



## “IGBO LINGUISTIC EXPRESSIONS” AS ETHNIC IDENTITY IN ELECHI AMADI’S *THE CONCUBINE*

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### ABSTRACT

*The basic concern of this article is to interpret Elechi Amadi’s novel, *The Concubine*, as an Igbo novel (i.e., a novel that specifically reflects on the ways of life of the Igbo people of Southeast Nigeria). Relying on insights from sociolinguistics and ethnic studies, the paper analyses select expressions in Igbo, along with ethno-linguistic and cultural features of the people as manifested in the novel. It shows that Amadi’s use of language in *The Concubine* appears to be a peculiar speech form of the Igbo language. The paper further reveals that the novelist makes conscious use of certain linguistic items in order to express ethnic identity as a way of projecting “Igbo linguistics” and their cultural values as these were before the advent of colonialism.*

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### INTRODUCTION

There is a significant amount of empirical and theoretical work on the relationship between language and identity (Akindele and Adegbite 1999; Fishman 2001; Harris 2006; Aboh 2012), as well as some important contributions from discourse-religious and socio-historical perspectives (Joseph 2004; Novikoya 2005; Aboh 2010; Jaspal and Coyle 2010; Aboh and Lamidi 2011; Ushie 2012). However, there has been little work on language and ethnic identity particularly on Igbo ethnic identity, one of the largest ethnic majority groups in Nigeria, although some attention has been paid to questions of ethnic identity in general (D e Fina 2007; Jaspal and Coyle 2009; Jaspal and Cinnirella 2012).

This article presents a linguistic as well as a socio-ethnic interpretation of Elechi Amadi's novels – *The Concubine*. It describes significant “Igbo linguistic features”, along with extra-textual entities naturally associated with ethnic and cultural representations. The paper has two concerns. First, it illustrates that socio-cultural entities such as ethnic identity and group membership construction are operational concepts that are reflected on literary discourse via ethno-linguistic variables. Such variables, however, vary from writer to writer, depending on the identity construction goal of the writer. The fact is that the novel, like other genres of literature, provides elaborate accounts of socio-cultural realities. In fact, Fowler notes that a novel “gives an interpretation of the world it represents” (Fowler 1996). Moreover, the novel indicates how non-native English writers employ it as a deconstructing site, where they attempt to dislodge the dominance of English over their indigenous languages, a typical Nigerian example being Chinua Achebe and much of his oeuvre. This political disempowerment has been upheld by the novelist, who considers language an essential component of ethnic identity, especially in instances where the novelist has a control of two languages: a borrowed language (usually a European language brought on the wings of colonialism), and an indigenous language.

The second concern of this paper is to account for the linguistic features of Igbo, as demonstrated in *The Concubine*, and to indicate that Amadi's use of language appears to be speech forms/mannerisms that are emblematic of the Igbo in eastern Nigeria. The contribution also shows how the novelist makes use of linguistic features in order to project his ethnic identity; reflect on the cultural exigencies of Igbo; and re-enact the communal identity of the Igbo people where communal imperatives take preeminence over individual ambitions. Aboh (2012) has particularly argued that “the adoption and adaptation of indigenous items” enables “Nigerian novelists to express their socio-cultural affiliations in a far reaching language that is in communion with their historical experiences.” This based on the knowledge that language is at the centre of identity construction in any context that involves its use. The choice of a socio-ethno-linguistic approach for our analysis here is especially rewarding given discourse analysis and identity construction's enduring tradition of studying both the micro and the macro levels of identity. Researchers in the area have realised that we can neither take for granted membership in social categories such as ethnicity, class, or gender, nor presuppose the aspects of social life that are relevant for the configuration of those categories. The present paper offers such a perspective. This is, however, not intended to represent a pre-determined framework for future studies on ethnic identity, but rather a means of providing explicit research questions which could direct future work in the area of literary discourse and ethnic identity construction.

## Theoretical Framework

This paper is anchored on the theoretical provisions of ethnic identity or ethnicity from the flank of language and linguistics. The most prominent approach in the literature on ethnic identity is to begin with ethnic groups and see ethnicity as evolving from one's relationship to a particular ethnic group. In this sense, ethnic identity is seen as the extent to which one identifies with (a) particular ethnic group(s). It describes one's sense of belonging to an ethnic group and the part of one's thinking, perceptions, feelings, and behaviour that is due to ethnic group membership as well as identification. The ethnic group tends to be one in which the individual claims belonging (Phinney 1996). It therefore implies that ethnic identity can hardly be separated from one's personal identity as the two inextricably influence each other. This is perhaps why Jaspal and Cinnirella (2012) argue that major debates on ethnic identity include issues around its contribution to the self, how individuals cope with threats to the self, and what motivates individuals and groups to defend it. This seems to be the position endorsed by Bucholtz and Hall (2005) when they define identity as "the social positioning of self and other."

The foregoing approach to ethnic identity is considered "problematic" and "pushes the researcher, often unconsciously, toward a primordialist understanding of ethnicity (Wan and Vanderwerf 2009). They see ethnicity "as a sense of solidarity shared between people (usually related through real or fictive kinship) who see themselves as distinct and different from others" (Wan and Vanderwerf 2009). Be that as it may, implied in the views of Wan and Vanderwerf is the conceptualisation of ethnic identity or ethnicity as a social construct/practice that gains impetus from extant primordial cultural values that are unique to a group as well as distinguishes them from other groups.

Abizadeh (2001), cited in Jaspal and Cinnirella (2012), argues that:

...ethnicity is based on mythical *beliefs* about the genealogical facts, not the genealogical facts themselves... the myths themselves can often be based on historically inaccurate *beliefs*. [Ethnicity]...exists as a socially constructed category contingent on *beliefs* . . . Ethnicity's very existence is dependent on *beliefs* about its existence...

(Abizadeh 2001)

Abizadeh's view is an expose on the social nature or constructedness of ethnicity, which constitutes a presumed identity and a belief in common descent. Though socially negotiated, ethnic demarcation lines are essentially existent in the sense that they form an important core of people's sociolinguistic realities while ethnicity itself is not primordial; it is often viewed as such by individuals who lay claim to an ethnic identity. Bucholtz and Hall (2005) agree that identity is a construct that continues to emerge and is negotiated based on different contexts. Bourdieu (1991)

takes this notion a step further in his analysis of identity, particularly ethnic identity, as a mental representation that is socially constructed using signs with associated meanings. He states:

But on a deeper level, the quest for the ‘objective’ criteria of ‘regional’ or ‘ethnic’ identity should not make one forget that, in social practice, these criteria (for example, language, dialect and accent) are the object of mental representations, that is, of acts of perception and appreciation, of cognition and recognition, in which agents invest their interests and the presuppositions, and of objectified representations, in things (emblems, flags, badges, etc.) or acts, self-interested strategies of symbolic manipulation which aim at determining the (mental) representation that other people may form of these properties and their bearers (220-221).

(Bourdieu 1991) position is an amplification of the earlier views of Yinger (1976). Yinger avers that ethnic identity is a social construct. He maintains that it is an individual’s identification with a “segment of a larger society whose members is thought, by themselves or others, to have a common origin and shared activities in which the common origin and culture are significant ingredients” (Yinger 1976). Ethnic identity is often perceived as a frame in which individuals identify either consciously or unconsciously with those with whom they feel a common bond because of similar traditions, behaviour, values, and beliefs. These points of connection allow individuals to make sense of the world around them and to find pride in who they are. Ethnic identity construction, therefore, consists of individuals’ movement towards a highly conscious and tendentious identification with their cultural values, behaviour, beliefs and traditions. Ethnic identity provides a framework for understanding individuals’ negotiation of their own culture and other cultures.

Implied in the foregoing postulations is the notion that identity and culture are two of the basic building blocks of ethnicity. Through the construction of identity and culture, individuals and groups attempt to address the problematics of ethnic boundaries and meaning. Ethnicity is best understood as a dynamic, constantly evolving property of both individual identity and group organisation. The construction of ethnic identity and culture is the result of both structure and agency – a dialectic played out by ethnic groups and the larger society. Ethnicity is the product of actions undertaken by ethnic groups as they shape and reshape their self-definition and culture; however, ethnicity is also constructed by external social, linguistic processes as they shape and reshape ethnic categories and definitions (Jaspal and Coyle 2010). Thus, ethnicity is bound up in language. One important factor for groups is the use of a language that links individuals to each other to create a sort of bond. “The entire phenomenon of identity,” argues Joseph (2004) “can be

understood as a linguistic one.” This implies that language differences can serve as a defining attribute for ethnic identification.

Myhill (2003) discusses the “language-and-identity ideology”, which assumes an intrinsic emotional connection between an individual and his/her language. Fishman, a proponent of this school of thought, suggests that in order “to be a better, more authentic, more loyal, more committed” member of the group, one must speak the language associated with it (Fishman 1972). Language is thus conceptualised as a marker of ethnic identity. The notion of language as a differentiator makes it such a salient part of identity. If a positive ethnic identity is an important component of self-esteem, then the maintenance of language as an important symbolic element of cultural identity seems inevitable. This paper specifies some linguistic ways ethnic identity and culture are created and recreated in a pre-colonial Igbo society. It is from this theoretical background that we attempt a study of the bond between language and ethnic identity construction in Amadi’s *The Concubine*.

### **Synopsis of the Novel**

Published six years after Nigeria’s independence (1966), *The Concubine* is one of Elechi Amadi’s most successful and widely received novels. It is taught both in secondary and tertiary institutions in Nigeria. It is one of those novels that contributed to the definition as well as the creation of an authentic African novel. Yet, there has been a paucity of studies that indicate the use of language as an ethnic identity marker in the novel. The characters and characterization, for example, present a novel that has not come in contact with modern thoughts and ways. The novel, taking after Achebe’s *Things Fall Apart* in terms of language and the presentation of African culture, is set in the pre-colonial village of Omokachi. But unlike *Things Fall Apart*, which examines both pre-colonial and colonial Africa, *The Concubine* presents a pristine African community that existed completely on the detects of the gods and their respective priests, insulated from the world of colonial masters and chiefs.

The foregoing is felt in the way Amadi uses language in the novel to adequately capture the cultural exigencies of the Omokachi people before the emergence of colonialism. The use of proverbs, code-mixing, cultural euphemisms, etc. (which are, by extension, distinct linguistic features of Igbo) reveal that the language of *The Concubine* betrays the nexus between language and culture and language and ethnic identity construction.

Set in the village of Omokachi (a village in the present day Rivers State, Southern Nigeria, with an Igbo background), *The Concubine* is a story woven around love, death, music and the overwhelming influence of the gods over the living. It depicts, in a subtle manner, the people’s aversion to self-indulgence and the promotion of communal imperatives, as the fundamental core of community survival. It is this cultural identity of a people, and how language weaves these socio-cultural realities that we investigate in this paper. The linguistic features examined in this

paper, in line with their use in the construction of Igbo ethnic identity, are code-mixing and proverbs.

### **Code-mixing as an Indices of Ethnic Identity**

Code-mixing (CM) contains elements of at least two languages in a communicative process. Code-mixing is a prominent feature of the language of different situations in multilingual countries, Nigeria being a near example. This linguistic feature is characteristic of Nigerian creative writers. The mixing of codes, Ogunsiji argues, “can be seen as markers of some sort of familiarity as well as a kind of distancing device”; however, he stresses that “the prevailing situation surrounding the use is a determining factor” (Ogunsiji 2001). CM being a consequence of languages in contact is used by most Nigerian/bilingual writers to affiliate with members of their endogroup. It is from this understanding that we locate CM as a strategy of ethnic identity construction in *The Concubine*.

There are certain concepts that exist in the writer’s indigenous language which the English language cannot meaningfully account for. But through the linguistic facility of translation or circumlocution, these concepts can be shifted into in English. This does not undermine the fact that in the process of translation the exact meanings are lost. However, the ultimate reason for the inclusion of words drawn from a colonized writer’s language is not just to retain the socio-cultural realities of his/her people, but also to “cause” the English Language to bear the burden of indigenous realities. Thus, to retain the cultural values of such expressions - a way of ethnic identity enactment - the writer avoids translation or circumlocution. By virtue of their usages, these items become woven into the syntax of English but their indigenous meanings are retained. The expression “ekwes”, which refers to columns of yams, is a variable that people of the traditional Igbo era used in measuring a man’s wealth. A man is only considered a “man” by the number of “ekwes” he has and also by the size of his yams. In this sense, Madume is not considered a successful man because:

Madume’s yams were few. It was a lucky thing that barns were normally constructed in the farms so that it was not easy to know exactly how many ekwes or columns of yams a man had. Still he had to sell his yams at the waterside market during harvest season and that gave him away (p.4).

In the above quotation we notice Amadi’s conscious promotion of his Igbo identity in the retention of the Igbo word, “ekwes” even when its meaning is given by him in the same sentence as “columns of yams”, an expression which would still correctly and appropriately complete the sentence meaningfully without the code-mixing. Also, the looks of a man’s wife is a wealth denominator. This is seen in *Nothing did a husband greater credit than the well-fed looks of his wife* (p.11).

There is code-mixing of items that refer to music and entertainment. This is seen in *He sang obo-obo* or *alto very well* (p.24). “Obo-obo”, which translates as alto, is used to describe Ekwueme’s musical artistry and versatility. While “obo-obo” refers to a type of musical pitch, “oduma” as seen in the following excerpt refers to a type of dance and also a musical instrument made of twelve sticks and two plantain trunks:

One evening, about one month after Emenike’s death, an oduma dance was held in the village arena. The night was clear as it had rained heavily the previous day. The moon was full. The shadows of trees were almost as sharply defined as on a bright sunny day (p. 26).

The “oduma” is a farewell dance organized by Emenike’s friends to honour him as well as relieve the village of the sorrow that befalls it owing to the passing of their beloved brother, Emenike. The “obo-obo”, “oduma” and “igele” (p.24) are musical tunes and items that explain the importance of music to the rustic life of the Omokachi people. This is a practical pointer to how a writer’s cultural consciousness influences his/her self-esteem; and, as language gives expression to literature, so does linguistic choices invigorate ethnic identity.

The fostering of traditional medicine is articulated in the use of the wound-healing “opolipo leaves”:

‘Fetch me some opolipo leaves instead of talking.’

She ran for the leaves. He crushed some other leaves in his palms and squeezed the juice into his wound. He collected the opolipo leaves from his daughter and covered the wound with them (p. 67).

Before we discuss the identity construction goal of Amadi, it will be important to first examine the morphology of “opolipo leaves.” The expression, a noun phrase, has two common nouns: one of the nouns, the indigenous item, performs the function of an adjective, qualifying the noun it precedes. The truth is that Amadi would have still made sense without including “opolipo.” The inclusion of “opolipo” in the phrasal structure brings out the identity of the particular leaf and thus reinforces the fact that before the advent of orthodox medicine, Africa had ways of handling its health challenges. Every code-mixed expression has its unique cultural sentiment. When Ekwueme is angry and refuses to eat because the soup is over-salted, his mother, Adaku, says:

‘Ekwe my dear, Okorobia, Dimkpa, fine boy, please don’t be angry.

I shall prepare a wonderful dish first thing in the morning’ (p. 49).

The expression “Okorobia” describes a young handsome man. In the context of the novel it is an endearment marker Adaku employs to pacify her son. This marker is further reinforced by her

preference of short form of the name, “Ekwe”, which conveys a mother’s fondness of her child. The mother does this in spite of the fact that she and her daughter, Nkechi, are themselves innocent receivers of Ekwueme’s anger resulting from Ihuoma’s refusal to marry him. So Adaku uses the invocative name to make him listen. In the preference of the Igbo praise expression, “Okoroba” we find another illustration of Amadi’s conscious use of an indigenous term which can, indeed, be equally articulated in English. The choice of “Okorobia” does not only adequately capture the meaning of Ekwueme’s mother’s passion, but also points to how invocative names are cultural practices which many mothers deploy to win the hearts of their children in problematic times, in this case in the Igbo world as reflected in the novel. The intensity of Adaku’s pity for Orhoji’s husband, who is suffering the pain of a boil on his thigh, is expressed in the exclamation “ewuu!”

‘Her husband has a boil on the thigh, he said.

‘Ewuu! Adaku exclaimed. Then I should not blame you for not calling’. (p. 61)

Aside from the fact that the exclamation expresses Adaku’s sympathy, it enacts the communal identity of the Igbo people where collective imperatives take preeminence over individual desires. It is such that the pain of an individual is the pain of the entire community. It is this primordial community spirit that causes Adaku to exclaim at the mention of Orhoji’s husband’s illness. It also indicates, to a large extent, how language gives expression to, and conveys cultural beliefs. Though language is neither culture nor identity, language is often used in culture to carry a linguistic message and as a means through which people identify with those they consider as members of their group. Yet, this is not the case with “taaa!” which is also an exclamation. In the Igbo sociolinguistic milieu and probably in most Nigerian languages “taaa!” is used to warn, rebuke and reprimand anyone who lives or acts contrary to the expectations of the community in specific situations. For example, the use of ‘taaa!’ in the novel is to reprimand Ahurole who speaks defamatorily of her suitor. Since both mother and daughter operate within the same ethno-linguistic milieu, the impact of the utterance is readily felt by Ahurole who desists from the verbal denigration of her suitor.

One noticeable feature of most Nigerian writers, in spite of their level of western education, is the subconscious alignment with the existence of supernatural beings, and they endorse the belief that the spirit world, controlled by the spirits of their ancestors, has an overwhelming influence over the living. They – the Nigerian intelligentsia – seem to uphold the notion that the living can only function if the ancestral spirits (the physically dead) so desire. Oko has stressed this position thus:

The absolute control of the universe by a supernatural being means that all sanctions come from him...The acceptance of the presence of the Supreme essence in all creation impels the African mind to behave in the sanctity of life and to invest a religious aura on all created things. (Oko 2005)



The implication is that everyone has a personal god ('chi' as Achebe puts it) that exists in the supernatural and controls absolutely the existence of the living. This religious identity construction applies to Ahurole's behaviour:

From all this, her parents easily guessed that she was being unduly influenced by *agwu*, her personal spirit. Anyika did his best but of course the influence of *agwu* could not be nullified over night. (p. 98)

In spite of Anyinka, the "debia"'s (a term that describes a herbalist or diviner) power to control the spirit world, he could not tame Ahurole's personal god. It therefore follows that Ahurole's unsteady behaviour is a manifestation of her personal god – a stubborn one, indeed. The novelist succeeds in capturing a pre-colonial society that thrives on the belief of supernatural beings. The respected position of the "debia", who is entrusted with the responsibility of interceding for the people, emphasizes the people's reverence and affinity to the gods. The "debia", before the advent of colonialism and Christianity, was an indispensable fragment of the people's spiritual reality. In most pre-colonial African societies, if not all, if anything went wrong, it was assumed that the gods were angry. To pacify them, sacrifices were made. Besides, sacrifices were done at intervals to put the gods' anger at rest, and also as a symbol of reverence to the priests of certain powerful gods. This is because of the understanding that the priests were as powerful as the gods they served. This is true of Nwokekoro, the priest of Amadioha:

Other rain makers stood in awe of him because he had the direct support of Amadioha. They dared not work in opposition to him. There was the case of Ogonda who tried to rival Nwokekoro. A village had hired Nwokekoro to dispel rain during a wrestling match. Ogonda felt he had been ignored and had tried to make rain. He was struck dead...it all went to confirm that a man could not wrestle with a god. (p. 8)

The indispensable position of a priest in the spiritual lives of the people is emphasized here. Submissiveness was the watchword: man existed to serve, not to question the authority of the gods nor those who served them. The meaning and essence of man's existence was total allegiance to the gods.

Beyond the functional value of the Igbo/African pantheon as displayed in this novel, we must also notice the ease with which the author introduces the names of the Igbo gods and priests: Amadioha, Ogonda, Nwokekoro, which not only consolidates the Igbo identity of the novel but also showcases it to the non-Igbo reader. The use of CM thus strengthens the argument proffered elsewhere that since Amadi, like other Nigerian writers, composes with a huge sense of ethnic identity, and given the multilingual nature of Nigeria, there is the tendency to "take" from indigenous languages, as a

way of fostering the bond among the writer, their language and their identity. Basically, the use of CM in *The Concubine* demonstrates fictionalized characters' involvement in communal affairs, hence the expression of group identity. Having examined the use of CM in the expression of ethnic identity, we turn to the use of Igbo proverbs in the work.

### **Adoption and Adaptation of Igbo Proverbs**

A prominent stylistic feature of Nigerian writers is the appropriation of indigenous proverbs into their creative engagements. Proverbs are usually short, cleverly constructed belief statements which are used to perform different communicative functions. One of such functions is to help users to say unpleasant things in an ameliorated way. They are able to do this because proverbs are "often associated with common or traditional wisdom or attitude" (Yusuf 2004).

For Akindele and Adegbite, one strategy employed by most Nigerian creative writers "is the transliteration of proverbs and idioms from Nigerian language(s) into English" (Akindele and Adegbite 1999). The culture-embeddedness of such linguistic items is well explored in *The Concubine*. Proverbs, according to Achebe, "are the palm-oil with which words are eaten" (Achebe 1958). They are usually expressed by fictionalized elders in African novels. This is because proverbs are conventionally a feature of the speech of elders. Their function is to universalize a specific incident and to reduce the harshness of an utterance.

With the facility of proverb, Amadi subtly captures the fight between Emenike and Madume in the following ways:

But Emenike was not afraid of him. He knew he could hold his own against him any day given a fair chance. But a man's god may be away on a journey the day of an important fight and that may make all the difference (p. 5).

The example above explains the significance of a god over a man's life. According to the Igbo spiritual practice, everyone has a personal god that watches over him/her. Like mere mortals, a personal god can travel and at such times the individual becomes vulnerable. This is beyond mere fairytale; the place of a personal god in an individual's life can hardly be over emphasized. Understanding the dominant role of a "Chi" in a man's life, Okonkwo in *Things Fall Apart* asserts that if a man says yes strongly, then his personal God (Chi) says yes also (p. 7). The underlying message is that a "Chi" controls a man's life. This is also explored in *The Concubine*. Emenike's ineptitude in the fight with Madume is not unconnected with the absence of his "Chi" who "travelled" and left him unsecured. A consequence of this is his death resulting from the fight with Madume. This, in essence, expresses the central tenet of the spiritual existence of the Igbo; the Igbo, even in the modern days of "western civilization" can hardly be separated from the extant and controlling role of the gods. The heroine, Ihuoma, for example, functions as a spiritual conduit who

transposes the wrath of the sea-king to any man who dares him. Her existence, besides being a channel for the overwhelming manipulation of man by the gods, describes the cyclic nature of human existence: birth, death and rebirth (reincarnation). The fact that the idea of the supernatural continues to surface in recent Nigerian novels such as Ben Okri's *The Famished Road*, Chimamanda's *Half of a Yellow Sun*, Vincent Egbuson's *Love my Planet* Tanure Ojiade's *The Activist* and Liwhu Betiang's *Beneath the Rubble* seems to suggest that even in the 21st-century, most Nigerians still believe in the inextricable link between the living, the dead ancestors and the gods, and the gods' overwhelming influence over the living. This appears to be Oko's view: "An ever abiding realization of a great spiritual force generated in the African a sanctity of life that enables him see the life process as a cycle incorporated in the living, the dead, and future generations" (Oko 2005).

Oko's position elucidates a spiritual ideology which Amadi, like most African writers, fictionalizes in his novel. Although this might interest a later study, it is expedient to point here that the African writer, a propagator of his/her culture, seems to be of the view that Africans still live in the world of gods, and reincarnations. And these gods perform specific functions that range from rain making to birth and death.

Proverbs are also used to rebuke as well as scold. In the example below, it is used to guide against self-indulgence:

The hunter who is never satisfied with small game may be obliged  
to carry home an elephant one day. (p.73)

The proverb succinctly describes the repercussions of gluttony. Chima, an elder, uses the proverb to rebuke Madume who harvests Ihuoma's plantain. It is in the process of harvesting the disputed bunch of plantain that Ihuoma's sea husband appears in the form of a cobra to defend his wife, by spitting into Madume's eyes. Here again, one encounters the powerful influence of the gods over man. A related case where a proverb is deployed is when Wigwe warns his son over marrying Ihuoma:

Remember that a hen cannot scratch for food with her two legs  
simultaneously (p.107).

Ekwueme's father, Wigwe, knows that Ekwueme's decision to marry Ihuoma is a dangerous one and Wigwe uses a proverb to advise his son to tread with caution. This is given the fact that Ekwueme's rejection of Ahurole, his bride-to-be, is abominable. The core of the message is that Ekwueme cannot simultaneously handle the issue of two women. So his father admonishes him to first settle Ahurole's case before thinking of marrying Ihuoma. Moreover, in the conversation that comes up, Ahurole uses a proverb to reorganize Wonuma's, her mother's perception of Ihuoma:

'I would never have believed it from anybody's lips but yours. I always thought she was a decent woman,' Wonuma said.

'No, mother, she is the quiet dog that eats up the hen's eggs without a bark' (p. 157).

This proverb comes with fresh insights from Ahurole as she clarifies that her constant domestic issues with her husband are not her fault but Ihouma's. Wonuma thinks Ihouma is a quiet and well-behaved woman, and that the constant fight between the newly married is the handiwork of her stubborn daughter. But Ahurole uses a proverb to dispel her mother's misconception of Ihouma, and strategically blames Ihouma for the jittery peace in her marriage.

The analysis reveals that proverbs are used to enrich the semantic value of interpersonal communication. It further demonstrates that proverbs are not used haphazardly, but that each proverb performs a specific communication function in a given context. Also, the proverbs in the novel function as communication codes that weave with the cultural essence of the people the literature speaks for.

## CONCLUSION

The use of code-mixing and proverbs in *The Concubine* shows that language and identity are component units of ethnic identity. The use of codes from a writer's indigenous language is to enable the writer to identify with the people s/he practically writes for, hence, ethnic identity construction. Moreover, the use of CM shows how the people are emotionally involved in their daily and communal existence. The use of "ewuu", for instance, as a code-mixed element, explains the fact that what affects a single individual, affects the entire community. This communal bond is illustrated in the search party of Ekwueme, and the general mood of loss that pervades the community at the death of Emenike. The use of CM generally sustains the claim that there are certain expressions that exist in the writer's world, which do not exist in the world of the language in which the novelist uses. So the writer creates words and transfers ideas from his indigenous Igbo language to account for ideas that do not exist in English. But we have noticed here that Amadi also uses code-mixing as a conscious strategy to consolidate Igbo identity.

In the presentation of cultural facts, the novelist deploys proverbs, and the result is that discourse gives way to implicit meanings and between-the-lines interpretations. This implied meanings function as presupposed assumptions that are shared with the fictionalized characters and the readers; the readers are hereby mandated to learn the ethnic realities of a people. Arguably, the proverbs do not require extensive explication since they function as semantic indexes to be inferred in the process of semantic interpretation. The analysis indicates that the use of language in *The*

*Concubine* demonstrates the intricate relationship between language and ethnicity. There are cases of linguistic engineering, i.e., the ability to bend language in order to achieve the desired communicative intent. In most instances, linguistic manipulation is done in accordance with the cultural norms of the people the novel is written to represent. Besides the fact that language gives expression to literature, it is a tool for representing knowledge and for constructing meaning, and ties members of a community together in continual interpersonal relationship. It is the instrument people draw upon for socio-ethnic identification.

In all, the CMs and proverbs, in spite of the fact that they are drawn from the writer's "miniature" culture, are linguistic items many Nigerians can identify with because the "Igbo" messages they carry are equally shared by most Nigerian sub-cultures. Most Nigerian writers adopt and adapt linguistic items from indigenous languages to demonstrate their "Nigerianness". The presence or absence of these features may be an important ingredient in the definition of a typical Nigerian novel.

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