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Language, literature and communication in contemporary Nigerian society

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Abstract

This paper explores the intricate relationship between language, literature and communication within the context of contemporary Nigerian society. In an environment characterized by immense linguistic diversity, Nigeria showcases a confluences of over 500 indigenous languages, alongside English as the official language, which serves as a unifying medium. This research examines the role of language as a vehicle for cultural expression and identity formation, as well as its function in literature as a means of articulating social issues. Literature in Nigeria reflects the complexities of societal dynamics, addressing themes such as post. Colonial identity, social justices and cultural heritage. Through the evolution of Nigerian literary forms-ranging from traditional oral narratives to modern novels, poetry and drama the paper highlights the ways in which authors navigate sociolinguistic landscapes to resonate with diverse audiences. Furthermore, the study analyses contemporary communication trends, including the rise of digital platforms and social media, which have transformed the landscape of literary discourse these platforms facilitate the exchange of ideas and foster dialogue among writers, critics, and readers, enabling a renewed engagement with traditional narratives and contemporary issues. Ultimately, this research underscores the significance of language, literature and communication as pivotal elements that shape the cultural and social fabric of Nigeria. By examining their interplay, the study contributed to a deeper understanding of how these elements influence not just artistic expression, but also social progress and cohesion in a multifaceted national content.

Keywords: Language, Literature, Communication

Introduction

In contemporary Nigerian society, language, literature and communication form an intricate web that encapsulates the nation's diverse cultural and social landscapes. Nigeria as a country, is a home to over 500 indigenous languages (Ethnological), each contributing to a complex societal tapestry. Language extends beyond mere communication. It serves as a vehicle for cultural expression identity reinforcement and social critique. This paper explores how language and literature function as pivotal tools for communication in Nigeria,

shaping social values and fostering national identity. It tries to bring to the fore the interconnectedness of language, literature and communication in contemporary Nigerian society.

Language, as a fundamental aspect of human existence, a distinctive quality of man, serves multiple functions; a tool for communication, a medium for cultural expression and a vehicle for thought. Emenanjo in his view highlights that language is not merely a collection of words but "a social phenomenon, a system of signs governed by rules and the primary medium of communication among people"[1]. This definition underscores the social aspect of language, emphasizing its role in facilitating interaction among individuals within a community. Language therefore, is not only a means to convey information but also a reflection of social relations and identities. Language as a vital component of identity in Nigeria a nation characterized by linguistic diversity.

According to Adebayo (2011), "language is not just a means of communication but a fundamental part of our identity, encapsulating our culture, history and worldview"[2]. The ability to communicate in one's native language fosters a sense of belonging and cultural pride, particularly in a multilingual society. Scholars like Omoniyi argue that in Nigeria language is often used as a political instrument to assert cultural identity and autonomy"[3]. Literature is an expansive and multifaceted domain that encompasses various forms of written and spoken works, ranging from poetry and prose to dramas and essays. At its core, literature serves as a reflection of human experience, embodying the complexities of life, culture and emotion.

Defined broadly, literature can be seen as a means of expression that allows for the exploration of ideas, themes, and narratives that resonate with readers across different cultures and epochs. One key characteristic of literature is its ability to evoke an emotional response in its audience. Through the use of language, literary works can transport readers to different worlds, enabling them to empathize with characters and their circumstances. For instance, the works of authors such as Chinua Achebe often delve into themes of colonialism, oppression and consciousness, creating a connection that transcends time and culture. This emotional engagement encourage readers to reflect on their own life and the society in which they reside. Literature, on the other hand is a manipulation and use of words, phrases and sentences, information available in the extant literature posits that:

> In literature, language is meticulously crafted not just to inform a reader, but to persuade him to play and poke his mind … without the birth of … ideas started with … words and the telling of stories… and passing on history to the younger generation. It was soon after verbal communication

[1] NolueEmenanjo, *Language and the Nigerian Experience (*Ibadan: Heinemann, 1990), 34
[2] Adebayo A. Adebayo, *Language and identity in Nigeria* (Lagos: University Press, 2011), 22.
[3] Tope Omoniyi, *the Sociolinguistics of Identity* (London: Continuum, 2013, 67)

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> came about; these drawings then moved on to picture languages … that the developed literature.[4]

Relationship between language and literature

Language and literature have a closely knit relationship. Akwanya portrays it in this manner.

> That literature was bound to the language in which it was born seemed to be understood by all… Every literary form is the site of encounter with language, every literary work is an encounter with language … Literature is the form of writing in which only language acts, "Performs", … In literature, language assumes the status of a person: Literature is the transformation in which language gives up the communicative function, and becomes a partner in a dialogue relationship.[5].This transformation and this dialogue is what constitute writing as literature (1-5).

The above excerpts is indeed the synopsis of our argument in this paper language is the sole medium of literature while literature is the most sophisticated manifestation of language.

Chinua Achebe's work serves as an essential starting point for understanding this relationship. In his essay, "The African writer and the English language", Achebe argues that language is a vehicle for cultural authenticity. He asserts, "The writer cannot be unaware of the fact that language is a peculiar institution", highlights how language carries the weight of history and cultural nuances.[6] Achebe's novels, particularly "*Things Fall Apart",* employ proverbs and idiomatic expressions from the Igbo Language, illustrating how language enriches the narrative and grounds it in specific cultural realities. This bilingual approach demonstrates that literature is not merely a reflection of language but also an extension of the cultural identity it conveys.

Similarly, Wole Soyinka emphasizes the significant role of language in crafting a literary tradition that resonate with the realities and aspirations of a society. In his Nobel lecture, Soyinka argues that |Language itself is a living organism, capable of dynamic adaptation and change".[7] This perspective positions literature not as a static form but as a dynamic interplay of language and cultural expression.

Through his poetry and plays, Soyinka's use of Yoruba proverbs and traditional forms creates a dialogue between the past and present, indicating that literature serves as a medium through which language and identity are continually negotiated. Niyi Osundare further expends on this relationship by

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[4] Relationship between Language and Literature," Yahoo Answers, Accessed June 8, 2026 (http://answers.yahoo.com/question/index?9id=1006051129847).
[5] Nicholas Akwany, *Language And Habits of Thought* (Enugu: New Generation Books, 2005), 1-5
[6] Chinua Achebe, "The African writer and the English language," in *morning yet on creation day* (New York: Anchor Books, 1975), 240.
[7] Wole Soyinka, *Nobel Prize Lecture* (Stockholm: Noble Foundation, 1986),11.

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exploring the connection between language, literature and social consciousness. In his poetry, Osundare frequently addresses themes of socio-political struggle and environmental degradation, using the English language as a tool for advocacy while infusing it with African Idioms and imagery. He notes that, "language defines a community and its literature what it aspires to be."[8].Thus, literature becomes an instrument for social change, wherein the speaker's choice of language reflects broader socio-political contexts.

Literature and communication in contemporary Nigerian society.

Literature in Nigeria plays a critical role in articulating societal issues and fostering a sense of community. Renowned authors such as Chinua Achebe and Wole Soyinka have utilized literature as a platform for social commentary. Achebe, in his novel Things Fall Apart, is preoccupied in creating an "authentic" African voice and presenting the direct articulate product of the European presence in Africa. In one of his pronouncements on the question of language and literature, Achebe writes:

> What I do see is a new voice coming out of Africa, speaking of African experience in a world-wide language.
> So my answer to the question, can an African ever learn English well-enough to be able to use it effectively in creative writing? Is certainly yes.[9] If on the other hand you ask, can he ever learn to use it like a native speaker? I should say, I hope not … the African writer should aim to use English in a way that brings out his message best without altering the language to the extent that its value as a medium of international exchange will be lost.

He should aim at fashioning out an English which is at once universal and able to carry his peculiar experience. On the question of theme, Achebe's. Preoccupation was to re-create out of the despised history of Africa the story of its dignity and integrity:

> African people did not hear of culture for the first time from European; their societies were not mindless but frequently had a philosophy of great depth and value and beauty. They had poetry and above all, they had dignity. It is this dignity that many African people all but lost during the colonial period and it is this they must regain.[10]

Achebe, by the choice of a theme dealing with the historical disintegration of the African people in their unequal contest with Europe, has decided to recreate the world of the African past and present, its austere dignity and its integrity. He imposes upon himself the task of re-educating the new generation and creating a new sense of awareness through what he considers will be "applied art" committed to the task:

[8] NiyiOsundare, *The Eye of the Earth* (Ibandan: Heinmann, 1990), 15
[9] Chinua Achebe, "English and the African Writer," Transition 18, No (1965): 28
[10] Achebe, "the African writer and the English language," 28

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> I would be quite satisfied if my Novels, especially the ones I set in the past, did no more than teach my readers that their past with all it imperfections- was not one long night of savagery from which the first Europeans acting on God's behalf delivered them.[11]

Achebe's trenchant commitment demanded from him the cultivation and perfection of an authentic Africa voice with which to play his role as the artist of the new Africa. This development and adoption of a style become important aspects of the founding of this voice. Moreover, contemporary Nigerian literature addresses pressing issues such a corruption, gender inequality and the quest for national identity. Chimanda Ngozi Adichie's. "Half of a yellow sun" offers a profound exploration of the Nigerian civil war, also known as the Biafran war and its enduring impact on contemporary Nigeria. Through her compelling narrative and rich character portrayals.

Adichie articulates the complexities of identity, conflict and the consequences of war. The lessons drawn from this tumultuous period are particularly resonant today, providing insights into Nigeria's ongoing struggles with ethnic division, the quest for national identity and the challenges of reconciliation. One of the central themes of "Half of a Yellow Sun" is the divisive nature of ethnicity and the complexities surrounding Nigeria national identity. Adichie poignantly states, "We were all born in Nigeria, but not all of us are Nigerian"[12]. This quote encapsulates the fragmented identity many Nigerians grapple with even today. She uses language and literature to communicate and present the civil war, which was rooted in ethnic tensions primarily between the Igbo people and the Hausa-Fulani and Yoruba ethnic groups, laid bare the fragility of a national identity that was always more aspirational than actual. In contemporary Nigeria, these ethnic divisions continues to undermine national unity, often manifesting in political strife and social discord.

Furthermore, the harrowing experiences of the characters in the novel underscore the devastating impact of war, not just on the body but on the psyche and spirit of individuals. Adichie writes, "There are things that cannot be undone. The past will always be with us". This reflection is crucial for understanding how the legacy of the Civil War continues to shape Nigeria socio-political landscape. The trauma of conflict, displacement and loss experienced by the characters serves as a microcosm of the collective memory of the nation. Many Nigerians today still bear the scars of historical injustices and unresolved grievances, making it essential for contemporary society to confront and address this legacy for genuine national healing.

"Half of a Yellow Sun serves as both a historical account and a lens through which to examine the lessons of the Nigerian Civil War in the context of contemporary Nigeria. Adichie's exploration of ethnicity, trauma, and resilience provides a framework for understanding the ongoing challenges the nation faces.

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[11] Chimamanda NgoziAdichie, Half of A Yellow Sun (New York: Achor Books, 2007), 45.
[12] Adichie, Half of a Yellow Sun, 314

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By historical divisions, recognizing the weight of the past and fostering resilience among its people, Nigeria can aspire towards a more united and harmonious future. The echoes of the past remain relevant, urging contemporary society to reflect, learn and strive for reconciliation and peace.

Communication

The realm of communication in Nigeria is profoundly influenced by the media landscape, which has evolved with technological advancements. The advent of social media platforms has sparked a significant shift in the ways individuals, communities and institutions share information and engage in discourse. The proliferation of mobile technology has democratized access to communication, enabling citizens to voice their opinions and participate in national conversations. This shift has empowered various demographic groups, particularly the youth, to engage politically, socially and culturally, reshaping the public sphere and influencing national policy discussions. Moreover, the communication styles prevalent in Nigerian society reflect its cultural dynamism. The use of proverbs, folklore and oral traditions permeates everyday discourse, enriching the communicative process and allowing for nuanced interactions. Such traditional forms of communication serve as educational tools imparting wisdom and communal values while fostering a sense of belonging. In contrast, modern communication trends often emphasize directness and efficiency creating a tension between traditional and contemporary modes of expression.

Conclusion

In conclusion, language, literature and communication in contemporary Nigerian society are intricately interwoven, each element reinforcing and shaping the others. The linguistic diversity of the nation not only enriches its literary canon but also enhances communication practices, underlining the importance of cultural identity in a globalized world. As Nigeria continues to navigate complex social and political landscape, the evolution of these element will remain pivotal in fostering mutual understanding and national cohesion. Ultimately, the embrace of its linguistic heritage, coupled with modern communication strategies, positions Nigeria to engage meaningfully with both local and global narratives, ensuring its cultural resonance in the 21st century.

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