

AN ETHNOGRAPHIC INVESTIGATION OF CHIMAMANDA NGOZI ADICHIE'S HALF OF A YELLOW SUN

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Abstract

Every speech community is unique in its communication pattern since people create and establish their own speaking codes and norms. These speaking codes and norms are meant to convey their cultural inclinations. Adichie's Half of a Yellow Sun has been subjected to various scholarly investigations mainly at the literary level while the linguistic aspect of the novel in relation to the speaking codes that exist in the culture that produce the characters appear not to have enjoyed much scholarly attention. This paper therefore aims at examining some of the linguistic behaviours of some of the characters in the novel with the aim of investigating how the concept of speech as a culturally defined practice is made evident in the characters' language use. Data for this study are excerpts of conversational interactions between the characters in the novel. These excerpts are randomly selected from the various chapters of the novel and arranged into speech events. Each speech event is then examined in the context of the norms of the culture or society in which the characters live. This is done within the framework of ethnography of SPEAKING by Dell Hymes which focuses on how factors like setting, speaker, purpose, topic, mood, channels, norms and genre structure interactions. Our investigation reveals that language is used to maintain social order and also that speeches in any context have intrinsic rules of interaction which are usually observed by the speakers. In instances where there are deviations from these rules, other social factors such as intimacy and individual ideology have been identified as accountable. The conclusion is therefore here that language as a major means of communication has norms that guide its usage in any speech event. Through language use, people reveal the inherent structure of speeches as well as their communal speech codes imposed on them by their culture. Deviation from such speech codes are therefore perceived as deviation from culture.

Key words: Norms, Communication, Speech, Genre ethnography

1. Introduction

Key to human existence is communication and most of what we communicate is done through language. Kramsch (2000) explains that language is the principal means by which we conduct our social lives. When language is used in contexts of communication, it is bound up with culture in multiple and complex ways. It plays an invaluable role in social integration and by extension social order. Members of a speech community do not only express experiences; they also create experiences through language (Sapir, 1929). Language users give meaning to language through the medium they choose to communicate with one another. For example, the choice of a face to face conversation instead of writing a letter or sending an E-mail is in itself meaning-embedded. This means that the way in which people use the spoken, written or visual medium creates meanings that are understandable to the group they belong to. Also, a speaker's tone of voice, accent, conversational style, gestures, facial expressions also help in encoding and decoding meaning. Through all its verbal and non-verbal aspects, language embodies cultural reality.

From the foregoing, it is evident that language use and interpretation are not unanimous. It varies across cultures and ethnic groups. Particular meanings are adopted by the speech community and imposed in turn on its members by cultural conventions. These cultural conventions as reflected in norms of interaction and interpretation from parts of the invisible rituals imposed on language users. This is culture's way of bringing order and predictability into people's use of language.

Scholars have over the years been occupied with examining the factors that constitute the variation in language use, meaning transmission and interpretation. These factors have been examined using different theoretical frameworks. One of such is variability concept made popular by Labov in which sociological factors such as age, sex, gender, social status and other factors have been identified as potential factors that determine an individual's use of language. Another is Conversational Analysis (Mey, 2001). The focus of Sack's work, which focuses on conversation, of discovering if there is an inherent order therein in conversational structure as it exists in everyday social behaviours. Ethnographic methods however, take a holistic look at how socio-cultural factors that include context (of situation and culture) contribute and indeed determine how successful communication is achieved.

The Igbos occupy what is known as the Eastern part of Nigeria that include Abia, Imo, Enugu, Anambra and Ebonyi states. They also occupy some part of Delta state. They speak the Igbo language which is derived from a group of languages commonly found in West Africa, the Kwa languages. Although there are many dialects of the language, they are mutually intelligible. It is based a lot on pitch, vocal inflections and context when defining the meaning of a word. A single word can have numerous meanings depending on these factors. Idioms and proverbs play an important role in the Igbo language. Anyone who does not use them in speech is considered a novice at speaking the language. Ideh however notes that

Proverb is for both sexes but there are some restrictions on
Women's use of proverbs among Igbo... a woman is allowed to
Use proverbs when she is in the midst of other women or
Younger men but not in the midst of elderly men (2005:58)

The village life for the Igbo people is like many other villages in Africa, but still unique in an Igbo way. Igbos lives in villages that have anywhere from a few hundred to a few thousand people comprised of numerous extended families. A very interesting thing about these villages is that there is no single ruler or king that controls the community like we have in Yoruba culture. Decisions are made by including almost everyone in the village. There are established institutions such as council of elders (a group based on age), men's associations, youth association, women's associations and secret societies. The Igbos simultaneously emphasizes individual actions and community living. The Igbos is profoundly religious. These polytheistic people worship many gods. They believe that there are three levels of divine beings: the highest level is the supreme god or "Chukwu". Underneath Chukwu are lesser gods called "Umuagbara", and under these are the "NdiIchie," the spirits of dead people (the ancestors).

The Igbos also believes in reincarnation. They see death as a transient phase between life and the spirit world. When someone dies, he or she starts a new life in the spirit world. After a time in the spirit world, a dead person would be reborn as a new person and the cycle would continue. Each village has priests and priestesses who help in all spiritual matters, conducting ceremonies and rituals. And since the Igbos believe that everything in life is controlled by higher powers, there are also diviners in a village that attempt to predict the future. Many of the Igbos are now educated and

are gradually losing their proficiency in Igbo language. Igboanusi asserts that “in Igbo society, it appears that the more educated a person is, the less fluent he is in Igbo. On the contrary, the less educated a person, the more competent he is in the use of Igbo” (1990:14), and consequently the more conscious of the Igbo culture.

2. Research Methodology

Data for this study are excerpts of interactions taken from Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie’s *Half of a Yellow Sun*, published in 2006. Interactions are selected based on some peculiar features that are relevant to this study. They are classified into speech events for easy analysis. The text is specifically selected because it is a novel that is rich in elements of a particular culture; the Igbo culture and the characters’ language use reflects the unspoken rules of interaction that is part of the Igbo culture. Data are analyzed within the framework of ethnology of communication particularly Hymes’ Ethnography of SPEAKING model (1962, 1964, 1972).

Information about the Igbo culture and language use is got from intensive reading of materials on the Igbo culture and language-use within the culture. Being an ethnographic analysis, observation and interview procedures are adopted in establishing the structuring of speech interactions.

3. Theoretical Framework

Ethnography of communicating is the study of the place of language in culture and society. It is an approach, a perspective and a method to and in the study of culturally distinctive means and meaning of communication. Ethnography of communication conceptualizes communication as a continuous flow of information, rather than as a segmental exchange of messages. Philipsen (1975) says that ethnography of communication can be used as a means by which to study the interactions among members of a specific culture or “speech community”. Ethnography according to Hymes (1974) is the offspring of anthropology and linguistics and it is the study of the speech behavior of a verbal community. Speech according to Wardhaugh (2006) is used in different ways among different groups of people with each group having its own norms of linguistic behavior. Anthropology however contributes to several under-developed intellectual areas involving speech and the one that is general and central to anthropological study of behavior is the ethnography of SPEAKING. The ethnography of SPEAKING according to Hymes (1974) is concerned with the situation and uses, the patterns and functions of speaking as an activity in its own right.

How societies use speech or talk is derived entirely from the norms we have internalized or the norms of others with which we have become familiar. A child learns different ways of speaking in different societies. This learning could be facilitated by (1) Psychological motivations: that is, a child must be seen and not heard while some have been trained to talk from youth. (2) Upbringing: this has to do with social or cognitive consequences to ‘the way one learns to speak’. Different ethnic and social groups in the same society exhibit different ways of speaking. This is due to the fact that there are special occasions and special places for certain kinds of speech. Examples are classroom, engagement ceremony, naming ceremony, funeral ceremony and so on.

Sometimes, an activity defined as speaking by one group may be defined as something else by another. These differences lead to the comparative study of the differential involvement of speaking in the structure and behavior within different groups. In one sense, a comparative ethnography of SPEAKING is but one kind of comparative study of the utilization of cultural resources. Not all behavior is communicative and not all communication is linguistic (and linguistic means include more than speech). The allocation of communication among behavior setting differs from group to group.

Every group has its “speech economy”. Speech economy has three aspects, they are: speech events, the constituent factors of speech events and the functions of speech. Speech events could be of different classes. Some classes are sermon, inaugural address, pledge of allegiance and so forth. Other classes are suggested by colloquial expressions such as heart-heart talk, sales talk, talk man-to-man, woman’s talk, bull session, chat, polite conversation, chatter (of a team) and so on.

Any speech event can be seen as comprising several components and the several analyses of these is a major aspect of ethnography of SPEAKING. Hymes uses the acronym SPEAKING for easy understanding of the concept:

S stands for the Setting and Scene of speech, that is, the real circumstances in which a speech event takes place. It may refer to the psychological setting or the cultural definition of social situation. The important aspect of settings is the time and place in which people interact and the influence of these aspects on the kind of communication that may occur (or whether communication is permitted at all). In different times and places the quality and quantity of the

language we use will be subject to social evaluation and sanction. The extent of which people recognize, submit to, or defy these sanctions is an important factor in any study of contextual ideology.

P stands for Participants, various combination of speakers/listeners, addressor/addressee or sender/receiver. Normally, a single person acts as sender or addresser.

E stands for Ends, that is, the conventionally recognized and expected outcomes of an exchange as well as the personal goals that participants seek to accomplish on particular occasions.

A stands for Act sequence, that is the actual form and content of what is said: the precise words used, how they are used and the relationship of what is said to the actual topic at hand.

K stands for Key, that is the tone, manner of spirits in which a particular message is encoded: light hearted, serious, precise, pedantic, mocking, sarcastic or pompous.

I stand for Instrumentalities, that is, the choice of channel. This could be oral, written or sign. Instrumentalities also include the actual forms of the speech used as language, that is, the dialect or register chosen.

N stand for Norms of interaction and interpretation, that is, the specific behaviors and properties that are attached to speaking as well as how these may be viewed by someone who does not share them, for instance: loudness, silence and gaze return.

G stand for Genre, the clearly demarcated types of utterance. Such types include poem, proverbs, prayers, sermons, lectures and editorials.

Evidently, when speaking goes wrong, that failure is often explainable in terms of some neglect of one or more of the above mentioned factors. What Hymes offers us in his SPEAKING formula is a very necessary reminder that talk is a complex activity and that any particular bit of talk is actually a piece of 'skilled work'. It is skilled in the sense that if it is to be successful, the speaker must reveal sensibility to and an awareness of all of the eight factors outlined above. Speakers and listeners must also go to work to see that nothing goes wrong. When speaking does go wrong, as it sometime does, that going is often describable in terms of some neglect of one or more factors.

4. Data Presentation and Analysis

The novel *Half of a Yellow Sun* is rich in Igbo culture orientation and characters that possess from little to much of Igbo traits. Adichie in this novel, majorly narrates the events that happened during the Nigerian-Biafran War that took place between 1967 and 1970. She skillfully introduces us to the financial world where her characters live but she recount the probable experiences of some Igbo people during the war. The major characters: Odenigbo, Olanna, Ugwu, Kainene and Richard each narrate their experiences, as in what happened to them directly or what they witness happen to others. Olanna and Kainene are the twin daughters Chief and Mrs. Ozobia. They are both trained overseas and have returned to Nigeria in the early 1960s. Olanna is the more beautiful, the more cool-headed and the more admired of the two while Kainene is known for her brazenness and astuteness. Olanna falls in love with Odenigbo, a university lecturer at the university in Nsukka. Odenigbo is an activist of the nationalist ideology. He believes that an end must come to the European imposition on Nigeria and to achieve this there must be a revolution. Ugwu, a young teenager who was brought from the village to serve Odenigbo was always a quiet listener at the various meeting of the university intellectuals that hold at Odenigbo's house. Ugwu is ambitious, courageous, scholarly, unassuming, intuitive and resourceful. He is never complaining and he makes good of the opportunities presented him by his stay with his master. He was deeply involved in the war as he is forcefully conscripted into the Biafra army as a child soldier. In fact, he constitutes the main character around which the story revolves. Richard is the Briton that was unfortunate to find himself in the mix of things during the war period as a result of his decision to stay back because of his love for Kainene. This novel captures the ills that come along with war; the destruction, hunger, loss of lives, loss of resources and hunger. It makes of children soldiers; it makes of adult criminals; even when it is over it is never really over because it leaves behind devastation and so much psychological effects.

For the purpose of this work, we shall particularly focus on utterance sequences that are of particular interest as regards the participants involved, the setting of the speech events and the purpose of the speech events that is able to influence or dictate the various linguistic choices the characters have opted for. We shall also concentrate on tone and manner in which an act or event is performed as well as on how the choice of channel; whether written or spoken displays the communicative competence of the speaker(s). This is in a final attempt to see how well the

linguistic code of conduct amidst the Igbos has been observed by Adichie's characters. The conversation sequences selected are those that are of particular interest and relevance to the work.

In every society, there is social stratification. The Igbo society also shares this characteristic. This is particularly evident in the relationship that exists between Ugwu (the house boy) and Odenigbo (master). They met for the first time in Odenigbo's house. Ugwu is brought on Odenigbo's request by his aunty from the village. Hitherto, Ugwu is uneducated and has not had much of city life. At their first meeting, this conversational exchange ensued:

Excerpt 1

1. Master: *Keduafagi*(Ugwu stood up)
2. Master: What's your name?
3. Ugwu: Ugwusah
4. Master: Ugwu. And you've come from Obukpa?
5. Ugwu: From Opi, sah
6. Master: You could be anything from twelve to thirteen, thirteen probably
7. Ugwu: Yes sah
8. Master:Ugwu, go to the kitchen; there must be something you can eat in the fridge
9. Ugwu: yes sah (p 5)

From the above interaction, language is used as a social tool of master-subordinate marker. In the Igbo culture as it is the case in many world cultures, the superior initiates the conversation. Here the opening utterance is a question. This is performing the act of request for information and is at the same time a demand for answer. Ugwu in response stood up. This reaction of Ugwu's here reflects reverence or kind of fear. Sequence (4) is another question that is pre-emptive; already suggesting possible options. This is an act to further ground his (Odenigbo's) superiority especially where Ugwu himself cannot replicate the demand for knowledge. This is also repeated in sequence (6). This continual use of pre-emptive question is an attempt to assert his superiority. The continual injection of 'sah' (3, 5, 7, 9), is indicative of the norm of the culture requirement. Since the Igbos does not genuflect or prostrate, the 'sah' interjection is a viable means of (i) asserting his master's superiority and (ii) accepting and displaying his subordination to him. With the lexical item, Ugwu reflects respect and reverence for Odenigbo even to the point of confirming his master's opinion of his age (6, 7).

Odenigbo's choice for Igbo instead of English here can be conditioned by the person of Ugwu who has limited education and consequently a minimal proficiency in the English language. It could also be a means of showing oneness, because he is an Igbo man himself (Igboanusi 1991:12). However, we notice an oddity in the exchange below. This event also takes place in Odenigbo's house. Ugwu, while trying to arrange the house, notices the need for another shelf. He calls the attention of his master to this who in turn promises to inform the university department in charge of such matters.

Excerpt 2

- Odenigbo (Ode): I will speak to somebody at the works department
- Ugwu: Yes sah
- Ode: Odenigbo. Call me Odenigbo
- Ugwu: Sah
- Ode: My name is not sah. Call me Odenigbo
- Ugwu: Sah
- Ode: Odenigbo will always be my name. Sir is arbitrary. You could be the sir tomorrow.
- Ugwu: Yes sah-Odenigbo

The request in (3) is considered quite unusual and tends towards abnormality. The immediate paralinguistic cue of "Ugwu stared at him doubtfully" (p.13) gives this impression. Amidst the Igbo, it is not usual for someone of Odenigbo's status to be addressed by name by someone of a lower social status. It is even odder when the request to so address is coming from such a person himself. Ugwu being the voice of Igbo traditional consciousness in the book remarks that he "really preferred sah, the crisp power behind the word" (p.13). For Ugwu, it is like his master is trying to cede his power. Such an action is however accounted for by Igboanusi who explains that "the educated Igbo are greatly influenced by the Western culture and civilization" (1990:12). Odenigbo on the other hand sees 'sir' as a transient or irrelevant horrific that has become common place and has lost its appeal to him (sequence 7). It is also an attempt to avoid the conferment on an air of unintended formality between him and his houseboy.

While it is an act that does not conform to the Igbo culture, Odenigbo perceives it as appropriate because of his level of education (a university professor) and his personal ideology (Marxist). Based on the mutual Contextual Beliefs (MCBs) between the participants, that such a request (to

be addressed by first name by his houseboy) is unacceptable in the Igbo culture, Odenigbo is compelled to explain himself (7). In some other situation, this self explanation and justification would have been considered odd and unnecessary.

Discussion Speech Event

Another conversation of interest is below. This speech event takes place in Odenigbo's sitting room with other learned colleagues including Dr. Patel, an Indian scholar; Professor Ezeka; Okeoma the poet; Miss Adebayo a co-lecturer at the University, and Odenigbo himself. This people are known to meet from time to time especially in the evenings to discuss whatever matter takes their fancy. They discuss issues ranging from education, international matters to arts; issues of nationalism, racism and neo-colonialism, however, take the centre stage.

Excerpt 3

1. Ezeka: We should have a bigger pan-African response to what is happening in the American South really
2. Ode: you know, the Africanism is fundamentally a European notion
3. Ezeka: You are digressing
4. Adebayo: May be it is European notion but in the bigger picture we are all one race
5. Ode: What bigger picture...can you see that we are not all alike, except to white eyes?
6. Adebayo: Of course we are all alike, we all have white oppression in common...
7. **Ode:** Of course... but my point is that the only authentic identity for the African is the tribe... I am Igbo before the white man came.
8. **Ezeka:** But you became aware that you were Igbo because of the white man.
9. **Ode:** The pan-Igbo idea existed long before the white man. Go and ask elders in your village about your history.
10. **Adebayo:** The problem is that Odenigbo is a hopeless tribalist, we need to keep him quiet (p 18-19)

The first thing that is easily noticeable in this speech event is the recurrence of the turns taken by Odenigbo. Turn-taking here is not equally distributed among the participants. Odenigbo being the host is expected to moderate and to keep the conversation flowing, this is usually required of a host in most cultures of which Igbo is not an exception. Following this cultural tendency, Odenigbo's contributions dominate the conversation. This is not necessarily an attempt to also dominate the other participants, but rather an effort at fulfilling cultural demands.

Noticeable also is the use of 'pure' English and the Standard Variety at that. This could be accounted for by considering the genre of the conversation, which is an intellectual discussion. The topics of discussions are mostly around political issues and issues of ethnic consciousness. Some of the words that will appropriately convey messages and emotions might not be easily accessible in Igbo and this will necessitate an option for English Language as an instrument of communication could be used to exclude or include other people. Taking cognizance of the composition of the participants, we discover a non-Igbo speaker in the person of Miss Adebayo. Thus the use of Igbo in this speech event will be sacrifice mutual intelligibility. Moreover, a deliberate action only aggravates the mutual suspicion that already exists among the various ethnic groups. Therefore, in order to form a speech community – “[a] group which shares both linguistic resources and rules for interaction and interpretation” (Couthhard 1985:35) – that will ensure successful communication as required by the context, the choice of language is influenced.

In the Igbo culture, “a woman wanting to address the audience should do so in a subtle, submissive voice and greet them in such a manner” (Ideh 2005:9). Ideh further notes that a woman's speech is expected to provide an enabling environment for the man to show his dominance (2005:10). This is however not the case with Miss Adebayo. Her not being Igbo is betrayed not only in her name and the language she speaks (p.19) but also in the way she carries through a conversation. Ugwu describes her as the loudest in the group and further explains that “he did not like the way her voice rose above master's in the living room, challenging and arguing” (p.19). She does the abominable when “she got up laughing and went over to master and pressed his lips close together”. (p.21). as the Igbo consciousness in the novel, Ugwu is startled because he is aware of the way a woman is supposed to behave, even linguistically and “he often fought urge to raise his own voice from behind the kitchen door and tell her to shut up especially when she called master a sophist” (p19-20). It will be important here to point out that this behavior of Miss Adebayo's is

not necessarily acceptable in the Yoruba culture to which she belongs. On the contrary, it is an indication of the tension that exists between her and Odenigbo as well as a way of lightening up the tensed mood. This behavior is acceptable in this particular setting and does not appear abnormal to anyone else except Ugwu.

Introductory Speech Events

Meeting people and greeting them is a fundamental part of the Igbo culture. Ogunsiji and Osundina (2005) assert that although greetings are universal in one form or the other to all speech communities, there are peculiarities which make the greeting forms of one speech communities significantly different from that of others. When people meet for the first time in a day, or after a long period of time, or for the first time in a lifetime, before any conversation ensues, greeting is introduced. Oke (2009: 154) observes that “the societal norms in form of conventions and rules of social and speech behavior (linguistic and paralinguistic cues) have to be strictly observed in greeting conversational interaction”. The first instance of greeting to be cited is set in Odenigbo’s house where his friends have converged for their usual meetings and Olanna, his girlfriend, who has just arrived and has never met any of these people has to be introduced.

Excerpt 4

- Ode: My Friends, my friends, this finally is Olanna
- Adebayo: How are you?
- Olanna: I’m well. You must be Lara Adebayo.
- Adebayo: Yes, He did not tell us that you were illogically pretty.
- Olanna: I will take that as a compliment
- Okeoma: I’m Okeoma, I thought odenigbo’s girlfriend was a human, he didn’t say you were a water marmaid.
- Dr. Patel: Very nice to see you finally.

The sequence of turns is informal since the setting demands an informal type of introduction and acknowledgment. The acknowledgements are mostly cordial and complementary. Even Dr. Ezeka, that was not reported to have said anything, responded by shaking Olanna’s hand. Where such introduction is made and it is shunned, hostility would have been detected. If Olanna had just joined in the conversation, it would have been considered very rude. The norm here is that whoever

is part of the group through whom the newcomer is coming, is obligated to do the introduction. It would be totally unacceptable if Olanna had introduced herself. By so doing she would not have received the warmth and welcome she did because such an action is unacceptable. Worthy of note is also the fact that a level of cordiality ensued immediately. This usually happens when the newcomer and the set of people to be met already have some background information about one another. A feeling of familiarity would have developed while the actual meeting only reinforces this familiarity. In the light of this, it becomes easy for Olanna to join in the subsequent discussion since a sense of belonging had already been established in the welcome.

The second instance of greeting noted is between Kainene, a daughter of a wealthy man and master's degree holder from London; Richard, a writer; and Susan, a Briton, working with the British council. They all meet for the first time at a party where both the wealthy Nigerians and the resident Britons were in attendance. The person presiding over this interaction is a friend of Susan's. Richard has been introduced to other Whites in such an exchange as exemplified below.

Susan: This is Richard Churchill

Richard: (shake hands and quip) "No relation of Sir Winston's I'm afraid, or might have turned out a little cleverer." (p 56).

When he meets Kainene, after having met several whites who laughed at his jokes, this sequence of conversation ensued.

Excerpt 5

1. Susan's friend: This Kainene Ozobia, Chief Ozobia's daughter. Kainene just got her master's from London. Kainene, this is Susan Grenville-Pittus, from British Council and this is Richard Churchill.
2. Susan: How do you do?
3. Richard: Hello, I'm no relation of Sir Winston's I'm afraid or might have turned out a little cleverer.
4. Kainene: How funny

To begin with, there is a change in participants here as well as the setting. This is a very formal occasion where the people being introduced knew nothing about one another prior to this time.

The norm demands that in such a situation, alongside their names, some things considered of good report should follow. For Kainene, she is recognized not in herself but in relation to her father's wealth. Susan is also recognized in relation with the organization she works with. No such remark accompanies Richard's name, probably because nothing is known about him by the person doing the introduction.

In the typical Igbo setting, the woman would have been required to keep quiet and allow the male counterpart to take the next turn. The European culture on the other hand is not gender discriminatory and thus permits anyone to hold floor where it is considered convenient. Although, this happened in the earlier example where Adebayo took the next turn (2), the setting is however different; the former is informal while the latter is formal. An Igbo man would have perceived Susana's action as threatening in the presence of a stranger while it meant nothing to Richard, an English man.

Susan's 'how do you do' has been identified as an example of routine by Saville-Troike. He notes that "routines must be learned as well as analyzed as a single unit although they may vary in length...." (1982:44). They may be uttered by an individual or required an adjoined statement(s) from others. In the above instance, it is not a question per se but a part of greeting routine "which by nature has no meaning apart from its phatic function in communication" (Saville-Troike 1982:45). This cultural knowledge is shared by Kainene who does not venture to answer "I am fine" as would have been the case with a non initiate. This is noted as significantly different from what we have in excerpt 4, turns (2) and (3).

Richard's accompanying quip had always elicited laughter from people because, it is consider a joke on the contrary. Kainene as an African woman, although with much exposure to the European culture, understands what the norm-required responses should be but considered it a weak attempt at being funny.

Ideh notes that, on the general, "it is considered good breeding and applauded linguistic proficiency, when a man is able to reject his utterances with good figurative language use" (2005:27). Richard's attempt at being witty is out of place in the Nigerian contest and unappreciated by Kainene. Rather than amuse her, Richard's fumbling attempt at humor, irritated

her and caused her to reply “How funny” in a mocking tone” (p57). After this exchange Kainene is reported to stare right into his (Richard’s) eyes. This action gave Richard the impression that Kainene is brazen and undaunted. This is in line with the European culture, while this same attitude would have been perceived as rudeness, defiance and challenge.

A third instance of meeting people is where Kainene’s friend, Major Madu and Major Udodi, Madu’s friend, met Richard in Kainene’s House. At this time, the meeting makes him to immediately assume that they are business partners.

Excerpt 6

1. Udodi: Are you Kainene’s business associate? Are you in oil?
2. Kainene: I didn’t do the introduction, did I? Richard, Major Udodi Ekechi is a friend of Madu’s. Udodi, this Richard Churchill.
3. Udodi: Oh (and says something in Igbo)
4. Kainene: My choice of lovers is none of your business Udodi. (p.80)

Here we witness a deviation from the norm where Udodi, a guest himself, takes charge in ensuring that the white man is introduced to him. Kainene takes the cue and performed an apologetic act before doing the formal introduction. Noticeable here is the use of language to exclude Richard, knowing well that he does not understand Igbo, but because Udodi wants to say something unpleasant which of course concerns Richard, he had to revert to Igbo. This is an unacceptable norm-breaking because Udodi is not unaware of the appropriate linguistic behavior expected of him. As a chastisement, Kainene not only retorted coldly but also reverted to English. By so doing, she is insisting that they maintain the status quo. Of course what happens next was more disastrous because he had to say all the nasty things he wanted to say in English to Richard’s hearing.

Appreciation speech event

There is no singular fixed way of showing appreciation, the degree of one’s show of appreciation often depends on the magnitude of the favour as well as on the role-relation that exists between the giver and the receiver of the favour. There are however unacceptable response to favor which

is generally avoided because this is believed to be capable of blocking some other favours. Instances of where these genres of conversation take place are extracted from the novel.

The first is between Olanna and her cousin Arize. Arize is the pregnant daughter of her much adored uncle. Olanna has in the past spent quality time with this family at Kano. Whenever she wishes to escape from the day to day stress, she sometimes go through in Lagos or Nsukka; or has just returned from London, she goes to this family. She is so fond of them that when she is experiencing some difficulties coping with Odenigbo's troublesome mother, she runs to them at kano so that they would share in her pain. On this occasion, Olanna takes Arize for shopping in Lagos for the expected baby, all at her expenses. Both Olanna and Arize are fond of each other and they maintain a very informal relationship. After much shopping that they, Arize opens the speech events.

Excerpt 7

1. Arize: She [the expected baby] will wear that white dress for her christening, sister.
2. Olanna: What, Ari?
3. Arize: Your goddaughter will wear that white dress for her thank you so much Sister.

In response Olanna smiles (p.113).

From the above interactions, such shortened form as used by Olanna; 'Ari', is a pointer to the fact that the relationship that exists between these two is a cordial one. Arize, however not taking for granted Olanna's kind gesture, shows her appreciation first by pronouncing the expected baby as Olanna goddaughter, by mentioning that one of the newly bought clothing shall be worn for the baby on her christening (a day considered one of the most important in a person's existence) and finally capping it with the official more common 'thank you'. By so doing, Arize shows that her appreciation is deeply felt beyond with her casual 'thank you' can convey. In response to this, Olanna gives a warm smile, which could be interpreted as an acceptance of the appreciation.

In another instance, this time between Odenigbo and Ugwu's father, we notice another mode of appreciation and response. Here Ugwu's mother has taken ill with a sickness that the village people have been unable to diagnose and Odenigbo has just offered to take her with him to his house in the city. Where she will be given a comprehensive medical care all at his

expense. Ugwu's parents are poor, uneducated and have till that moment been unable to afford a better medical care for the sick woman.

Excerpt 8

- Ode: Get your mother's things quickly: I have friends visiting from Ibadan
- Ugwu: Yes Sah
- Ugwu's Father: Thank You sah. Thank Sah. May another person do for you.
- Ode: Get up
- Ugwu's father: This is my other wife sah
- The wife: Thank you master. Deje

(p. 89)

In this case, the relationship existing between Odenigbo and Ugwu's father is not a familiar one and could even be seen as high-low one where Odenigbo is high. In order to express his profound gratitude, Ugwu's father accompanies his 'thank you sah' with the kneeling in the dirt and clutching Odenigbo's leg. This can be seen as the height of submission where superiority is recognized and submitted to. Of importance also is the fact that Ugwu's father brought his younger wife to thank Odenigbo. Amidst the Igbos, it is not uncommon to show gifts given or share actions of favours received with close relatives so that they can join in appreciating the giver and bear witness to the giver's benevolence. In line with the culture, to show humility when being thanked and indicate that he would have done more if there had been a need, Odenigbo helps Ugwu's father up. Also note worthy is the prayer of 'may another person do for you' to foreground his inability to pay back this good deed but that provision will come for him too from an unexpected sources when he is in need of help. Ugwu's father has an option of what the follow-up prayer would be; the more usual 'God bless you' would be appropriate but for the magnitude of the favour, he chooses to pray that his need be met too.

A third instance of gratitude is noticed between Olanna and Alice. This was during the period of war where there was so much food scarcity and children are dying of Kwashiorkor. Alice is Olanna's neighbor and Olanna takes some of the edible items she has to Alice.

Excerpt 9

- Olanna: A friend of ours brought us some provision (hands out the items)
- Alice: Hei! I can't take all of this (she takes it) thank you, oh thank you so much!

- Olanna: We haven't seen him a while it came as a surprise
- Alice: And you are bothering with me. You shouldn't have.

Here we witness a show of gratitude. Alice's first reaction to this favour is a pseudo rejection of the offer. Saville-Troike (1982:36) notes that this is a kind of indirectness that is reflected in routines for offering and refusing or accepting gifts or food. He explains further that a 'yes' or 'no' intended to be taken literally is more direct than an initial 'no' intended to mean 'Ask me again' (Saville-Toike 1982:36). This means that Alice's statement in sequence (2) should not be taken literally but as norm amidst the people. If this is not done, the person might be perceived as greedy or an opportunist. Therefore, even though she has a great need that the given items will help meet to some extent, she still had to offer the initial refusal and follow it up with an act of appreciation. The initial exclamatory 'Hei' and the 'Oh' are meant to foreground her heartfelt gratitude. In sequence (4) Alice repeats an act of gratitude using it to perform what a straight 'thank you' would have done. Sequence (4) would be interpreted by Olanna as act of gratitude. Sometimes, as a show of humility, people tend to trivialize their benevolent actions by explaining how they got the item themselves or the fact that what is done does not amount to much. Olanna opts for the former and by doing so, humbles herself.

Summons Speech Events

In the Igbo culture, summonses are made from time to time. It could be a general meeting, the Obi or Eze could summon someone to the palace or the clan head could summon an individual. Summons could be to defend oneself, to give a report or to bear witness to an event. Two instances of summons have been extracted from the novel. The first is a general meeting of the Abba inhabitants at a designated point designated specially for such meetings. This implies that it is a regular activity for the people to attend such meeting to discuss issues that affects the general populace. The Igbo society has been noted for its republican nature where everyone is mostly independent of any supreme leader. In case of any important issue, the head of each clan will represent his clan at the meeting but where necessary, every member of the community would have to stand in for himself or herself. The latter is the case here where, in a war situation, there arises a need to encourage the people not to flee. The village of Abba, where so many people have run to seek refuge, is now being invaded by the army of the federal government. It then becomes

pertinent for the people to leave this village and seek refuge in another place. The people are however being encouraged to be brave and not flee their homes. They are being charged with the fact that their forefathers have lived in war times and have even participated but have never abandoned their homeland because of invasion.

Excerpt 10

1. The Dibia: Abba Kwenu
2. Everybody: Yaa!
3. Dibia: Abba! Kwezuenu!
4. Everyone: Yaa!
5. Dibia: Abba has never been defeated by anyone. I said that Abba has never been defeated by anyone. We do not look quarrels, but when your quarrel finds us we will crush you... we will never run from our own land. Our father forbids it. We will never run from our own land!

Everybody cheers

(p. 190)

This event opens with a bellow from the DibiaNwafoAgbada “the man whose medicine was said to be the strongest in [Abba]”. (p. 190). As a convention, he bellows to get the people’s attention and introduce his intention to begin a speech. It is also used to call people to order and demand silence in case of side talks. The bellow performs several acts at the same time. With such openings, and the personality of the speaker as well as the setting (the war periods), the event takes on a serious mood. The paralinguistic cue of the dibia’s strong voice and the plunging of the staff into the ground further suggest a tense moment. The bellow is characteristics of the male speakers. Ideh (2005:8) asserts that a woman does not bellow before speaking while a man is expected to bellow first before he continues with what he wants to say. And as an unspoken convention, the people are expected to respond to such bellows. After the opening sequence, the dibia goes ahead to deliver his speech. The Igbo’s have a consciousness of the presence of their ancestors thus there is constant reference to them. They are considered capable force, able to protect, bring wealth, ensure good yield and conquer battles on behalf of their living children. Their presence and their ability to forestall evil is reference to here. The dibia’s position and personality is strategic in this speech event. This is because the people already acknowledge him as the most powerful in their area and if an assurance of the ancestors’ support as well as invocation of their past victory is coming from him, then their security is assured. Therefore, his speech elicited the desired effect

encouraging the people to be brave and not run in the face of an impending military attack. This effect is seen in the people's cheering. However, it is worthy of note that even if the people are not sufficiently convinced, at the moment of the speech, the conventional response is such as they have done.

The second instance is when Olanna is summoned by her clan's men. The emissary is Uncle Osita. The meeting is at her grandfather's compound where she is supposed to narrate what she witnessed as concerning the death of her uncle and his wife in Kano. Olanna is in Kano when the crisis breaks out. She however escapes being killed because she is at that time with a royal Hausa man who could not be penetrated by the rioters. She sees her aunt and her uncle's body on the floor, she did not see Arize's but is told that the area where Arize lives has been ravaged by the Hausa who are bent on killing all the Igbo there.

This event too, like the example above is a general meeting but this time of the clan alone. Such meetings are conventionally led by the eldest if the participants are related or; the eldest or; or most powerful in some ways if it has to do with the whole community. In this case, Nwafor Isiah being the oldest member of the Umunna presides over the meeting.

1. Uncle Osita: Umunachi summons you
2. Uncle Isiah: Others have come back and we keep our eyes on the road for our son Mbaezi and our wife Ifeka and our daughter Arize as well as our in-law from Ogidi. We have waited and we have not seen them many months have passed and our eyes ache from being focused on the road. We have asked you to come today to tell us what you know. Umunachi is asking about all her children who do not return from the North. You were there, our daughter.

What you tell us we will tell Umunachi.

(olanna narrates the events just as she saw it).

3. Mama Dozie: Do not lie Olanna Ozobia. *Isiswanaasi*. May chicken pox afflict you if you lie. Who told you it was my sister's body that you saw: who told you? Do not lie here or cholera will strike you dead. (p. 192).

The prevailing atmosphere here is tensed as the participants are waiting to confirm what they already suspect; the death of their family members in the North. As a convention the elders will

be gently and formal while interrogating the eye witness (p. 191). The witness will be expected to speak in a clear voice and wear a grim look to show a sense of remorse. This is all to express an act of regret for the unpleasant news or report she is about to break. In the Igbo culture the loss is seen as a collective one. This is evident in the language choice of Uncle Isiah: our son, our wife, our daughter, our son-in-law. As they all participate in this loss, so would they all participate when celebration arises. This is communal living where both good and bad fortunes are shared by the entire clan. Noteworthy is also the use of such inclusive pronoun as 'our'. This should be taken literally to mean that they all gave birth to the son or that they all are married to one woman. Rather, it is to indicate that in this culture, the child of one is the child of all, and the wife of one is the wife of all, and so on.

When an individual is summoned, it will be considered the height of insolence when such summon is not honored and this kind of insolence is duly punished. The elaborate language used is characteristic and even expected of an elder. This is to show off the wisdom he has accrued over the years, to drive home his point and elicit the desired effect. Usually, when such news is given, a mournful reaction follows, this could include wailing or silence (Saville-Troike 1982:10). What we witness here is an outburst from Mama Dozie. This outburst should be noted as not intended as cursing the bad news bearer but a show of her grieve and her wish that the sad event was not true. Sometimes the violence of the bereaved is understood and is condonable. Thus, there is no hard feeling that Olanna is being cursed rather the people become more sympathetic.

Condolence Speech Event

The above excerpt gives us an insight into what could take place at the death of a family member. Since it is a natural thing that people should die, the Igbos from time to time sympathize with the bereaved. We witness this in the novel when the news of the death of Odenigbo's mother was received. Okeoma, a family friend, visits Odenigbo's family at their house on hearing of the unfortunate incident to pay condolences. She had insisted that she was not going to leave Abba that was already under heavy attacks from the Federal soldiers. On entering, he met Olanna, Odenigbo's wife who was also still in shock about the incident.

Excerpt 11

- 5.0 Okeoma: I heard what happened
- 6.0 Olanna: He has not really spoken to me. What he says to me makes no sense.
- 7.0 Okeoma: Odenigbo has never known how to be weak. Be patient with him. (Okeoma hugged Odenigbo)
- 8.0 Okeoma: *Ndo*(sorry)
- 9.0 Ode: I think she must have been surprised when they shot her. Mama never understood that we are really at war and that her life was in danger.
- 10.0 Okeoma: What has happened has happened. You must be strong. (p.322)

The situation here involves Okeoma who is coming for the first time after the unfortunate incident to pay condolences. He opens the conversation with an informative act to immediately state his purpose of visit. In this context, the statement in (1) is understood by all the participants as referring to the death of Odenigbo's mother. Therefore, it will be inappropriate for anyone to ask what happened. This introduction of intent is also a way of creating room for deniability (to deny whether then news was true or simply a rumour). At no such denial, he proceeds to render the all purpose greeting 'Ndo'. This word is roughly translated into 'sorry' which in the Igbo culture is equally appropriate in expressing an act of regret for an unpleasant experience. The word 'sorry' is often used in the native speakers' context to express apology for mishap to the addressee" (Oke 2009:157). It is used here as an expression of condolences to fill the gap created by the non existence of such expression in English. According to Ogunsiji and Osundina (2005) the expression 'sorry' is a term that can never say it all. It is an embodiment of so many acts at the same time: sympathy, empathy, apology and so on. Okeoma reinforces his feelings by hugging Odenigbo, an action that depicts solidarity and support. While Odenigbo wants to talk about what he believe the mother must have gone through before her death, Okeoma quickly intervenes with (6), not be shun him but to encourage him to be strong. The statement 'what has happened has happened' is interpreted as 'accept my sympathy' and as an encouragement not to remain depressed. This greeting is considered a balm or therapeutic dose with the efficacy to relieve the bereaved of the psychological pains. This change in topic is not interpreted by Okeomaas anything else but what Odenigbo intends it to be.

5. Conclusion

This study reveals that language, as a major means of communication, has unspoken conventional norms that guide its use in any speech event. The choices made by different characters in *Half of a Yellow Sun* are influenced and conditioned by the actual event, setting, purpose and other factors encapsulated in the acronym SPEAKING all within the context of culture. Language, as used when introducing people to one another, is significantly different from language, as used when arguing or summoning. Even within the same genre, the participants, time and place of such a speech interactions have been noted to have significant influence in the choices made in language use. Observable from this study is that these rules that guide utterances also guide interpretations in such a way that within the context of use, misinterpretation and misunderstanding are avoided.

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