



A Discourse Analysis of Ethnography of Communication among the Igbo in Chinua Achebe's *Things Fall Apart*

Okechukwu Onyenweaku¹

¹Department of Languages, Akanu Ibiam Federal Polytechnic, Unwana, Nigeria Email: okechukwuonyenweaku@gmail.com

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ABSTRACT

Most critical works on Achebe's novels have often focused on their literariness, undermining the use of language in the texts and their sociolinguistic and cultural significance. Language and the sociocultural speech community in which it is used are intricately interwoven. This fundamentally accounts for the expediency of the acquisition of adequate communicative competence as well as sufficient sociocultural knowledge of the society in which language operates. Such a knowledge is acquired through exposure to studies on ethnography of communication of a speech community of interest. This paper examines ethnography of communication among the Igbo (of Nigeria) in Chinua Achebe's *Things Fall Apart*. The study engages in a discourse analysis of selected relevant speech events in the novel to describe and explicate culture-bound issues that influence and condition speech in Igbo linguistic community as represented in the text. The paper is anchored on Dell Hymes' communicative competence and ethnography of communication frameworks. Findings emanating from the study revealed that effective language use and what is communicated through it is predominantly a culture-bound phenomenon. This, therefore, makes the present study relevant to readers of *Things Fall Apart*, especially the non-Igbo speakers, in that the study would provide them with significant insight on the sociocultural issues that influence language use among the Igbo. The paper, thus, advocates that such readers should take cognizance of those culture-bound linguistic issues analyzed as they do a re-reading of the novel for its better appreciation.



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Corresponding Author's Email: okechukwuonyenweaku@gmail.com

INTRODUCTION

Prior to its study in multidimensional approaches across varied disciplines, ethnography of communication had been an exploratory and descriptive aspect of anthropological and sociological research. Historically, as a result of early practice of oral transmission of peoples' sociocultural experiences occasioned by the absence of documented account of facts and observations, ethnography (which studies the way of life and ideas that a group of people more or less share) lost its root in antiquity (Kuper and Jessica, 2004; Encyclopedia of Social Science, 1974). In its more general sense, ethnography is simply the descriptive study of a particular

human society or the process of making such a study. This has to do with the study aimed at producing valid and reliable cultural descriptions regarding the life of a people. The result of such a study is usually an objectively written account of an aspect of a peoples' culture. From the foregoing standpoint, ethnography is generally conceived as a descriptive study of a particular human society's cultural experiences that are of significant social and cultural interest (Encyclopedia Britannica, 1998).

In recent times, ethnographic study has been extended to the study of how language is used in sociocultural and linguistic milieu/settings by members of a speech community. Research investigations on language use have been approached from different perspectives. The essence is usually to ascertain how language is appropriately used by speakers to communicate meaning among them selves. Studies on ethnography, in relation to language use, form an interesting aspect of investigation in this regard. As language scholars investigate language use in speech communities, they focus on the language the participants are using and the cultural practices such a language reflects. According to Uzoezie (2001), ethnography of communication involves the description of language and the analysis of speech within the context of the culture of a speech community. It studies language beyond the use of grammatical expression for communication. The basic assumption here is that speakers functioning as members of a particular society in terms of a particular culture have internalized not only the rules of grammar but also rules of appropriate speech usage which are broadly shared by members of their society (Sankoff, 1974), and which they apply in their speech behaviour. This knowledge of language use is known as communicative competence.

Holmes (2008) asserts that ethnography of communication approach provides another way of defining a speech community i.e. as a group of people who share the same norms, rules and expectations regarding the use of language. Obviously, people who belong to the same speech community interpret events differently, and know the norms for behaving appropriately in the regular communicative events of the community. The ethnography of communication framework developed by Dell Hymes provides a means of describing communicative events in any culture. It is an approach to analyze language which has been designed to heighten awareness of culture-bound assumptions (Holmes, 2008).

Among the Igbo people of Eastern Nigeria, speech (language use) is not only a means of communicating intentions and meanings but also an art or skill that is highly respected. Achebe (1976), writing on language and the destiny of man, quoted in Igwe and Green (2000) as having observed that in Igbo speech community, a person who could use language effectively, and has a good command of idioms and proverbs is highly respected by his fellows. In other words, understanding language use in Igbo society entails a firm knowledge of the culture and worldview of the people.

Against this backdrop, therefore, this paper examines ethnography of communication among the Igbo in Chinua Achebe's *Things Fall Apart*. Adopting the theoretical framework of communicative competence and ethnography of communication, the work analyzes communicative events (precisely extracts from the text) to explicate how the components of ethnography of communication framework have been used to effect communication/understanding among the discourse participants (Igbo speakers) in line with their cultural norms and practices guiding speech. The analysis will assist readers of this classical text

to better appreciate the work, especially non-Igbo speaking readers from different cultural and linguistic backgrounds.

Understanding the Concept and Tenets of Ethnography of Communication

Ethnography of communication/speaking is one of the interesting multidimensional approaches in the conduct of ethnographic studies in other fields of study other than Anthropology. Studies in this area are particularly championed by sociolinguists and discourse analysts who investigate language and society, especially to ascertain and analyze the interrelationships among the elements that make up performance, towards the construction of a descriptive theory of speaking as a cultural system in a particular society. According to Montgomery (1995), studies from this perspective “owes most to anthropology in as much as it is particularly occupied with questions of cross-cultural differences in speaking practices and the degree to which language enters into the life of different societies to sustain and produce them.”

Studying language from this cultural perspective of the speech community, Dell Hymes in 1974 proposed an ethnographic framework which considers the different salient factors that are involved in speaking. Dell theorized that “by looking at how people use language, patterns could be discovered that otherwise would not be by just looking at the words themselves” (Agbedo, 2015). Ethnography of communication may be conceived as a research directed towards the formation of a descriptive theories of speaking as a cultural system or as a part of cultural system of particular language users. Wardhaugh (2006) asserts that ethnography of communicative event is a description of all the factors that are relevant in understanding how that particular communicative event achieves its objectives. A particular speech event is said to have achieved its objectives when all the participants or a participant in a communicative event had adhered to the laid down and acceptable cultural practices that condition speech acts in a particular society.

The major focus of ethnography of communication is usually on the language the participants are using and the cultural practices such a language reflects. Studying language through this approach, as noted by Ezeifeka (2018), heightens awareness of enormous culture-bound assumption – what is normal, appropriate, usual and correct in human communication. This implies that knowledge of acceptable cultural behaviours of a speech community is imperative in deciphering how to communicate appropriately in every communicative event and contexts within the linguistic milieu. To this end, Uzoezie (2001) citing Hymes notes that in studying language from ethnography of communication perspective, “one must take as a context community or network of persons, investigating its communicative activities as a whole, so that any use of channel or code takes its place as part of the resources upon which members draw.”

Ethnography of communication extends the study of language beyond lexicon and grammar. This entails that linguistic study as regards its use in society widens the contextual horizon of language beyond grammar and words to embrace speech events, speech acts, speech occasion and speech situation, reflecting cultural norms and linguistic practices of a speech community. According to Bauman and Sherzer (1974), the patterning of language goes far beyond laws of grammar to comprehend the use of language in social life, such that organization inescapably involves the radical linking of the verbal and sociocultural in the conduct of speaking. One who practically and effectively uses language in this respect is considered as possessing communicative competence, and so, is adjudged a competent user of the language.

It can, therefore, be safely concluded that practical studies on the theory of ethnography of communication are exclusively devoted to the discovery of the linguistic and social organization and relationships in respect to language use among a people. Commenting on the principles upon which the theory of ethnography of communication is based, Bauman and Sherzer (1974) explain that it has to do with The set of community norms, operating principles, strategies and rules which guide the production and interpretation of speech, community ground rules for speaking. The nature and distribution of norms of interaction to be found within the community, in so far as these organize spoken interaction. These norms of interaction are goal-directed; they may be viewed strategies, to be studied with reference to the goals of the participants, closely related to values, hierarchies of preference for the judgment and evaluation of speaking.

Indeed, what is discernible from the forgoing elucidation is that societal norms and unwritten laws guide speech production and interpretation. And so, participants in such speech situations must, as a matter of necessity, be conscious of this sociolinguistic reality to enable them communicate effectively and also understand their fellow interactants. Furthermore, it is crucial to assert that rules governing speech/speaking are not uniform across cultures. This reality further justifies the expediency of ethnographic studies to ascertain how cultural norms and practices influence and condition speech acts and their interpretations in different societies of the world.

Indisputably, the primary task of an ethnographer of communication is particularly to identify and analyze the dynamic interrelationships among varied elements which combine to make performance (effective communication), from which one constructs a descriptive theory to describe the cultural systems of a particular society with respect to language use. In consonance with this, Bauman and Sherzer (1974) state that within the context of the speech community, “the ethnographer of speaking seeks to determine, among other factors, means of speaking available to its members.” These include the language varieties and other codes and sub-codes, the use of which accounts as speech within the society, the distribution of which constitutes the linguistic repertoires of members of that community for the purpose of communication. Consequently, studies on ethnography of communication focus on the verbal and nonverbal ways of sense-making in different cultures in order to find out particular communication acts or codes that are important to particular groups, the kind of meaning each group attach to different speech events, (Ezeifeke, 2018), and how group members learn these codes within their linguistic community for effective communication.

Components of Ethnography of Communication Model/the Speaking Grid

Discourse analysts and sociolinguists who carry out studies on language in communicative events and situations in varied speech communities often make use of Dell Hymes’ ethnography of communication framework. Hymes in 1974 proposed a theoretical model which could be helpful in analyzing speech events to ascertain their successfulness in ensuring that effective communication has taken place, taking cognizance of the norms and principles guiding speech in a particular linguistic community. For the sake of clarity and convenience, Hymes used the word SPEAKING (otherwise called the speaking grid) as an acronym for the different factors considered relevant in the analysis of communicative events in any speech community. It is these factors that we refer in this discourse to as the components of ethnography of communication model. They include the follow:

Setting and scene (S): Setting refers to the physical setting, while scene refers to the subjective definition of an occasion (Ezeifeke, 2018). Setting is also used to refer to the time and place which and where the speech takes place.

Participants (P): This describes the speakers or addressees or audience. Participants in a speech event refer to the discussants who engage in a talk exchange for a purpose of interest.

End (E): End refers to the conventionally expected result or outcome of an exchange. In other words, the purpose or goal for engaging in the speech is the end.

Act sequence (A): This has to do with the message content and form. This usually determines the choice of words employed during interaction so that one may know whether the speech is intended to direct, inform, request, promise or make a declaration, etc.

Key (K) By key, Hymes is referring to the tone or manner in which a message is delivered. Key can also come in the form of non-verbal forms such as a speaker's gestures or even his posture exhibited during rendition. Generally, key can indicate seriousness, mockery, sarcasm, pomposity, elation, sadness, etc.

Instrumentality (I): This refers to channel of communication which may be written, oral, telegraphic or even multimodal (use of signs and symbols for communication). Instrumentalities can also be extended to the dialects, codes, registers of a speech community, as well as code-switching sometimes employed during informal conversation.

Norms of interaction and interpretation (N): This has to do with specific behaviours and properties attached to speaking, and how these may appear to an individual who does not share in such cultural behaviours or properties. This is usually a question of interpretation of norms within cultural and social belief systems. For example, there are various norms or belief systems in respect to greetings, turn-taking, addressing elders, body postures, etc. during conversations. These differ from culture to culture, as well as their interpretations during speech events.

Genre (G): Genre refers to various types of utterances – textual categories, such as votes of thanks, a sermon, a lecture, a political speech, a marriage transaction, etc. Each of these has a contrasted form from other text types, each having its own unique internal structure for its specific social goal. This means that certain genres are more appropriate on certain occasions depending on the expected social outcomes, goal or intention of the speech event. This is why it is easily recognized when a particular genre intrudes into another genre during a particular speech event.

From Dell Hymes' speaking grid, it is obvious that speaking, even during a casual conversation, is a complex social activity, requiring great skill and knowledge. A language user must, therefore, recognize the fact that speech is used differently by different groups of people as they communicate among themselves. Furthermore, the norms of linguistic behaviour (which vary from society to society) significantly influence language use and its interpretation within a linguistic community.

The Theoretical Framework of Communicative Competence

This paper is anchored on the theory of communicative competence. The concept of communicative competence was introduced into the lexicon of Linguistics through Dell Hymes'

theory which argues that the ability to use language transcends linguistic ability/competence as proposed by Noam Chomsky.

Language users in a linguistic community, indisputably, demonstrate varied degrees of competence in language use. But appropriate use of language in a real communicative situation goes beyond ordinary linguistic competence; it encompasses a wide range of abilities, both grammatical and sociolinguistic. Indeed, using language appropriately involves knowing the sociolinguistic rules for speaking in a speech community. It involves understanding the influence of social factors on speech (Holmes, 2008). The ability to take into consideration these crucial social factors and contexts that condition language use is a demonstration of communicative competence. It involves the ability to use language appropriately, accurately and flexibly so as not to cause a breakdown in communication. In the light of the above, Nnamdi-Eruchalu (2012) citing Osakwe sees communicative competence as ‘the ability not only to apply grammatical rule of a language in order to form grammatically correct sentences but also to know when and where to use these sentences and to whom.’ It is these considerations that inform a speaker’s choice of words and expressions in any speech event, without which such a speaker would certainly be misunderstood and consequently be adjudged an incompetent language user.

A speech community is a group of people who share a set of norms, rule and expectations regarding the use of language. This implies that a person who knows a language is not only the person who knows the grammatical rules of the language but also one who has the knowledge of the right expressions to use in various contexts in recognition of who the discourse participants are. So, it is one thing to use a language and it is another thing to use that language appropriately. Gumperz in Wardaugh (2006) explains that whereas linguistic competence covers the speaker’s ability to produce grammatically correct sentence, communicative competence describes the ability to select, from a totality of grammatically correct expressions available to him, forms which appropriately reflect the social norms of governing behaviour in specific encounters.

Dell Hymes believes that the ability to use language goes beyond linguistic ability or competence as proposed by Noam Chomsky. He opines that appropriateness of language use in line with social factors that shape language use is crucial in communication. Communicative competence, in the thinking of Hymes, is the knowledge needed by a speaker to use linguistic forms appropriately (Hudson, 2001), in line with the speaker’s knowledge of the situation that informs the utterance, purpose of the discourse as well as the audience involved. This is to say that knowledge of one’s language does not stop at mastering the rules guiding utterance formation in the language. Some sociolinguistic factors must be considered for one to use language appropriately. To this end, Nnamdi-Eruchalu contends that language competence involves much more than forming grammatically correct sentences in a language; it involves ‘knowledge of the suitable language to use in a particular situation’ (20). This is quite different from linguistic competence because here sociolinguistic knowledge is required to enable a speaker of a language communicate effectively and appropriately in a linguistic community.

Linguistic competence, on the other hand, refers to internalized knowledge of a language possessed by a native speaker of a language. The thorough knowledge of a native speaker’s language assists him/her to effortlessly speak and understand novel sentences he/she has never heard or spoken before. According to Sweet quoted in Anagbogu, Mba and Eme (2010), ‘we do not study grammar in order to get a practical mastery of our own language, because in the nature of things, we must have that mastery before we begin to study grammar at all.’ Thus, users of a

language do not strive to acquire linguistic competence because they naturally possess this ability in them right from infancy. In other words, no learning is required in the attainment of linguistic competence, but a great deal of learning is indeed needed in language use. And this additional competence a speaker needs to use language appropriately in his/her speech community is the communicative competence. Acquisition of this competence is considered highly necessary for effective communication in a language and within a speech community.

Data Presentation and Analysis

This segment of this discourse makes a presentation of data for the study. The data for the study are culled from Chinua Achebe's classic novel, *Things Fall Apart*, excerpts extracted from pages 57-59, representing a speech event in which traditional marriage rites are performed, and then a randomly selected speech events from the text. The data are presented below:

(As the men drank, they talked about everything except the thing for which they had gathered. It was only after the pot had been emptied that the Suitor's father cleared his voice and announced the object of their visit). He then presented to him a small bundle of short broomsticks. Ukaegbu countered them.

"They are thirty?" he asked.

"We are at least getting somewhere," Ukaegbu said, *(and then turning to his brother and son, he said:)* "Let us go out and whisper together."

(When they returned, Ukaegbu handed the bundle of stick back to Obierika. He counted them; instead of thirty, they were now only fifteen. He passed them over to his eldest brother, Machi, who also counted them and said:)

"We had not thought to go below thirty. But as the dog said, "If I fall down for you, you fall down for me, it is play." "Marriage should be a play and not a fight; so we are falling down again."*(He then added ten sticks to the fifteen and gave the bundle to Ukaegbu). (In this way, Akueke's bride-prize was finally settled at twenty five bags of cowries.)*

"Go and tell Akueke's mother that we have finished," Obierika said to his son, Maduka.

(As the men ate and drank palm-wine, they talked about the custom of their neighbours) "It was this morning, said Obierika," "that Okonkwo and I were talking about Abame and Aninta, where titled men climb trees and pound foo-foo for their wives.

"All their customs are upside-down. They do not decide price-prize as we do, with sticks. They haggle and bargain as if they were buying a goat or a cow in the market."

"That is very bad," said Obierika's elder brother.

"But what is good in one place is bad in another place. In Umunso, they do not bargain at all, not even with broomsticks. The suitor just goes on bringing bags of cowries until his in-laws tell him to stop. It is a bad custom because it always leads to quarrel."

"The world is large," said Okonkwo. "I have even heard that in some tribes, a man's children belong to his wife and her family."

“That cannot be,” said Machi. “You might as well say that the woman lies on top of the man when they are making the children.”

“It is like the story of the Whiteman who, they say, are as white as this piece of chalk,” said Obierika.

(He holds a piece of chalk, which every man kept in his obi [house]...). “And the White men, they say, have no toes.”

Furthermore, below are a randomly selected incidents from various speech events in the text under examination that are worthy of our attention and analysis in this study, in as much as ethnographic study of the Igbo people (in respect to language use/communication) are concerned:

(i) “Unoka went into an inner room and soon returned with a small wooden disc containing a kola nut, some alligator pepper and a lump of white chalk. ‘I have kola’, he announced when he sat down, and passed the disc over to his guest....They argued for a few moment before Unoka accepted to break the kola. Okoye, meanwhile took a lump of chalk, drew some lines on the floor, and then painted his big toes. (pg.5)

(ii) “There was pounded yam and also yam pottage cooked with palm oil and fresh fish. There was also pots of palm wine. When everything had been set before the guests, one of the people of the sky came forward and tasted a little from each pot. (78)

(iii) “The priestess’s voice came at long intervals now, but its vigour was undiminished. The air was cool and damp with dew. Ezimma sneezed. Ekwefi muttered “life to you!” At the same time, the priestess also said, “life to you, my daughter.” Ezimma’s voice from the darkness warmed her mother’s heart. (pg. 83).

(iv) “The body of the Whiteman, I salute you! He said using the language in which immortals spoke to men. “The body of the Whiteman do you know me?” he asked. Mr. Smith looked at his interpreter, but Okeke, who was a native of distant Umuru, was also at a loss. Ajofia laughed in guttural voice. It was like the laugh of rusty metal. “They are strangers,” he said, “and they are ignorant. But let that pass.” He turned to his comrades and saluted them, calling them the fathers of Umuofia. (pg.151)

(v) “One of the things every man learned was the language of the hallowed-out wooden instrument “The first cock had not crowed and Umuofia was still swallowed up in sleep and silence when the *ekwe* began to talk, and the cannon shattered the silence. Men stirred on their bamboo beds and listened anxiously. Someone was dead.” (pg.96).

ANALYSIS AND DISCUSSION

The data collected for the study are analyzed using the ethnography of communication framework to explicate and describe how the components of the communicative event (payment of bride price, and other related speech events) have helped to achieve the objectives of the interactional encounter in a typical Igbo speech community as represented in the text under study.

In the first speech event, the communicative event is payment of a bride price. The setting is the bride's place; it is a wine-carrying feast. The scene is also a joyous one. Participants in the speech event are the family members and friends of the bride and the bridegroom (Obierika, Ukaegbu, Machi, Ibe and Okonkwo). It is worthy of note that in this gathering, there is no woman/female person present as part of the 'dowry negotiation team'. This is, undoubtedly, in consonance with the cultural practice of the Igbo people of Nigeria, which does not permit women's presence during negotiation and payment of a bride price. The conventionally expected result of the communication exchange is the successful accomplishment of a marriage contract between Akueke and Ibe, the bride and the bridegroom. The talk exchange culminated in the bride's father giving out her daughter in marriage. Furthermore, an examination of the act sequence reveals that most of the words and sentences used in the conversation established a concrete relationship with the topic under discussion. As a relatively formal gathering in which negotiation of a bride price features prominently in what represents a typical Igbo community, it is observed that these statements (which show accurate initiation, response, feedback) have a direct relationship with the issue under deliberation: (i) *"we are at least getting somewhere"* (ii) *"we have not thought to go below thirty cowries"* (iii) *"let us go and whisper together."* (iv) *"marriage should be a play and not a fight"* (v) *So, we are falling down again."* These expressions best convey the intended message of the speakers in an initiation--response--feedback act sequence, taking cognizance of the manner of speaking in the speech community. The tone of the conversation is relatively formal. However, one can vividly observe a combination of other tones as the conversation progressed, which depict humour, light-heartedness, and somewhat seriousness-mindedness. For example, the groom's father's occasional jokes and humorous proverbs are a case in point. The major instrumentality of the communicative event are oral conversation and multimodal (because of the broomstick, culturally used in bride price payment in the speech community). Again, the discussants' native language which embodies the message of the proverbs they used (although loosely translated into English language) equally constitutes an important instrumentality in the speech event. In respect of norms of interaction and interpretation in the speech event under study, some behaviours and utterances made and exhibited by some of the speakers can only be well interpreted by someone who shares the same cultural knowledge and tradition with the speakers. For instance, the presentation of the broomstick to the family of the groom by the bride's family could only be interpreted rightly as depicting the amount of money (number of cowries) expected from the groom because both share the same culture and tradition. Someone from a different cultural background would have certainly misinterpreted the intended message. Furthermore, the use of proverbs and local sayings by Ukaegbu such as *"the dog said if I fall for you, you fall down for me, it is play"*, *"We are falling down again, let us go out and whisper together,"* could only be well interpreted because both the addressers and the addressees belong to the same linguistic community. Finally, the genre of the speech event (i.e. the text type of the speech event) is bride price negotiation and payment. In the execution of speech act here, proverbs, another aspect of genre in communication, is introduced to help culturally drive home the speakers' message.

Furthermore, an examination of certain speech acts emanating from the randomly selected speech events in the text indicate a peculiar sociolinguistic usage among the Igbo, which require linguistic and cultural analysis for the benefit of the 'uninitiates.' Some of these speech acts are accompanied with specific behaviours that are attached to speaking, whose meanings and interpretations are culture-bound. For instance, when Okoye visits Unoka (Okonkwo's father)

and is served kola nut, he, thereafter, collects a lump of chalk, draws some lines on the floor and then paints his big toes. Culturally, this means, among the Igbo, that the visitor has come in peace, and that he has no evil intentions or grudges against his host for which he has paid him a visit.

Similarly, in the speech event in the text where the author narrates a fairy tale of the visit of the animals to the sky (Achebe, 1958), it is observed that “one of the people of the sky came forward and tasted a little from each pot” containing food served the animals by their host. Socioculturally, this entails that the host is sure that the food is not poisoned but safe for consumption. This is, indeed, an Igbo cultural practice – a host tasting the food or drink he has brought before he passes it on to his guest. This must be done even when the guest is not suspecting any foul play from his host, or has no reason to be afraid of accepting edible things from him.

Also, the incident where the priestess of Agbala, Chielo, is taking Ezimma to the cave indicates another cultural practice of the Igbo people. When Ezimma sneezes, Ekwefi, her mother, trudging behind mutters “life to you” simultaneously with Chielo. Its cultural significance, among the Igbo, is to ensure that the person who sneezes does not encounter a bad experience projected by an evil fellow who might have called his/her name during an incantation. So, by saying “life to you,” such an evil intention would not come to pass if it had been initially orchestrated to be so.

Again, worthy of our attention is the speech event in which Mr. Smith, the Whiteman, is being interrogated by the leader of Umuofia masquerade, together with his interpreter, Mr. Okeke, who hails from a different speech community. In Igbo land, masquerades represent the forefathers of a community who are long dead. This accords them so much respect from the people. They regard the other human beings as mere mortals, and claim to be speaking the minds of the ancestors, they themselves being ‘immortals’ too. This is why Ajuofia, the leading masquerade, addresses Mr. Smith as the ‘*body of the Whiteman.*’ And when his addressee alongside his interpreter cannot understand him, he concludes that they are ‘ignorant.’ This is because both Mr. Smith and Mr. Okeke come from different speech communities, and so, do not share the same norms of interaction and interpretation with the people of Umuofia.

Finally, it is interesting to point out that in the ethnographic study of the Igbo people, the sound of the *ekwe* (wooden gong) accompanied with firing of cannon shots usually signify the demise of an important personality in the community. The ‘talking’ of the *ekwe* and the canon firing as early as when the first cock has not even crowed (Achebe, 1958) is to alert the community and inform people of the unfortunate incident. And this is well understood by every adult member of the community. This understanding is made possible because the people share the same cultural norms regarding language use in every speech situation and event in the community, the instrumentality employed notwithstanding.

CONCLUSION

Language is, indeed, inseparable from the sociocultural environment of the speech community in which it is used. This explicates the imperativeness of the acquisition of communicative competence to enable a language user understand and effectively use language in consideration of the social factors that influence and condition speech. This is the concern of studies on ethnography of communication. It is not only the study of cultural differences in act of

communication but also goes beyond simple differences in language use to cover other aspects such as greetings, parting rituals, study of body movements during conversations and distance between discussants during speech encounters (Onuoha, Oboko, Nzekwu, and Ofordi, 2014). This study has, following the ethnography of communication framework, made a valid description and analysis of relevant issues and conditions that combine to make the speech events of our study (culled from Achebe's *Things Fall Apart*) achieve their objectives. An interesting finding of this study is that language use and understanding of discourse are most often culture-bound; language use and interpretation of what is communicated through it differ from culture to culture, giving credence to Jules Chametzky's observation as cited in Achebe (2009) that a person's perceptions are shaped by social and cultural contexts out of which a person operates. Therefore, the relevance of this study is hinged on the fact that the analysis of culture-bound linguistic issues made in this study, in respect of language use among the Igbo, has provided illuminating insights (which are beneficial to non-Igbo speaking readers of *Things Fall Apart*) on how language is socioculturally used among the Igbo for effective communication. This crucial insight, no doubt, would assist such readers to better appreciate this classical and widely celebrated novel written with Igbo linguistic background. Consequently, the researcher advocates that readers should pay particular attention to those sociocultural and linguistic issues analyzed in this study as they do a re-reading of the text.

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