Africa, and he understands that much of his culture was lost due to the cultural and linguistic assimilation of Nigeria. Statements like these add both clarity of Achebe's beliefs and complexity to his written words; and it is the depth of meaning within the written word that lends the clearest understanding of Achebe's language attitude.

The literary sketch of Achebe's language attitude comes to the conclusion that Achebe desires to preserve a realistic depiction of Africa through an honest, in-depth portrayal of the pre-colonial African archetypes. Achebe labors to this end, constructing characters and a rich narrative structure in hopes of presenting to the Western bias a nation worthy of acceptance and appreciation. The linguistic analysis of *Things Fall Apart* finds an even deeper level of Achebe's language attitude: a level that causes even Achebe's subconscious language choices to reflect his passion for his country and his dedication to its preservation. Although Achebe writes the majority of *Things Fall Apart* in the Standard British English, he is unfailingly loyal to his first language. Achebe finds value in the content words of Igbo, and although he chooses to address the world in English, he cannot and will not sacrifice his Igbo lexicon to a foreign tongue.

The life, the death, and the power of a language rest in its speakers. Achebe is only one African voice, but he is one voice that has captured an image of Africa and has challenged his readers to reinterpret their opinion of the Igbo people. Pinker argues that words "are not just about facts about the world stored in a person's head but are woven into the causal fabric of the world itself" (9). Achebe's fabric weaves a story about the Igbo society and its reaction to English imperialism. Language in the hands and hearts of willing vessels has the power to shape the world, and the choices that individual language speakers make on a daily basis will

ultimately determine the validity of their oral and written language. Achebe has transcended canon and cultural boundaries because he has united the skillful ability of a writer with a strong story and a stronger conviction. He has, as a speaker of Igbo, made an important mark in the typography of his language, and he will continue to inspire and convict readers of both worlds until the lions of the world have a chance to share in the glory of the tale.

This research is only the beginning of further research. World literature, both oral and written, should be appreciated for its wealth of cultural and linguistic information. Further research into the intentionality of an author and the influence of an author's linguistic context over the production of his work should be approached with respect and vigor. A more detailed analysis of the ecology of languages may reveal certain linguistic relationships between the creator and the created that have not yet been explicated here. It is possible that *Things Fall Apart* may be only one chance book that manages to display such a clear bond between language and identity; however it is likely that it is only the first of many cultural works that defend the existence of an author and his beliefs about language. World literature cannot be fully appreciated unless it is expressed through language. This thesis shows an undeniable bond between language and a literary masterpiece; and with future research this relationship may prove to be an invaluable link between the critical reading and understanding of world literature.

Appendix A

The Use of Igbo Words Within the Novel

Igbo Word	English Meaning	Page(s)	Times Found in Text
achi	Tree	63	1
agadinwayi	Title For an Old Woman	9	2
agbala	Duragatory term for a person who has not earned a title	10	2
agbala ekenegio-o-o-o! Agbala cholu ifu ada ya Ezinmao-o-o-o!	"Agbala wants to see his daughter Ezinma"	60	1
akalogoli	"Good for nothing"	50	1
aru oyim + de de de dei	"My friend's body" + chanting wail	53, 54	2
chi	A person's spirit	12, 18, 20, 30, 48, 76, 81, 88, 97	16
efulefu	A foolish man	83, 89	3
ege	A wrestling technique or the drumming energy found at a wrestling match	31	1
egwugwu	Masked men, the spirits of the Igbo tribes who bring justice and order	4, 53, 54, 55, 56, 57, 72, 73, 105, 106, 107, 108, 109	34
ekwe	A wooden drum	5, 36, 71, 72	6
ekwensu	Devil or satan	106	1

eneke-nti-oba	A deaf bird (unhindered)	33	1
eze-agadi-nwayi	Old woman's teeth	22	1
iba	Malaria	46, 52, 69	4
ibe	An extended relative, also the name of Akueke's suitor	44	1
ike	power	67	1
ikenga	A carving of an Igbo deity	101	1
ilo	A public gathering place used for dances, playgrounds, and meetings	27, 29, 53, 64, 111	6
inyanga	A cocky attitude	28	1
isa-ifi ceremony	A cleansing ceremony	76	1
iyi-uwa	A physical item that signifies reincarnation	49, 50, 51	9
jigida	Decorative beads	43, 44	4
kotma	Foreign liasons between the Igbo and Europeans	99, 100, 102	4
ndichie	The Igbo Elders	9, 11	2
Nna ayi	"Our Father", a greeting offered to male leaders	13	1
nne	mother	47	1
nno	"welcome"	112	1
nso-ani	An offense against earth	20	1
nza	small bird	20	1

obi	An Igbo Hut	10, 13, 19, 20, 22, 28, 32-3, 35, 38, 40, 42, 44, 45, 48, 50, 51, 52, 66-7, 69, 74, 79, 87, 93, 97, 101, 112, 113, 116	35
ochu	A murder	75	1
ogbanje	A reincarnated child	47, 49, 50, 104	7
ogbu-agali-odu	"The one who kills"	62	1
ogene	A bell-shaped gong	5, 6, 7, 8, 111	6
ogwu	Medicine	106	1
osu	Outcasts/low members of society	90, 91	4
oye	already have	48	1
ozo	Stately, deserving respect	36, 42, 43, 97, 104	7
tufia-a	Repulsed curse	61	1
udu	Pot used as Instrument	5	1
uli	An ink used to draw on skin	43, 58	2
umu	community	67	1
umuike	Empowered community	67	1
umunna (equivalent is umuada)	Commuunity of Male Kinsmen (umuada is the community of females)	66, 76, 95, 96	5
Umuofia kwenu	Umuofia, listen	8, 54, 56, 57, 114	8

uri	A celebratory ceremony and dance	66	1
Yaa	Yes	8, 54, 56, 114	7

Appendix B

Igbo Names and Terms Created or Used by Achebe in *Things Fall Apart*

Term	Meaning	Note
A		
Afa	An Igbo oracle	
Agbala	A Male Deity of the Igbo People	Communicates through a human priest or priestess called the Oracle of the Hills and the Caves
Ajofia	"Spirit of the forest" or "Evil forest"	Leader of the egwugwus
Akueke	"Pride of the Python"	Obierika's daughter
Akukalia	"One Who is Richly Endowed"	Igbo Tribesman
Akunna	"Father's wealth"	Prominent Igbo man who gives his son as a student to Mr. Brown
Amadi	"My Compound is here"	Prosperous Igbo farmer
Amadiora	Deity of Thunder	
Amalinze the Cat	Title of Agility and Honor	An Umuofian Tribesman
Amikwu	"Compound of Curses"	Okonkwo's cousin
Anasi	"Let Them Say"	Wife of Nwaikibie
Ani	Earth Goddess	Second variant spelled Ala
C		
Chika	"God is Supreme"	Priestess of Agbala
Chukwu	Term for the western missionary's God	
D		
Dwarf Wall	Small storage place for yams	
E		
Egonwanne	"Money of my sibling"	

Ezeani	An Igbo Chief, Ruler	Priest of Earth Goddess
Ezinma	"My household is beautiful"	Okonkwo's Daughter, also called Ezigbo (p. 26) meaning "the good one"
F		
Feast of the New Yam	A Celebration of Life and Rebirth	
I		
Idemili	The God of Water	The Idemili Title Is a High Title Bestowed Upon Igbo Members
Igwelo	"God in the Sky is mindful of us"	One of Nwakibie's Sons
Ikemefuna	"My Strength Will Abide"	Okonkwo's Adopted Son
Ikezue	"I am filled with Strength"	An Igbo Leader
Imo		The central river in Igboland
Isiuzo	"Top of the Road"	A doorway, or a Nigerian Village
Iweka	"Anger is Great"	Obierika's father
M		
Maduka	"The Human being is Supreme"	Obierika's Song
Mbaino	Nigerian Village and Dialect	
Mbanta	A Small settlement in Nigeria	
Mgbafo	Woman born on Afo market day	
N		
Nneka	"Mother is supreme"	Okonkwo's first daughter in exile
Nwakibie	"Greater than the other person"	A renowned tribesman
Nwankwo	Child born on Nkwo Day	
Nwofia	"Begotten in the Wilderness"	Okonkwo's son in exile
Nwoye	Born on the Oye Market Day	Okonkwo's Firstborn Son

O

Obiageli	"Destined for Prosperity"	Okonkwo's Daughter and Nwoye's Sister
Obiako	"My Compound Will Never Perish"	Friend of Okonkwo
Obierika	"My Household is Supreme"	Igbo Man
Obodoani	A Village Name, *ani* means land	
Odukwe	A formal/ceremonial greeting	Spoken in reference to the spirit of a dead Igbo man
Ofoedu	"The ancestors are our guide"	The word ofu means divine justice
Ogbuefi Ezeugo	Ogbuefi: a man who has killed a cow	Okonkwo's Friend
Ogbuefi Ndulue	"The life is here"	A man from a neigboring village
Ogbuefi Udo	Peace	An Igbo Tribesman
Ogbuefi Ugonna	"Pride of his father"	Prominent Igbo man who abandons his position in order to become a Christian
Ogwugwu		The most deadly Igbo god
Okagbue Uyanwa	Okagbue: "I have put a stop to evil and all forms of ill omen" and Uyanwa: a nwa (child) caretaker	
Okafo	One Born on Afo Market Day	Igbo Leader
Okika		One of the six Igbo leaders who is imprisoned with Okonkwo
Okolo		Okonkwo's ancestor, most likely a great warrior
Okoye	Name of a Man Born on Market Day	Okonkwo's Neighbor
Okudo	A singer who would travel with the warriors in pre-colonial Africa and give them courage through his words	
Otakagu	"One who bites like a tiger"	One of the egwugwu
Onwuma	"Death may please itself"	Ekwefi's dead child

Onwumbiko	"Death, I implore you"	Ekwefi's dead child
Ozoemena	"May it not happen again"	Ekwefi's dead child
Ozoemena	"May we be spared another sorrow"	Ogbuefi Ndulue's wife

U

Uchendu	"One experienced in life"	The eldest member of Okonkwo's family
Umuachi	Farthest Ibo village from Okonkwo's hut	
Umuofia	Nigerian Village	Home to Okonkwo and Igbo
Unoka	"One's home is the ultimate refuge"	Okonkwo's Father
Uzowulu	"The road that I built"	Mgbafo's husband

Appendix C

Pidgin and Standard British English Variations within the Novel

Pidgin Word	Meaning	Page Number
inyanga	A cocky attitude, used to mock Obiageli's childish behavior	28
tie-tie	Palm branches fashioned into a rope	34

Standard British English Spelling Variations

Variation	Page Number
arm-pit	36
centre	46
emphasise	19
grown-ups	38
matchets	36, 38
minimise	19
neighbours	19
recognise	37
shoulder-high	29, 32
unheard-of	19
valour	40
red-earth	87
behaviour	88

Appendix D

Igbo Chants and Songs with English Translations

Chant or Song	**Translation**
Eze elina, elina! Sala Eze ilikwa ya Ikwaba akwa oligholi Ebe Danda nechi eze Ebe Uzuzu nete egwu Sala	King, do not eat Sala King, do not eat, If you eat this Where Danda is being crowned Where the dust is dancing It is people (that is, who are raising the dust) Sala
Agbala do-o-o-o! Agbala ekeneo-o-o-o-o Okonkwo! Agbala ekene gio-o-o-o! Agbala cholu ifu ada ya Ezinmao-o-o-o!	This is a chant that the priestess of Agbala speaks. She is calling Ezinma to join her in the cave, to see Agbala.
Agbala do-o-o-o! Agbala ekeneo-o-o-o!	The priestesses' greeting to Agbala
Agbala do-o-o-o! Umuachi! Agbala ekene unuo-o-o!	The priestess of Agbala calls a greeting to the village of Umuachi
Agbala do-o-o-o! Agbala ekeneo-o-o-o! Chi negbu madu ubosi ndu ya nato ya uto daluo-o-o!	"The deity that kills a man on the day his life is sweetest to him"
Oji odu achu ijiji-o-o!	The one that uses its tail to drive flies away, or in the English vocabulary, "cow"
Umuofia obodo dike! Umuofia obodo dike!	Umuofia, "the land of the brave" Umuofia, "the land of the brave" (Things Fall Apart 72)

Onomatopoeic Chants	**Meaning**	**Page Number**
gome, gome, gome, gome	The sounding of the gong	53
Go-di-di-go-go-di-go	The sounding of the gong	71
Di-go-go-di-go	The sounding of the gong	71
Diim! Diim! Diim!	Cannon explosions	71
Di-go-go-di-go-di-di-go-go	The sounding of the gong	71

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