



43

# Journal of Nigerian Languages and Culture



**Volume 11, No 2 November, 2009**

**ISSN 1595-4730**

**Published by**  
Association for promoting  
Nigerian Languages and Culture

**Journal of Nigerian Languages  
and Culture (JONLAC)**

ISSN 1595 – 4730

Vol.11 No.2

November, 2009.

Published by  
Association for Promoting Nigerian  
Languages and Culture (APNILAC)

All rights reserved

Printed in Nigeria by:  
**SAN PRESS LTD.**  
182 Agbani Road,  
Enugu, Enugu State  
08033169079, 08051399666  
E-mail: sanpressenugu@yahoo.com

## EDITORIAL BOARD

CHAIRMAN:

Ichie Prof. P.A. Ezikeojiaku  
*Imo State University, Owerri*

EDITOR-IN-CHIEF:

Rev. Fr. Prof. J. I. Okonkwo  
*Imo State University, Owerri*

SECRETARY:

Ifeoma Obuasi  
*University of Nigeria, Nsukka*

EDITORIAL ADVISERS:

Prof. E. N. Emenanjo  
*University of Port-Harcourt*

Prof. Philip A. Ogundeji  
*University of Ibadan*

Prof. Adeyinka .O. Folorunso  
*Lagos State University, Ojo*

Dr. R. I. Ndimele  
*Abia State University, Uturn*



## TABLE OF CONTENTS

|   |           |
|---|-----------|
| Editorial Board - - - - -   | iii       |
| Notes to Contributors - - - - -   | iv        |
| Table of Contents - - - - -   | v         |
| Inclusive Education in Nigeria: Policy and Practice - - - - -   | 1 - 10    |
| The Concept of Justice in Wole Soyinka's <i>The Beatification of Area Boy</i> and Ahmed Yerima's <i>Hard Ground</i> - - - - - | 11 - 19   |
| Globalization And Culture: The Inevitability Of A Pro-Active School Curriculum  | 21 - 26   |
| The Internet As A Tool For Learning French in Nigerian Tertiary Institutions - -  | 27 - 34   |
| Culture As a Variable in African Literature -- - - -  | 35 - 45   |
| Stereotypical Gender Assumptions: The Nsukka Experience - - - -   | 47 - 56   |
| Feminism, Literature And Culture: The Example Of Akachi Ezeigbo in <i>House Of Symbols</i> - - - - -                          | 57 - 64   |
| The Legal Interpretations of The Disjunct "or" And The Conjunct "And" Through The Cases - - - - -                             | 65 - 71   |
| Traditional Festivals And Nation Building: A Historical Perspective - - -   | 73 - 82   |
| Sex Bias And Language Use In Igboland: A Sociolinguistic Study - - -  | 83 - 93   |
| Managing Cultural Diversity for Justice and Competitive Advantage - - -   | 95 - 106  |
| Nigerian Home Video: Reflection of Language and Culture - - - -   | 107 - 114 |
| A Semiotic Analysis of Political Party Logo - - - - -   | 115 - 125 |
| Language, Culture And Justice: Some Misconceptions And Barriers To National Growth -- - - -                                   | 127 - 134 |
| ICTs, Globalization And Cultural Imperialism: A Study Of Nigeria's Position in The 21 <sup>st</sup> Century. - - - - -        | 135 - 141 |
| Political Divisions And Cultural Survival: The Case Of Divided Cultures in Nigeria - - - - -                                  | 143 - 150 |
| Gendercentrism: Social Justice And Discrimination Among Ndi-Igbo of Nigeria: An Appraisal - - - - -                           | 151 - 159 |
| Science Technology and Mathematics Educational Policies: Status, Impediments and Implementation Strategies - - - - -          | 161 - 170 |
| Ethnocentrism In Nigerian Democracy: A Historical Perspective - - -   | 171 - 179 |
| Pragmatics Of Language Choice In Settling Disputes in Lagos, Nigeria - -  | 181 - 191 |

## CULTURE AS A VARIABLE IN AFRICAN LITERATURE

By

APARI, WUSU JACOB

*Tai Solarin University of Education*

&

MAKINDE, SOLOMON O.

*Lagos State University*

### ABSTRACT

*Culture is an independent variable in African literature. Every African literary text of any genre depends heavily on African culture for it to be classified as African literature. The oral forms of African literature which are rooted in African culture are the major features of the modern African literature. They are also called elements of tradition, which includes folktales, songs, sacrifice, marriage, burial custom, and rituals which are identified as variables in African literature. The understanding and identification of these culture variables make the understanding of African literature easier and distinguishable from other regional literatures like American, British, French, Caribbean and Scandinavian literature. The inability of students to identify themes, messages and appreciate the aesthetics of African literature is informed by their inability to identify elements of culture and its literary application in modern African literature. This paper therefore attempts to identify cultural instances that abound in African literature.*

### Introduction

African literature has no graphic literary place in African pre-colonial era. It however emerged on African literary scene with the zeal, cultural consciousness and literary acumen of African pens after independence of various African nations. As a result of this literary emergence, many scholars defined African literature in different ways. Emenyonu (1982:2) noted that African literature means several things to several people thus:

To some, it is a tool for the literate African's arrogation of the essence of his cultural heritage- an assertion and at times an imposition of the contents and excellence of a black culture, on a white dominated world. To others, African literature means 'a new literature of the world' with its authentic and original genre, themes and message. To a few, it is simply a political document of protest against the assumptions of colonialism and imperialism as they relate to the world of the black man. To yet other people, African literature in all its ramifications represents a mere appendage to British or French literature since most of the African writers write chiefly in English or French.

The analysis of the three definitions shows that (i) African literature is the identification and imposition of the beauty of black culture on a white dominated political,



economic, cultural, social, and intellectual world. (ii) It means a new literature among the literatures of the world, with new African themes weaved around African experience within his culture or contact with alien culture. (iii) To some, it is a protest against the perception of imperialism of the world and the values of the Blackman. (iv) It is an extension of British and French literature because majority of African writers write in English or French.

An x-ray of all definitions boils down to the fact that African literature is the literature written by an African about African experience within his culture or contact with alien culture. This means that African literature such as Chinua Achebe's *Things Fall Apart* (1958) and all his works, Efua T. Sutherland's *The Marriage of Anansewa* (1964) and all her works, Wole Soyinka's *The Strong Breed* (1964) and all his works, and works of other African writers in different genres constitute modern African literature. Nevertheless, the works of Arabs in North Africa and the likes of Joyce Cary's *Mr. Johnson* (1948) which describes African culture and experience in alien language are not modern African literature. Through the modern African literature, the people offshore African continent, specifically the west gets wind of beauty in knowledge and the living traditions of African culture; its heritage as rooted in African living traditions. Adedoyin (2003) defined literature as the works of art authored by Africans in whatever language medium, about Africa and Africans. The weakness of this definition is that the literary works of Arabs who dwell in North Africa are also regarded as African literature, which should not be because they have different cultures. Their sojourn on the African continent is a geographical mistake; so, African literature in this context excludes literature of non-African works of Arabs in North Africa and white minorities in South Africa. However, the modern African literature has its antecedents in Oral tradition that is the authentic literature of African rooted in African culture (Akporobaro, 2004). Within African culture, orature is rendered in indigenous language. Oral literature is performed *in-situ* because it is free and belongs to the community without specific author. The oral form of African literature is divided into what is sung, acted and spoken which represents different genres of African literature thus: Poetry, drama, and prose. Oral poetry includes various songs like children rhyme and lullabies, hunting, birth, war, work, funeral, tale, and praise songs, which are accompanied by various forms of activities analogous to modern African literature. (National Teachers Institute, 1990).

However, what is acted has its dramatic forms in the performance of rituals, festivals, and dance among others. But what is spoken in oral tradition is a longer form of prose narrative genre which includes folktales, legends, and myth; there are different types of folktales depending on the nature and purpose of the tale within African culture. It could be

etiological tale which explains why of a phenomena or moral which teaches moral or animal tale which explains the adventure of animals, or didactic tale which teaches lessons. Folktale is the queen bee of all oral forms of literature, which incorporates other forms like the proverbs, riddles, songs, myths and legends.

Every folktale has a setting in time and space. The setting could be a rural area or spirit world, while the time is timeless as indicated in the opening formula, 'once upon a time' The purpose of every folktale is to explain every aspect of the culture of a given society. The tale often ends with either punishment or moral lesson or knowledge of why certain things are how they are.

In sum, elements of oral tradition are also oral archetypes, which are distinctive features of Modern African literature. Except students of modern African literature identify these archetypes, their interpretation of modern African literature would be a mirage. This paper however, identifies these archetypes in two modern African literary texts with the view of showing scholars including students of how dependent African literature is on culture.

### Methodology

The methodology employed for gathering data is the analysis of two African literary texts from archetypal perspective. This is an analysis from the perspective of oral archetypes, which involves identification of elements of oral tradition in African texts: Chinua Achebe's *Things Fall Apart* (TFA) (1958) and Sutherland's *The Marriage of Anansewa* (TMA) (2007).

### *Things Fall Apart* (1958)

This was the first novel in literature published by Chinua Achebe in 1958. I see it as a compendium of culture because of the totality of Igbo ways of life which are highly embedded in it. The elements of culture are what I choose to call the culture variable. It was discovered that the art of storytelling in African traditional society is an artistic tool of inculcating morals and knowledge of the society and why certain things are how they are in the society, hence we have different types of tales which are told either in a market place, around a night fire, or a sacred groove whose meanings are significant for the people in the culture. However, in *Things Fall Apart* (1958:67-70) Ekwefi told Ezinma a tale of a tortoise who deceived other animals to get a meal and the story of the bird "eneke nti oba" who challenged the whole world to a wrestling contest was finally thrown out by Amalinze, the cat. There is also the story of the tortoise and his wily way on page 7, and the story of the quarrel between Earth and Sky on page 38. This quarrel forced the sky to withhold rain for



seven years, crops died; food became scarce and the dead cannot be buried. Vulture was sent to the sky to plead with the heaven to release the rain which he did, but on his way, 'he pieces the cocoyam leaves in which rain was wrapped and there was a heavy rainfall.' As a result of this mishap, the vulture escaped to foreign land.

Song is also a recurrent cultural feature in Achebe's TFA (1958) on pages 25, 36, 83, 95 and 99 among others. On page 25, it was noticed that when rain fell, it gradually became lighter and less frequent, and earth and sky once again became separate, children then ran outdoors singing thus:

*"The rain is falling, the sun is shining.  
Abue Nnadi is cooking and eating".*

Similarly, at a wrestling square, Ikezua, one of the two wrestling contestants desperately went down on his knee in an attempt to fling his opponent backwards over his head, but it turned out to be a sad miscalculation, so, "quickly as the lightening of Amadiora, Okafo raised his leg and swung it over his rival head" and the crowd roared and sang his praise while the young women clapped their hands (Achebe 1959:36).

Achebe (1959:83) also noted that Okonkwo's father, Nnoka is 'being very good at playing flute and has enjoyed listening and playing band at its rhythm.' So, when Obierika was celebrating the daughter's marriage, they sang the latest song in the village. See also, (Achebe 1959:99).

Marriage is another significant element of tradition in Achebe's *Things Fall Apart* (1959). On pages 92-93 Amikwu, the youngest of Uchendu's five sons was marrying new wife. The interesting part of the marriage was the question and answer session. Uchendu's eldest daughter Njide asked the bride, how many men have lain with her since her brother first expressed desire to marry her. The response to the question was in negative thrice the question was asked, even when she invoked the spiritual staff of his father and even death at child birth. The beauty of this is that it ensures sexual trust between the couples. Similarly, celebration of Uri is a significant aspect of marriage in Igboland. Obierika celebrated his daughter's Uri, after the greater part of her bride price has been paid. The suitor brought palm-wine to the entire family and everybody was invited to partake in the drinking and dinning. Uri celebration is significant because it is an avenue for everybody in the society to know the would-be couple and vice versa. (Achebe's 1959:77-80).

More so, religion is another element of tradition in African literature. It was discovered that Igbos are diffused monotheists and their deities have different places of worship. The personal "chi" is symbolized by different shrines at the centre of the village; the



shrine of Ulu was located at the market place of Umuaro and some of these deities inhabit the hills, caves or rivers as noted in Achebe(1959:9).

• The Marriage of Anansewa (2007)

Efua T. Sutherland's *The Marriage of Anansewa* (2007) is a compendium of a Ghanaian folktale which literarily means Anamsem and has overage developed into full system of traditional theatre classified as Anansegoro. In *The Marriage of Anansewa*, other elements of oral tradition such as Songs, Sacrifice, Marriage, Burial custom, and Ritual are identified.

Ritual is an element of drama. It is a process through which the man makes the nature work. However, ritual and ritual libation becomes a significant element of tradition in African literature and featured prominently in TMA where chief who-is-chief is a contestant for Anansewa's hand in marriage. He sent some bottles of drinks for the funeral of Anansewa make-belief death. Ananse poured some libation to invoke the spirit of Anansewa thus:

"Wake, oh wake  
Oh wake, oh wake.  
Kweku's child, Anansewa,  
Wake, oh wake!  
Love is calling you, return,  
Wake, oh wake!  
Chief-Who-is-Chief loves you true  
- Wake, oh wake!

Immediately she heard the chief's name, she woke up and was later married to him. (Sutherland, 2007:90).

More so, burial custom is another aspect of Ghanaian culture. In Akan culture of Ghana, the husband has the customary obligation to give his dead wife a befitting burial and the children also have the same cultural backing to bury their parents. Yet, these cultural obligations according to Sutherland (2007:98) have some peculiar cultural limitations as noted in the words of the messengers from the chief of mines:

*We will be brief sir, our royal one has is to say: that because this lady had not become his wife, he cannot give her burial, that which custom does permit, he is not reluctant to fulfill. He sends this bold of silk; this Kente from bonwine; this dunes cotton cloths. Use them for dressing his lady's bed for her. He sends these drinks, and this bag of money to help the father pay the funeral in farewell to his lady.*

In addition to the above is the culture of marriage. Marriage is significant in Africa and has a peculiar cultural way of getting glued to each other. The stories in *The Marriage of Anansewa* (2007) is anchored on the marriage of Anansewa. The father was poor and wanted to make fortune from the daughter's marriage. He promised all chiefs his daughter's hand and made a good fortune from them. He now used cunning way to give the daughter to her heart-desire, Chief-Who-is-Chief. So, from the beginning to the end, the story of *The Marriage of Anansewa* permeates the theatrical play.

Finally, sacrifice is another aspect of African culture and has also become a distinctive feature of African literature. When a lady is going to join her husband in Ghanaian Akan African culture, sacrifice must be carried out to make the future of the bride bright. The sacrifice includes the squeezing of lime on the head of the bride, sprinkling of sacred palm-oil, yam touching lips, while an egg is to invoke blessing for her and adorning her with gold to honour her (Sutherland, 2007:48).

#### Culture Variable in African Literature

From the analysis of the literary texts above, these writers have identified the following independent culture variables: folktale, song, sacrifice, and marriage, burial custom and ritual variables. Each variable is represented by roman figure CV which means culture variable.

#### CV (I): FOLKTALE

Folktale is a famous act of storytelling in African culture which has transformed into literary form. It has crept into and has become the basic element of oral tradition in African literature. Akporobaro (2004) noted that such stories reflect cultural norms, local history and the realities of an environment. It is in forms: dilemma, etiological, animal fairy among others which are often fraught with music, dancing, singing and sometimes pantomime and often told by a single person or group of people. The language is very simple but saddled with literary devices and actions that sustain the attention of the audience so that they could achieve meanings out of the story. The stories have survived because they are passed from generation to generation and have special meanings and importance for the people in culture. In Achebe (1957: 67-70) Ekwefi told Ezinma of folk story of tortoise who deceived other animals to get a meal and the story of the bird "eneke nti - oba" who challenged the whole world to wrestling contest and was finally defeated by the cat. The lesson derivable from this story is that a single person does not challenge the world and win, instead, people should



learn how to live in harmony with other people. There is also the story of the tortoise and his wily way on page 7, and the story of the quarrel between Earth and Sky on page 38. This quarrel forced the sky to withhold rain for seven years, crops died, food become scarce and the dead cannot be buried. Vulture was sent to the sky to plead with the heaven to release the rain which he did, but on his way, he pieces the cocoyam leaves in which rain was wrapped and there was a heavy rainfall. As a result of this mishap, the vulture escaped to foreign land.

*The Marriage of Anansewa* (2007) itself is a Ghanaian folktale which literarily means Anansem; and which overage developed into full system of traditional theatre classified as Anasegoro. However, folktale, which was originally classified as oral *archetype* in oral literature has crept into modern African literature and has become one of its independent variables.

## CV II: SONG

This is a short piece of music with words that we sing. In African literature, Song manifests as an archetypal element of African literature and has become an effective medium of storytelling. It is noted in Achebe (1958) that Okonkwo's father, Nnoka is being very good at playing flute and has enjoyed listening and playing band at its rhythm. Even when Obierika was celebrating the daughter's marriage, they sang the latest song according to Achebe (1958:83-99) in the village thus:

*If I hold her hand  
She tables Don't touch  
If I hold her foot  
She says Don't touch  
But when I hold her waist beads  
She pretends not to know.*

Songs are also forms of poetry, which depend on voice modulation in its performance. It has its scope, meaning and strength and linguistic level. This traditional element takes a different dimension in Sutherlands (2007) where songs were used as natural social song in verbal condolence messages and praise songs. In every African society, praise song is extensively used in greeting (as in Yoruba's *oriki*) royal appellation and sometimes-heroic deeds of one's family lineage. Examples abound in chief of Sapa's Praise song and in Chief-Who-Is-Chief's appellation. Work songs, war songs and other songs are all elements of folk literature, which have been linguistically nativised, and introduced as one of the basic features of African literature. An example of wailing song can be found on *In Sutherland*

(2007:85) where Christie led Pa. George and his condolence team from Sapaase's Palace round the bed where Anansewa is laying dead.

### CV III: SACRIFICE

Oxford Advanced Learners Dictionary (ed.) sees this archetype as an act of giving up something valuable in order to get or do something that is more important for oneself for another person. There are so many social, spiritual and economic problems ravaging the African man from the day earth was created to the present day. However, sacrifice, which is indispensable element of African belief system, is always a spiritual instrument of finding solution to these problems and in African literatures of all genres as noted in Sutherland (2007). However, sacrifice has become a distinctive feature of African literature. When a lady is about to go and join her husband in Ghanaian Akan culture, sacrifice must be carried out to make the future of the bride bright. This sacrifice includes the squeezing of lime on the head of the bride, sprinkling of sacred palm-oil, yam touching lips with an egg and adorning her with gold to honour her as performed by Aya in Sutherland (2007:48) thus:

*We squeezed lime on your head  
To season you so that  
• When life's hardship approach,  
You will be capable of standing firm to field them  
We have sprinkled sacred palm oil, yam  
We have touched your lips  
with an egg to invoke blessings for you  
and we have adorned you with gold to honour you.*

Moreover, Aya demanded from Nnanya a ritual vine believed to have the power to purge and avert evil forces and to purify the bride. The literary feature has remained an indispensable religious way of life in Africa and one of the elements of oral tradition which anchor African literature and makes it unique. Closely connected to sacrifice element is ritual libation, which characterized African literature and this is obvious in the way Ananse pour libation to invoke the spirit of Anansewa into life Sutherland (2007:90).

### CV IV: MARRIAGE

Just like every other culture, marriage is important in Africa and has a peculiar cultural way of getting glued to each other. The stories in TMA (2007) are anchored on the marriage of a beautiful lady called Anansewa. The father was poor and wanted to make fortune from the daughter's marriage. He promised all chiefs his daughter's hand and made a good fortune from them. He now used cunning way to give the daughter to her heart-desire,



Chief-Who-Is-Chief. So, the story in *The Marriage of Anansewa* permeates the theatrical play.

#### CV V: RELIGION

Religion is the belief in the existence of a God or gods and the activities that are connected with their worship. It is a man's spontaneous awareness of and spontaneous relation to his immediate awareness of a living power which is infinitely greater than himself (Idowu, 1982). However, religion is an element of culture which has a peculiar way of worship depending on the types of religion. It was discovered that Igbo are diffused monotheists and their deities have different places of worship. The personal 'chi' is symbolized by different shrines at the center of the village, the shrine of Ulu was located at the market place of Umuaro and some of these deities inhabit the hills, caves or rivers as noted in Achebe (1958:9).

All these have linguistic implications on African literature because the writer has to understand the culture of his religion, bend, coined lexical items of and manipulates them through the process of linguistic, pragmatic and creative nativizations, if the writer chooses to use foreign language to express African religious experiences without necessarily affecting intelligibility.

#### CV VI: BURIAL CUSTOM

Custom is an aspect of culture, which deals with the man's way of life. Indeed, man's ways of life is deep rooted in his culture. However, every aspect of culture has a peculiar way of life. Burial custom is no exemption in every culture. Indian culture permits cremation of corpse while African culture permits befitting burial due to their belief in life after death and roles of ancestors in the life of the living. In Akan culture of Ghana, the husband has the customary obligation to give his dead wife a befitting burial or children have the same cultural backing to bury their parents. Yet, this cultural obligation has some peculiar cultural limitations as noted in Sutherlands (2007:78). The messengers from the chief of Mines said that:

*We will be grief Sir, our royal one has this to say: that because this lady had not become his wife, he cannot give her burial, that which custom does permit, he is not reluctant to fulfill, He sends this bold of silk; this Kente from bonwire; this dunes cotton cloths. Use them for dressing his lady's bed for her. He sends this drinks, and this bag of money to help he father pay the funeral in farewell to his lady.*

The above excerpt shows that the fineness of African burial custom in Ghanaian culture and its attempt limitations. Its translation too has language implications as the language has to be coined in such a way that the cultural currency is not lost in translation.

#### CV VII: RITUAL

Ritual is an element of drama, which is as old as man on this planet earth. Man viewed the natural forces including the yearly seasonal changes as not predictable and sought through various means of controlling this power through rituals. Ritual is a process through which the man makes the nature work. However, man believes that he could cut nature to achieve his desire through ritualistic celebration which has become religious rite and well institutionalized in African culture. Ritual and ritual libation becomes a recurrent decimal in African literature and they featured prominently in Sutherland (2007:90) where chief – who – is – chief is a contestant for Anansewa's hands in marriage. He sent some bottles of drinks for the funeral of Anansewa make-belief death. Ananse poured some libation to invoke the spirit of Anansewa thus: *'Chief-Who-Is-Chief who loves you, true, wake – oh – wake...'* Upon hearing the chief's name, she woke up and was later married to him. This element of tradition has become one of the parameters of conceptualizing African literature.

#### CONCLUSION

It is hereby concluded that African literature has cultural variables. Two African literary texts are analysed; Chinua Achebe's TFA and Efua T. Sutherland's TMA where the following elements of oral tradition: folktale, song, sacrifice, marriage, religion, burial custom and rituals are identified as cultural variables and distinctive features of modern African literature which distinguished it from American, British, Caribbean, and Scandinavian literature. The analysis projects that Africans are very rich in culture and their oral and written literature are African culture based. It also envisaged that the conceptualization and recognition of these culture variables would facilitate better understanding and appreciation of Modern African literature.



**Bibliography**

- Adedoyin, B. (2003) *The English Language Usage in Nigeria. Creative and Non Creative Approach*, J.S. Piston, Apapa Lagos.
- Adejare, O. and Adejare R.O. (2006) *Tertiary Grammar*, Difamo Books, Ilupeju, Lagos.
- Achebe, C. (1958) *Things Fall Apart* Greenwich, Fawcett, Ind.
- Amadi, L. (1973) *Historical and Cultural Elements in the writing of Chinua Achebe and Soyinka*, W. University Michigan.
- Akporobaro F.B.O. (2004) *Introduction to African Oral Literature* Williams Wilberforce Institute for African Research and Development.
- Brumfit, C.J. and Carter, R.A. (1991), *Literature and Language Teaching*, Oxford University Press, London.
- Emenyonu, E. (1982), African Literature: What does it take to be its critic? In Jones, E.A. (1982, Ed) *African Literature Today*, An Annual Review No. 5 The Novel in Africa, Heinemann London.
- Graham A. Walsh, C. and Watkins, S. (1995), *Studying Literature: A practical Introduction*, Harvester Wheatsheaf, New York London.
- Osiyale, B.O. (2004) *Man and His Beliefs* in Fagbeyinbo M.O. (2004) *Topics in Tertiary Social Studies*, Lucky Odoni (Nig.) Enterprises, Ijebu-Ode, Ogun State.
- National Teachers Institute (1990) *English Course Book, Module 1*. NTI, Kaduna.
- Sutherland, E.T. (1964) *The Marriage of Anansewa*. Animo Press Ltd. Ikeja.