

OF SYNERGIES: LINKING LITERATURE, LANGUAGE AND ENGLISH IN NIGERIA

BY

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DEDICATION

THIS INAUGURAL LECTURE IS DEDICATED TO

A great “Army,” an outfit comprising one general, five lovely ‘girls’ and one Kalabari chief without a kingdom.

AND

To another *Family* that is called *FAITH*, and amongst them, the first *deacon-professor*, a consequential, cryptically crafted title I consciously conferred on him.

1.1 Introduction

The Vice-Chancellor, the Deputy Vice-Chancellors, distinguished Professors and Senior academics, all other academic colleagues, Great Students of the Unique University, distinguished Ladies and Gentlemen. An Inaugural Lecture provides an academic or scholar who has gained promotion to the professorate to acquaint a quite diverse audience with what exactly he *professes*. I am therefore delighted to stand before you this afternoon to *profess*, indeed deliver my Inaugural Lecture entitled “Of Synergies: Linking Literature, Language, and English in Nigeria.”

The “tradition” of the masquerade has since stuck regarding Inaugural Lectures in the Faculty of Humanities. Before our very eyes have performed such towering masquerades as Professor E. J. Alagoa, the late Professor Kay Williamson, the late Professor Ola Rotimi, Professor Charles Nnolim, Professor Chidi Maduka, Professor Chidi Ikonné, and Professor (Mrs) Helen Chukwuma. It is far from fortuitous that the last four on this intimidating list are all from the Department of English Studies, a domain universally acknowledged as the *queen* of the Humanities. In this university also, the English Studies Department is one which prides itself on creativity and excellence. No one can deny that the founding fathers of this Department have left a sound and enduring tradition.

As I pay tribute to these forerunners who have since captured the Inaugural gold, silver and bronze, it must be for me, the 5th Inaugural Lecture Speaker from English Studies, a huge illusion to even remotely consider myself as capable of standing alongside these towering masquerades. I have simply no quarrel with masquerades or the considerable attention, even veneration, accorded them in different parts of Africa. But at this point, I must depart from, if not jettison, this

metaphor. I therefore declare instead and, like John the Baptist, that I am not able to untie the shoe laces of these academic forebears. Thus, as I acknowledge these precursors, whose shoes are indisputably larger than mine, I must wear my own very shoes and walk in my own very gait and steps. An Achebean dictum likens wisdom to a goatskin bag, and this realization emboldens me as I endeavour to display the *goatskins* I have *professed* in the past number of years.

Mr Vice-Chancellor, Sir, my academic career represents a quite multicoloured tapestry, a canvas as rich as it is varied. Surveying my career thus far, I can only declare like Samuel: “Ebenezer ... Thus far the Lord has helped us.” My standing before you this day, on the occasion of an academic feast, is particularly indicative of God’s special favour and mercies on me. Today marks a significant milestone in my relatively long academic career, for which I cannot thank my Maker adequately. It is all the Lord’s doing and it is marvellous in our eyes.

My academic tentacles are extensive, with my research interests encompassing such domains as literature (both oral literature and modern African literature), language and language teaching, EAP/ESP and World Englishes. The title of this Inaugural captures three focal concepts. *Literature* presents us with a central human endeavour, *language* is deemed the “human essence,” while a particular language, *English*, straddles the world like a colossus. These domains have since been the focus of my teaching and research and thus the selfsame preoccupations that I wish to share with all today. In endeavouring to demonstrate my scholarship, I shall take you on a journey through the valleys, hills, marshes and mountains of such domains, delving into diverse dimensions of the disciplines.

As Inaugurals go, I shall explore the prevalent perceptions, trends, attitudes, as well as misconceptions, *even by people who ought to know*. These are some of the issues that have been my focus and

interest in the past three decades. While I have since variously expressed my views on them in different places, the Inaugural offers me the opportunity of bringing some of them together in one place. Endeavouring to distil the very essence of my teaching and research in a limited number of pages must be a tall order. Still, I am grateful for this opportunity to share some of my standpoints, my views and my experiences as a researcher and classroom teacher.

We live in an age indisputably propped and propelled by the twin forces of science and technology. It is an era in which concerted measures are in place to relegate the humanities to the background. It is a rapidly technologizing, even highly technologized age, one in which the Arts are grossly denigrated, distorted, underfunded and undermined. This makes me even more delighted to give a Lecture on *humanistic* domains which I consider not only integral to our lives, but quite indispensable to humanity. In today's presentation, my expectation is that of a feast of ideas, a meeting in which both your ideas and mine will interrelate, synchronize, indeed *synergize*. My expectation is that at the end of the presentation, I would have given you enough to chew and digest, indeed a surfeit of linguistic and literary food for your continued consideration. I also expect you to respond even after the embers of this lecture have dimmed, the excitement of today subsided, and you have left this grand auditorium. When this happens, I shall be satisfied that I have shared with you some of the thoughts I have nursed, incubated, breathed upon, and tinkered with, for nearly three decades. I desire that you also see why I consider many issues that have since preoccupied me in my academic career as quite intriguing.

Since the audience of an Inaugural Lecture is a varied one, comprising experts and specialists, even laymen, I shall endeavour to reach all. I desire that at the end of the Lecture, new insights will be gained by the audience into areas they had possibly taken for granted or

thought of differently. I shall examine three major domains (literature and language, ELT/ESP, and English in Nigeria), which have since been the focus of my work. My objective is to share with you my thoughts on the selfsame concerns, issues about which I have thoroughly thought, formed some opinions on, and reached certain conclusions.

It will become evident that one of the dominant themes or unifying threads is a concern with *synergies*. I am not a business or financial expert, nor am I qualified to talk about gains in revenue or cost savings arising from mergers and takeovers, but my concern with *synergies* is all about approaching my chosen disciplines, not in segregationist, atomistic fashion. Rather, I advocate cross-disciplinarity, some marriage and integration, so as to arrive at a fuller, more productive configuration of the disciplines or sub-disciplines here involved.

Mr Vice-Chancellor, Sir, while I have not allotted any particular section to “Acknowledgments,” I wish to here briefly mention some persons whose help, goodwill and encouragement I have enjoyed regarding my *academic* endeavours. Today I am in a profession whose major “raw material” is words. By my Primary 5, I had already become fascinated and excited by words. I must thank the man who laid this foundation, my “father,” Pastor John Jibuno Okwechime. He did not live to see this day, but I vividly remember the motivating strategies with which he really ignited my interest in words. My mother did not particularly go to school, but her sharp intellect thoroughly taught her the value of education. It happened that a sharp dissension arose between her and my father, over my going to school; yet both of them were right. I thank them so much.

At Secondary School the interest in words grew by leaps and bounds, of course, by God’s special arrangement. The American Peace Corps teachers, by their shabby teaching methods, ensured that I did not

enjoy mathematics. But the Latin, English and Literature teachers were excellent, for which I am grateful to them all. I am grateful to the Federal Government for seeing me through my undergraduate studies, to Professor Donald E. U. Ekong and the University of Port Harcourt on the one hand, and the British Council on the other, for enabling me to obtain higher degrees from three top-flight universities in the UK. For finding me appointable in the Faculty of Humanities those heady days, I am grateful to Professor Alagoa, the late Professor Feuser, and the late Professor Williamson, who was herself instrumental to my studying in the extremely beautiful Yorkshire city, Sheffield.

I am also grateful to Professor Nolue Emenanjo and Professor S. N. Okiwelu. The latter talks with ants and other insects but I am sure he would have loved to be in the humanities. The following Primary and Secondary School teachers also kept my torch of linguistic interest very much aglow: Mr J. A. Washington, Dr J. N. Egwu, Mr. C. T. Ogboli, Mr Ibeji, Mr O. K. Nwani, Mr Osu and Mr Osuoza. I am particularly fortunate to have been taught by the best university teachers. They simply belong to the very *la crème de la crème* of academia: Professor B. O. Oluikpe, Dr Christopher Heywood, Professor Donatus Nwoga, Professor M. J. C. Echeruo, Professor R. N. Egudu, Dr Dave and Mrs Jane Willis, Professor B. W. Andrzejewski, Dr Tom Bloor and, of course, Professor Gordon Innes, the *Sunjata* specialist. I thank those who are still living. The appreciation here must be irrelevant if it does not mention my greatest academic brother and friend, Professor Edet B. Akpakpan. Man, you are of an extremely rare socio-intellectual species!

For my family, no words will adequately convey my appreciation. I am sure they have gathered enough material to sustain the writing of a PhD thesis on what it means to have a father who is in the house but is not there. You need to meet them; they are a great and wonderful mix. Still, it is *To God be the glory* for everything.

As I approach the first finishing line here so I can breast the tape, Mr Vice-Chancellor, I cannot thank you enough for the opportunity to deliver the 97th Inaugural Lecture of this uniquely

prestigious University. Many may be unaware, but certain vagaries and unforeseen uncertainties had conspired to delay this presentation up till now. I am therefore highly excited at this particular season, this time, and this very day, all of which I am persuaded have been divinely determined. Of a truth, He makes everything beautiful in its time. This is the right time to ask you aboard on a linguistic and literary journey. I am not only familiar with the route, I will also provide you with some important means, namely several tiny germs of ideas. I therefore invite you, highly distinguished Ladies and Gentlemen, to fasten your seat belts; it is time for take-off.

2.1 The nature of literature

To be sure, the most logical take-off point is *literature*, a phenomenon particularly associated with flights of fancy. It is, of course, a sound scholarly procedure to embark on an investigation by first endeavouring to delimit and delineate one's subject of study or discourse. To open this section, then, we pose the question *What is literature?* Such a question appears particularly puerile, if not impertinent. Still, it is a highly valid and justifiable concern, considering that our audience comprises not only people from differing backgrounds and disciplines, but also experts and non-specialists, even others not as informed.

First, we underline that literature can be viewed from a general perspective, namely as anything in print. When a new product is launched in the market, an electronic firm or pharmaceutical conglomerate, for example, encloses a leaflet or manual, which it calls *literature*. As Okoh observes: "... every discipline under the sun - from mathematics and mechanics to geography and gynaecology, from genetic engineering and garri-making to marine biology and nuclear technology - parades its own "literature" (*Preface 1*). Second and, more relevant here, is *literature* considered from a more circumscribed sense, in other words, as a phenomenon well bound up with the imaginative, creative and

aesthetic. From this perspective, we can say that literature employs the basic medium of words, although not everything expressed in words qualifies as literature. Strictly speaking, literature has to do with a composition in language which tells stories, represents, re-enacts or dramatizes real life situations. Apart from advocating ideas, literature is a form of communication which expresses emotions. Right from Aristotelian times, literature has been associated with the tripartite arrangement of fiction (prose), drama and poetry.

In any attempt to define literature, then, a crucial consideration concerns the cumulative use of words, in other words, the kind of **language** involved. According to Wellek and Warren:

The simplest way of solving the question [that of definition] is by distinguishing the particular use made of language in literature. Language is the material of literature as stone or bronze is of sculpture, paints of pictures, or sounds of music. But one should realize that language is not mere inert matter like stone but is itself a creation of man and is thus charged with the cultural heritage of a linguistic group. (22)

Thus, the language employed by literature is distinct from, say, everyday language, technical, scientific, or legal language. Experts generally refer to the *literature of power* and the *literature of knowledge*. Writings that are primarily informative (such as technical, scientific, or scholarly types) belong to the first category, in contrast to *belles lettres* (Fr = “beautiful letters,” or *imaginative literature*). Imaginative literature has to do with works that display *formal* and *linguistic* excellence. Thus, the language here involved is more inventive and creative, considerably condensed and compact, less *denotative* and more *connotative*, *figurative*, or *idiomatic*. In all, therefore, literature cannot but be approached from the perspective of its

preoccupation, namely a deft and deliberate exploitation of language or linguistic resources.

Regarding the relationship between literature and society, we will not here engage in any disputation regarding the validity of the common expression that “literature is an expression of society” (Wellek and Warren 95). Still, we must agree that there is, in the words of Okoh, “an unambiguous relationship between ... literature and the individual society that produces it” (“Regal” 21). Thus, literature cannot be seen as existing in isolation, but has to be linked to a society. Still, literature has the capacity of simultaneously speaking not just to a given society, but to humanity as a whole. The protagonists in, say, Chinua Achebe’s *Arrow of God* and Leo Tolstoy’s *War and Peace* do not just represent characters from Igbo or Russian society, but symbolize man and his environment, no matter the part of the globe in which he finds himself.

Achebe’s Okonkwo in *Things Fall Apart* belongs to the Igbo stock, but he is also representative of man in any environment - from Lagos to Lithuania, America to Afghanistan, or Jamaica to Johannesburg. To illustrate further the *timelessness*, even *universality*, of literature, we cite the English poem, *Beowulf*, composed probably as early as the 8th century. No one can deny the very relevance, even to contemporary society, of the work’s experiences. For example, one simple theme here – that the forces of good and bad are perpetually locked in combat – is still pertinent and also appears in modern works. As Kennedy remarks: “Literature addresses an audience in its own time, but it makes interesting statements about human beings and their universe, it addresses an audience in other times and other places as well” (v).

While literary works can be said to be culture-specific, we can also associate them with some universals, chiefly the capacity to entertain and to delight. Aside from delighting and entertaining us,

literature displays an enormous capacity for **teaching**. Any keen reader stands to be taught some profound lessons regarding human nature and existence, on encountering any of the following: William Shakespeare's *As You Like It* or *Julius Caesar*, Ola Rotimi's *Ovonramwen Nogbaisi* or *Our Husband Has Gone Mad again*, Buchi Emecheta's *Joys of Motherhood*, Homer's *Odyssey* or *Iliad*, I. N. C. Aniebo's *The Anonymity of Sacrifice* or *Rearguard Actions*, Gabriel Okara's *The Voice*, Thomas Hardy's *The Mayor of Casterbridge*, D. H. Lawrence's "How Bestly the Bourgeois Is," James Shirley's "The Leveller," Ovid's *Metamorphoses*, or Robert Herrick's "To the Virgins, to Make Much of Time."

Every discipline, from History and Hydrology, Geography and Geomorphology, to Thermodynamics or Aeronautics claims and, rightly so, to **teach**. But the crux here lies in the particular "methodology": literature employs a mode decidedly devoid of drudgery, as may characterize a typical classroom or any other formal learning setting. Teachers may prove incompetent or their teaching methods boring, but literature always offers us a *pleasurable* means or kind of learning. Mr Vice-Chancellor, Sir, I speak from experience regarding the power and ability of literature to transport anyone to a never-never land, the selfsame experience which Emily Dickinson is concerned with communicating in her poem, "There is no frigate like a book:"

There is no frigate like a book / To take us lands away,
Nor any coursers like a page / Of prancing poetry: /
This traverse may the poorest take / Without oppress of toll;
How frugal is the chariot / That bears the human soul!

As *homo sapiens*, we savour a good story, a tale well told, a narrative sufficiently imaginatively spiced and embellished. Thus, all

other genres of literature can catapult us as readers to far-away lands, even Utopia. It is the particular attention to language that makes us enjoy the stories and ideas that we read in a work of literature.

By means of its especial language, literature works variously on our emotions. One person may well burst into tears on reading or watching a *literary* text being performed, while the selfsame text provokes uproarious laughter from yet another person. Literature has a therapeutic dimension and produces in us a purgation of the feelings or emotions, what Aristotle calls *catharsis*. I must confess that I have caught a few tears in my eyes on reading such works as Thomas Hardy's *Jude the Obscure*, John Munonye's *The Only Son*, or Edgar Mittelholzer's *Kaywana* on account of their predominantly tragic portrayal of human life.

Such lachrymal reactions cannot be ruled out also when some readers encounter, say, Matthew Arnold's "Sohrab and Rustum," "To an athlete dying young," Michael Wordsworth's "Michael" or Alan Paton's *Cry, the Beloved Country*. Nor will several "episodes" in such literary works as Okot p'bitek's *Song of Lawino*, George Orwell's *Animal Farm* or *Nineteen Eighty-Four*, Ferdinand Oyono's *Une Vie de Boy* and *Le Vieux Nègre et le Médaille*, Achebe's *A Man of the People* fail to provoke rumbustious responses and commensurate amusement.

Indeed, literature plays a crucial role in the intellectual-cum-emotional development of man, wherever he finds himself on the globe. Thus literature maintains an enormous capacity for taming our emotions. To justify the discipline of literature or its values, we cannot provide a better summary than that of Roberts, especially as it is expressed in simple, delightful, and lucidly straightforward language:

Literature helps us to grow, both personally and intellectually ... It links us with the cultural, philosophic, and religious world of which we are part. It enables us to recognize human dreams and

struggles in different places and times that we otherwise would never know existed. It helps us develop mature sensibility and compassion for the condition of *all* living things – human, animal and vegetable (*Writing ... Literature* 2-3).

Mr Vice-Chancellor, one area in which the power of *synergies* can be pressed into service is the Use of English (U of E) class. While language is presumably the target of teaching, literature will add even more value. For example, students of non-Arts disciplines will derive no small measure of enjoyment from literature. This must be a much-needed tonic in our extremely cramped and overflowing U of E classes. While everyone complains that Nigerians generally do not read, such “extra” reading will encourage a good reading habit in the student, irrespective of his chosen discipline. For the U of E teacher, in fact, including some *literature* in his *language* teaching will encourage in his learners the very idea of reading for *enjoyment*, not necessarily for *examination*, in other words, train the students to appreciate reading - essentially for its sake.

Such pleasure derived from literary texts can be translated into more practical terms. For example, he is equipped to analyse situations and events, express himself in English, with even greater confidence, apart from acquiring the powers of *appreciation* - of his real world, even through the portrayals of a fictional, even *utopian* world. This further encourages analysis and interpretation of everyday, even far-fetched events or situations. Indisputably, then, reading, say, novels, poems and drama improves one’s English – whether vocabulary, expression, or the ability to write. A student may feel that reading is a waste of time, since he is interested in say, speaking or writing. This is where the ESP teacher comes in, to encourage the student with the simple fact that the different language skills are not only closely linked, but also mutually beneficial.

A crucial reason why literature is highly valued lies in its ability to give us pleasure and enjoyment. Such other “methods” of

“enjoyment” as wine, sex and drugs will flutter, flail, fade, and finally fail. In contrast, literature presents us with considerably enduring pleasure, which can even be replicated. Like millions of people worldwide, I derive enormous pleasure and joy from literature (or its *performance*). I am drawn to repeatedly read such titles as Thomas Hardy’s *Jude the Obscure*, Ayi Kwei Armah’s *The Beautiful Ones are Not yet Born*, Achebe’s *No Longer at Ease*, or such Marie Corelli classics as *Barabbas*, *The Sorrows of Satan*, *Temporal Power* or *The Master-Christian*. It is for good reason that literature is singled out in the humanities and christened the *queen of the arts*. Of course, scholars and critics may engage in other concerns regarding literature, say, the business of literary analysis and criticism, but the average reader approaches literature with enjoyment in view.

But whether we are reading for enjoyment, analysis, or critical thinking, literature can make an enormous impact on our lives as *human* beings. In the words of Okoh (2002:3):

Literature ... has the capability of really *shaping, influencing* and, above all, *humanizing* us. Literature identifies and brings out in us such *humaneness* or quality of being “man,” which would clearly differentiate us from the lower animals ... people often remark that the Humanities *humanise* us, nowhere is this truer than with the discipline or art called literature ... the *queen* of the arts. Anyone who enjoys literature for its own sake ... or engages in its study, is supposed to acquire the most decent and enduring values, as well as imbibe the very best of culture.
(*Preface* 3)

I round off this section with two brief points. First, I will not cross swords with any colleagues of mine here present, as I am quite aware that texts in their disciplines also impart *knowledge*, even copiously. What I cannot categorically declare concerns exactly the

kind of *pleasure* one derives from books on Petroleum Engineering, Physics and Mathematics. That argument will be for another day, so we shall not split hairs here over it. I really mean no offence, but I expect a reasonable answer from such colleagues regarding precisely what kind of pleasure can be derived from *scientific* language. Second, Sir, with your permission, I wish at this point to propose a recipe. In fact, it is not just a recipe; I consider it a panacea, and one which will beat counsellors and medical doctors. To my distinguished audience, my prescription is simple: *When next you are sad or stressed, or you want to release emotional tensions, or you desire a good laugh, then, read literature!*

Latin/ Udala m pue pue pue ... Ndah/ Afia Afor Obio

2.2 Did you say *oral literature*?

From the discussion so far, I am certain that not a few members of my audience have acquired sufficient familiarity with *literature*, and what it means. Before now, in fact, I am even more certain that many in the audience must have variously come in contact with such works as Ngugi wa Thiong'o's *A Grain of Wheat*, Okot p'bitek's *Song of Lawino*, Chimamanda Adichie's *Purple Hibiscus*, Ernest Hemingway's *The Old Man and the Sea*, or Ferdinand Oyono's *The Old Man and the Medal* or J. P. Bekederemo-Clark's *Song of a Goat*.

I can surmise, then, that no member of this august audience is in any doubt that our discussion has so far focused on literature as a *written* phenomenon, as our texts above have one common denominator: they are all *written* or printed. I wonder if any member of this dignified audience has ever bothered to look up the word *literature* in a dictionary. Of course, I must every so often embark on such lexicographical forays. With more than **five** influential English language dictionaries examined (cf Okoh's (*Preface* 5ff), including the highly authoritative *OED*, an interesting fact emerges: they all associate *literature*

with *writing*. From all our examples so far, we can see that *etymologically*, literature has to do with writing [the word *literature* derives from Latin *littera* "letter of the alphabet" *litterae* = "letters"].

This brings us to an important juncture in this Inaugural. Indeed, the objective of much of this segment of our discourse today is to demonstrate that the picture that has so far emerged portrays only an aspect of the enthralling and exciting subject called literature. The principle of going from the known to the unknown is far from unscholarly, so I shall now proceed to the *literature* that is not so well known, in other words, literature that is *oral*.

A constant and major thread or argument in my research and scholarship is that any discussion of literature that does not consider oral literature is as irrelevant as it is biased. A number of questions clearly arise: Is there a conundrum or incongruous situation here: is literature necessarily tied up with print or can it exist in an *unwritten* or *unscripted* form? Is the concept of an *oral* literature a veritable, viable or valid one? Are the dictionaries wrong? Is some red herring or shadow-chasing involved here, or are we actually dealing with an illogical, elusive and nebulous, if not altogether anomalous notion?

Simply put, the basic question which any oral literature course or study must confront, and which summarizes all others above is: In the light of all the dictionary definitions, can literature be *oral*? To address this issue directly, it is imperative to paint a wider picture, namely of the Europeans' prejudices, and stereotyping of Africa as primitive, backward and barbaric. Of course, Africa was considered a continent lacking in literary sensibilities. The following quote is instructive:

There used to be a widely held view - especially among European intellectuals who observed African societies in the nineteenth century ...

- that there was nothing of true poetic merit in African oral literature ... Poetry, these scholars argued, is a mark of an advanced culture or civilization ... Traditional African societies were, on the contrary, still groping in the dark and ... had not yet attained the level of perception where men could engage in the pursuit of poetic excellence; besides, their languages were not yet sufficiently developed to cope with the complex techniques of poetic expression. (Okpewho, "African Poetry" 4-5)

Such prejudices against the black man and his culture made juicy reading as Europeans consistently engaged in a repulsive and repugnant stereotyping of the African. The overall portrayal of the blacks is of a people with no contribution to human civilisation or the development of a world culture. The domain of African Studies is replete with "brilliant" contributions by such giants as Hugh Trevor-Roper, Herodotus, George Hegel and John Hulme, to help people understand the African. Conversely there are responsible responses from such figures as Achebe, Okot p'bitek, Basil Davidson, Ernest Emenyonu, Olaudah Equiano, Mbonu Ojike and Nnamdi Azikiwe. I shall briefly cite only the last named:

Educate the renascent African to be a man. Tell him that he had made definite contribution to history. Educate him to appreciate the fact that iron was discovered by Africans, that the conception of God was initiated by Africans, that Africa ruled the world from 765 to 713 B.C., that while Europe slumbered during the "dark ages", a great civilization flourished on the banks of the Niger, extending from the salt mines of Therghazza in Morocco to lake Tchad. Narrate to him the lore of Ethiopia, of Ghana or Songhay. Let him relish with the world that, while Oxford and Cambridge were in their inchoate stages, the University of Sankore, in Timbuctoo, welcomed scholars and learned men from all over the Moslem world, as Sir Percy put it. (9)

There is no denying the lucidity of Azikiwe's prose, while its sheer beauty is unequivocal. It remains a matter of sadness that not much history is taught in our schools today, offering the younger generation no opportunity to learn of such great black figures as Martin Luther King, Jr., Bob Marley, James Brown, Emperor Haile Selassie, Edward Blyden, Langston Hughes, Leopold Sedar Senghor, Alex Haley, Casely-Hayford, Dr Kwame Nkrumah, Jomo Kenyatta and Barack Obama. Such knowledge remains a guaranteed means of giving greater meaning to our *Africanness* or *blackness* and more importantly, challenging, even permanently overthrowing, the lingering shackles of European prejudices and presumed supremacy.

We have referred to Western prejudices as a background to understanding two issues. The first concerns why it was easy for Europe to fabricate theories to demonstrate that Africa was the white man's burden or responsibility, the Dark Continent, a land with no history, culture, philosophy or even literature. The second concerns the fact that the field of African oral literature has been so misunderstood, so there is the need to address some of the misconceptions and false claims. To return to the first: because societies in Africa are not generally known to have developed a tradition of *writing* and could thus be associated with what he calls a "culture of *literaturelessness*," Okoh comments as follows:

Like love and laughter, literature (no matter its shape, preferred form, mode of existence or perpetuation) is not the exclusive property of any one nation, culture, or race, no matter how sophisticated, arrogant, or disdainful of other cultures. No society is so backward, deprived, depraved, or under-privileged technologically, as to be totally lacking in literary, artistic activity. God the Creator cannot be said to have denied any people the *imagination* or capacity to *create* things - whether literature, or other products - from available raw materials. Such attribute of universality ... does not preclude the possibility of differences in the

manifestations, features or forms of literature from one society to the other. In other words, even within the basic framework called literature, a wide array of differing forms can be detected from different societies. (*Preface* 28)

It is significant that even as early as in 1948, Wellek and Warren had responded to the question of whether a literary work of art "can exist outside its printed version" thus: "Obviously this answer is quite unsatisfactory. There is, first of all, the huge oral 'literature'. There are poems or stories which have never been fixed in writing and still continue to exist. Thus the lines in black ink are merely a method of recording a poem which must be conceived as existing elsewhere" (142).

Also, as early as in 1939 Chadwick had commented as follows: In 'civilised' countries we are inclined to associate literature with writing; but such an association is accidental ... Millions of people throughout Asia, Polynesia, Africa and even Europe who practise the art of literature have no knowledge of letters. Writing is unessential to either the composition or the preservation of literature. The two arts are wholly distinct" (qtd. in *OLA* 15-16).

As I begin to round off this section, Mr Vice-Chancellor, please permit just one slight "digression," specifically on the subject of prejudices. It is easy for blacks to feel revulsion at the Western stereotyping of Africans as barbaric, primitive, even subhuman. To think aloud, fabricating such lies reveals man's penchant for denigrating or casting aspersions on phenomena which he neither understands nor cares to know about. If the roles were reversed, would Africans have been any more humane or charitable? Is it not quite common, for example, to dismiss an entire ethnic group with just a stroke of the pen, in the form of such "justifiable" claims or expressions as: *Don't mind the Ogonis: that is how they behave! And the Hausas, Igbos, Yorubas, Kalabaris, Ikwerres: that is how they all are!* Could the logic here be any

more perverted; where are the facts and figures? Even in the same country, such barriers and barricades ingeniously erected are often a figment of peoples' imagination. Such wishful or negative fictionalizing shows that capacity of the human heart for wickedness, except it is affected divinely.

I now deal with a “modern” prejudice, one in which I was actually a “participant.” I am aware that people have their observations or opinions concerning English. It may interest you to know that one of the things I am most enamoured of in the language is its very expressiveness, sophistication and subtlety. The English, of course, have such an idiom as *to hear from the horse's mouth*. Thank God, I can't exactly sight any horses now at the Ebitimi Banigo Hall. I say *Thank God* even more that I have not transformed into one.

First, I was in an MA class and the lecture entailed a discussion of such emotive terms as *barbaric*, *uncivilized* and *primitive*. Of course, the suggestion was that Africans quite merited all such obnoxious labels. Given the opportunity to speak, I posed the question: “Who is really *primitive*: the village African going about his daily life quietly or the Europeans who manufactured bombs that can create a holocaust in the twinkling of an eye?” To say that the lecturer was displeased remains a classic understatement, especially as the author of such “accusation,” who was not only black, but also displayed the effrontery of holding a PhD before coming into that lecturer's Masters class.

Second, in another class on models of grammatical analyses, we were supposed to subject a longish sentence to some Chomskyan analysis involving *affix hopping* specifically. The sentence was highly contrived and so grossly unreal and I protested that people (except Charles Dickens himself) do not write in such a manner (one sentence with two colons, two semi-colons, two commas and, of course, one full stop). The lecturer's response was swift: “Just go on and do the analysis; after all, the sentence was written by one of your

compatriots!” While my counsel here is that students or budding writers must avoid the Dickensian style, it might interest you, Mr Vice-Chancellor, to know the writer of the sentence being analyzed: the giant called Wole Soyinka!

2.3 Oral Literature: What it is and what it is not

At the very outset, *literature* was seen as a composition or imaginative piece of writing that tells a story, mirrors, enacts or dramatizes real life situations, advocates ideas, as well as expresses emotions. We can actually apply precisely the same definition to oral literature, except for the phrase, “piece of writing.” In other words, we are dealing with a piece of imaginative composition or a literature that is *oral, spoken, transmitted by word of mouth.*

Deriving specifically from its dependence on *orality*, it is a literature in which *performance* is crucial. Such performance, actualization or verbalization means that oral literature is a fluid and flexible phenomenon, not fixed, frozen or “frigid,” as in the case of print. Oral literature “dies” after each re-enactment or performance, as it is fleeting, ephemeral and evanescent, with no independent or *tangible* existence. *Performance* constitutes the very essence and lifeblood of oral literature as none of its genres can exist outside performance.

Any mention of performance in oral literature calls up the question of the **audience**, who maintain a looming presence. Unlike that in written literature, the audience are in a *face-to-face* contact with the artist, narrator or performer. In several of the genres of oral literature, performance is far from an exclusive activity of the artist, but essentially a collaborative endeavour between him and the audience.

Our concern here is with showing that this kind of literature is not only as valid as the written, but also displays very much the same characteristics. For example, whether we are talking of oral literature or

the written, the basic medium of expression is *words*. Thus, there are similarities as well as areas of divergence, regarding, say, mode of existence, nature of transmission or criticism, spontaneity and immediacy of the oral medium, the question of change, stability, variability and verbal flexibility, taxonomy of the genres, ownership and “copyright,” or composition-in-performance.

We shall touch upon just one of such areas, namely mode of existence or what Okoh calls “the *beingness* of oral literature” (*Preface* 85ff.). In written literature, there is a *text* for the general public to read and enjoy; there are **texts** for the scholars and critics to dissect, analyze, synthesize or criticize. In written literature, then, text and tangibility intertwine, as one can see, read, smell, or feel such texts as Ngugi wa Thiongo’s *A Grain of Wheat*, William Golding’s *Lord of the Flies*, Lord Byron’s *Don Juan*, Elechi Amadi’s *The Great Ponds* or Kofi Awoonor’s “The Weaver Bird.” In contrast, the oral literature scholar does not enjoy such luxury of ready-made materials, but must *generate* the text, and necessarily, from its very *habitat*.

Mr Vice-Chancellor, sound scholarship cannot but pride itself on such criteria as verifiability and accuracy of analysis. Some doubting Thomases who still denigrate oral literature may demand proof that the materials we collect from the field – *tales, proverbs, riddles, myths, legends, narratives, epics, lullabies, dirges and birth songs* – can really qualify as *literature*. A quite logical approach entails subjecting such oral forms to a straightforward literary and linguistic examination. By ascertaining exactly the aesthetic ambience of the language used, we will establish whether such data actually qualify as literature. We shall briefly examine one example, an oral poem collected from an Ogba village:

Eme is a thief
He is not the type

that goes about with a gun.
 He sits down to steal
 He sits in his work place
 Have you seen his stomach?
 His house can contain the whole village
 His stomach is the largest pot on earth
 Eme is the wind,
 The wind has gone with our money.

To demonstrate that the above Ogba oral piece can be called *literature*, we briefly consider its language. Written poetry quite often engages in hinting at the points, rather than making them explicitly. In the same manner, the oral poet here refers to Eme in terms of the *wind*. Members of the audience and the discerning reader will find the analogy between Eme and the wind a delightful one, indeed enjoy it. The oral poet also employs such poetic devices as repetition, exaggeration, and metaphor.

Oral songs are a prominent form of oral literature. Even tale songs have stylistic and structural features, as in this example:

Udala m, pue pue pue ... Nda / Pue pue pue ... Nda
Nwunye nna ya go-te udala n'afia; nye ye, o ju o ...
Enuwa bu olili ... Nda
Ony nosia o naba ... Nda

Nor are structural properties of such oral forms as riddles in doubt:

Tinye aka n'akpa akakpo, ka i welu akwu n'akpa akakpo

(Put your hands in the dwarf's pocket and take palm kernel from the dwarf's pocket)

Ejeko m afia Afor Obior

I am going to the Afor market at Obior.

Now that we have established the existence and validity of a literature that is *oral*, in other words, shown that literature can either be in a *written* or an *oral* form, we shall not engage in any hair-splitting regarding which is the head or the tail. Since they both really intermarry and inter-borrow, we cannot conceive of them as two different kinds of literature. They constitute **two** sides of the **same** coin and should not be treated otherwise. Thus, there is no form of rivalry between both **kinds** of literature. While oral literature predates the written, they both enjoy a mutually beneficial and productive co-existence.

But while oral literature presents scholars with a fascinating phenomenon for study, it remains a field plagued by a myriad of misconceptions. African oral literature, in particular, has been much maligned, denigrated and misunderstood, even by those who should know. The expression *even by those who should know*, like another, *Big Brother* will recur often, as I attempt to show how grossly undermined and underestimated African oral literature has been. The term *Big Brother* is one I coined myself to portray the display of arrogant condescension of some scholars, even colleagues, who are experts in *written* literature, towards oral literature. *Big Brother* is a metaphor for all – scholars, researchers, academics, even PhD holders in *written* literature – who delight in denigrating oral literature, considering it as an all-comers affair, a discipline with neither focus, methodology nor profundity, even as a frivolous subject for unserious scholars. The term includes all who still live in the anachronistic era of perceiving oral literature as inferior to the written. Those who display the *Big Brother* mentality are either ignorant or being mischievous. All persons who fall into this category or deny the status and viability of oral literature not only exhibit an ignorance that is as deplorable as it is reprehensible, but also suffer from what may be termed *the tortoise disease* (see Nwoga,

qtd. in Okoh, “Re-reading” 38). Whether the issue concerns the earlier studies of oral literature, or the activities of the newer elitist, Westerncentrics such as *Big Brother*, there is invariably and ultimately only one loser: oral literature as a field of study.

One domain which has witnessed much confusion and misconception and in which “occasional rumbles do get heard still” (Apronti 39) is that of arriving at a name that appropriately designates the field. Some of the terms proposed by scholars as a means of clarifying or demarcating the exact boundaries of this subject include: *native literature, folk literature, unwritten literature, verbal art, oral art, spoken art, traditional literature, aural literature* and *orature*.

It must be emphasized at this juncture that 1970 remains a significant milestone in the study of African oral literature. As a *literary* scholar myself, it has been my lot to preach the gospel of *literariness*, that is, as the essential yardstick by which African oral literature should be measured or appreciated. It remains an irony in African oral literature that it took Ruth Finnegan, herself a social anthropologist, to challenge all other approaches that did not emphasize the legitimacy, indeed the *literary* dimensions of African oral literature. Such a stand earned her the wrath of fellow anthropologists like Thomas Beidelman, but the ensuing controversy will not detain us here.

Indisputably, her highly acclaimed and comprehensive pioneering work, *Oral Literature in Africa* (1970), “has in great measure served to stamp the name on the field, as well as establish African oral literature itself as a subject deserving of serious scholarly attention” (Okoh, “Happened” 120).

But in spite of the impact of the work of Finnegan, appropriately acknowledged as “a founder figure in the field of African oral literature” (Furniss & Gunner 1), a disturbing reality quite rears its head: numerous **misconceptions** regarding the field of oral literature

persist. A major reason why the field has witnessed several setbacks lies squarely in the fact that those who first engaged in its study were mainly scholars in anthropology or some other disciplines, rather than people with *literary* backgrounds. The most predominant misconception involves scholars and scholars confusing this field with several others which are either contiguous to it, or maintain some other affinity with it. For example, according to Mbunda: “Dance, a form of oral literature which Bakare 1994 cited in Bakare (2002: 185) defines as ‘the rhythmic movement of the human body in time and space to make statements’ is an integral index of human culture for it features in almost every social ceremony in contemporary society” (135).

By no stretch of the imagination can anyone consider dance as a form of oral literature. While it is true that dance “features in almost every social ceremony in contemporary society,” such an activity is far from synonymous with oral literature, the phenomenon with which Mbunda is concerned. Mbunda also declares that “Ceremonies: like marriage, birth celebration, initiation, burial, installation and almost every government organized ceremony use dances” (136). Still, valid as these occasions are they are by no means synonymous with oral literature, nor are they *literary* events or genres of oral literature. Mbunda’s misconception degenerates and deepens with the assertion that “Masquerade performances, **a form of oral literature** are still prominent in contemporary society” (137) [emphasis mine]. According to him, “They [masquerade performances, which he calls oral literature] feature in occasions like new yam festival, art festivals, cultural festivals, burial ceremonies, installations, and Christmas and New Year celebrations” (137).

Nor are misconceptions regarding oral literature peculiar to *even those who should know*, that is, scholars, some even with PhDs in humanistic disciplines, specifically in language or literature studies. My

classroom experience teaching oral literature in the past three decades sufficiently makes me especially conscious of the fact that English Studies students often submit theses or term paper topics on history, dance, music, culture, fine art, or choreography, supposing that such phenomena actually constitute their people's oral literature. When I also engage the students in field work, the overwhelming majority record and collect a motley or miscellany of traditional materials – from child-naming ceremonies, New Yam festival events, to wrestling and dance events.

There is also the erroneous conception of oral literature as an antiquarian, moribund or anachronistic phenomenon, performed by raconteurs and performers who engage in no creativity, but merely function as passive *traditors* or rigid transmitters of a tradition. The real position here is not difficult to ascertain: "... the demands made on the traditional artist - that he adhere to tradition and that he exercise his creative freedom within the framework of the traditional style - are by no means antithetical, or mutually exclusive" (Okoh, *Preface* 124). One fact needs to be emphasized here: whether or not we live in an electronic or technologically sophisticated world, the synergies and constant interfacing of *orality* and *writing* or print are a *fait accompli*. The oral medium continues to occupy a prominent place, while various forms are transmitted via the spoken word (employed by the radio, television, theatre etc). The impact of oral literature is seen in its capacity for propelling the oral medium to a predominant position in contemporary society. Indeed, *print* or the *written* medium does not necessarily stifle, suppress, preclude, dislodge or even exterminate the *oral*. As Roberts & Jacobs rightly observe: "... Even in our modern age of writing and printing, much literature is still heard aloud rather than read silently. Parents delight their children with stories and poems; poets and story writers read their works directly before live audiences; and plays and

scripts are interpreted on stages and before cameras for the benefit of a vast public” (1).

Another elitist or *Big Brother* fallacy is the postulation that oral literature lacks academic rigour and by implication, constitutes a fertile ground for all-comers (for those supposedly unable to excel in literature). No insult to an English Department could be worse than such myopic and jaundiced logic. It is simply unacceptable, especially as we are dealing with a Department in which excellence must be entrenched. The facts here speak for themselves: as a rule, the oral literature scholar must first embark on field collection, then confront the arduous and daunting tasks of transcription and translation, even before embarking on any literary or critical analysis.

Mr Vice-Chancellor, Sir, without any modicum of immodesty, I declare that my own background (with higher degrees in both written and oral literature), emboldens, indeed, qualifies me to pontificate on all such issues – whether pertaining to the errors of the first scholars of African oral literature or the arrogant but excellently myopic disposition of Big Brother. Such scholars indeed erect iron walls where there is none, some claiming to be for Paul, others for Apollos. Oral literature and written literature share far too many potentialities, even interlock and interrelate, to be subjected to such discrimination, balkanization or atomization. The necessity or desirability of approaching scholarship from more interdisciplinary perspectives must be emphasized. My contention is that whether in English Departments or others in the University, the spirit of narrow over-specialization must be bound hand and foot, then sent crashing into a bottomless pit of perdition.

It is the selfsame spirit that promotes and ensures that there is, to use an oxymoronic impossibility, a raging but silent war between English and Linguistics Departments in Nigerian academia. Particularly as we emphasize the power of synergies and pulling together our

resources, such a relationship is unhelpful and inimical, even to the very cause of the humanities in our country. All disciplines that deal with language or literature in one way or the other should be pursuing the same goals, even if with sometimes slightly differing methods. In fact, there should be cooperation between linguistics and English Departments in our universities; in other words, there should be more cooperation, not an over-separation, which seems to obtain at the moment. In the concluding words of Okoh: “ ... considering such affinities, those teachers who perpetuate (whether consciously or otherwise) any division between them [language and literature] do all – themselves, their disciplines, as well as the entire Nigerian nation - a great disservice” (“Friends or Foes” 281).

Mr Vice-Chancellor, I quarrel with those who build artificial towers and parapets to separate related disciplines. I challenge those who build artificial walls to divide us, as in Okoh’s words, “ ... the acrimonious relationship that sometimes exists between language and literature, or their teaching, in our universities” is uncalled for (“Friends or Foes” 282)

It has become imperative as an antidote to such misconceptions *even by those who should know* for scholars and students to receive a balanced training in both oral **and** written literature. We cite Wellek and Warren again:

Though the study of oral literature has its own peculiar problems, those of transmission and social setting, its fundamental problems, without doubt, are shared with written literature; and there is a continuity between oral and written literature which has never been interrupted. Scholars in the modern European literatures have neglected these questions to their own disadvantage, while literary historians in the Slavic and Scandinavian countries ... have been in much closer touch with these studies. (47)

This section has been concerned with showing what the subject of our study is and, conversely, is not. In spite of the obloquy and calculated misconceptions heaped on it, oral literature is a full-fledged discipline, not an appendage or appanage of any other field contiguous to it. Thus, it is not to be confused with, say, dance, culture, masquerade display, New Yam festival, wrestling, marriage or burial ceremonies. We conclude that from our discussion in all, it is no longer of any consequence whether *Big Brother* maintains the arrogant stand of denying that oral literature exists at all, or views it as inferior, in Nigerian English parlance, the *junior brother* of written literature. Whether *Big Brother* acknowledges the fact or not, African oral literature is not only valid and vibrant, it is “a self-contained system which can stand side by side the written” (Okoh, “Reading Okot p’bitek” 52).

2.4 The Relevance of oral literature

Since, as already shown, there exists a link between literature and society, we now examine the relationship between oral literature and *modern* society, or more specifically, the relevance in a *modern* society, of oral literature. It is necessary to explore such interconnection as oral literature is sometimes considered a creation deriving from the past, even antiquity. Such was the emphasis by the anthropological and *folklore* studies which held sway in the early study of African oral literature.

In contrast, we endeavour to show that oral literature not only maintains a living tradition, but more importantly, has an enormous role to play in the modern Nigerian setting. Today our society is beleaguered, thoroughly besieged by a myriad of: from wanton violence, youth restiveness, corruption and greed, to disregard and contempt for discipline and decorum. If we must understand "where the rain began to beat us," it

is necessary as a people to go back to our culture, in general, and oral literature in particular. Given the association of oral literature with “antiquity,” can such oral forms as proverbs, riddles, tales and oral songs be said to have any message for, or impact on, modern society? What and how can we learn from our oral literatures as a means of bettering our lot? How can we properly tap or adequately harness the resources of oral literature to return our society to very paths of sanity? To encapsulate, indeed summarize all the foregoing, we ask: *What relevance, if any, can oral literature claim, in a contemporary society?*

The message of the following lines from T. S Eliot is here pertinent: “Time present and time past / Are both perhaps present in time future, / And time future contained in time past” (*Four Quartets* 13). It is to be emphasized that oral literature, as well as its performance, often involves a marriage of past and present. Some of our discussion here makes apparent such coalescing of *tradition* and *modernity*. The contention here is that by the instrumentality of such link, contemporary Nigerian society can see the past, live the present, then project and plan for the future, that is, by studying different forms of oral literature. In Nigeria’s drive towards national cohesion and development, oral literature offers her some profound or wholesome messages; borrowing and imbibing such lessons will be of considerable benefit to the country.

Despite the undue emphasis some earlier schools of study placed on the *pastness* of oral literature, it can be seen that in a bid to teach and entertain, different genres quite embody and embrace both the past and the present. Regarding the tale genre, for example, not only are new tales coined, new episodes are creatively incorporated or modified in old plots, to reflect the realities of modern society. Such intermingling of past and present remains a constant, even as verisimilitude and a *willing suspension of disbelief* take centre-stage, as narrators variously endeavour to enrich and embellish the traditional materials with which they are working. For

example, we are enthralled by an artist's portrayal of the irrepressible trickster figure, Tortoise, controls a fleet of Rolls Royce cars, or parading a harem of sophisticated, extremely beautiful, impeccably and exquisitely dressed *human* wives.

To begin to understand the significance of oral literature even in modern times, we draw from Green, whose informants not only observe that "topical events are woven into existing songs or give rise to new ones," while in the words of one of her informants, "Our songs are our newspapers" ("Unwritten" 841). This is an accurate and weighty statement, as it points to the fact that in traditional African societies, oral literature is as *current* as the daily newspapers in contemporary society.

The picture presented by Green's informant seems re-echoed in the following: "... African poetry has so much vitality that not only does it survive in ritual or traditional social contexts, but it also finds itself new motives and new functions. Anybody who has watched an election campaign in a Nigerian village will know that songs of praise and abuse, composed in the traditional manner, may have more power to swing votes than the speeches of politicians" (Beier ed. 15), while Finnegan's comments are also instructive:

Even in a society apparently dominated by the printed word the oral aspect is not entirely lost ... Add to this the interplay between the oral and the written - the constant interaction in any tradition between the written word and, at the least, the common diction of everyday speech (an interaction which may be heightened by the spreading reliance on radio and television channels of transmission), as well as the largely oral forms like speeches, sermons, children's rhymes, ... or current pop songs, all of which have both literary and oral elements - in view of all this it becomes clear that even in a fully literate culture oral formulations can play a real part, however unrecognised, in the literary scene as a whole. (*OLA* 19-20)

It is also well acknowledged that much of modern African writing owes a huge debt to the particular oral literatures of the writers. Indeed, it is impossible to study such writers as Chinua Achebe, Wole Soyinka, Kofi Awoonor, Gabriel Okara, Amos Tutuola, Ben Okri, Ayi Kwei Armah, and Ngugi wa Thiong'o without some attention to their creative use of their oral literatures. Such works in which oral literary elements are particularly prominent and often well exploited, indeed demonstrate that modern society has much to learn from the past, in other words, that "... no study of literature can afford to divorce it from its *society*. (Okoh, *Preface* 264). In other words, many critics would agree that literature has great links with society, and should be studied accordingly. This, in fact, remains one important criticism against, say, the formalistic approach to criticism, in other words, this school's non-acceptance of sociological data as necessary tools for analysing or illuminating a text. Obviously in connection with such denial of the link between literature and society, Frye points out that "Art for art's sake is a retreat from criticism; which ends in an impoverishment of civilized life itself" (29).

While it is has the ring of a cliché in African literary studies, Achebe's dictum of *where the rain began to beat us* remains an important one. It is quite pertinent to the wave or urge of cultural nationalism which caught especially the first generation of African writers. The artists were rightly responding to the exigencies of the period, borrowing in the present from the past, to assert the African's humanity and the validity of his culture, all dealt a severe and crushing blow especially by decades of denigration.

Regarding the relevance of oral literature in contemporary society, or more specifically the use of such materials by African writers, Okpewho observes as follows: "[the writers] collect and publish texts of the oral literature of their people ... and use that literature as a basis for

writing original works that reflect, from a more or less modern perspective, some of the major concerns of today so as to demonstrate that traditional African culture is not obsolete but relevant for the articulation of contemporary needs and goals (*AOL* 265).

Oral literature features prominently in such traditional activities as ritual and festival celebrations, as well on such modern events as electioneering campaigns, strikes, rallies and demonstrations, even the game of football. The advent of television, the radio, and the portable tape-recorder particularly has given an impetus to, indeed considerably boosted the recognition accorded oral literature in modern society, especially its appreciation or study. Performances (poetic and dramatic re-enactments) of *oral literature* feature prominently on the electronic media, whether for entertainment or pedagogical purposes.

As a way of promoting the culture, entire programmes based on the various genres of oral literature are not only broadcast in the indigenous languages, such programmes are properly packaged and designed for a wide range of audiences. As Andrzejewski points out, for example: "At weddings and feasts chanted *poetry* often adds to the rejoicings, and even the dull tasks of everyday work are enlivened with *songs*. In the modern popular songs which form one of the main attractions of African radio programmes, one often finds real gems of *poetry*. ["Emotional Bias" 98; emphasis mine]. In all therefore, not only does oral literature thrive in modern society, it remains an inherent component of everyday life. Those occasions cited above may actually be considered special events; in other words, oral literature can be seen to permeate virtually every aspect of the community's daily existence. From different genres of oral literature, we will discover that particular values or ideas constituted an inseparable aspect of our traditional cultures.

Even a cursory look at the Nigerian society today shows that it is plagued by a multiplicity of ills such as immorality, violence and

corruption. The real force behind these is greed, even an unbridled desire for riches, which leads people "into many senseless and hurtful desires that plunge men into ruin and destruction." Such men, it is obvious, "have pierced their hearts with many pangs." Christ himself duly recognised that greed can hamper, even scupper, one's or society's well-being and warns thus: "Take heed, and beware of all covetousness, for a man's life does not consist in the abundance of his possessions." Greed, of course, is squarely responsible for the prevalence of the *419*, as well as the get-rich-quick syndrome. While much denigration and derision is rained on Nollywood, the industry variously depicts the dangers of what may be termed the *Otokoto* theme, and other negative tendencies such as cultism, dealing in, or drinking human blood, entering into pacts with the devil. In the Nigerian society, such are portals to quick riches, but when such a mad quest for riches takes over, honesty, integrity and hard work must take the backseat.

But more important here is the fact that all the genres of oral literature variously enunciate positive qualities to be transmitted or imbibed. Tales, for example, advocate such values as friendship, good neighbourliness, honesty, while simultaneously expressing the reprehensibility of greed, cutting corners, injustice, cultic activities, and laziness. Regarding the last-named, the Igbo society, for example, places great stress on success and hard work; so the tales, extol honest labour, or conversely decry laziness. Such loathing for laziness is clear, even from the very opening of *Things Fall Apart*, for example, as the reader immediately encounters a protagonist with a dread for laziness, and its logical concomitant: poverty. Achebe's portrayal is of a man simply driven by a near pathological fear of failure. Okonkwo himself works with consuming passion to escape the indignity of poverty, or the stigma of being an *efulefu*, like his father.

The tales also reveal the emphasis on, say, respect for age and seniority. Thus the children were taught the expected cultural comportment on how to relate to elders or obey constituted authority, how to show deference and consideration for others, as well as diverse other wholesome values. Today such positive values have all but vanished in our societies, while a variety of other destructive values have become the special trademark of the youth. Records show that much of the crime and violence in the society is perpetrated by the youth. An understanding of their oral literature, as well as imbibing the society's sound cultural values will equip such members of society better for decent and responsible living.

In virtually every African society, proverbs have enormous educational, legal, and aesthetic value. Not only are they usually associated with wisdom, and its catalytic agents (age and maturity), proverbs also perform the important function of enforcing societal values and thus improving the moral health of the society. The selfsame sustaining and constructive values are well encapsulated by a sample of proverbs which I collected from the Enuani region of Delta State:

O gbu onye bu igwu, o bulu igwu wa egbu e

("He who kills another carrying palm fronds will himself be killed when he carries palm fronds")

Igwe bu ike ("Numbers (Unity) is strength")

Nwata new okpa, mana ezi okenye ka o si akwa ("A child may own the cock, but it crows in an elder's frontage")

Nwa mmo emegbune nwa mmadu, nwa mmadu emegbune nwa mmo

("Let not the spirit child cheat the human child, let not the human child cheat the spirit child")

Nwanne na nwanne adigh eri nni, a si wa bute ukpe

“A lamp is not sought when brother and brother dine together”

Aka nni kwoa aka ekpe, aka ekpe akwoa aka nni

(“When) the right hand washes the left, the left washes the right”

Nwata adi agwa nadi a, ‘Nee bee anyi bi mbu’

“The child cannot say to his father, ‘This is where we lived before’”

Eji asi na ile oma ka ya ji aga n ‘ogwu

“The snail says that it is with a sweet tongue that he sails past thorns.”

The proverbs highlight the communality of African life, as well as underscore the need for peaceful co-existence, absolute honesty in dealing with others, and such other values as understanding, unity, tolerance, justice and fairness, kindness, helpfulness, and due consideration for others.

Oral forms, for example, which are a form of oral literature, are created, not just for their melody or rhythmic excellence; they are also imbued with didactic potential, as they advocate good values. Their composers are often concerned with attacking social ills, to the overall benefit of society. In the following, for example, the popular oral poet, Dan Maraya Jos, addresses one social problem.

Do not take drugs,
It is not good,
Give me your attention,
Drugs should not be taken anyhow...

Do not take drugs without Doctor’s prescription
Since your grandfather and your father did not take them
Why should you take drugs?
(from Daba 212)

The validity of Green's informant's assertion that "Our songs are our newspapers" ("Unwritten" 841) is hardly in doubt, as Igbo oral songs actually function in much the same manner as the electronic and print media in a modern society. The following Igbo oral poem, for example, is neither composed nor transmitted in antiquity, but deals with a modern phenomenon, one that millions still alive can relate to:

Do you see what we have seen recently
 Have you watched what has been confronting our eyes
 If you imitate priests you won't go to church
 There was some funeral food that came to us
 Father ... built and locked a fence around it
 Those who don't bring chickens don't eat it
 If you don't come in a car you won't taste it
 And so we send our pleadings to God
 God who owns us/Let him take pity on us: Let the war come to an end.
 (Nwoga. "Obscurity"28)

The song makes a poignant commentary on the Nigerian civil war, a quite "recent" event. The poet criticizes the very corruption, insincerity, deceit, even brutality of the reverend father. Like Toundis's in Oyono's *Houseboy*, the poet sees through the reverend father, to unmask his insensitivity, highhandedness, and hypocrisy. Not only are satirical songs a pervasive feature of traditional life in Africa, they are also concerned with encouraging positive values and condemning the negative.

In demonstrating the immense potential of oral literature for nation building, we contend that the nation can arrive at answers, not necessarily by solely borrowing foreign ideas, or wearing Western *developmental* robes, but also by critically looking *inwards*. Nigeria,

like several other African nations, has for long groped in the dark, engaging in a seemingly interminable search for a form of government (whether Western, Westminster, Whitehall, or White House model) that will answer our particular needs and yearnings. Can we not identify, from our *tales*, for example, patterns and modes of governance that would suit us, even if some tinkering with and adjustments might be required? Considering a number of tales on the theme of governance, Okoh counsels a return to our oral literature, with a view to borrowing from them such political or governmental configurations that may have proved their viability. In his own words: "... several 'modern' African societies - some at the level of primitive accumulation, others badly buffeted by the storms of political instability - are groping desperately for an enduring, practical, political pattern ... By engaging in a proper study of oral literature, we can easily ascertain the high level of socio-political organisation which obtained in [our] traditional societies. ("Regal Repression" 21-22)

The challenge is that we have not adequately explored our oral literature which emphasises such sound values as enunciated above. Indeed, the enabling or conducive environment can be created - whether by governments, public-spirited individuals, universities, NGOs and other organisations - in which the right values from our oral literature can be fully imbibed, especially by the youth.

Oral literature displays great didactic potential, which should be duly channelled to the benefit of our society. Still, not much attention has been given to the possibility of exploiting the exuberance and potentials of African oral literature. It is indeed a literature that is still grossly underrated and untapped. *Even people who should know*; the governments, educationists, and the universities in particular that ought to seize the lead are guilty in this regard. In all, then, we have not exploited, borrowed or looked inward sufficiently to learn from our oral literature.

2.4.1 Oral Literature and National Development

From our discussion in the preceding section it is evident that oral literature is a relevant phenomenon, with its benefits. From this viewpoint, it is evident that oral literature can contribute to national development. Interestingly, while oral literature is necessarily from the **past**, our subject here is a **modern** one. Social scientists, for example, employ the term in discussing foreign trade, debt rescheduling, alleviation of poverty, entrepreneurship, or even negotiations with the IMF or other creditors. They also speak of, say, industrial, agricultural, or economic development, real output in goods and services, growth in the GNP and, of course, developed countries and LDCs. In Nigeria, the noun *development* is also frequently in used, either tagged on to, or preceded by, such other expressions as "national," "economic," "cultural," "political," even "democratic." From all such perspectives, *development* suggests some form of "advancements" or changes in the life of the society. To quote Akpakpan: "Most economists and social scientists in general now see development as having economic, social, political, and other dimensions. They define it qualitatively as a process of 'improvements' in the general welfare of the entire society, usually manifested in the various aspects of the life of the society" (*Crossroads* 4). Obviously, then, there is a common tendency to view "development" as synonymous with technological or scientific advances, urbanization, the quality and real output in goods and services, even improved, higher standards of living in a society. In spite of such emphasis, we must agree that development goes well beyond such *material* manifestations as skyscrapers and oil installations, nor does it stop with advances in technology or science. Indeed, we here posit that development cannot but arise from, indeed *begin from*, the mind. Development begins when the mind is liberated and exposed by meaningful experiences over time. Such freedom is

mandatory before we can even begin to appreciate any development gains, even from the techno-scientific perspective. A mind perpetually geared to evil and tuned to deceit is far from developed. A brain that is warped, preoccupied with securing undue advantage over others, or aggressively and unscrupulously pursuing wealth, cannot be associated with development. Nor can a man that is an inveterate liar and mean, even concern himself with the advancement of his society. If development is to be achieved in whatever colour, size, or shape, it must begin from the *mind*.

Such *mind development* can be gained when we imbibe positive values. Development will necessarily begin from the individual, in other words, such values must *first* occupy his mind if he is to develop at all. Such values will come when we look inwards, or more specifically, understand, then *explore* the very strength and resources of our oral literature. But in spite of such potentialities, Mr Vice-Chancellor, I wish to advance two arguments here. The first is that our oral literatures have not been fully exploited, even though we made the point that most African writers borrowed extensively from their indigenous literatures. The second argument is related but more weighty: African oral literature has so far not been given enough *educational* and *literary* attention.

There is clearly need for more oral literature content in our curricula: to be taught, approached, appreciated, understood *primarily* as *literature*. Oral literature does **not** feature on the curriculum whether at the primary or the secondary school, so Nigerian undergraduates customarily arrive at the university with the perception that *literature* has no further manifestation beyond the endeavours of such writers as William Shakespeare, Thomas Hardy, Samuel Taylor Coleridge, George Orwell, and Jonathan Swift, or such titles as *Robinson Crusoe* and *Gulliver's Travels*. The students are taught, and they read authors and works in drama, fiction and poetry, especially as dictated by their teachers and

syllabuses. But while more of our students are quite versed in English, European, or American literature, they are virtually ignorant of their own *indigenous* or oral literatures.

That our students are taught and reared more on written texts constitutes a scenario which I consider inadequate, unwholesome, even dangerous for any African student. Such imbalance or bias of exalting Western literatures at the expense of the indigenous, cuts across all the genres. On poetry among the Tiv, for example, Hagher opens his article, "Performance in Tiv Oral Poetry," as follows: "Very little is known about Tiv poetry. Unfortunately our educational system has been and still is oriented towards the study of Byron, Wordsworth, Keats, etc., to the detriment of traditional poetic forms. Even the educated Tiv have begun to doubt the very existence of a poetic tradition in Tivland" (38). It is a grossly incongruous situation that the younger generation or so-called future leaders are not exposed to this subject early enough on the road to academic and moral development. It is imperative to include oral literature in the curricula of both the primary and secondary schools. If taught, this is a subject with which such youthful minds could so easily identify with. If they are truly considered the leaders of tomorrow, then they need sufficient grooming in diverse aspects of their cultural heritage. So the question remains: Is it that African *oral literature* is not dignified enough, to be included as a subject in the primary/secondary school curricula? Is it not ironical that Western universities recognise the importance of African oral literature, yet we do not even include enough courses on this subject for our own university students.

The case for far more attention to oral literature is an important one, considering that in a sense, it is the only valid form of *African* literature we can lay claim to, since the modern literature is still embroiled in the turmoil and controversy of which language it should be written in, to qualify as *African*. In contrast, the position in oral literature is

indisputable: no scholar, politician, nationalist, or linguist can quarrel with, let alone raise the slightest objection regarding the language of African oral literatures. A mere sprinkling or smattering of courses on oral literature, even for students taking degrees in *literature*, remains anomalous and to the detriment of our students and society. Still, other students from non-literature Departments also ought to have some training on oral literature (say, though the GES 103 - "Nigerian Peoples and Cultures course." With adequate planning and will, provision could be made for every student to study the oral literature of an ethnic Nigerian group other than his. Thus the *leaders of tomorrow* will learn to appreciate other people's culture, an important prerequisite to the achievement of unity in the Nigerian nation.

The question of unity becomes even more cogent for a nation of diverse peoples. Multi-ethnic communities cannot but be built on such values as respect for one another, justice, hard work, fair play, equity and fairness to the *different* members of the *one* body. No doubt, the question of unity has variously bothered successive governments, leading the Yakubu Gowon government, for example, to set up the National Youth Service Corps (NYSC). There is no doubt the programme has recorded some results, but here we advocate a simple recipe of a compulsory course for every participant, on the oral literature of the ethnic group amongst whom he is serving. There is already some half-hearted attempt to make participants learn the language of the group, but we contend that this is not enough, since we can learn immensely regarding a people's culture from the various genres of their oral literature.

The Government, educational planners, and above all, the universities, must wake up and especially as intellectual places give leadership in this direction of helping us rediscover ourselves by incorporating in our curricula, far more oral literature content. Indeed, by either some strange twist, or for sometimes obvious reasons, the situation

remains that far more African oral literature is studied in foreign universities than in those in Nigeria. Which Nigerian university boasts more facilities or courses in this area than, say, the University of Texas, London, or some other Western/American universities? Emenyonu makes a bold point here:

If we can teach, in African and Western universities alike, courses in Hausa Language and culture, Swahili Language and culture, Igbo Language and culture, Yoruba Language and Culture, Wolof Language and Culture, why can't we also teach the rich cultures of these same cultural groups - some of which are bigger in land mass and population and have longer literary histories than some of the European ethnic literatures that adorn the catalogs and programs of many Western universities? But African universities themselves, however, must set the pace for such an endeavor, and this they have yet to do. Such an approach to the study of African literatures would provide the much-needed diversity for graduate students in universities throughout the United States and Europe who now seem compelled to combine the study of African literature with the study of other Western or non-Western literatures to guarantee themselves employments after their studies (Preface x).

The call here for a reversal of the trend noted of the vast majority of our students being vast in English Studies, or American English, while conversely faring no better than illiterates in matters of their own cultures is indeed a call for some *decolonisation* efforts. Oral literature courses and texts are therefore not only desirable as part of the *decolonisation* process, but will encourage our students to dig deep into the vast oral resources of their cultures. At the initial stages of teaching an undergraduate course in oral literature, I always ask the students how many of them are thoroughly, or at least reasonably, familiar with their traditional cultures, especially the *literary*, and in terms of an ability to

write and read their indigenous languages. Of course, the “right” percentage is constantly low.

In fact, my contention is that Nigerian universities and English Departments should be challenged and reprimanded, for enriching Nigerian, African, British and American literature while ignoring and thus impoverishing the indigenous. Indeed, starving the oral literatures of Nigeria or even positioning them properly for death raises some moral questions, if it is not an outright betrayal. Indeed, our universities should further be rebuked for yearly graduating thousands of students who know more English, French, German, or written literature, but remain practically ignorant regarding the literatures of their own indigenous Nigerian cultures. This represents a worse form of imperialism, colonialism, neo-colonialism, or any other *-isms* by which the phenomenon being discussed here may be known. This is a great disservice that demands to be redressed, especially at a time when there is much talk about rediscovering ourselves.

Okoh’s question, “Is it that there is nothing sustainable or worth teaching in the staggering varieties of our oral literature?” (*Preface* 148) as well as his complaint, “One finds everywhere a gross imbalance in favour of written literature and the enthronement or superimposition of foreign literatures” (151) are important ones. It is imperative for all the forms of lopsidedness here observed to be corrected by the Government and its educational planners, in favour of more *indigenous* studies.

It is indeed imperative to increase the oral literature content of the curricula, considering that the subject is crucial to national development. As we begin to conclude, the questions multiply and bear reiteration. Why do most of our universities accord such an important subject only scant attention? Why do our curricula at the primary and secondary levels exclude the *real* literature of Africa? Far from being fortuitous, the word *real* is carefully chosen: by it, I unequivocally refer

to African indigenous literatures. I consider oral literature to be the unquestionable and *bona fide* literature of Africa and for this reason, we must teach it, not abandon, or shy away from it. It is indeed time for Africans to not only "... put away the complexes of the years of denigration and self-abasement" but also discover "where the rain began to beat us" (*MYCD* 44).

3.1 The nature of language

We have now arrived at an important linkage, set to cross the *literary* bridge to arrive the *linguistic* shore. Nor can we envisage a better crossing point than one already erected by the literary guru himself, William Shakespeare. In *Hamlet*, Polonius demands of the protagonist: "What do you read, my lord?", while the latter provides the somewhat cryptic but enduring answer: "*Words, words, words*" (Act II Scene II)

Whether we have ever wondered about this or not, the truth is that even if we were to spend an entire lifetime reading, speaking, writing or listening, then in all, we would have been dealing with nothing else but one phenomenon, namely **words**. While words constitute the very *building* blocks of language, we do not necessarily stop at that level, as speech entails a concatenation of a variety of words. As a rule, we constantly encounter, employ, deploy and re-deploy hundreds of thousands of words.

Language constitutes an integral and crucial component of man's life. As Okoh observes, it "can be seen to permeate and pervade virtually every aspect of his [man's] life" ("Communication" 1). But in spite of the importance of language and, as Strang correctly observes: "Many people do not reflect on the part language plays in their lives ..." (i). In our arrangement of words as we employ language, our concern is with

Essentially for *communication*:

communicating our feelings and emotions imparting factual information, conveying commands, wishes, etc

To maintain *positive* human relationships or social contact at a friendly level; what is usually referred to as *phatic communion*-

For the preservation and transmission of a given culture

For *aesthetic* reasons - for beauty, as in poetry and other forms of literature

For releasing tensions, pent-up feelings, or emotional stress

conveying emotions or thoughts from one person to another. Thus, language is a system of conventional symbols, devised for the purpose of communication. Crystal defines it as "human vocal noise (or the graphic representation of this noise ...) used systematically and conventionally by a community for the purposes of communication," while in the words of Lyons, it is "a purely human and non-instinctive method of communicating ideas, emotions and desires by means of voluntarily produced symbols" (LL 3). The words *human* and *symbols* are significant, as they indicate that we are dealing with a *semiotic* system, since specific signs or symbols are employed to represent the very ideas and meanings to be so conveyed. We can easily summarize the *functions* of language thus: We have seen that being a *social* being, man has great need of interaction with others and thus uses language to communicate his ideas, desires, fears and accomplishments to others. In addition to its functions, we will briefly show some of the salient characteristics of language:

- Language is essentially *sound* (cf. body language, gestures, and *verbal* language).
- By no means *instinctive*: it has to be learnt (cf. a child 'learning' to cry, feed, or sleep).
- *Meaningful* (both speaker and listener are "on the same *linguistic* wavelength").
- Constitutes a *unique* phenomenon (each displays its own system, patterns, and peculiarities (still, we have "linguistic universals," and *relatedness* of languages)
- Does not exist in isolation; we can locate or trace the language to a given or specific *speech community*.
- *Linear*, often comprises a sequence or stringing together of symbols (in the form of words, phrases, and expressions; such symbols can be spoken or written
- *Systematic* and *systematized* (the grammar of a language reveals such an elaborate system or '*patterning*')
- Still, can be considered *arbitrary*

- *Creative and productive: homo sapiens* demonstrates the ability of creating or generating new structures
- *Verbal language is human*: the lower animals lack *linguistic creativity*.

From the foregoing, it cannot be overemphasized that man is a social being; he desires greatly to interact and communicate with others, to reach them, understand them, and be understood by them. Man particularly craves ideas and information and, more than any other before, the 21st century is characterized by a bewildering maze of ITs. In the words of Okoh: “Even the blind can see and the greatest Thomases acknowledge that man has undergone great technological transformation from those ancient days of inscribing on caves ... The unprecedented advancements, even explosion in information technology has transformed the entire world into a real global village ...” (*Communication 5*).

The last three characteristics above deserve at least some comment. The creative dimension of language is of great importance to scholars and students of language, for as we have already seen, it is the *numero uno* in terms of features which differentiate literature from *non-literature*. On the particularly *creative* use to which language can be put, Chomsky, for example, comments as follows: “Within traditional linguistic theory, further more it was clearly understood that one of the qualities that all languages have in common is their ‘creative aspect’. Thus an essential property of language is that it provides the means for expressing, indefinitely, a diversity of thoughts and for reacting appropriately in an indefinite range of new situations” (*Aspects 7*). Our earlier point that language is systematic and systematised seemingly contradicts the fact that language is also an arbitrary phenomenon. We shall take up the question of such *order in disorder* at a later stage, by exploring the *arbitrariness* of language.

More importantly, language is an enormously malleable instrument which users frequently bend and manipulate for aesthetic reasons. The literal or **denotative** level of language is, of course,

germane, but writers and speakers often appropriately aspire to another mode, the **connotative**. While the denotative dimension cannot provide the key to the intended meaning, such metaphorical or figurative level is concerned with communicating meaning in a more striking fashion. To take the now famous Achebean palm-oil maxim which derives from the Igbo culture, the utterance yields no "meaning" at all, as people do not *eat* words, as they do, say, coconuts, candies, or cakes. From this viewpoint, we can define such figurative usage quite simply as language which says one thing, while actually meaning another.

Indeed, meaning is the essence of all communication. Thus, to understand, create, or receive discourse, those involved in the communication must be on the same "wavelength", that is, share some common body of knowledge. Communication is promptly impaired if there are "misjudgements and mismatches of schemata" (Cook 74). This phenomenon is one frequently encountered, especially in the process of inter-cultural communication. On the question of the gulf which sometimes exists between what is *said* and what is in effect *meant*, Stubbs comments as follows: "If speakers always said what they meant, then there would be few problems for ... discourse analysis. But, of course, they do not, and in principle could not, say in so many words exactly what they mean on any occasion of utterance" (147). So, whether in spoken or written discourse, we quite often discover a wide gap between the words used, and their underlying intention or meaning. Deploying words in an ironic context, and the use of repetition, for example, provide some of the means of creating such a gap.

Since most language users hardly bother with analyzing or understanding it more fully, it is not surprising that one of the commonly underrated facts is that a language often boasts *varieties*. While in English, for example, the formal/informal dichotomy remains an inescapable reality, the speaker or writer must understand that each variety is restricted in a sense to a given *context*. It is clearly unthinkable for any student of this institution to address the Chief Executive thus: "*Oga VC, how you dey now?*" The same student will by no means open a letter to his father using "Dear Sir." Nor would any

Professor of English, on getting to Mile One market, address a seller thus: “*Madam, I’d like to purchase the comestible or commodity called garri!*” If he did, he is sure to get such a retort as “*Oga, i be like say you don dey kolo!*” From all examples, it is clear that different varieties have to be pressed into service in different contexts.

It is also necessary to underline that the structures of one language may not be necessarily and neatly transposable into those of another. If we fail to recognize this, we fall into several linguistic traps. In dealing with several African languages, for example, it would be futile to expect, even demand that regarding meaning, words will constantly display a one-to-one correspondence with English.

From the foregoing, it becomes evident that language is necessarily “... a truly multifaceted phenomenon, whether it is used in society, or in literature” (Okoh, “*Indirection*” 241). Such *culture-specificity* also means that different societies or language communities may have diverse styles in language use or behaviour. As Okoh points out: “Sociolinguists, discourse analysts, and ethnomethodologists ... will readily acknowledge that every speech community boasts its own discourse configurations and style, even diverse other manifestations of interpersonal communication” (“Name-Coining” 464).

3.2 English: A global phenomenon

Having seen some of the features of human or *verbal* language, we now focus on a particular language, in this case, English. In explicating the power and proliferation, even ascendancy, of English worldwide, Kachru views the language in terms of *concentric circles*. Thus, when we put together the “members” of the Inner, Outer, and Expanding circles, it becomes clear that the language in question no longer displays one fixed, monolithic form, but boasts a bewildering array of varieties, in other words, *Englishes*.

Today English has become the lingua franca of the world, not because it has the largest number of native speakers, but because of its enormous *geographical* spread. Apart from L₁ or *native* speakers, millions of other people worldwide use English either as an L₂ (*second*

language) or a *foreign* language. In addition to *national* or *regional* varieties, there is also a wide range of *academic* varieties of the language. When we view the enormous spread or distribution of English in terms of ENL, ESL, and EFL countries or language blocs, it is quite interesting that the ratio of *non-native* speakers today is far higher than that of the native speakers. In the words of MacArthur: “In the latter 20c, non-native users of English have come to outnumber native users, partly because of the accelerating spread of the language, and partly because of increases in population and educational opportunities in many parts of the world” (329).

Given the phenomenal development of English, it is no longer accurate to consider it the exclusive language, property, or God-given right of the British; spoken, engineered, directed and guided by them. It is interesting, in fact, that the overall development and spread of the language today is not determined by the English, but by non-native speakers (authors, writers, and other users) who variously adapt and *nativise* it. It is obviously in connection with the *internationalization* of English that Smith observes as follows: “When a language becomes international in character, it cannot be bound to any one culture” (Larry Smith ed. 7) African and Caribbean writers are in the vanguard of such *indigenization* of English. I cannot resist the temptation of citing one of my favourite teaching texts, one which I often ask my students to memorize. It is a short but excellent and particularly powerful demonstration of the *nativisation*, *Nigerianization*, even *Igbonization* of English, from the father of African literature himself. The towering intellectual, Ezeulu, speaks to his son, Oduche, before setting him on the quest for the white man’s superior knowledge:

‘The world is changing,’ he had told him. ‘I do not like it. But I am like the bird Eneke-nti-oba. When his friends asked him why he was always on the wing he replied: ‘Men of today have learnt to shoot without missing and so I have learnt to fly without perching.’ I want one of my sons to join these people and be my eye there. If there is nothing in it you will come back. But if there is something there you will bring home my share. The world is like a mask dancing. If you

want to see it well you do not stand in one place. My spirit tells me that those who do not befriend the white man today will be saying *had we known tomorrow*' (AOG 45- 46)

Only few, if any, Achebe scholars will disagree that he here attains the pinnacle of consummate craftsmanship. The language is English, but the very heart and soul of the passage (its tone, texture, and rhythmic intensity) is unmistakably that of the Igbo oral tradition.

It is necessary to make two points, as this section draws to a close. First, there are, of course, such other *world* languages as French, German, or Italian. It must be difficult to get the most exact of records, but we can use estimates as pointers. According to vista.wide.com: "There are approximately 6900 languages currently spoken around the world, the majority of which have only a small number of speakers ...", while Skutnall-Kanagas comments as follows: "[despite] uncertainties in ...definitions and knowledge, ... there probably are something between 6,500 and 10,000 **spoken (oral)** languages in the world" (30).

Of the 6 thousand+ languages in the world, it is important to note that Mandarin Chinese boasts the largest number of **native** speakers, **even millions more of native speakers** than English. The fact that not many non-Chinese speakers have any need to learn or speak Mandarin Chinese in their daily lives underlines the edge which English has over Chinese. Indeed, and as Okoh rightly points out, "It has become a cliché in the 21st century, but the point cannot be over-reiterated, that English is today the world's language for trade, industry, science, education, and technology" (*Marrying* 6). It is true that "The **number of speakers of English** worldwide is not as easy to calculate as might be imagined" (<http://exploredia.com>), but judging from the different varieties and Englishes around the world, even the language's status as an L₁, an L₂, or a foreign language, the number of speakers of English in the world can be put at between 1.8 and 2 billion people.

Second, the entire discussion here regarding the worldwide explosion of English, making the language no longer the property of any one nation clarifies one fact: the English you and I know today has undergone enormous changes, even aside from metamorphosing and

proliferating into a bewildering maze of varieties. The English language, which belongs to the West Germanic branch of the family of Indo-European languages, has had a long history easily categorized or characterized by three major stages. The first, Old English (formerly called Anglo Saxon) dates from AD 500 to 1100 AD; Middle English can be said to date from about 1100 to 1500 AD, while Modern English begins from about 1500 to the present. Modern English itself is further categorized into Early Modern English (from about 1500 to 1660, and Late Modern English, from about 1660 to the present time. Nor is any halt to the development or proliferation of the language anywhere in sight.

Indeed, as will be seen presently, English is deeply entrenched in Nigeria, especially given the country's colonial history. While it cannot be said with certainty the exact date when Europeans made contact with the West coast of Africa, the early part of the 16thC seems a probable period when the early British traders, missionaries and adventurers first set foot on the West African coast. The point can be made that whether regarding Nigeria or the entire West African coast, trade was the driving force behind such Western incursion. Thus, the early contact between Europe and West Africa involved mainly the Portuguese and, of course, the West Africans. For the Portuguese to achieve their trading mission, it was imperative to communicate with the native Africans, a scenario that necessitated a Portuguese-based pidgin. The Portuguese established trading links with Benin, setting up a trading post at Gwarto, and a flourishing trade in sylvan products, pepper, and slaves.

But Portugal's monopoly of the West African trade was to come to an end with the arrival of British missionaries, administrators and educationists, and also the replacement, though not total, of the Portuguese-based Pidgin with an English-based one. From then on, the British had begun entrenching themselves and their language in the political unit called Nigeria, which actually began with the amalgamation of the Southern and Northern Protectorates in 1914. If we are to summarize the history of English in Nigeria, it can be put roughly in the following stages:

- 1400-1842: the earliest incursions
- 1843-1914: the era of missionary adventurism
- 1915-1990: Independence and experimentation
(see Awonusi 46)

3.2.1 Nigerian English: Yes Salami, there is ...

The question as to whether there is a Nigerian English has been raised in several quarters since the late sixties and early seventies. Our subheading above is indeed meant to reflect some common post-1968 reactions or replies affirming that there is indeed a Nigerian English. Since then, linguists, sociolinguists, language teachers and other experts (cf. Spencer, Banjo, Bamgbose, Ubahakwe, Ogu, Odumuh, Mobolaji, Adekunle, Okoh) have variously attempted to provide answers to the question. Given especially how long English has sojourned in this country, the language cannot but have made some impact on the indigenous cultures, while also being affected by the latter. Indeed, in simple linguistic terms, a rolling stone gathers considerable moss. Sociolinguists, language theorists and other experts acknowledge that contact situations potentially produce divergent forms of the same language. Clear evidence of such fusion or linguistic tributaries is apparent from such varieties as Caribbean English, Indian English, Singaporean English, Caribbean English and, of course, **Nigerian English** (NE).

According to Oluikpe, "Nigerian English is that form of English domesticated by Nigerians, and for Nigerians' intra- and international communicative needs" (9), while in the words of Jibril): "Nigerian English is, fortunately, a term that has now come to be recognized and accepted as referring to a legitimate sub-type of English ... " (43). In his own "definition," Okoh points even to an issue we shall address later, that of attitude:

In the seventies, doubts were raised concerning even the very existence of NE, as some purists judged it a linguistic *l'enfant terrible*. But contemporary linguistic reality is a far cry from such scenario, as the notion of a variety of *Englishes* becomes increasingly entrenched worldwide ... Significantly, such change means that NE [Nigerian

English] is today considered a variety with great attraction and prospects. (“Bedfellows” 16)

In all, the issue is no longer about the reality or existence of a Nigerian English. Neither the native speakers of English, nor the most ardent linguistic purists or loyalists anywhere else can deny the existence of the variety called Nigerian English. It should be underlined, in fact, that even from the days of Salami, the kingdom of Nigerian English has not only existed, but also waxed stronger. We provide a little sample at the *lexical* level, of items which typify Nigerian English.

NE Forms

dowry
 senior service
 branch

 to deliver a baby
 to *pregnate somebody
 go-slow
 to on (or off) something
 to hear a smell
 to eat (or chop) money
 to know something off-head
 to have (or use) long legs
 to take in

 longer throat
 zinc
 dash
 hot drink
 light
 lesson
 watchnight
 academician
 pensioneer
 senior (brother)
 tight friend

Standard English Forms

bride price
 top government official
 to call on one's way (to or from another place)
 to *be delivered of* a baby
 impregnate, make pregnant
 traffic jam
 to *switch* on or off
 to *perceive* an odour
 to *steal* (money); *embezzle*
 to know *off heart*
 corruption, to cut corners
 to conceive a baby, become *pregnant*
 salivate, tantalize, greedy
 corrugated iron sheets
 gift, bribe
 spirit, strong drink
 electricity, power supply
 private tuition
 night watchman
 academic
 pensioner
 elder (brother)
 close (or bosom) friend

Regarding intelligibility, the point can be made that, on the one hand, the Nigerian user of English will make sense of the foregoing examples. On the other, the non-Nigerian speaker of English (say a British or American) may encounter some difficulty in a bid to decipher what is meant or being referred to. Regarding some of the expressions, one speaker of Standard English, or an L₁ speaker may not have the foggiest of what is being said, while another might guess and thus stumble at some meaning. Clearly, the issue of international intelligibility hangs like an albatross around the neck of Nigerian English. In the words of Okoh: Nigerian English is associated with a circumscribed audience and fulfils a purely local or regional function. Like any other region-bound variety, it can hardly pass the test of international intelligibility” (*Writing Right* 117).

On the question of attitudes to Nigerian English, two broad reactions can be identified. First, there is a pervading attitude of scepticism or at best, partial acceptance. Nigerians not only display a generally ambivalent attitude towards this variety and use it, to borrow Pidgin parlance, in *how-for-do* fashion, they also rank it lower and inferior to Standard English. On “... the reactions that the utterance of the phrase (or the mere thought of it) evokes among Nigerians,” Jowitt adds as follows: “Derision and hostility are common attitudes ... There is also the widespread prejudice ... that Nigerian English is a deformed creature which ought not even to be mentioned in good society” (28).

Second, some Nigerians endorse Nigerian English, emphasizing its excellent socio-political credentials, that is, as a variety which effectively serves in the present diglossic setting, and may rightly be considered an *endonormative* model, as against the *exonormative*. In a sense, such Nigerians demand and yearn for an English they can truly call *our own*. Okoh summarizes the position or attitude of such advocates thus: “If the Americans can invent their own brand of English, why can't we in this part of the world do the same?” (*Writing Right* 117). The illogicality or otherwise of such argument will not detain us here.

In spite of the generally ambivalent attitude to this variety, then, some people who are obviously propelled by the spirit of nationalism, have called for it to be used in education, possibly to accomplish an eventual *dethronement* of English in the educational system. In the words of Banjo (“Codifying” 230): “... attention has been focused on the characterization of a standard Nigerian English, a variety which, given the status of English as a second language in the country, *can legitimately be expected to take over from standard British English as the model for the teaching of the language in schools ...*” [emphasis mine].

My stand is clear, whether regarding the validity of Nigerian English or the proposal of an *educational* role for NE. Not only has Nigerian English a right to exist, it remains a variety with much charisma and power. Thus I endorse it fully; not because it is one of my preoccupations in the classroom if I am to make a living, but because it constitutes in its own right a valid and legitimate branch of *World Englishes*. That Nigerian English looms large on the Nigerian linguistic landscape remains a reality that not even the diehard language purists or prescriptivists can alter.

But having expressed such a position, I also contend that in spite of its validity, even vibrancy, Nigerian English should be far removed from the educational domain. In other words, its attraction should not be misplaced. As a variety, it is already functioning creditably well in social and other contexts to which it belongs, and to which it should logically be confined. There is no place for this variety of English in the university classroom, or in the teaching of English for Academic Purposes (EAP). By my training as an ESP practitioner, I cannot but underline that communication, indeed, *communicative competence* constitutes the principal objective of language teaching. Nigerian English cannot offer our students communicative competence, and should therefore not be given the opportunity to hinder them either. To reiterate an earlier point about *context*, which means that there is a time, place and occasion for every kind of English, I cannot subscribe to the extreme of legalizing Nigerian English for academic or *pedagogical* purposes. For Nigerian English, in all, gaining overall acceptance remains an uphill task, even

though the initial mountain of hostility in the 1970s has shifted considerably. This is due in large measure to the fact that this variety has been receiving quite some scholarly attention.

3.2.2 The *pikin* called Pidgin

From the variety called Nigerian English, then, we move on to another called Pidgin, in this case, *Nigerian Pidgin* (NP). We have already seen aspects of the dynamics of language contact, as well as underlined the multilingual nature of Nigeria, especially the diglossic angle. Here involved again is the issue of a *contact language* to facilitate communication between the African and the European trader, missionary, or colonial administrator.

Pidgin, therefore, often functions among people who have no common language; thus it can be a trade language or a *lingua franca*. It may also be seen as a simplified or reduced form of the *base* or original language, and for this reason, we can talk of, say, an English- or Dutch-based pidgin. In the words of McArthur (ed.), it is “... a hybrid ‘makeshift language’ used by and among traders, on plantations (especially with and among slaves of various backgrounds), and between Europeans and the indigenous peoples of Asia, Africa, and the Americas, especially during the heyday of European expansion (17-20c)” (698).

Within the context of Nigeria’s multilingualism, Pidgin itself is of great significance in the country, while claims have been made for it as the undisputed official language. According to Simire (2005), for example: “One can safely add that ANP [Anglo-Nigerian Pidgin] is the closest thing to a ‘lingua franca’ in Nigeria as regards non-formal domains. It is also becoming the most popular medium of inter-group communication in various heterogeneous communities and in many educational institutions, especially federal government colleges and Universities located in various states throughout the country” (p. 171). Those who argue for an “indigenous” lingua franca and are quick to point out the *neutrality* of Pidgin are right, especially if by this they mean that Pidgin serves the important role of linking people of divergent social and cultural backgrounds. Indeed NP serves as an important medium of *inter-ethnic* as

well as *intra-ethnic* communication and thus a potent force for uniting Nigerians as a people.

In some parts of the country, NP has achieved the status of the language of the home. This is the case especially in the cities, where the population is drawn from different parts of the country, especially in the context of, say, mixed marriages. In addition to being the true lingua franca in many homes, either by choice or default, NP functions not only at the lower rungs involving the masses, but clearly cuts across society. While, for example, doctor-doctor communication is couched in pure *medical register*, *oga* to *servant*, even *oga* to *oga* communication frequently makes use of NP. This variety is also used for humorous effect, in informal occasions and sweet talk between colleagues in the office; even highly educated people.

NP also features prominently in the media: several radio and television stations nationwide have the news, advertisements and other programmes broadcast in Pidgin. On the Nigerian literary scene, Pidgin features prominently, which can be traced to the very progenitor of written Nigerian literature, namely *Onitsha market literature*. Such linguistic tradition in, say, Ogali's *Veronica my Daughter* is today upheld in some measure by virtually every Nigerian writer of note.

In addition to the foregoing, regarding the influence and significance of Pidgin in Nigeria, it is even touted as a viable variety for academic purposes. In the words of Gani-Ikilama: "Nigerian Pidgin can effectively be used in schools, especially to solve linguistic problems and problems of socialisation to school life in the initial years of primary education, provided teachers are well prepared for this in their training programme" (219). Just as we saw in the case of Nigerian English, nationalistic forces are doubtless at work, as even a scholar of Elubge's status declares: "In barracks across the nation, [NP] has become the first language of many Nigerians. Unofficially, in spite of the lack of official provision for the use of [NP], teachers in major Nigerian Pidgin areas are using it in the classroom (Ofuani 1981)."

But NP has a number of setbacks it must overcome, if it must be a serious candidate for "higher" functions than it is performing at present.

One of the problems here is that there are too many varieties. Even if NP were to be adopted, the fundamental problem arises: How is it to be written? In other words, even the basic problem of *orthography* has not been resolved in the first place. Mafeni (1971) comments accurately on the serious limitation regarding writing in NP: “There are ... two problems connected with writing in pidgin which should be mentioned ... the fact that it is difficult to specify a standard form of Nigerian Pidgin; and the lack of a uniform orthography for the language. ... Nigerian Pidgin is really a dialect cluster, ... but there is the further complication that within a single community of Pidgin speakers, there is a wide range of pronunciation differences ...” (100).

On the obvious limitations and thus inappropriateness of Pidgin in several domains, especially the educational, Akindele and Adegbite (1999) comment as follows:

Pidgin has no defined standard grammar or model. Indeed, Pidgins do not have noun-verb agreement endings. Pronunciations tend towards a pattern of consonant followed by vowel clusters. In Nigeria pidgin serves as a lingua franca in some states and a trade language in some others. In Edo, Delta and Rivers States for instance, pidgin can be considered as lingua franca. However, in Yoruba, Igbo and Hausa speech communities pidgin is considered as a trade language (54).

Of course, still lurking in the corner is the problem of *attitude*. In other words, most Nigerians consider NP to be of an inferior linguistic stock. As in the case of Nigerian English, there is a generally ambivalent attitude towards NP. In one breath, Nigerians employ it, and yet in another they show little or no regard for it as a serious or viable medium of communication. It is this picture of, in colloquial parlance, of blowing hot and cold that Elugbe endeavours to capture in the following poem:

Naijiria Pijin
bi laik pikin
we no get papa

Nigerian Pidgin
is like a child
who has no father

but evribodi
de sen am mesej

but everybody
send him on errands
(284)

In spite of the handicaps we have seen associated with Pidgin, it remains a quite valid variety and should not be seen as substandard or inherently inferior to what people sometimes carelessly refer to as **the three major Nigerian languages**. No language can be considered superior to another. Such assessment, in other words, the higher rating accorded the **Wazobia** tongues is based on *political*, not *linguistic* considerations, as no language can be said to be “more major” than another. Linguistically, then, a language spoken by only 10 people is equal to another spoken by 100 people and yet another which boasts 10 million speakers. In this regard, Emenanjo’s table provides us with a better picture regarding the “state” of languages:

His classification caters for the well over 450 languages, creating even room for any that might still be discovered. This is how he (1985:1) classifies the languages spoken in Nigeria:

1. Foreign or exoglossic languages (eg, English, French, (Arabic).
2. `very large' languages: Hausa, Igbo, Yoruba, Nigerian Pidgin.
3. `Large' languages: Efik, Fulfulde, Nupe, Edo, Tiv, Izon, Kanuri.
4. `Medium sized' Languages: Idoma Central, Idoma North, Nembe, Igalla, Urhobo, Bokwai, Kalabari, Angas, Abuan, Bekwarra, Epira, Ekajuk, Ibibio, Kha, Engenni, Juken of Takum, Wapan, Mambilla, Iju and Ikwo.
5. Roughly 350 `small' Languages, including all those not already listed

3.3 English in Nigeria: To be or not ...

Much of the modern history of African nations is linked or affected by the incursion of Europe and by such events as the Scramble for Africa. The Berlin Conference of 1885, for example, meant the partitioning of Africa along political and linguistic lines, that is, the language of the colonizing power. Not surprisingly, the language question has "an

outstanding history of fierce controversy" (Okoh 1995:27), whether regarding the language in which African literature should be written or which language should "reign" in Nigeria. The issue in Nigeria, of course, elicits a wide range of answers, many of which are couched in highly emotive or even vitriolic language. This As far back as 1961, this oft-quoted warning appeared in a newspaper, *The Daily Express* (November 23, 1961):

Parliament should be more careful about involving itself in the language tangle into which it is now being drawn. English is the accepted official language, the outward expression of all that unites the various peoples in this country ... to seek to replace English with some vernacular at a particular date-line is asking for more than the greatest nationalist of them all can handle ... What happened in India and more recently still in Ceylon should make the protagonist of this motion have second thoughts.

That was in the 60s. Still, the comments made by a member of the 1989 Constituent Assembly are quite relevant and instructive, showing that the fire of the controversy is still aglow: "... how can three languages which are mother tongues to less than 45% of Nigerians be imposed on us all? This is the question. We will bend or break over this" (qtd. in Okoh 1994, p. 27).

Considering the centrality in man's culture of his language, feelings can be expected to run high in matters of language, especially in a multiethnic setting as Nigeria's. Not surprisingly, a figure of Chief Enahoro's immense stature is blunt and uncompromising in his utterance regarding the perceived "supremacy" of some Nigerian languages. In his own words:

As one who comes from a minority tribe, I deplore the continuing evidence in this country that people wish to impose their customs, their languages and even their way of life on the smaller tribes ... My people have a language, and that language was handed down through a thousand years of tradition and custom. When the Benin Empire exchanged ambassadors with Portugal, many of the new Nigerian languages of today

did not exist. How can they now, because the British brought us together, wish to impose their language on us? (qtd. in Iwara 2003, p. 19).

As pointed out, there are of course the *pros* and the *cons* to the issue here. Many have since advanced reasons why English should be replaced as Nigeria's official language. In this section, I shall briefly look at a strand of the major argument, as a basis for reaching some conclusions. The major contention is that it is shameful for us not to have a national language in which we can discuss, possibly to the exclusion of the white man. Such excellent demonstration of nationalism is, of course, worthy of all commendation. Another strand of the argument against English is that an indigenous language is a symbol that will adequately project our national pride and consciousness. Again, the veracity of this point is undeniable.

In fact, we must concede that the nationalistic spirit lies behind much of the argument on the matter. Still, we must understand that language is just an aspect of the totality of our cultures or endeavours, even though it is an important one. It therefore follows that there are several other fields or endeavours in which we can adequately and legitimately reveal, indeed parade our national pride, culture, Africanity, independence, or whatever we deem positive enough to bring to the attention of the wider. It is undeniable that Nigerian sportsmen, writers, actors and musicians have performed excellently well on the world stage, thus bringing great honour to the country.

From this viewpoint, then, I posit that there is nothing wrong or shameful about the continued use of English as Nigeria's official language. To briefly examine other domains, has it been suggested that in public places, one can only dress in the indigenous *agbada*, *sokoto*, or more specifically, the *etibo* or *woko* from Rivers State. No one insists that in our hospitals, schools, and universities, English dressing should be outlawed, or at least frowned at? Regarding our foods and eating habits, the spirit of *nationalism* has not outlawed foods from other parts of the world. An indigenous language, of course, is a worthy possession. There is as yet no indigenous Nigerian car, but there has been no clamour against the Fords,

Range Rovers, Jaguars and Rollers from Britain, even Hummers and other brands that are imported from just about any part of the universe.

The arguments for an indigenous language to replace English can go on *ad nauseam*. But a better corollary is to seek how best to empower an indigenous Nigerian language, or two, even three, to develop to the point of *naturally* replacing English. Our indigenous languages must be developed if they are to play their crucial role in our national life, from education to banking to economics.

The ascendancy of English can be challenged effectively by an indigenous language, only if the latter is appropriately empowered. Achebe has this to say: “... I have been given this language and I intend to use it. I hope, though, that there will always be men, like the late Chief Fagunwa, who will choose to write in their native tongue and ensure that our ethnic literature will flourish side-by-side with the national ones ...” (*MYCD* 62).

More financial, political and nationalistic energy should be devoted to developing our indigenous languages in Nigeria to give them any chance of effectively challenging (even if they do not succeed overnight) English, or counter its entrenched position. Regarding such a practical and more pragmatic measure, we cite Okoh: “To continue dissipating so much intellectual energy, prodding and projecting Hausa, Igbo or Yoruba as the lingua franca, as has been the preoccupation of writers and contributors to the language debate for more than two decades now, is to put the cart before the horse ... the task of securing acceptance for one Nigerian language ... may seem herculean but it is not an impossible one (“Underdeveloping” 36).

The Government and other Nigerians must reflect seriously on the development of our indigenous languages and engage less in empty rhetoric and shadow-chasing. Nigeria can arrive successfully at her desired linguistic destination, with the right political will and goodwill. But even if such signs are still so distant, Chike Obi’s comments regarding the case of Switzerland are still instructive: “...an independent state need not have a lingua franca ... All languages are tools and world property, and Africans must use them to make up for their failure, throughout the past 500 years

or so, to contribute their share to the world pool of tools" (qtd. in Nwaegbe).

3.4 ESP and the Nigerian university

The increasing internationality and internationalization of English has bred a staggering array of *Englishes* or varieties, while, I profess particularly that called ESP. This acronym has nothing to do with *Extra Sensory Perception*. Rather, it stands for *English for Specific Purposes*. Since my audience is varied, I will pose the question: What is ESP? In attempting to explicate this approach, I shall look at the *why* of ESP, the *how* of ESP, and who the *ESP* teacher is.

To begin to address the focal question, then, I draw a distinction between *General English*, with which people have greater familiarity, especially as it is what virtually all Nigerian universities teach in the U of E course and *ESP*, which they ought to be teaching. To Solomon's counsel about events and their times, we add that there is also a time or place for every variety of English, as indeed there is an English for, say, science, business, the medical professions, tourism, even Shell workers.

By ESP, then, is meant the teaching and learning of English that is *discipline-specific*. Thus ESP deals with language related to a *specific* field, that is, the teaching of English based on the specific needs of the learners. ESP has actually been called "applied ELT," especially as the contents and objectives of the courses so designed are determined by the needs of a particular group of learners. In the words of Hutchinson & Waters: ESP is " ... an approach to language teaching in which all decisions as to content and method are based on the learner's reason for learning" (19). ESP is often broadly categorized into **EAP** (English for *Academic Purposes*) and **EOP** (English for *Occupational Purposes*). Such further subcategories of the latter as business English, *professional* English (the kind of English pertaining to, say, law and medicine, or used by lawyers and medical doctors) and *vocational* English (English for, say, plumbing, local government, artisans, etc). An important point emerges here: the primary context for ESP teaching and research is institutions of higher education, the workplace, professional institutions or organizations.

In Nigerian education, it is now a cliché to state that there have been perennial complaints concerning the poor results in English. Nor are the results different in the *Use of English* (U of E) course in the universities. From my longstanding familiarity with the course, I have discovered that the students' generally poor performance is in great measure attributable to the quality of teaching. By today's standards, the kind of English taught is grossly outmoded, even anachronistic. It has become imperative for Nigerian universities to adopt a newer and more productive pedagogical framework, specifically the *ESP* approach.

Since the learner is the one who needs the language for a *specific* purpose, we must pursue a pedagogical framework that is concerned with really making the student more proficient in the language, while simultaneously emphasizing his very place, even contributions. Thus, a *learner-centred* approach is the most productive, that is, in terms of making the learner more proficient. Such older methods as the Functional-Notional Approach or Audiolingualism overemphasized the content and materials or de-emphasized the role of the learner, regarding him as a predominantly passive individual in the learning process. In contrast, *ESP*, like other *communicative* approaches, not only rightly recognizes the role of both learner and teacher, but also specifies even the instructional materials (in fact, begins with a Needs Analysis). Pursuing a more *communicative* approach makes language learning and teaching more effective on account of its *learner-centredness*.

While the older language teaching frameworks laid far more emphasis on *grammatical* competence, *ESP* teaching measures competence or proficiency by the learner's *communicative* abilities. Rather than bombarding the learners with sheer grammatical knowledge, or perpetuating what Okoh calls "the mere teaching of grammar and the teaching of mere grammar," the *ESP* teacher considers language as a form of *social interaction*, and is thus concerned with "the creative and purposeful use of language in social interaction" (Williams, *Language Teaching* 64). Indeed, the overall focus in *ESP* is to produce, not just language *learners*, but language *users*. In

developing courses, the ESP teacher is concerned with the *specific* use to which the learner desires to put the language after learning it. Thus particular attention is given to *situational* and *appropriate usage*.

It must be underlined that the ESP teacher is a multi-faceted figure, functioning as guide or conductor, catalyst or facilitator, encourager or motivator. Such *many-sidedness* constitutes the most important single factor to be considered by the teacher making the transition from General English to ESP teaching. The role of the ESP teacher as **conductor** or **facilitator** is directly related to another, that of **motivator**. Even with such latitude granted the learner, the personality of the teacher is still important, as he must serve as a linguistic **model** for his students to follow. Given the prominence or “mobility,” indeed ubiquity, of English in the Nigerian educational system, the ESP practitioner must function in a special capacity as unifier and **collaborator**. In fact, he is desirous of cooperating with teachers of other subjects, whether such colleagues are in Law, Physics, or Mechanical Engineering. Conversely, other teachers need the language teacher. It will simply become counter-productive and damaging to the student’s efforts if teachers from other disciplines give the impression that language skills are not really necessary for the particular course the student is pursuing.

By collaborating with other teachers that encounter the same Use of English students, the ESP practitioner traverses academic boundaries and borders, to design a course on the basics of, say, medical English, English for Science and Technology, or the language of sociology. While, for example, the sociologist is an expert in the *content* and concepts of his field, the *language* of sociology is hardly the exclusive domain of the sociologist. As teachers designing ESP (or EAP-based) programmes, an essential aim should be to teach our students *the language*, not *about the language*. By extension, our overriding objective should be to teach the language as a means of communication, not necessarily as a system or structure. All this forms part of a wider scenario: language teaching has witnessed a shift, a clear move away from the traditional or *language-centred* approach, with its *prescriptiveness* and *teacher-centredness*, to a *learner-centred* approach.

One important reality here emerges: all this calls for training. Only the trained teacher can imbibe the central focus of ESP and communicative language teaching. Indeed, the major distinguishing characteristic of ESP methodology lies in a greater recognition for the individuality of the learner. Such recognition which constitutes the very heart of *learner-centredness* means that the learner takes the centre-stage as the whole concept of TBI comes into play. Only the one trained can make learner-centredness the very centrepiece of his teaching or, more importantly, understand that his role in the classroom is not just that of a teacher, as he also functions as a manager, guide and informant, counsellor, facilitator, collaborator and motivator.

We have endeavoured to show that ESP remains a more innovative and thus appropriately productive approach to teaching English, particularly in our L₂ context. Nigerian universities must abandon General English and embrace ESP teaching. Such a change has become quite imperative. Harding's counsel is particularly applicable to Nigerian universities: "Like it or not, the days of the EFL generalist teacher may be numbered, so it might just be time to explore the possibility of working in ESP!" In advocating and justifying the "death" of General English and an introduction, even entrenchment of, ESP in the Use of English programme in the Nigerian university, we have variously shown the merits of the latter.

3.4.1 ESP: Charity begins...

The preceding section has laid some foundation to enable us know and appreciate the necessity for ESP in the service course U of E. Still, my job of informing on what I profess is not yet done. Please permit me therefore, Mr Vice-Chancellor to now tread a "personal" path or begin from **home**, by providing some facts about an English Department. The aim of this section is not to eulogize any Department or denigrate another. Rather, it is to lead a greater understanding by people, of my "immediate constituency," in other words, the discipline that nurtured me. Such knowledge provides my listeners with a platform, even a

vantage point from which to appreciate some of the issues I have raised here and my own particular responses to them.

I find it surprising that in spite of the centrality and relative *age* of English departments (I know of no Nigerian university in which the English Department does not rank amongst the oldest), they remain relatively underestimated and misunderstood. It is not known by many, for example, that an English Studies or English Department necessarily houses a *language* and *literature* component, while others think it is the same as Linguistics Department. Of course, I recognize that there is an overlapping, especially as I also preach inter- and cross disciplinarity).

Many people are still far from knowledgeable regarding the workings, demands or peculiarities of such a department, and assume that it constitutes a monolithic structure, and one concerned with just the kind of issues and functions they were exposed to at Secondary School. On the contrary, we are dealing with an enormously diverse and complex Department, with even larger areas of specialization. The reality is that someone who has taken a PhD in Feminism, or Achebean studies, or oral literature, for example, is not necessarily an expert in, or teacher of, the English *Language*. Many years ago, for example, there was in this unique university, for example, the entire argument of decentralization in the Communication Skills in English (SCE) course, to the ridiculous extent of demanding in effect that individual departments be allowed to teach their students the CSE course. It must be underlined that successfully executing a PhD dissertation in English in Toxicology, Metallurgy, Philosophy or Anthropology does not make one a teacher of the language. While English is the *official* language of the country, which means every scholar or academic must master it, it is also a discipline which is studied or taught **professionally**. As Gbenedio rightly points out: “An English Language teacher ... is a person who is trained to teach English Language, and in our circumstance, to teach it as a second language (L2)” (3). The point here precisely is that teaching the English Language is not open to all-comers.

Indeed, no eyebrows should be raised at this assertion: not every lecturer in an English Studies Department can justifiably be

adjudged **competent** to *really* teach the English Language. This is an entire business and profession for which one has to train *professionally*. When people say they are experts in ELT, ESP, TESL, or World Englishes, they are asserting that they have been trained in the teaching of a particular form, variety, indeed manifestation of the English Language. In this part of the world, even those so trained must continue to learn, since they are L₂ users. To cite Gbenedio again: “Publicly, he [the teacher] is an expert in the subject and so much is expected of him. But within him, he knows that he is still a learner of the subject ...” (3). Such a “learner” simply has to “stay up to date with the latest developments in ELT teaching, theory and management” (“IATEFL Special Group”).

Without watering down or bastardizing the point here, I hasten to balance it by adding that the present writer, for example, cannot claim any expertise in such domains as, say, the teaching of Feminism, Structuralism, Marxism, or Deconstructionism, diverse literary domains for which there are experts in English Departments all over the world. It is quite possible to break down several academic barriers and explore existent or emerging synergies. Indeed, collaborative and cross-disciplinary research should be encouraged. From the foregoing, forging relationships and collaboration with, say, the English Studies Department of the unique university and such others disciplines as sociology, political science or the physical sciences must be a highly beneficial project. This is for the simple reason that all of such other Departments also investigate varying dimensions of the above-named domains or phenomena.

Of course, one of the areas I profess is ESP. This manner of ELT, like several others, often considers the four language skills. Whether one teaches writing, like me or not, it is common knowledge that our students fare extremely badly in this skill. From this viewpoint at least, I consider it counterproductive and grossly anomalous for students to take the CSE examination without as much as being required to write a single sentence. Even if we have not trained language or writing experts to teach, we can still employ other hands to deal with

tutorials in writing, as was done in the early eighties when students wrote essays weekly and had their work marked on time by a team of three teachers. Granted that today, the *large classes* problem has become a nightmare, little beginnings can still be made in this regard.

Every Department is distinctive, so English Departments cannot necessarily be treated like biology departments, in terms of subject content and methodologies. While we have seen that the Arts are often downplayed in favour of the sciences, for example, we cannot force the arts to work like exactly like the sciences. An English Department is not meant to work like a Mathematics Department; it is thus illogical to expect an examination format that is necessarily the same. While everyone appreciates the wonders of OMR, as well as the concern of the University regarding releasing the General Studies results early, the present approach disregards the fact that English cannot be taught, examined, or the scripts marked, entirely by means of **objective-type** questions. Thinking or writing in any language goes well beyond choosing options *A, B, C, or D*. This is a basic fact which examination bodies worldwide recognize: from London, Cambridge, or Oxford, to IELTS and WAEC.

Like other English Departments in universities all over the world, the English Studies Department here is not only a degree-awarding Department, but also a service Department. This means that members of the Department particularly place their language and literary expertise at the disposal of the entire University. Such a responsibility is well acknowledged as being fundamental to the workings of such Departments in all English-medium universities of the world. Especially as a service Department, we are conscious of our role in, or contribution to, any failures in the University. Experts contend that if you fail mathematics or physics, for example, it is not because you do not know mathematics or physics; it is rather because you do not know the **language** of mathematics or physics. Indeed, as Doughty rightly remarks, "Educational failure is purely linguistic failure" (5).

I must observe further that we are the *barometer* for measuring the linguistic well being or vibrancy of the university and the measuring rod of the institution regarding the teaching and learning of English.

Thus, if an English Department is undisciplined or linguistically blind, it cannot lead the University appropriately to use English in competent fashion. Christ Himself taught on the implications of one blind man guiding another. Thus, the English Studies Department is constantly aware of the need to maintain the highest linguistic standards.

Permit me to observe that the entrance to the Ken Saro-Wiwa English House spots a banner welcoming all to the domain of the *queen of the Arts*, and the *heart of the Humanities*, which, of course, is the oldest Faculty in this University. The banner reminds entrants that they have arrived at the very *heart beat of the university*, where “the world’s *lingua franca* is explored in multi-faceted fashion.” The implication is that they are now on a literary burning bush, a holy linguistic ground, on which to tread softly, even without removing their shoes.

Language is serious business and its use, teaching or learning cannot be taken any less seriously. The English Studies Department is not stagnant, but aspires to be what we are meant to be: the leading centre of academic excellence. That is why, for example, we take IT seriously. For example, given the IT revolution even in language teaching, our cybercafé and our very own IT-*sentient* classroom are measures to enable us achieve a desired goal: to turn all our students and staff to IT **natives**, not IT **immigrants**. This involves financial commitments; while we have already begun, we call on the university to support us as a Department.

Mr Vice-Chancellor, Sir, Nigerian universities are lagging behind in ELT which has become a highly specialized and diversified discipline. I will show you presently that there is quite a profusion of courses designed, packaged and **sold** to a variety of customers. It is interesting that in today’s world, English has become a hot-selling product. Especially in a dispensation of emphasizing entrepreneurial skills, the English Department, if empowered has the capacity to bring revenue to the university by selling English also to targeted customers (cf. my paper, “Managing and Marketing ESP in Nigeria”). The level of explosion in the varieties is evidenced by the multiplicity of professional acronyms and abbreviations depicting one variety or sub-variety or the other, of ESP:

- ALOS (Academic Literacy and Oracy Skills)
- CLIL (Content and Language Integrated Learning)
- EAP (English for Academic Purposes);
- EBP (English for Business Purposes)
- EGAP (English for General Academic Purposes)
- EMP (English for Medical Purposes)
- EOP (English for Occupational Purposes)
- EPP (English for Professional Purposes)
- ESAP (English for Specific Academic Purposes)
- ESOL (English to Speakers of Other Languages)
- E3L (English as a Third Language)
- E4W (English for Work)
- ESL (English as a Second Language)
- ELF (English as a Lingua Franca)
- EIC (English for International Communication)
- EAL (English as an Additional Language)
- E4WPS (English for Widening Participation Students)
- EMI (English as a Medium of Instruction)
- TT, TT & TE in ESP (Teacher Training, Trainer Training and Teacher Education in English for Specific Purposes)

3.4.2 Of *Attitudes*: Does it matter?

I am constantly confronted by people, students and other persons who accuse the English of being a difficult language to study. In much of my teaching and research, I have found that quite often, this pretext is borne out of wrong attitudes, manifest in either laziness or an unwillingness to accept change. To approach language with the common *it-doesn't matter* attitude is to make no progress at all. It is sad to hear people, even teachers, unable to differentiate between such as simple pair as *ask/axe*, end up saying **I want to axe a question*, or **Tank you very much* or even declaring: What does it matter how I pronounce *category, favourite, biblical, Senate, palace* or *divorce*?

It must be said that language is highly patterned and ordered and thus cannot be approached, in Pidgin parlance, *any and anyhow*. No matter the language involved, the learner must really work at it. It is really the hard work that those who complain that English is a difficult language are seeking ways to circumnavigate. In French, for example, the user must first understand whether a given noun is preceded by the article *le* or *la*. Still, whether a noun is masculine or feminine, English spares the learner the trouble of deciding on an article by applying *the*, even in both cases. In Latin, for example, there are no such particles as *a*, *an*, or *the*. Since the article is lacking in this language, a simple noun like *agricola* means *farmer*, *a farmer*, or *the farmer*. It is even more puzzling to have nouns changing their *endings* as a means of showing the relationship between them and other words in the sentence. The change is determined or governed by the case involved (Latin depends heavily on **case**, English on **word order**). To take a simple noun or root, (*mensa* = “table”) then, the user must engage in declension, to know which *case* is required, as follows:

Singular		Plural
Nominative	mensa	mensae
Vocative	mensa	mensae
Accusative	mensam	mensas
Genitive	mensae	mensarum
Dative	mensae	mensis
Ablative	mensa	mensis

Indeed, **declension** cannot be an easy matter, but of course, nouns in English do not change their forms depending on whether they occupy the subject slot or function as objects (only pronouns do). The above “digression” will help us resolve which language is easy or not.

My experience teaching English over the years demonstrates that one domain in which such poor attitudes are most prevalent is oral skills.

Oral and *dictionary* skills are prerequisites if we must remain in full control of words, unless we want the words otherwise, the words will dominate and disgrace us. Indeed, oral skills (the quality of our spoken English) remain an important yardstick by which people assess our competence in the language. While spelling and pronunciation in English are sometimes quite contradictory, it is interesting that anyone who spells badly will also pronounce badly, and vice versa. For example, between, say, the noun form and verb form of a word: we say *pronounce* (but never **pronunciation*), we say *maintain* (but never **maintainance*). Also, one who pronounces **strenght* or **lenght* will write them accordingly, that is, the one cannot spell them correctly as *strength* or *length*.

Part of the hard work in learning the language lies in acquiring and using a dictionary, a truly veritable tool if we must improve in our *spoken* and *written* English. The dictionary helps us understand the sound system of English, so we can learn to pronounce English words. Understanding the *key* or the phonetic symbols employed by the dictionary is crucial. It means that with such a key, we can “unlock” every word in question; that is, we are able to transcribe and pronounce it appropriately. It is recommended that we use dictionaries which use the phonetic symbols of IPA: International Phonetic Alphabet). By mastering such symbols as /ð /, /tʃ /, and /ʃ / for example, one is able to pronounce such words as *the*, *church*, and *sheep* respectively.

While there are 44 sounds in English we present the first 20 called vowels, as a means of challenging us to teach ourselves simple phonetic representations of words. **Vowels**

Pure Vowels: Monophthongs

1.	/i:/	as in	seat, peat, we
2.	/i/	as in	bit, pit, guild
3.	/e/	as in	egg, bed, ten
4.	/æ/	as in	add, pat, blank
5.	/ɑ:/	as in	part, hard, heart
6.	/ɒ/	as in	ox, what, cock
7.	/ɔ:/	as in	Paul, law, wore

8.	/ʊ/	as in	pull, wolf, foot
9.	/u:/	as in	woo, full, student
10.	/ʌ/	as in	bus, butter, come
11.	/ɜ:/	as in	bird, church, murder
12.	/ə/	as in	ago, mother, doctor

Impure Vowels (Diphthongs)

The word *diphthong* is Greek (it means “double sound”)

13.	/eɪ/	as in	play, baby, days
14.	/əʊ/	as in	home, goat, snow
15.	/aɪ/	as in	rice, high, mile
16.	/aʊ/	as in	house, cow, louse
17.	/ɔɪ/	as in	moist, coil, toil,
18.	/ɪə/	as in	beer, near, here
19.	/eə/	as in	bear, pair, mere
20.	/ʊə/	as in	poor, tour, perpetual

As a listener, I am traumatized and harassed by much of what I hear. Indeed, my ears are jarred, pummelled and bombarded on a daily basis by a concrete horde of errors and negative linguistic deviations. I witness a lot of linguistic incest, I wince, I fuss, fidget and demonstrate, as I seek a Utopian escape route, but find none. Where can I escape to? I am surrounded and hemmed in by this linguistic dilemma; whether in the classroom, in the church, on the streets, at meetings, even with senior academics, or in casual conversation with colleagues and friends. It is quite discomfiting and frustrating but, of course, any thought of *If you can't beat them join them* must be ruled out. There is no hiding place; a “dilemma” that is akin to the psalmist's: Whither shall I go from thy spirit? / Or whither shall I flee from thy presence? If I ascend to heaven, thou art there! / If I make my bed in Sheol, thou art there! / If I take the wings of the morning / and dwell in the uttermost parts of the sea, / even there thy hand shall lead me ...”

This is a delightful gathering of town and gown, still “university people” predominate, whether they are experts in language or literature, scholars of humanistic dispositions, or academics and specialists from other disciplines. Without appearing to pontificate or ascend the moral high horse linguistically, I cannot but assert in the most unequivocal of terms that we – Nigerians, academics, anyone who uses language in and outside this great Ivory tower – must grasp and appreciate that in the words of Okoh: language [like miscommunication] is “clearly no respecter of persons” (*Marrying* 212).

Especially as *university people* then, we must endeavour to rise above such common *howlers* as we here list:

- Sir, **Vice-Chancellor** is written as a hyphenated word (never as **Vice Chancellor** or *Vice chancellor*, both of which constitute an affront on our Vice-Chancellors!)
- We do not **convocate** (even though from Latin, the verb is *convoco*, *convocare*): instead, Sir, we CONVOKE after successfully completing our academic programmes (not *programs*!)
- We do not **write** exams: In English we *do, take, or sit* for them
- We must not be caught regarding the following, which are unEnglish: ***discuss about, *return/reverse back, *can be able, or *must have to**
- We talk of an academic **session** (not *section*)
- A Senate meeting, or any other meeting, for that matter cannot start **by** 10 am
- *Shining, dining* and *anointing* never double the “n” (never write or spell **shinning, *dinning, *annointing*)
- **Fulbright** is spelt with one “l,” never with two

For good measure, I add a number of words that are particularly badly handled and thus contribute to my “pummelling” experience:

ask/a:sk/

axe/æks/

bare /beə r /

weapon /'wep.ən/

world /wɜ:ld/	breadth /bredθ/
Wednesday /'wenz.deɪ/	king /kɪŋ/
divorce /dɪ'vɔ:s/	nurse /nɜ:s/
first /'fɜ:st/	strength /streŋθ/
foetus /'fi:təs/	tomb /tu:m/
bird /bɜ:d/	church /tʃɜ:tʃ/
third /θɜ:d/	listen /'lɪs. ə n/
thirst /θɜ:st/	wing /wɪŋ/
person /'pɜ:s ə n/	word /wɜ:d/

As *university people*, our attitude to language use must change. Once we truly “repent,” our writing will change and those memos from our offices will be better written and vetted. Our speaking will change and we will begin to pay attention to even, say, our stress and intonation, as we approach such words as the following, which we may truly have been *Piginizing* or *Nigerianizing*:

water	Mary	coffee
baby	turkey	party
motor	monkey	uncle

All this points to the hard work involved; by this I mean giving far more attention to our language. Just as we give particular thought to the level of our hygiene (we care for our clothes, teeth, eyes, mouth, bedrooms, etc), we must now be geared towards stepping up attention regarding what I have called our *linguistic hygiene*. We do not have to be medical doctors to know how to take care of our bodies or appreciate the overall importance of personal hygiene. Those who approach their personal hygiene with enormous care, and take special care of their personal surroundings are likely to be healthy and fit. We can also derive enormous joy and health by paying particular attention to our language. Living in a dirty environment cannot be without consequences: it can be quite costly indeed. If our language use is poor, or we can only afford what I sometimes call in class, *I dey come, I dey go English*, there may

well be dire consequences also. Poor language use can humiliate and disgrace us, and make several doors in life to be shut firmly against us.

While, of course, people talk of the four language skills, I have focused on oral skills for two reasons. Firstly, it remains a dreaded domain and one in which people usually maintain a *laissez-faire* attitude. This is a far from a salubrious situation, as there is simply nothing so esoteric about oral skills or English pronunciation that any serious user of the language cannot conquer. Secondly, speaking necessarily takes place “live.” In other words, it assumes more significance, considering its spontaneity and immediacy, even the possibility of attracting censure if you bungle or abuse some linguistic structures in your speech. Our speech promptly makes an impression on our audience because, as in the performance of an *oral* literary text, both interlocutor and audience are in a face-to-face situation. It is indeed important to give particular attention to our **oral skills**; how we *pronounce* words, use intonation and stress, or such other features as politeness markers, to avoid linguistic aggression or violence.

4.1 Conclusion

Mr Vice-Chancellor, distinguished ladies and gentlemen, we enter the very last segment of the journey which we all willingly embarked on together say about an hour ago now beckons. My brief here then is to reaffirm some of the signposts we all saw on the journey. Then, of course, I will leave with all some of my thoughts or projections for the future. One of the cornerstones of my teaching and research has been to preach a particular gospel; oral literature is a full-fledged phenomenon, not an appendage of another. For this reason, I argue vehemently that oral literature cannot be tied to the apron strings of the meddlesome *Big Brother* but instead, must be accorded much the same treatment as literature, that is, as an essentially *literary* phenomenon. Indeed, feedbacks from colleagues and especially students suggest that the “gospel” is taking roots and making some impact. In both my undergraduate and MA classes, there are clear indications that even the students have become emboldened to reject particularly any suggestion of oral literature being tied to the apron strings of written literature or

any other preposterous prescriptions of the meddlesome and elitist cabal christened *Big Brother*.

Sir, it may be said that while I bask in a profession promoting the language and literature of another culture, the selfsame aspects of my culture are perched precariously on the precipice of extinction. With this realization, I threw myself with every zeal into the studying the Enuani, with the essential objective of contributing my own little quota to their culture. Thus, I have been engaged in variously publishing or documenting some aspects of their culture, from, say their language, their onomastics, to their oral literature.

To situate my work properly, then, much of my scholarly effort has focused on the Enuani, whose “culture in general, and oral literature in particular, have been grossly underexposed and neglected” (Okoh, “Categories” 1). Osia rightly considers the Enuani “a people who have been burdened by the lack of documented and interpreted history” (*Foreword*, Ohadike xi.). The reality of such under-exposure of the Enuani culture remains - whether we are dealing with the sociology, political institutions, religion, or arts of the people. In fact, Mr Vice-Chancellor, I hazard a guess that a good number of those seated here may well be asking, Who, indeed, are the Enuani, to whom a substantial portion of this Inaugural is devoted. Is it not ironical that while an Inaugural audience cannot throw questions at me, I myself can ask them? Indeed, I must now make extremely good use of my diplomatic immunity or better still, poetic licence, before it is withdrawn (obviously in the next few minutes). How many have the slightest inkling that the Enuani engaged the British colonial government in the Ekumekwu wars which were fought between 1899 and 1904? How many in Nigeria have read of a certain revolutionary, Kaduna Nzeogwu, or are able to locate Okpanam on a map of Delta State or Nigeria? How many people know that the Enuani region has produced such military chiefs as Paul Dike, Joe Achuzia, Michael Okwechime, and Conrad Nwawo? Has anyone ever considered the Obi of Idumuje Uno as one of the longest reigning monarchs (if not the longest; see [http:// umuanionoma.com/about/us](http://umuanionoma.com/about/us)) in the world? Which region has ever produced **four** Nigerian football captains

(one, Oliseh, is of the wider Aniom stock): Stephen Keshi, Nduka Ugbade and, of course, the genius himself called Jay Jay?

Mr Vice-Chancellor, it must be observed that sadly, the overwhelming majority of Nigerian universities (and that includes the only *unique* Nigerian university) do not really teach English to their students, that is, as a *service* course. For one thing, English Departments across the nation lack the requisite staff to teach the Use of English or Communication Skills in English course with effect or professionalism. In English-medium universities worldwide, such a course is designed specifically to enable the freshman in *specific* Departments understand the *particular* language of his discipline. Training is thus mandatory in ESP for the would-be U of E teacher or lecturer. The trained ESP teacher is able liaise with subject teachers and design courses for students in, say, Medicine, Technology, Fine Arts or Mathematics.

In presenting several papers both at home and abroad, therefore, I have endeavoured to show how imperative it is for Nigerian universities to arise from their sleeping state and teach ESP or EAP to the students, instead of the anachronistic General English being taught now, which in no way equips the aware of to tell freshman with the *specific* language of his discipline. My long association with that course quite proves to me how minimally beneficial it is for our students, considering the enormous challenges by which it is best at present. I have argued especially with regard to grammatical teaching that on account of obvious reasons, the overwhelming majority of the lectures are *cheating*, not *teaching* the language. Since the inception, even conclusion, of the COMSKIP project, I have endeavoured to make *communicative competence* the major target in my U of E classes, rather than propagate the traditional and outmoded but predominant pattern of *teacher-centredness* or bare grammatical teaching.

Similarly, in fact, I have argued that since no oral literature is not on the curricula of both the primary and secondary school those who teach literature are also cheating the system as they present only a partial, indeed fully incomplete component of the subject.

I am truly astounded at the common phenomenon of abusing language or doing violence to it, whether at the lexical, morphological, grammatical, syntactic, or semantic level. In much of my research and teaching, therefore, I emphasize the overall importance of paying attention to the use and correctness of language. The seeds sown in this regard can be said, at least to a degree, to have fallen on fertile ground as some of my students confirm that such insistence has challenged them to express themselves better. In my personal fight against poor English, I have what I consider to be valid contributions to the linguistic health. Since poor writing insults the eyes and assaults our aesthetic sensibilities; I have pulled down signposts (not in an iconoclastic manner), insisting that every inscription be accurate linguistically. I have caused some documents uploaded on the Web by the university to undergo some correction, as well as encouraged some members of this community on writing better memos and other forms of communication.

As an ESP teacher, I am also a teacher trainer. For those teachers who have as yet no language teaching background, a lot of insights can be gained from my publications regarding how they can become more effective in their classroom interaction and procedures. Since I encounter teachers at all levels of education, I consider myself as contributing not only to the teachers' development, but also to the development of ELT in Nigeria. For such teachers, the relationship of interdependence between language and literature, which I emphasize, can be effectively exploited, in say, teaching literary texts, to develop, improve, or consolidate their students' linguistic skills.

I will not conclude this work without at least some suggestions from my own research. Clearly, our curricula needs far more oral literature input. It has indeed become imperative not only to achieve this at university level, but also to have the subject introduced and taught at both the primary and secondary school levels. Students of other disciplines (non-humanistic) should be introduced also to oral literature. This can be incorporated in such a course as GES 103.

The universities should stop paying lip service to the teaching of the U of E and take practical steps to realign and reposition that course for maximum effectiveness, in other words, to achieve the essential goal of *communicative competence*. In conclusion, Mr Vice-Chancellor, I am not here concerned with possible contributions emanating from my research and teaching. I am already anticipating my future contributions. Given the present economic climate, my ESP background equips me to harness the entrepreneurial potentialities of the English Studies Department. By this I mean packaging and selling courses, with an emphasis on targeting *vocational, professional and work place* English. But as a Department we need more empowerment in training and finance. Once such issues are sorted out, we will set to work and deliver the goods. In the words of Winston Churchill, *Give us the tools and we will finish the job*.

I wish to conclude by underlining a reality which, from my presentation, you will agree is far from tangential to my scholarship. More specifically, I have been guided in all of my research as well as classroom interaction by what I consider a particularly uncomplicated philosophy: building “bridges,” establishing and exploring synergies, even interdisciplinary collaborations must be a profitable and productive approach to scholarship, especially in a developing society like Nigeria. Indeed, if we are to adequately capture the essence of man and his society (both of which are quite complex), then, we must recognize that, in the words of J. P. Clark-Ambakederemo, *Two hands a man has*. Indeed, we should be reminded of the words of a fascinating and towering Achebean character that “The world is like a mask dancing. If you want to see it well you do not stand in one place.” So, collaborative research efforts and interfacing are necessary, between, say, language and literature, language and political science, geology and linguistics, literature and nutrition, Feminism and Medicine.

Mr Vice-Chancellor, distinguished Ladies and Gentlemen; the time approaches for me to bow out. You have listened attentively, and I know you have heard me. My parting question for all is one that should

be personalized thus: What shall I do, to be saved, to be delivered from poor pronunciation, grammatical infelicities or a general abuse of language and its use? The times of ignorance, that is, the period before this Lecture, God overlooked. From now on, then, please be alert, lively and alive regarding your language. **Thank you, thank you, thank you, and God bless!**

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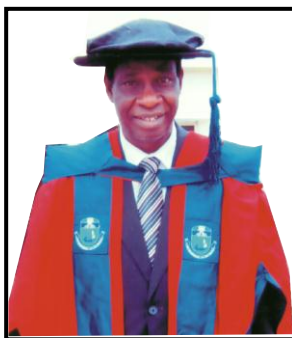
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CITATION

on



PROFESSOR NKEM OKOH

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Professor Nkem Okoh was born on January 21, 1948 at Bida, in the present Niger State. His parents, Mr Onwuegbusiuno Nicholas Okoh and Achanu Alice Okoh (nee Konyeshi), hail from Idumuje Uno in Aniocha North LGA of Delta State. He had his early education at St Patrick's Primary School, Bida, Pilgrim Baptist Primary School, Issele-

Azagba and Oligbo Baptist Primary School, Issele-Uku. On completing his primary school education, Professor Okoh proceeded to Pilgrim Baptist Grammar School, Ewohimi, Esan East LGA and later complemented this with a Teachers' Grade 2 certificate, obtained from Pilgrim Baptist Teacher Training College, Issele-Uku in 1970. In 1972, he was admitted to study English at the University of Nigeria, Nsukka. He graduated from UNN with a Bachelor of Arts degree (Second Class Upper) in 1975. In 1976 he was admitted to the University of Sheffield, England, where he obtained a Master of Arts degree in Modern African Literature in 1977. Between 1980 and 1984, he studied at the University of London's School of Oriental and African Studies (SOAS), where he bagged his doctoral degree in African oral literature. In 1991 he earned a Master of Science degree from the University of Aston in Birmingham, UK, in TESP (Teaching of English for Specific Purposes).

Professor Nkem Okoh considers teaching as the only vocation meant for him. He started his teaching career at the tertiary level during his National Youth Service assignment at Bayero University College, Kano from 1975 through 1976 where he lectured in English at the Preliminary Division. In August 1976 he joined the University of Port Harcourt, Port Harcourt, as a Graduate Assistant and a pioneer member of the School of Humanities, indeed as a pioneer member of staff of the new University College, affiliated to the University of Lagos. He rose through the ranks to become a Professor in 2007 in the Department of English Studies. At the Department, he has taught a wide range of courses such as Introduction to Literature, Communication Skills in English, World *Englishes*, African Literature, African Oral Literature, Business Communication, Structure of English, Advanced English Composition, Grammar and Composition, Academic Writing, English in Nigeria and Research Methods.

A particular inspiring thought that has guided Professor Nkem Okoh as a scholar maintains as follows: "A society that cannot read should, at least, watch. A society that is devoid of both is headed in the Carthaginian direction." In this is located his principal research interests, which lie in written discourse (especially research writing and

academic writing), World Englishes, EAP grammar, oral literature, English in Nigeria, and sociolinguistics. Since 1984 Professor Okoh has supervised over 200 Undergraduate Long essays, over 40 Masters' theses in the following areas: Oral Literature, Modern African Literature, World *Englishes*, Language Contact, the Teaching of English as a Second language, Sociolinguistics, and ESP/EAP. Between 1999 and now, he has successfully supervised 3 PhDs in Oral Literature and at present, he is supervising 6 Masters theses, 3 PhD dissertations; as well as co-supervising 1 PhD in ESL and 1 PhD in Language and Communication. He remains a committed classroom teacher and researcher.

Professor Okoh attended several specialist EAP teaching sessions – workshops and seminars – in different Nigerian Universities between 1989 and 1993, under the Communication Skills in English (COMSKIP) Project organized by ODA/British Council, National Universities Commission and the University of Reading, United Kingdom. Through his career at the University of Port Harcourt, Professor Okoh has authored seven books and co-edited one book with Professor Onyemaechi Udumukwu. Professor Okoh has published well over 55 articles in international and local journals and chapters in books. He is equally regular at academic conferences, both overseas and in Nigeria.

Professor Nkem Okoh, over the years and in the course of his service, has earned the following recognitions and awards:

Federal Government Scholarship (for Undergraduate Studies, 1973-1975); British Council Scholar (1990-1991); Award of Excellence from Student Union Government, August 1999; Merit Award from NASELL (1998, 2004, 2009); Delta Students' Postgraduate Association, University of Port Harcourt; Congratulatory Letter (as PG Hall Warden) from Vice-Chancellor (1990); Congratulatory Letter (as Assistant Hall Warden) from Dean, Student Affairs (1994); Merit Award from NASELL (2010)

University Positions Held:

Mr Vice-Chancellor, Profesor Okoh has served in numerous committees in the University of Port Harcourt. Please permit me to list some of these.

Acting Head of Department, English Studies (1997-1999); Examination Officer, English Studies Department, 1989-1990; Assistant Hall Warden, New Undergraduate Hall (1990); Hall Warden, Postgraduate Halls, (1992-1994); Member, Graduate Studies Committee, English Studies Department (from 1990 till present); Chairman, Departmental Graduate Studies Committee (from 2007 till 2010); Chairman, Organizing Committee for the proposed International Conference on Language, Literature and the Arts in the Niger Delta; Member, General Studies Board (from 1993-2007); Member of Senate as Acting Head of Department, EST (1997-1999); Member, Faculty of Humanities Appointments and Promotion Committee (1998-1999, 2007 till present); Head of Department, English Studies (November 2008 till February 2011); Member of University Senate (2007 till present); Member, English Studies Departmental Appointments & Promotion Committee (1998-1999, 2007 till present); Chairman, Departmental Graduate Studies Committee (from June 2011); IELTS Examiner 2011-2012

Positions as external examiner/Assessor

Professor Okoh has held several positions as External Examiner or Assessor positions as the following: Department of English and Literary Studies, Imo State University, Owerri, 1999-2001; External Examiner, Bori Polytechnic, 1999; External Assessor (Principal Lecturers), Abia State Polytechnic, 2007; External Assessor (Principal/Chief Lecturers), Abia State Polytechnic, 2009;. External Examiner, Department of English and Literary Studies, Niger Delta University, Wilberforce Island, 2010.

Editorial Positions:

Professor Okoh has held the following editorial positions:

Associate Editor, GES 100.0 (*Communication Skills in English Section General Studies Textbook* (1994); Co-editor, *General Studies Department Brochure*, University of Port Harcourt, 2000; Co-editor, *Communication Skills in English Textbook*, 2009; Associate Editor, *Working Papers: Journal of English Studies*. Journal of the English Studies Department, University of Port Harcourt; Associate Editor, *Kiabara: Journal of Humanities*: Journal of the Faculty of Arts, University of Port Harcourt; Member, Editorial Board, *Abraka Journal of Education*; Consulting Editor, *BETFA: Journal of the Ogbomosho Circle*; Assessor/Course Material Editor, National Open University; Member, Editorial Board, *Xpression: Journal of the English Language Teachers Association of Nigeria* (2006 till present).

Membership of Academic Bodies

Professor Okoh is a member of the following professional academic bodies:

National Association of Lecturers of English for Academic Purposes (NALEAP); English Language Teachers' Association of Nigeria (ELTAN); Literary Society of Nigeria (LSN); Nigeria English Studies Association (NESA); Modern Language Association of Nigeria (MLAN); National Association of Teachers and Researchers in English as a Second Language (NATRESL); International Association for World Englishes (IAWE); International Association of Teachers of English as a Foreign Language (IATEFL); International Society of Oral Literature in Africa (ISOLA); International Council of Onomastic Sciences (ICOS).

Community Service outside the University

IPUN Town Union (Patron); *Otu Mmuta* Cultural Association, Nigeria (National Secretary, 2002 till present); *Izu Anioma*, Port Harcourt Chapter (Secretary, 2004-2011); Baptist Student Fellowship (Patron),

Baptist Men's Fellowship, Faith Baptist Church, Port Harcourt President (two terms; 1992/1995), Postgraduate Christian Fellowship, University of Port Harcourt (Patron); Global Mission (Nigerian Baptist Convention) Board, Etche Home Mission; Rivers Baptist Conference Education Board (Member, 2020 till present); Faith Baptist Church, Port Harcourt, Certificate of Appreciation (Best Sunday School Teacher, (1989).

Religious Life

Professor Okoh is a committed Christian. Not only is he an ordained Deacon of the Nigerian Baptist Convention, he believes that what has been uppermost is God's mercies on him, rather than so-called achievements. As a believer, Professor Okoh talks about his numerous testimonies regarding the efficacy, immutability, even contemporary relevance of God's word. He considers the Bible to be the greatest of all books, "and one that provides *all* the answers, whether we are dealing with Medicine, Engineering, Aeronautics, Biology, governance, or human relationships" (Blurb, *Faith and Jokes*; forthcoming)

Hobbies and Social Life

Professor Okoh is a keen sports enthusiast who has also engaged in a number of sports. In the hurdles event at the 1969 Midwestern Nigeria Amateur Athletic Association Championships, he returned a time of 16.3 seconds, which was then a State record. He played "some good football" at both PBGS, Ewohimi, and PBTTC, Issele-Uku. His football coach, Mr John Ojidoh of the then NFA, wanted him to sign for Bendel Insurance in 1970, but the young player had since set his eyes on first becoming a university graduate. In his three years at UNN, Professor Okoh played in three NUGA games. His hobbies include extensive reading, reading for pleasure, gardening and extremely *heavy doses* of football watching.

Professor Okoh has a catholic taste in music – from pop, Indian flutes and Celtic pipes, to Beethoven and Mozart, Gospel, and highlife. His is a prolific music collector and can hardly have enough of any kind of music or of such artistes as the Beatles, Simon & Garfunkel, Sam Cooke, Ofege, The Everly Brothers, Musical Youth, Bob Miga and the Strangers, Frankie Edwards, Rex Lawson, Saint Augustine, Erasmus Jenewari and Shola Allyson Obaniyi, to name just a few. He is also a compulsive singer of hymns, and considers the *Baptist Hymnal* the most exciting and enduring hymnbook.

Family Life:

Professor Nkem Okoh is married to the very *wife of his youth*, the ever youthful Mrs Esther Ndidi Okoh (nee Enyi). The marriage is blessed with four wonderful girls and a *beautiful* boy (the best adjective for a male in the midst of women!). He is a firm believer in the power of the family, as well as in God's own special purpose for the family itself.

Mr Vice-Chancellor Sir, I have great pleasure in presenting to you the 97th Inaugural lecturer, Professor Nkem Okoh.