ABSTRACT

The primary aim of the paper is to show how language of Chinua Achebe’s novel, Things Fall Apart is very rich because of various figurative expressions. A practical study of his language is made without taking the help of many references. As it is known, literature as a reflection of society is concerned with man and his experience. The creative artist exploits the language in a significant way to suit his temperament and thoughts. Moreover, language is functional. Meaning is found at all significant level. So Achebe is found using various figurative expressions in the novel. Such uses make the language of the novel ornamental and elucidate vividly its various themes, characters, atmosphere, artistry and points of views. Such a study is of a very new kind. It has a great scope for all who want to know about different aspects of the language of Achebe’s novels.

KEYWORDS: Simile, Personification, Metaphor, Oxymoron, Antithesis, and Rhetorical Questions

INTRODUCTION

Language of Achebe’s Novel

A novelist exploits and explores the various resources of language according to his temperament and purpose. According to Lodge: “The novelist’s medium is language, whatever he does, qua novelist; he does in and through language (O.Lodge, 9)”. So, the language of the text provides with an insight into the artistic values of the novel. Moreover, language is functional. Meaning is found at all significant level. As Halliday has pointed out in “Linguistic Function and Literary Style: An Inquiry into the Language of William Golding’s The Inheritor”: “It is through this function that language makes links with itself and with the situation, and discourse becomes possible because the speaker or writer can produce a text and the listener or the reader can recognize one (32)”. Keeping this in mind a practical study of the use of figurative expressions by Chinua Achebe in his Things Fall Apart is made under this paper. His language is extra-ordinary for its ornamental value, vividness and impact. He has tried to picturize the Igbo community, its tradition, culture, belief, taboos and degradation of all with the predominance of white men. The facts intended to be communicated are done in an effective way. The figures of speech such as similes, personifications, antithesis, and rhetorical questions etc. used in Things Fall Apart elucidate vividly its various themes, characters, atmosphere and points of view.

Simile

The similes used in the novel are very realistic and vivid. Achebe’s characterization in the novel is also very vivid. He describes characters and their actions in a very uncommon manner. While going to compare his characters and their actions in the course of the novel, he uses animals, birds, insects and some abstract aspects. The use of such similes aggravates the quality of his language. The similes in the following sentences throw light on characters, their actions and states: Amalinze was a willy craftsman, but Okonkwo was as slippery as fish in water (Things Fall Apart, 3).

As soon as Unoka understood what his friend was driving at, he burst out laughing. He laughed loud and long and his voice rang out clear as the ogene, and tears stood in his eyes. (7)
Okonkwo did not taste any food for two days after the death of Ikemefuna […]. He felt like a drunken giant walking with the limbs of mosquito. (57)

Maduka vanished into the compound like lightening. The conversation at once centered on him, and everybody agreed that he was as sharp as a razor. (64)

She was rewarded by occasional spells of health during which Ezinma bubbled with energy like fresh palm wine. (72)

It is here”, said Ezinma touching the ground with her finger. Okonkwo stood by, rumbling like thunder in the rainy season. (75)

At the mention of Ezinma’s name Ekwefi jerked her head sharply like an animal that had sniffed death in the air. (91)

A strange and sudden weakness descended on Ekwefi as she stood gazing in the direction of the voices like a hen whose only chick has been carried away by a kite. (93)

Ekwefi screwed her eyes up in effort to see her daughter and the priestess, but whenever she thought she saw their shape, it immediately dissolved like a melting lump of darkness […]. It was a long and weary journey and Ekwefi felt like a sleep-walker most of the way. (96)

The priestess, with Ezinma sleeping on her back, had crawled out of the shrine on her belly like a snake. (101)

The concept of egwugwu is very special to Igbo community. A person wearing ancestral mask represents a village of the clan. He is considered as egwugwu. His function is to make the judgment of something wrong done by any person. The nine villages of Umuofia have their own egwugwu. Their leader is called Evil Forest. He represents the village of Umueru. Ferocity and importance of Evil Forest are expressed by the similes in the following sentences:

Evil forest then thrust the pointed end of his rattling staff into the earth. And it began to shake and rattle, like something agitating with a metallic life. (81)

Evil Forest began to speak and all the while he spoke everyone was silent. The eight other egwugwus were as still as still as statues. (84)

The novel Things Fall Apart tells about Igbo community. The people of the community dwell in villages that are surrounded by forest. The night is extremely dark when moon is not in the sky. Oil lamp lightens the huts only whenever there is no rain. The sun pours down hot rays causing pain and problem to people and when it rains, that brings relief. The similes in the following sentences throw light on Nature and its different tricks:

The night was impenetrably dark. The moon had been rising later and later every night until now it was seen at dawn. And whenever the moon forsook evening and rose at cock-crow the nights were as black as charcoal […]. There was an oil lamp in all the four huts on Okonkwo’s compound, and each hut seen from the others looked like a soft eye of yellow half-light set in the solid massiveness of night. (86)

At last rain came. It was sudden and tremendous. For two of three months the sun had been gathering strength till it seemed to breathe a breath of fire on the earth. All the grass had long been scorched brown and the sand felt like live coals to the feet. Evergreen trees wore a dusty coat of brown. The birds were silenced in the forests, and the world lay panting under the live, vibrating heat. And then came the clap of
thunder. It was unlike the deep and liquid rumbling of the rainy season. A mighty wind arose and filled the air with dust. Palm trees swayed as if they combed their leaves into flying crests like strange and fantastic coiffure. (118)

Personification

A few numbers of personifications are found in Things Fall Apart. Some inanimate objects are attributed with human qualities. Those are described and addressed as if they were human beings. Apart from that some animate objects, not being human beings are also addressed as if they were human beings. Most of the personifications in the novel occur in the course of telling short stories by certain characters. Excluding inanimate objects, some animals and bird are personified as they are generally personified in fable. However, personifications in the novel highlight artistry and decorate the text and build the theme.

Nowye, the son of Okonkwo is being told a story by her mother. In that story ‘Earth’, ‘Sky’ and ‘Vulture’ etc. are personified:

He remembered the story she often told of the quarrel between Earth and Sky long ago, and how Sky withheld rain for seven years, until crops withered and the dead could be buried because the hoes broke on the stony Earth. At last Vulture was sent to plead with Sky, and to soften his heart with a song of suffering of the sons of men. Whenever Nwoye’s mother sang this song, he felt carried away to the distant scene in the sky where Vulture, Earth’s emissary, sang for mercy. At last sky was moved to pity, and he gave to Vulture rain wrapped in leaves of coco-yam. (48)

As above, there is another story that was told to Okonkwo by his mother when he was a child. He remembers that story. In the course of the story ‘mosquito’ and ‘ear’ are personified:

Mosquito, she had said, had asked Ear to marry him, whereupon Ear fell on the floor in uncontrollable laughter. “How much longer do you think you live?” She asked. “You are already a skeleton”. Mosquito went away humiliated, and any time he passed her way he told Ear that he was still alive. (68)

Apart from the above there are some other short stories told by character where words like ‘Tortoise’, ‘Parrot’, “Mother Kite’ and “Daughter Kite’ etc. are personified.

Metaphor

There are a few uses of metaphors in Things Fall Apart. Those are indicating the point of similarity or resemblance between two essentially different things but not directly. The similarity is suggestive and speculative. The metaphors in the novel throw light on characters and atmosphere.

Igbo people generally depend on yam for their food. They cultivate yam in their fields during rainy season. Yam is considered as the supreme crop. Okonkwo works hard and grows Yam in his field. The resemblance of Yam is made with men’s crop and coco-yam is with women’s crops as follows:

And so at a very early age when he was striving desperately to build a barn through share-cropping, Okonkwo was also fending for his father’s house. It was like pouring grains of corn into a bag full of holes.

His mother and sisters worked hard enough, but they grew women’s crops, like coco-yams, beans and cassava. Yam, the king of crops, was a man’s crops. (21)
The metaphor of ‘locust’ in the novel is related to nature. The arrival of locusts to Umuofia is a source of pleasure to people. Undoubtedly, they cause destruction to crops. Still, people become happy with their arrival, as they take locust very good to eat. The following sentences present the metaphor of ‘locust’ that is resembled with harbingers:

The locusts had not come for many, many years, and only the old people had seen them before […]. At first, a fairly small swarm came. They were the harbingers sent to survey the land. (50)

Some characters of the novel are suggestive. Odukwe describes his in-law, Uzuwulu in his speech, who represents beastly nature:

My in-law has told you that we went to his house, bear him up and took our sister and her children away. All that is true. He told you that he came to take back her bride-price and we refused to give it him. That also is true. My in-law Uzuwulu is a beast. (83)

Umuofia, the land of Igbos is formed with nine villages. Each village is represented by an egwugwu, whose charge is to control crimes in the clan.

Evil Forest is the chief egwugwu, who enjoys power in the clan. He is the metaphor of construction as well as destruction. The following sentences show it:

I am Evil forest, I am Dry meat- that-fills-the-mouth, I am Fire -that-burns-without-faggots. (85)

The main character of the novel Okonkwo is very suggestive. He stands for vigour, strength, anger and destruction. It is indicated in the following sentences for example:

That seemed the most likely reason, and he was not afraid of war. He was a man of action, a man of war. (10)

Okonkwo was popularly called the “Roaring Flame”. As he looked into the log fire he recalled the name. He was a flaming fire. (139-140)

It is thus found that the metaphors in the novel are related to nature and characters. Some of them are negative in implication. However, they intensify the theme of the novel.

Oxymoron

Oxymoron in Things Fall Apart is a few in numbers. In some places in the course of the narrative, two words or phrases of opposite significance are brought together in order to make an effect. Most of the oxymoron in the novel are related to characters and express their nature.

Moreover, those are highlighting the artistry of Achebe’s language. Most of the oxymoron in the novel reflects the attitude of Okonkwo; the protagonist, Uchendu; Okonkwo’s uncle, people of Mbanta and Mr. Kiaga; the white missionary. Those are as follows:

When he began again, the anger of his face was gone and in its place a sort of smile hovered, more terrible and more sinister than the anger. (11)

He laughed a mirthless laughter and turned to his sons and daughter. (121)

When this was interpreted to the men of Mbanta, they broke into derisive laughter. (133)
There was no question of killing a missionary here for Mr. Kaiga, despite of his madness, was quite harmless. (142)

Thus, oxymoron in the novel hints about the negative attitude and aspect in the characters and build up the feature of Achebe’s language.

**Antithesis**

In the novel Things Fall Apart Achebe has used some numbers of antithesis. The two clauses contrasted in meaning highlight the characters, situations, artistry and theme in the novel.

A few examples will be discussed below. Morning shows the day. Similarly, Okonkwo, the protagonist was able to manifest his qualities from his very youth. He had proved himself as the famous wrestler as well as on of the greatest men of his clan. The following antithetical expressions expose the above:

He was still young but he had won fame as the greatest wrestler in nine villages. (7)

And although Okonkwo was still young he was already one of the greatest men of his time. (8)

Okonkwo was banished from his village as per the rule of his clan because he unknowingly killed the son of Ezeudu. He lived seven years in the village of his maternal uncle Uchendu. But, living there does not satisfy him. He thought he could have got more prosperity, had he lived in his own village. The antithetical expression below shows it:

Although he had prospered in his mother land, Okonkwo knew that he would have prospered even more in Umuofia, in the land of his father where men were bold and warlike. (148)

Okonkwo and some others of his village are called for by white District commissioner. They are kept inside jail for a few days and then released. But, when they were in jail, that had left a great impact on Okonkwo’s family and on Okonkwo himself when he came back home after being released. The following antithetical expressions show the above:

Okonkwo’s compound was like a deserted homestead. It was as if cold water had been poured on it. His family was all there, but everyone spoke in whispers. (177)

Ezinma had prepared some food for her father as soon as news spread that the six men would be released. She took it to him in his obi. He ate absentmindedly. *He had no appetite; he only ate to please her*. (179)

The white missionaries in Mbanta, a neighbouring village of Umuofia was given the place in Evil Forest, when they asked for place to the leaders of the village.

Evil Forest was a place of evil spirits. So, people of Mbanta thought that white people cannot exist long there. But, white people built church and carried on different activities. The following antithetical expressions show it:

At first clan had assumed that it would not survive. But it had gone on living and gradually becoming stronger. The clan was worried, but not overmuch […] It was true they were rescuing twins from the bush, but they never brought them into the village. (141)

White men gradually predominate Umuofia like her neighbouring villages. They establish church, spread their religion and at the same time they carry on some developmental works. Okonkwo has the above realization. The following expression shows the above fact:

The white man had indeed brought a lunatic religion, but he had also built a trading store and for the first time palm-oil and kernel became things of great price, and much money flowed into Umuofia. (161)
Rhetorical Question

In *Things Fall Apart*, Achebe has used a lot of rhetorical questions. In many where in the novel, questions are asked not for the sake of getting answers, but to put a point more effectively. These rhetorical questions highlight characters, situations, theme and artistry in the novel too. A few examples of such uses are cited below.

Ikemefuna was a boy who was kept as war hostage at the house of Okonkwo. He was brought by Okonkwo from an enemy clan as the people of that clan had killed the wife of Udo, a man of Umuofia. The boy lived in Okonkwo’s house for three years. But, according to the law of the clan, the boy should be killed in response to the murder of Udo’s wife. So, he was taken to jungle for the purpose. The boy did not know anything about it. He felt as if he was being taken to his own village. On the way, he had many thoughts in mind about his family members. This is represented as follows:

Would he recognize her now? She must have grown quite big. How his mother would weep for joy, and thank Okonkwo for having looked after him so well and for bringing him back […]. Could he remember them all? (54)

Okonkwo killed Ikemefuna in the jungle. He came back home. But his mind went back to the boy again and again. Being a very hard hearted man he shivered with nervousness. Different questions that arise in his mind are represented as follows:

When did you become a shivering old woman”, Okonkwo asked himself, ‘you, who are known in all the nine villages for his valour in war? How can a man who has killed five men in battle fall to pieces because he has added a boy to their number? Okonkwo, you have become a woman indeed. (59)

Ezeudu, a man of many titles dies. According to the custom of the clan, his funeral is performed. But on the eve of the funeral, guns are fired as last salute to the man. Unknowingly, the bullet from Okonkwo’s gun enters the body of Ezeudu’s son and he dies. So, Okonkwo has to flee from the clan as per the law of the land. Everything he has in the village is demolished by people of his clan. After everything is done, Obierika has thought concerning Okonkwo, his innocence and the law of the land. This is presented through the following rhetorical expressions:

Why should a man suffer so grievously for all offence he had committed inadvertently? But although he thought for a long time he found no answer […]. He remembered his wife’s twin children, whom he had thrown away. What crime had they committed? (113-114)

After Okonkwo is exiled for seven years, he goes to the village of his maternal uncle, Uchendu. But living at the house of his uncle does not give him comfort. He has always thought of his village, his twin children thrown away and about his precarious condition. His uncle gives him consolation. That is represented through following rhetorical expressions:

You think you are the greatest sufferer in the world. Do you know that men are sometimes banished for life? Do you know that men sometimes lose all their yams and even their children? I had six wives once[…]. Do you know how many children I have buried – children I begot in my youth and strength? Twenty two? (122)

When Okonkwo is in exile, he comes to know that one of his sons, Nwoye is influenced by white men’s religion. He is going to their church. That hurts his heart. He hates himself for giving birth to such a son. That is expressed through the following rhetorical expressions:
Why, he cried in his heart, should he, Okonkwo, of all people, be cursed with such a son? He saw clearly in it the figure of his personal god or chi. For how else could he explain his great misfortune and exile and now his despicable son’s behaviour? (139)

When Okonkwo is in exile, Obierika visits him. He tells him how white men have captured Abame, a neighbouring village of Umuofia. He says how white men have interfered into the religion, custom and laws of Igbo community. After knowing everything Okonkwo has a great reaction. That is represented through following rhetorical expressions:

Does the white man understand our custom, about land? How can he when he does not even speak our tongue? [...] How do you think we can fight when our own brothers have turned against us? (160)

Thus, rhetorical questions play a great role in expressing different situations, characters and their feelings as well as the artistry of Achebe’s language.

REFERENCES
