

## THE PRAGMATICS OF METAPHOR IN NIGERIAN LITERATURE

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Metaphor, the quintessence of figurative expressions, is pervasive in everyday life. Research in both linguistics and psychology has made it abundantly clear that metaphor plays a central role in human linguistic and non-linguistic behavior. According to Lakoff and Johnson:

Metaphor is for most people a device of the poetic imagination and the rhetorical flourish—a matter of extraordinary rather than ordinary language. Moreover, metaphor is typically viewed as characteristic of language alone, a matter of words rather than thought or action. For this reason, most people think they can get along perfectly well without metaphor. We have found, on the contrary, that metaphor is pervasive in everyday life, not just in language but in thought and action. Our ordinary conceptual system, in terms of which we both think and act, is fundamentally metaphorical in nature (1980: 3).

So pervasive is figurative language in human affairs and thought that it is estimated by Polio *et al.* (1977) that about four figures of speech are uttered per speaking minute on the average in free discourse. Including both novel forms and common idiomatic or frozen forms, this results in about 21 million figures of speech per lifetime. Indeed, some linguists, philosophers, and psychologists have wondered whether all word meanings might not have metaphorical origins (Hoffman and Honeck, 1980: 6).

Roman Jakobson was an influential linguist who argued the central role of metaphor in human behavior. Writing about the linguistic problems of the disorder called aphasia (loss or impairment of the power to understand and use speech), Jakobson observes that the two major component disorders (similarity disorder and contiguity disorder) seem to be related to the two basic rhetorical figures of metaphor and metonymy (1956).

In Jakobson's view, the distinction between these figures is fundamental. Metaphor proposes a transferable similarity or analogy between one entity (*e.g.* the movement of a car) and another which may be substituted for it (*e.g.* the movement of a beetle). In the case of metonymy the basis for the substitution is not similarity so much as sequence. The entity involved in the substitution is chosen because it is "adjacent" to or "contiguous" with the one it replaces: it "follows on" in sequence. So for the "The President of the United States" we can substitute "where the President lives" with the result that "The White House" can serve as an example of metonymy for the President. In the same fashion, "hands" can stand for humans, "the crown" for the monarchy, "a good table" for food, and so on.

Consequently, when language is used poetically, Jakobson argued, it draws on both the selective and the communicative modes in order to promote equivalence: "The poetic function of language projects the principle of equivalence from the axis of

selection into the axis of combination” (1960: 358). Thus, when I say “my car beetles along,” I select “beetles” from a storehouse of other possibilities and combine it with “car” on the principle that this will make the car’s movement and the insect’s movement equivalent. This gives the message complexity. According to Jakobson, “similarity superimposed on contiguity imparts to poetry its thoroughgoing symbolic, multiplex, polysemantic essence” (1960: 370). However, the main problem with Jakobson’s analysis is that it fails to take into account the full context involved in the production and interpretation of metaphors. In the words of Hawkes, “The ‘meaning’, value and simple *existence* of any metaphor is discernible only as it actually occurs” (1972: 79, original emphasis).

Current philosophical approaches to figurative language represent a reaction against linguistic approaches, especially those conceived within the narrow confines of transformational-generative grammar. According to Honeck:

These newer philosophical approaches to pragmatics highlight important issues in the psychology of figurative language— context, speaker-listener roles, intention, inference etc. They underline, not linguistic competence in the form of fixed rules for producing grammatical sentences, but mastery of the entire linguistic system in the service of saying what one wants to say in a way one wants to say it. (1980: 34).

Within the philosophy of language, “speech-act theory” (Austin, 1962; Searle, 1969, 1979) and the theory of “conversational implicature” (Grice, 1975) have particularly influenced thinking on figurative language. For example, several scholars have suggested that metaphors might be treated as (indirect) speech acts since it would appear that metaphor is not completely specified by the literal utterance used to convey it. In this connection, Steinmann argues that “Speaking figuratively consists...of saying (utterance meaning) what you mean (intended meaning) by not meaning what you say (sentence meaning)” (1973: 224). Also Honeck notes that

in literal language, intended meaning and sentence meaning are consonant, as are intended meaning and utterance meaning, so that sentence meaning and utterance meaning are consonant also. In figurative language, sentence meaning and utterance meaning do not accord. (1980: 33).

Similarly, Loewenberg claims that metaphors (as well-formed indicative sentences) are false and thereby fail as assertions. The listener, therefore, judges them not to be truth claims but rather speech act proposals, that “certain things be viewed or understood in a certain way” (1975: 335).

Here I will use notions derived from systemic-functional grammar to investigate the prototypical figurative forms of simile and metaphor in Nigerian literature, with particular reference to the novels of two prominent Nigerian authors, Wole Soyinka, the Nobel laureate for literature in 1986, and Chinua Achebe, whose first novel, *Things Fall Apart*, a classic, has sold millions of copies worldwide and has been translated into over

60 languages including German, Italian, Japanese, Spanish, Slovene, Russian, Hebrew, French, Czech, and Hungarian. In the United States alone, according to a recent report by Doubleday, publishers of the reprints of the novel, *Things Fall Apart* has sold more than five million copies since its publication in 1958.

Systemic-functional grammar is the brainchild of a British linguist, Michael Halliday. This grammar, as formulated by Halliday, has changed considerably over the years. Whereas the early form of the theory was known as scale-and-category grammar, Halliday's work became increasingly influenced by ideas on the functional nature of language during the latter half of the 1960s. In this respect a multifunctional semantic dimension was not merely added to systemic theory but became central to it. Given this orientation, Halliday now regards the text as the basic semantic unit and he and others working within systemic framework have vigorously applied themselves to the study of texts of all types.

However, in systemic linguistics, the attitude towards figurative language has been one of ambivalence and inconsistency. For example, Halliday (1985), while devoting a significant portion of chapter 10 of his book, *An Introduction to Functional Grammar*, to what he calls 'grammatical metaphor', indicates that figurative language such as simile and metaphor are among the "'figures of speech' recognized in rhetorical theory . . . having to do with verbal transference of various kinds. The general term for these is METAPHOR" (Halliday, 1985: 319, original emphasis). However, he suggests that we can interpret metaphor and simile grammatically in terms of relational processes; for example, the metaphor implied in "a flood of protests poured in following the announcement" derives from the intensive ('is') type of relational process paraphrasable as "a large quantity is a flood." In this instance, "a large quantity" is the Token and "a flood" is the Value. This literal paraphrasing is based on the fact that "a meaning may be realized by a selection of words that is different from that which is in some sense typical or unmarked. From this end, metaphor is variation in the expression of meanings" (1985: 320). Nevertheless, the danger here is that no literal paraphrase "would have the same power to inform and enlighten as the original" nor "give the *insight* that the metaphor did" (Black, 1981: 78-9, original emphasis).

Furthermore, according to Halliday, "In *simile*, resemblance is treated as a circumstantial relationship of comparison 'is like'" (1985: 320, original emphasis). Similes can also be treated under the relational processes as "circumstance as attribute." Here, "the Attribute is a prepositional phrase and the circumstantial relation is expressed by the preposition, e.g., *about*, *in*, *like*, e.g., *my love is like a red red rose . . .*" (1985: 119, original emphasis). In the latter example, *my love* is the carrier, while *a red red rose* is the attribute. As regards the textual metafunction, Halliday also treats similes as a matter of collocation; for example, in "quick as lightning it turned round . . ." (1985: 314), he regards the vehicle lightning as collocating significantly with quick.

From the foregoing it would thus appear that there is no consistency in systemic linguistics as to how figurative language might best be described and characterized. However, the metalanguage for talking about figurative expressions like simile and

metaphor is already present in the ideational component of systemic-functional grammar. Since, in the main, semblance and equivalence belong to the relational processes of the circumstantial and identifying types, then simile and metaphor have to be interpreted with respect to functional labels such as Carrier-Attribute and Token-Value. These are the functional labels I will use in the discussion that follows. These functional labels are similar to the terms “tenor” and “vehicle” proposed by the rhetorician I. A. Richards (1936). He distinguished the thing that is being commented upon, the tenor (or topic), and the thing used to talk about the tenor, the vehicle. For example, in “my love is like a red red rose,” the tenor is *my love* while the vehicle is a *red red rose*. The implicit relation between the tenor and vehicle, the semantic basis for the metaphor, is called the ground. It would then appear that the systemic labels of “Carrier” and “Token” on the one hand, and “Attribute” and “Value,” on the other, are subsumed under Richards’ “tenor” and “vehicle,” respectively.

Discussion and analysis that follow are based on examples from Soyinka’s *The Interpreters* (1965) and Achebe’s *No Longer at Ease* (1960). (After excerpts, *The Interpreters* is abbreviated as *Int.* and *No Longer at Ease* as *NLE.*) Both novels are chosen because they show similarities in setting and theme which are important for my discussion of the pragmatics of metaphor in Nigerian literature. For example, most of the actions in both novels take place in the urban centers, particularly the city of Lagos, the commercial capital of Nigeria. Both novels are also concerned with young Nigerians struggling with their destinies in a society riddled with contradictions. My central thesis is that we can understand the functions of figurative language more clearly if the “attributes” and “values” are analyzed as realizations of specific ideational functions. But it must be realized that attributes and values which any author constructs to describe and characterize people, places, and events in his/her writings are not intra-textual properties describable solely in terms of their aesthetic functions, but rather they work simultaneously within a “higher-order” social semiotic of choice, which signals something of the user’s own socio-cultural and ideological preferences.

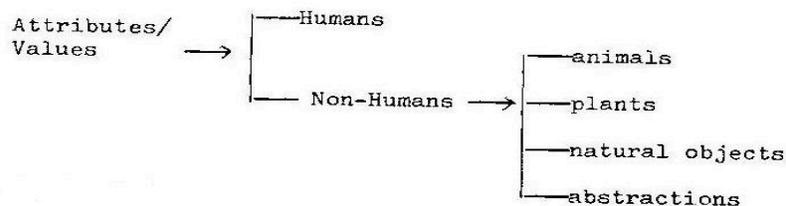
The distribution of similes and metaphors in both novels is as shown in the table below.

	Wole Soyinka: <i>The Interpreters</i>	Chinua Achebe: <i>No Longer at Ease</i>
Similes	113 (57%)	61 (87.1%)
Metaphors	85 (43%)	9 (12.8%)
TOTAL	198	70

Note that in this paper, similes are semantically comparative (x is like y, x is as y, etc.), while a metaphor is a reclassification that is supposed to be structurally equal (x is y). At

a glance this table indicates that Soyinka makes use of more figurative expressions than Achebe. However, both writers show a preference for similes.

The pragmatics of metaphor in Nigerian literature is explicable in terms of the ideational or experiential function of language, as defined in systemic-functional grammar. In this grammar the ideational function of language is to communicate ideas. It is the function whereby a speaker or writer expresses the constitutive elements of his/her utterance or message. Given this orientation, it can be deduced that the various “attributes” and “values” which Soyinka and Achebe have chosen to describe and characterize the people, objects, places, actions, events, states, and circumstances in their novels are semantic choices realized, in the first instance, from the options specified in the figure below:



The options in this figure are more like things which the writers have chosen to describe the people, places and events in their novels. An examination of the examples in Soyinka’s and Achebe’s novels reveals certain preferences in the semantic choice hierarchy as follows: natural objects, animals, humans, abstractions and plants.

Some examples are given below:

#### 1, Natural objects:

In Soyinka’s *The Interpreters*, most of the natural objects are the elements {tornado, rainbow, earth, rain-drop, moon, etc.) and parts of the human body (ear, nose, head, chin, tongue, toes, etc.), while in Achebe’s *No Longer at Ease* they include the elements and other objects drawn from the environment. In the following examples, the attributes and values denoting the natural objects are italicized.

- a. . . . the sound of *a tornado* which was again his grandfather’s contented laughter (*Int.*, p. 11).
- b. . . . her brown arched *a rainbow* (*Int.*, p. 24).
- c. . . . Kola risen, *a quivering rain-drop* on the roof-edge (*Int.*, p. 164).
- d. Noah’s apostasy is not the wilful kind, it is simply the refusal to be a living being, like *the moon* (*Int.*, p. 231).
- e. “He is like *rain* wasted in the forest” (*NLE*, p. 9).
- f. . . . at night, the electric shines like *the sun* (*NLE*, p. 11).
- g. “His mind cleared immediately as if *the sun* had risen and dried the dew that had settled on it (*NLE*, p. 41).

- h. A stalk of elephant grass had bent into the furnace inspection vent, like *an ear* being tickled (*Int.* p. 29).

## 2. Animals:

- a. The saxophone slunk out of light, *a wounded serpent* diminished in obscene hisses (*Int.* p. 15).
- b. One moment it looked . . . like *a winged rodent* (*Int.* p. 35).
- c. . . . she wiggled like *a trapped fish* (*Int.* p. 61).
- d. Excitement loosened him in short drips like *a dog* (*Int.* p. 143).
- e. He lowered his head like *a charging ram* (*NLE*, p. 1).
- f. We are like *ants* in your sight (*NLE*, p. 8).
- g. . . . soldiers were as strong as *lions* (*NLE*, p. 11).
- h. After his encounter with Mr. Mark he did feel like *a tiger* (*NLE*, p. 80).

## 3. Humans:

- a. One moment it looked like *a woman* (*Int.* p. 35).
- b. He started up like *a madman* (*Int.* p. 56).
- c. . . . for death to come at Sagoe rather like *a rude child* (*Int.* p. 110).
- d. Christ dodged him like *an acrobat* (*Int.* p. 166).
- e. . . . he always looked like *a boy* just out of school (*NLE*, p. 33).
- f. . . . there was something about him that made me think of *the patriarchs* (*NLE*, p. 121-22).
- g. . . . he let tears run down his face like *a child* (*NLE*, p. 146).
- h. He began to say some more things . . . like *a District Officer* (*NLE*, p. 154).

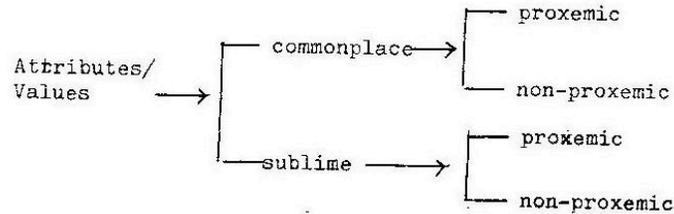
## 4. Abstractions:

- a. . . . drawn to it as *a dream of isolation* (*Int.* p. 12).
- b. the promise it still hold for him like *a salvation* (*Int.* p. 15).
- c. . . . in flight he presented *a shaming spectacle of injustice* (*Int.* p. 114).
- d. . . . his longing to return home took on the *sharpness of physical pain* (*NLE*, p. 11).
- e. . . . gazing at Obi as if he was *a miracle* (*NLE*, p. 57).

## 5. Plants:

- a. . . . drew an object in the rejected space, shaped like *an onion* (*Int.* p. 16).
- b. . . . and became an indispensable to the cocktail part as *the olive* on a stick (*Int.* p. 21).
- c. I can almost hear her buttocks squelch, like those *oranges* (*Int.* p. 25).
- d. . . . plucking houses, trees and children like *the unripe mango* (*Int.* p. 225).
- e. It always reminded him of twin *kernels* (*NLE*, p. 16).

Although the figure sheds some light on the writers' choice of imagery (in the literary, critical sense of the word), thereby furnishing labels and emphasizing similarities, it does not reveal how the choice of imagery can be linked to a higher-order social semiotic of choice, which signals something of the writer's own socio-cultural and ideological preferences. In other words, the choice of attributes and values is in many ways an ideological choice in that the attributes and values not only have to construct a reality for readers, they also have to help in transmitting systems of ideas and beliefs which are products of the society from which the text is created in the first place. In order to capture this social semiotic of choice, the next figure is proposed.



This figure posits that in describing and characterizing the people, places, and events in his/her works, a writer chooses between attributes and values which are either commonplace or sublime. Note that the word *commonplace* is not to be interpreted in a pejorative sense; rather, in this study, it denotes ordinary everyday objects, actions, or occurrences. *Sublime*, the opposite of *commonplace*, refers to ideas, subjects, objects, actions, occurrences, etc. belonging to the highest regions of thought, reality, or human activity.

The term *proxemic* means whether the values and attributes are images drawn from the Nigerian social milieu and are, therefore, cognitively and socio-culturally relevant to the text receiver's experience. *Non-proxemic* means the opposite. In other words, the terms *proxemic* and *non-proxemic*, as used in this study, are concerned with the ways in which texts create or obliterate culturally relevant contexts. Consequently the metaproperties of the attributes and values are not absolute; rather, they are relative to a perspective, a *Weltanschauung*, which must be based on the Nigerian experience. Prominence, proximity and relevance should radiate, first and foremost, from the eye of the Nigerian *Weltanschauer*. How we see things depends on where we see them from, and where we see them from is a socio-historical, culturally shaped position. Figurative expressions—like proverbs, conventional sayings, and other art forms drawn from the social milieu—should aim to reproduce the intelligible world, that is, the world that the Nigerian intellect imposes upon nature in accordance with Nigerian beliefs and the whole Nigerian way of life. It is in this sense that the attributes and values must be proxemic: must construct a social reality relevant to the Nigerian experience.

Conversely, a Nigerian writer who chooses non-proxemic attributes and values to encode his/her experience will not only be experiencing a world fundamentally different from the one the typical Nigerian reader inhabits, but he/she will also be employing figurative expressions which are not products of our own sort of culture, attributes and

values which spring from the heart of quite a different way of life. It is in this respect that Foucault (1972) argues that there is no single right way to see things. Our knowledge and beliefs are discursively produced; they are not universal but social-semiotic in origin, and function and depend on power-based cultural shaping processes in a society. Also, as quoted in Carter and Simpson (1989: 12), Barthes argues that claims for the universal validity of literary values are specious. What is valued as literature changes from one society, or culture within a society, to another and cannot be validated outside a study of the discourses which a society produces and lives by.

Similar sentiments have been echoed in the world of literary criticism. For example, Samuel Taylor Coleridge (1956, 1969) emphasizes that metaphors need an audience to complete them, to respond to, or join in with any thought-process that springs from the center of a culture. For instance, he distinguishes between metaphors of Fancy and Imagination. The central feature of the metaphors of Fancy is that they do not creatively involve their audience in themselves. Such metaphors “are ‘abstract’ in this sense and however ingenious they may be, there is a gulf between them and their audience which matches and reflects the gulf between the separate elements which compose them” (Hawkes, 1972: 50). Conversely, the metaphors which spring from the Imagination do require the involvement of the audience because “in this sense, they are part of ‘concrete’ experience, and their language is never self-conscious, or artificial” (Hawkes, 1972: 50). Similarly, I. A. Richards posits that all meanings are universally relative, only appropriate to and valid in the cultural context in which they occur. He argues that “any part of a discourse, in the last resort, does what it does only because the other parts of the surrounding, uttered or unuttered discourse, and its conditions, are what they are” (1936: 10).

Coming nearer home, a Nigerian literary critic has suggested that the most suitable language for the African poet writing in English is the “language of African particulars” which reflects “an African poetic landscape with its flora and fauna – a landscape of elephants, beggars, calabashes, serpents, pumpkins, baskets, town-criers, iron-bells, slit drums, iron masks, hares, snakes, squirrels” (Chinweizu, 1973: 4). After probing Soyinka’s poem “Idanre” Chinweizu arraigns Soyinka as a “Western modernist” poet, thereby implying that he has no regard for the African literary tradition because the imagery in his poem is “imprecise and opaque and lacking in evocative power” (1973: 4). However, we will see in a moment whether this criticism of Soyinka is justified in light of the analysis I am going to undertake relating to his choice of attributes and values as social semiotic in his novel *The Interpreters*.

The rhetorical objectives of logical message and situational relevance are also substantiated by research in modern rhetoric. For example, in their book, *Rhetoric: Discovery and Change* (1970), Young, Becker, and Pike claim that the ethical goal of prose writers is “to be discoverers of new truths as well as preservers and transmitters of the old.” In constructing a message for rhetorical discourse, writers must discover “an ordering principle, or hypothesis” that governs the hierarchical arrangement of information that will be presented in the discourse. In constructing the shape of the discourse, the writer looks for “shared experience, shared knowledge, shared beliefs,

value, and attitudes, shared language” (1970: 120, 172). Halliday has also remarked that a literary text “creates its own immediate context of situation and the relating of it to its environment in the social system is a complex and technical operation” (1978: 140).

Ultimately, the proxemic and non-proxemic have implications for field and tenor. In systemic-functional linguistics, the “field” of discourse is “that which is going on, and has recognizable meaning in the social system; typically a complex of acts in some ordered configuration, and in which the text is playing some part, and including ‘subject matter’ as one special aspect” (Halliday, 1978: 142-3); “tenor” is concerned with “the cluster of socially meaningful participant relationships, both permanent attributes of the participants and role relationships that are specific to the situation” (Halliday, 1978: 143). It is thus hypothesized that

- (1) a Nigerian writer who draws most of his/her imagery (attributes and values) from a world relevant to the Nigerian reader’s experience is more situationally relevant than the one who does not. In other words, the field of his/her discourse is of more immediate relevance to the Nigerian reader’s experience.
- (2) a Nigerian creative writer who uses more non-proxemic attributes and values creates a “communicative distance” (see Peng, 1974) between himself/herself and the Nigerian reader. In this respect attributes and values should be viewed as audience design (tenor). The more non-proxemic attributes and values a writer employs, the more universal his/her work becomes. Non-proxemic attributes and values include abstractions.

With these hypotheses in mind, I proceed to compare Soyinka’s and Achebe’s use of figurative language based on the assumptions underlying the second figure; this figure yields four levels of choice of attributes and values as follows: (1) +commonplace, +proxemic; (2) +commonplace, -proxemic; (3) +sublime, +proxemic; (4) +sublime, -proxemic. Here is a summary of these levels of choice in Soyinka’s and Achebe’s texts, respectively.

	Wole Soyinka <i>The Interpreters</i>	Chinua Achebe: <i>No Longer at Ease</i>
1. +commonplace, +proxemic	110 (55.5%)	60 (85.7%)
2. +commonplace, -proxemic	52 (26.2%)	2 (2.8%)
3. +sublime, +proxemic	29 (14.6%)	5 (7.1%)
4. +sublime, -proxemic	7 (3.5%)	3 (4.2%)
TOTAL	198	70

It is obvious from this table that both Soyinka and Achebe favor the choice of +commonplace, +proxemic attributes and values in the ordering of their ideational experience with particular reference to the people, places, and events in the novels under consideration. However, on the average, Achebe employs more of this level of choice than Soyinka. Examples of the four levels of semiotic choice are given below.

### **+commonplace, +proxemic**

In the examples that follow, the attributes and values are proxemic to the extent that they not only include images drawn from the Nigerian physical and cultural environment, but they also embody images that readily flash relevant pictures in the Nigerian reader's mind.

#### Soyinka's *The Interpreters*

- a. Bandele fitted himself, *wall-gecko*, into a corner (p. 10).
- b. . . . his flabby paunch overflowing downwards, huge rolls of soft *amala* over a leather rim (p. 17).
- c. Simi, Queen bee, with the skin of light pastel earth, *Kano soil* from the air (p. 51).
- d. . . . the air was *a horn of straight palm-wine* on a ten-day fast (p. 52).
- e. . . . the neck of the taxi-driver, its muscles glistening with water, bunching like *P & T cables in oiled insulators* (p. 108).
- f. . . . the coffin . . . it looked like *the perfect tongue of a colanut addict* (p. 111).
- g. Egbo felt he was like *the quarry of Abeokuta* when all the granite had been blown apart (p. 125).
- h. But Death never learns his lesson, he went and brought boxing gloves. When Christ gave him an uppercut like *Dick Tiger* all his teeth were scattered from Kaduna to Aiyetoro (p. 165).
- i. . . . and Death was walking about in bandages from head to toe like *Ologomugomu* (p. 166).
- j. . . . do you always make them feel they are *smuggled watches on sale outside Kingsway?* (p. 195).

#### Achebe's *No Longer at Ease*

- a. Ikoyi was like a *graveyard* (p. 16).
- b. Watching his face one would think they had served him portions of *Epsom salts, rhubarb, and salt alba* (p. 21).
- c. They sat with the feet on the same level as their buttocks, their knees drawn up to their chins like *roast chickens* (p. 38).
- d. Nowadays going to England has become as commonplace as going down to the *village stream* (p. 42).
- e. All his skin peeled off like *snake slough* (p. 44).

- f. And not in a canoe, but a white man's ship that runs on water as a *snake* runs on grass (p. 46).
- g. She was as strong as *iron* (p. 55).
- h. He is like the little *bird nza* who after a big meal so far forgot himself as to challenge his chi to single combat (p. 148).
- i. . . . and that at a season when yam was as precious as *elephant tusks* (p. 151).

At this level of choice, Soyinka encodes a variety of socio-cultural information about Nigeria into the attributes and values: food (amala, a favorite dish, especially among the Yorubas of southwestern Nigeria); geography (Kano, Abeokuta); traditional drink (palm-wine); technology (P & T cables); fame (Dick Tiger); and social stigma (Ologomugomu, smuggled watches). For example, the late Dick Tiger was the first African boxer to win a world title when he beat the American Gene Fulmer in 1963 to clinch the world middleweight crown. Ologomugomu, among the Yorubas, is an imaginary character always covered with sores and is, therefore, a symbol of social stigma. By packing a variety of socio-cultural information into these attributes and values, Soyinka's figurative expressions (at least relating to the examples above) serve the most basic function of language: to mediate socially constructed reality. The result is that a reader who is not familiar with the Nigerian socio-cultural milieu might be unable to interpret these attributes and values.

#### +commonplace, -proxemic

##### Soyinka's *The Interpreters*

- a. . . . each voice grew even a projected echo . . . as the dusk wailing of the *muezzin catechist* (p. 10).
- b. . . . the sound of a *tornado* which was again his grandfather's contented laughter (p. 11).
- c. . . . and became as indispensable to the cocktail party as the *olive on a stick* (p. 16).
- d. Don't keep supporting me like a *crook* (p. 35).
- e. He said they now make castor in round form, like a tablet . . . nearly round, like the *egg of a lizard* (p. 88).
- f. This is a sprinkler, a dripper, a *eunuch's secret* (p. 104).
- g. Built spathe form, a broad cowl moulded two figures, uncanny in their realism, like *fluid faces in the sky* (p. 132).
- h. . . . an albino sat slanted like a *leprous moonbeam* without the softness (p. 157).
- i. Freckles on his face like *poisoned motes* (p. 151).
- j. This boy did not look like a thief, he was purity itself among the other apostles, *toughened ball eleven* (p. 172).
- k. Grotesque he was like a *folded desiccated corpse of the Maori* (p. 219).

Achebe's *No Longer at Ease*

- a. As the sun set, the rugged hills of Funchal and the green trees and the houses with their white walls and red tiles looked like an *enchanted isle* (p. 24).
- b. He said life was like a *bowl of wormwood* (p. 36).

In the examples above, the attributes and values either are not taken from the writers' immediate socio-cultural environment or embody very abstract ideas or concepts contrary to the Nigerian text receiver's experience and expectations. For example, tornado is alien to the Nigerian and, indeed, African geographical experience. What is a muezzin catechist? What do olive and egg of a lizard look like? What are fluid faces in the sky, leprous moonbeam, and poisoned motes? Is a dessicated corpse of the Maori not entirely alien to the African experience? What does Soyinka mean by toughened ball eleven? Achebe, in contrast, avoids as much as possible attributes and values that are incompatible with the Nigerian and African experience.

**+sublime, + proxemic**

Soyinka's *The Interpreters*

- a. . . . no wanton child has thought to scrawl on the daughter of the rivers when she bathes . . . *ayaba Osa . . . omo Yemoja* (p. 57).
- b. And like a *masquerade gone to ground*, the tent was thrown suddenly back (p. 74).
- c. He rocked backwards as far down as any *igunuko* could boast at public display (p. 74).
- d. This sage-like oddity possessed a narrow head, tapering backwards like the *carved head of an ibeji* (p. 77).
- e. The bridge spanned the Ogun where the boulders appeared like those rugged *Egba ancients* in conclave (p. 125).
- f. They were *far-flung toes of the unyielding god, Olumo black of Egba* (p. 125).
- g. Egbo lay on the rocks and waited for the train to run him over with that deep rumble, below here it would sound like the *laughter of gods . . .* (p. 126).
- h. . . . black, black as the *deep-sunk cauldrons of women dyers* and the indigo streams from 'adire' lining up to dry, dripping like *blood in the oriki of Ogun* (p. 126).
- i. Egbo rose and looked around him, bathing and wondering at life, for it seemed to him that he was born again, he felt right now as a *womb of the gods* (p. 127).
- j. . . . that man looked like *yellow bark soaked eternally in 'agbo'* and boiled tough and arid (p. 158).
- k. And Bandle sat like the *staff of Ogboni*, rigid in single casting (p. 244).
- l. . . . the black bubbles were huge as *Olokun's angered eyes* (p. 246).
- m. Egbo's eyes were outheld on black cusps, *embers on the end of a black-smith's tongs* (p. 249).
- n. Bandle, old and immutable as the *royal mothers of Benin* (p. 250).

- o. . . . old and cruel as the ‘*Ogboni*’ in *conclave* pronouncing the Word (p. 250).

Achebe’s *No Longer at Ease*

- a. She looked not unlike those *wooden masks* made in Ikot Ekpene (p. 13).  
 b. To throw a white man was like unmasking an *ancestral spirit* (p. 58).  
 c. The incident like a *bath of palm-wine on incipient measles* had brought all the ugly rashes to the surface (p. 82).  
 d. Almost as unthinkable as a *masked spirit in the Ibo society* answering another’s esoteric salutation (p. 90).  
 e. . . . there was something about him that made me think of *the patriarchs*, those giants hewn from granite (pp. 121-122).

Apart from the fact that the attributes and values in the foregoing examples are veritable vehicles of socio-cultural information, the ideas and concepts embodied in them are not everyday topics; these attributes and values are sublime in that they are calculated to inspire awe, deep reverence, and lofty emotion by reason of their belonging to the highest regions of thought, reality, and human activity among the Yorubas and Igbos represented by Soyinka and Achebe, respectively. For example, Soyinka presents a panoply of Yoruba gods, thus delineating aspects of Yoruba mythology: Yemoja, Ogun, Olumo, and Olokun. In Yoruba mythology Ogun is the god of creation, of iron, and of the road. One central characteristic of this god is his ambivalence: he is ready to create life as to destroy it. In fact, the image of Ogun recurs throughout Soyinka’s writings: drama; prose; poetry. Olokun is the god of the sea while Yemoja is the goddess of the sea. Olumo is an important god among the Yorubas. The *igunuko*, Egba ancients, the *Ogboni*, and the royal mothers of Benin are higher mortals; for example, if the *igunuko* (an ancestral spirit), Egba ancients, the *Ogboni*, and the royal mothers are in *conclave*, ordinary mortals are not supposed to see them. Anyone who dares even to cast a glance at them does so at the peril of his/her life. Notice that many of these attributes and values are transferred or borrowed from Soyinka’s mother tongue, Yoruba, mainly because such lexical borrowings “signify culturally bound objects and systems of belief that have no direct translation equivalence in English” (Bamiro, 2006b: 318). (For a discussion and analysis of the functions of code-mixing and code-switching in Nigerian literature, see Bamiro, 2006a, 2006b) Notice also the recurrence of the mask and the ancestral spirit in Achebe’s examples.

**+sublime, -proxemic**

Soyinka’s *The Interpreters*

- a. And silence is to the Voidante as the *fumes of opium* are to the mystics of the Orient (p. 96).  
 b. . . . his ‘haji’ mantle blown about his shoulders like the *mane of Lear on an asphalt heath* (p. 98).  
 c. . . . he had the lean, little torso of one of the *not-so-holy companions of the Agony* (p. 114)

- d. . . . that versifier too had made a *Christ* of his fugitive and this scum of Oyingbo was no mean substitute. *Pontius Pilate* on point duty faltered only for a moment but his sense of duty won (p. 114).
- e. . . . the pull of life from within his sensuousness he felt as the *reading of heavenly vaults and upheaval in earth's core* (p. 123).
- f. Like a lot of *busy monks* (p. 132).

#### Achebe's *No Longer at Ease*

- a. A university degree was the *philosopher's stone* (p. 84).
- b. It was like the *voice of Joel, the son of Pethuel* (p. 87).
- c. Then he remembered the story of *King David* (p. 149).

Attributes and values marked +sublime, -proxemic above intuitively embody sublime ideas but are not drawn from the Nigerian and African experience. For example, Soyinka's allusion to Shakespeare in "the mane of Lear on an asphalt heath" boggles the mind. Obviously, there is a deliberate anachronism in this attribute in that an asphalt heath could not have existed in Shakespeare's time. In the same vein, what is the semantic significance of "fumes of opium" associated with "the mystics of the Orient" to the Nigerian reader? Notice also the biblical allusions to Christ, Pontius Pilate, Joel, and King David. Although Christianity is a popular religion in Nigeria and, indeed, Africa, it is not a traditional Nigerian/African religion. Actually, example (c) in Achebe is an anecdote rather than a metaphor but it has the ingredient of a metaphor because it is used to comment on a situation.

#### **Conclusion**

I have argued in this article that the attributes and values writers use to describe and characterize the people, places, events, actions, etc. in their novels should be linked to a higher-order social semiotic of choice which signals something of the writers' own socio-cultural and ideological preferences. This becomes imperative in that several scholars have argued that all meanings are universally relative, only appropriate to and valid in the cultural context in which they occur. In fact, as I indicated earlier on, one radical Nigerian literary critic, Chinweizu, has suggested that the most suitable language for the African poet writing in English is the "language of African particulars" and it is in this light that this particular critic arraigns Soyinka as a "Western modernist" poet, thereby implying that Soyinka has no regard for the African literary tradition.

However, Chinweizu's criticism is not tenable since Soyinka's attributes and values, just like Achebe's, are keyed to the Nigerian and African socio-cultural experience, thereby justifying the two hypotheses I posed before analyzing the similes and metaphors as social-semiotic choice: that is, the field of both Achebe's and Soyinka's discourse is of more immediate relevance to the Nigerian text receiver's experience and, consequently, there is no communicative distance between these writers and the Nigerian audience (tenor) at this level of rhetorical communication.

Nevertheless, especially in Soyinka's *The Interpreters*, a problem of reconciliation arises as some of the sublime attributes and values are meant to describe and characterize people, places, and events which do not share the same lofty universe as these attributes and values. This ultimately creates a tension between the carriers and tokens on the one hand, and the attributes and values on the other, for example, as when a thief (token) is equated with companions of the Agony and Christ (values), ants (carrier) with monks (attribute), Christ (carrier) with Dick Tiger (attribute), etc.

It can thus be argued that while, ideationally, several examples of Achebe's figurative language stay at the level of rhetoric (metaphor as ornaments) and semantics (metaphor as transference of meaning), Soyinka's examples go a step further by exploiting the hermeneutic view of figurative expressions. The hermeneutic view was proposed by Paul Ricoeur (1977). Ricoeur's theory presupposes two premises: metaphor as "conflicting structure" and as "creative function." The hermeneutic view regards conflict or tension in metaphor as a crucial phenomenon. Metaphor is accompanied by tension between "semantic impertinence and pertinence, between literal and metaphorical interpretation" (Ricoeur, 1977: 247). In other words, tensive elements are mediated in metaphor by the work of predicative assimilation although their conflicting structure is preserved. The tensional structure is regarded as crucial to the creation of meaning and reality.

However, it should be noted that the hermeneutic view was anticipated by I. A. Richards in 1936 when he proposed, among other things, the tensive view which emphasized the conceptual incompatibility between the terms in a metaphor (that is, between the topic and the vehicle). Richards calls this incompatibility "the tension."

Fiction should also be questioned by geolinguists in terms of how much or how little of the richness or even meaning of a text can be translated from one society's context to another and the extent to which cultures differ in terms of preference for either fancy writing or straightforward prose.

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