

# Exploring the Ideological Use of Grammatical Structures in a Written Text: Applications for Students of Literature

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## Abstract

By the fall of Colonialism in the mid-20<sup>th</sup> century, a plethora of writers and critics mostly from the excolonies started to write back to the Empire. Being categorized as *Postcolonial*, this group has used for the most part the language of the colonizers for their writing. Thus the latter has imposed its own criteria on the used language. This research has chosen Chinua Achebe's magnum opus, *Things Fall Apart*, as its language is English: the language imposed on Nigeria and many other colonized nations. He wrote this novel supposedly as a reaction against European novels that depicted Africans as uncivilized people who needed to be civilized by Europeans. Adopting Fairclough's approach to *Critical Discourse Analysis* to analyze the text for the ideological use of certain grammatical structures, the present paper argues that Achebe, despite his nationality, is virtually writing as a western literary figure who has set his fictions in Nigeria. This goes contrary to what the novelist has embarked on; it still perpetuates the same African stereotypes.

**Keywords:** Achebe, Critical Discourse Analysis, Postcolonialism, Things Fall Apart, Grammar

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## 1. Introduction

Postcolonialism is an approach founded after the fall of colonialism in the middle of the 20<sup>th</sup> century with its heyday marked in the 1970s and 1980s (Abrams, 1999; Childs & Fowler, 2004). Writers and critics from different

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areas started to write back against the colonialism, most of whom using the language of those colonizers for their own writings (Ashcroft, Griffiths, & Tiffin, 1994, p. 38). Chinua Achebe, a celebrated African author of postcolonial literary works, wrote one of his world-famous novels, *Things Fall Apart*, in colonizers' language. *Things Fall Apart* creates a clear view of Igbo cultures including democratic institution, tolerance of other culture, a degree of redistribution of wealth and compelling art, poetry and music. This literary masterpiece narrates the story of Igbo people before and after the arrival of European missionaries whose imperialistic notions almost destroy the religion and culture of the colonized.

Of the reasons that *Things Fall Apart* received worldwide attention could have been the choice of language, the theme, and the scope of readers for whom Achebe has concocted an understandable structure. This study aims to reflect on the chosen language of Achebe's *Things Fall Apart*, English, by adopting Fairclough's (1989) approach to critical discourse analysis (CDA).

Studying the concepts of colonialism and colonial literature, one encounters the ideas of self or center and other. Colonialists assume themselves at the center and the holders of civilization. They see this act of civilizing a burden on their shoulders and which has been well reflected in literature. *Things Fall Apart*, set in the 1890s, portrays the clash between Nigeria's white colonial government and the traditional culture of the indigenous Igbo people. Achebe's novel shatters the stereotypical European portraits of native Africans. He is careful to portray the complex, advanced social institutions and artistic traditions of Igbo culture prior to its contact with Europeans. Yet, he is just as careful not to stereotype the Europeans. This novel is not a thing of the past. This fiction has become world-famous; hence, the influence of this work also extended beyond the very English readers. It has had its effect on numerous writers from Africa. This influence of Achebe on a variety of writers shows the impact of Achebe's borrowed

language and form and how he has opened up a new potentiality for being colonized under different formulations. It should be acknowledged here that Achebe claimed it was his own language used for his own new purposes (Benson & Conolly, 2005, p. 15).

Remembering that three quarters of world population have been affected directly by colonization and the other one quarter belongs to either the colonizer's population or feed on the globalization process, it becomes really significant as Achebe's borrowed English language and standardized culture and literature stand as an epitome nowadays for almost all postcolonial fiction and (nonfiction) writers. The practice ushers a jump into a glocalized world. Actually, despite the novel having been examined from different literary perspectives (*postcolonial, feminist, archetypal, new historical, etc.*), linguistic analysis of the text holds or resolves further mysteries that might escape the eyes of the reader. The following analysis illustrates how the linguistic form of *Things Fall Apart* is attached to the colonialist ideology and domination, despite its declared affinity to postcolonialism. This view is of many critics. Achebe's production in English language according to a proposition from Fairclough (1989) reveals that he also shares similar prototypes in his book. Fairclough divides features of a text into different categories: vocabulary, grammar, and textual structure. It appears that following up grammar necessities and study of the sentences are the foundational bricks for analyzing the explicit and implicit discursive implications in the text. While the overall structure of the novel is considered, the analysis focuses on sentences chosen for efficient analysis to clarify the purposes of this paper. Four questions relevant here are sketched under the grammar category that can be listed in short as follows:

- 1) What experiential values do grammatical features have?
- 2) What relational values do grammatical features have?
- 3) What expressive values do grammatical features have?
- 4) How are (simple) sentences linked together?

The features of the grammar of the text will be studied under these four questions to analyze the ideological implications.

### **2.1 What Experiential Values do Grammatical Features Have?**

Question one of the four questions on the analysis of the grammatical features of a text is concerned with the experiential values of the grammatical features. This question is moreover followed by six subquestions, respectively: *Is agency unclear? Are processes what they seem? Are nominalizations used? Are sentences active or passive? Are sentences positive or negative? and What types of process and participant predominate?*

Under the analysis of the grammatical features of the text, the notion of the readers is still of importance. In this story, the narrator sometimes presents the agency while it can be absent. For instance, in the following excerpt, while the narrator can hide the agency of the sentence as usual, he presents it: As the Ibo says: "When the room is shining the cripple becomes hungry for a walk" (Achebe, 2627). The narrator, nonetheless, could use other statements like *as the saying goes...* and then bring the saying for the readers. In fact, by presenting the agency, the writer clarifies that the readers of this story are not the Ibo. The relationship between text and social structures, thus to say, is an indirect one. It is mediated by the discourse that the text is a part of, because a text and the features of it "become real, socially operative, if they are embedded in social interaction, where texts are produced and interpreted against a background of common-sense assumptions which gives textual features their values" (Fairclough, 1989, p. 140). Other examples of the kind are sometimes very direct:

If the clan had disobeyed the Oracle they would surely have been beaten, because their dreaded agadi-nwayi would never fight what the Ibo call a fight of blame. (Achebe, 2628)

The New Yam Festival was thus an occasion for joy throughout Umuofia. And every man, whose arm was strong, as the Ibo people say, was expected to invite large numbers of guests from far and wide. (Achebe, 2639)

This kind of narration shows the narrator as an insider and on larger scales leads the reader to assume the Ibo people as the others. One flagrant example is the following commentary that the narrator adds up complimenting the Ibo people:

Any wonder then that his son Okonkwo was ashamed of him [Unoka (Okonkwo's father)]? Fortunately, among these people a man was judged according to his worth and not according to the worth of his father. (Achebe, 2626)

In the above excerpt, the narrator of the story directly mentions the word 'people' that signifies the otherness of the Ibo to both the writer and the readers (For different ideas on this matter and how later writers have moved beyond it the reader might see Tunca, 2014).

When a writer wishes to present some real or imaginary action, event or even a saying, there is often a "choice between different grammatical processes and participant types", and the selection that is made can be ideologically significant" (Fairclough, 1989, p. 120). A sentence of the 'declarative' sort has a subject (S) followed by a verb (V); this V may or may not be followed by one or more other parts like object (O), complement (C), adjunct (A) (Fairclough, 1989, p. 121). There are three main types of simple sentences; below are three sample sentences having Okonkwo as the subject (S):

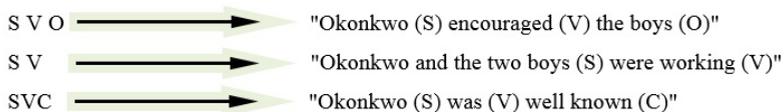


Figure 1. Okonkwo as the subject (S)

Notice that both O and C can follow V in these examples. The difference is that 'O, but not C, can be turned into S of an equivalent passive sentence'. This is possible with all the SVO examples, for instance, the boys were encouraged by Okonkwo, her heart was won by Okonkwo, things were never done by Okonkwo (Fairclough, 1989, p. 121). The sentences made up around the main character of the story, Okonkwo, are more in SVO. The number of SVO sentences in active voice, having Okonkwo as the agent, conspicuously outweighs the sentences in the passive voice. For an instance of this sort, notice the excerpt below:

He [Okonkwo] (S) was (V) still young (C) but he (C) had won (V) fame as the greatest wrestler in the nine villages. He (S) was (V) a wealthy farmer (C) and had (V) two barns full of yams, and had just married (V) his third wife (O). To crown it all he (S) had taken (V) two titles (O) and had shown (V) incredible prowess (O) in two inter-tribal wars. And so although Okonkwo (S) was (V) still young (C), he (S) was (V) already one of the greatest men (C) of his time... Okonkwo (S) had clearly washed (V) his hands (O) and so he (S) ate (V) with kings and elders (C). And that was how he (S) came to look (V) after – the doomed lad (S) [who] was sacrificed (V) to the village of Umuofia by their neighbours (S) to avoid war and bloodshed. The ill-fated lad (S) was called (V) Ikemefuna. (Achebe, 2626)

Such choices to "foreground or background agency may be consistent, automatic and commonsensical", and as a result, ideological" (Fairclough, 1989, p. 121). The above excerpt clearly shows how the writer had put Okonkwo as the agent of a bunch of sentences and at the same time, in presenting the child, the sentence structure changes from active to passive (The ill-fated lad (S) was called (V) Ikemefuna (O)), while this sentence could be an (SV) sentence (e.g. the lad's name (S) was (V) Ikemefuna (C)). This juxtaposition shows how the writer had approached the two stances

differently. It could be, as Fairclough (1989) mentions, commonsensical. The writer has grown up the same brain of storytelling as that of the Western writers. In doing so, he built up a heroic character that is identifiable with those in the Western definitions. Of course, Achebe is deliberately showing us the failings of the macho Okonkwo with these structures. One assumes, sometimes, that this is very deliberate writing. The fall of this heroic character, thus to speak, is the fall of the things apart. In the third part of the story, where the missionaries come to the village, the character 'Okonkwo' fades away. The grammar, moreover, shifts against this character.

The Commissioner (S) became (V) angry and red in the face (C). He (S) warned (V) the men (O) that unless they [the villagers] (S) produced (V) Okonkwo (O) forthwith he [the commissioner] (S) would lock (V) them (O) all up. (Achebe, 2708)

Okonkwo is the object of these final paragraphs of the story. Okonkwo, in fact, occupies the position of Ikemefuna, who once was sympathized; and he was the (O) of the sentence. Chapter twenty-four starts with a sentence in passive voice:

Okonkwo and his fellow prisoners (S) were set (V) free as soon as the fine (S) was paid (V). (Achebe, 2704)

This sentence could be in an active voice by putting Okonkwo and the fellow prisoners as the agents (e.g., Okonkwo and his fellow Prisoners (S) became (V) free (C) as soon as the villagers (S) paid (V) the fine (O)). The writer, however, is trumpeting the fall of the main character by focusing on him, not as the agent, but as the patient of the sentence. Still the subtlety of the book is that the fall of Okonkwo, for all his failings, remains assumingly tragic. This is captured by the agency shift noted, which invokes passing of power to the white colonialists, that is the theme of Achebe's novel. This continues up until the end of the story, at the loss of the main character:

Exploring the Ideological ...

When he [Okonkwo] (S) has been buried (V)  
we (S) will then do (V) our duty (O) by him.  
[...]That man [Okonkwo] (S) was (V) one of  
the greatest men (C) in Umuofia. You (S)  
drove (V) him [Okonkwo] (O) to kill himself  
and now he (S) will be buried (V) like a dog  
(C) [...] (Achebe, 2708-9)

The protagonist, who is at the center of the story, falls apart hence things fall apart. The first sentence is in passive voice and represents a process (burying) and the (S) is Okonkwo. The second excerpt has two sentences, first of which is an (SVC) on the popularity of Okonkwo, and this is immediately followed by an active sentence whereby Okonkwo is put as the (O) of an active sentence.

The protagonist of the story reveals a set of semantic options that leads to a concoct of a character that is of a Western formulation and also touches on the matters of social situation. This is very much on a par with the Western colonialist society. The idea of centrality in the analyzed sentences is not whatsoever something apparent. They are "potential semantic options, not grammatical categories" (Halliday, 2003, p. 326).

## 2.2 What Relational Values Do Grammatical Features Have?

This question is followed by some other sub-questions that consider the modes of sentences, modality and pronouns. The subquestions are: "*What modes (declarative, interrogative, imperative) are used?*"; "*Are there important features of relational modality?*" and "*Are there pronouns we and you used, and if so, how?*" There are, following Fairclough (1989), "three major modes for a sentence – 'declarative', 'grammatical question' and 'imperatives' (Fairclough, 1989, p. 125). Here we follow the 'grammatical questions' and 'imperatives' in analyzing the ideological values of the sentence structures. Grammatical questions, including wh-questions and yes/no questions, have different values. "They may have value of a demand"

or they may be used for collecting information. Here is an effort to show how the grammatical questions related to Okonkwo are ideologically valued. The three parts of the story will be separately analyzed in terms of the questions and then it will be shown how the virility and position of Okonkwo will diminish as the story goes on.

### **2.2.1 Part one (chapter 1 through 14)**

Throughout this part, the questions are mostly yes/no questions that are seeking confirmation or disconfirmation. For the most part, Okonkwo asks questions, requiring pertinent replies, while when he is asked questions, the communication between the two:

"He belongs to the clan," he told her. "So look after him."

"Is he staying long with us?" she asked.

"Do what you are told, woman," Okonkwo thundered, and stammered. "When did you become one of the ndichie of Umuofia?"

And so Nwoye's mother took Ikemefuna to her hut and asked no more questions. (Achebe, 2629)

In the above excerpt, Okonkwo is asked a yes/no question. He refrains from a direct reply to the question based on what is asked, in so far as the answer is neither a confirmation (yes) nor a disconfirmation (no). The answer, however, not only is irrelevant, but also is an imperative ("Do what you are told, woman"), which is itself ideologically important (see Fairclough, 1989, pp. 157-158). The tone of Okonkwo's imperative is noteworthy here. Because this is a text and there is no voice tonality at hand, we rely on the subtextual commentary of the third person omniscient narrator, 'Okonkwo thundered'. To this end, it can be concluded that the tone is of a 'force' and 'strong command' (Halliday, 2002, p. 129). This shows the writer has decided to show the macho characteristics of Okonkwo (the case of imperatives will be explicated later on).

Rhetorical questions in "modern *speech-act theory*, through its 'illocutionary force' is not to question but to assert" (Abrams, 1999, p. 271). As we see here in the excerpt, Okonkwo is not looking forward to being replied. He asks the questions for assertions. The two rhetorical questions that Okonkwo asks Nwoye and Ikemefuna, moreover, have ideological implications. The two questions in the excerpt show the superiority of Okonkwo and his rhetorical tastes. Consider the same excerpt with ellipsis:

////////////////////////////////////  
//////// he [said] to Nwoye [:] "If you split  
another yam of this size, I shall break your  
jaw. You think you are still a child. I began to  
own a farm at your age. And you," he said to  
Ikemefuna,[becautious]  
////////////////////////////////////.  
(Achebe, 2637)

With this elliptic version of the same excerpt, one sees how the writer has ideologically made up a character that not only is authoritative, but also has rhetorical powers. Firstly, this sort of questioning shows his charismatic characteristic; secondly, it gives the text a sense of being a "literary" work, under Western definitions.

### 2.2.2 Part Two (chapter 15 through 20)

In the previous part on the analysis of the questions of the story, except for the final commentary on a soliloquy, we reached this consensus that the questions having Okonkwo as their axis were concocted in a way to show more the rigid and macho characteristics of Okonkwo. In the second part of the story (chapter fifteen through twenty), however, the posed questions are more for exchange of information than for showing the virility of Okonkwo:

"When did you set out from home?" asked Okonkwo.  
"We had meant to set out from my house before cockcrow," said Obierika. "But Nweke did not appear until it was quite light. Never make an early morning appointment with a

man who has just married a new wife." They all laughed.

"Has Nweke married a wife?" asked Okonkwo.

"He has married Okadigbo's second daughter," said Obierika. (Achebe, 2682-2683)

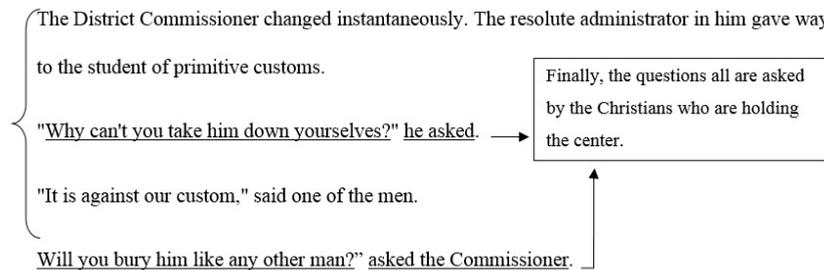
The Christians have already intruded into the land and things have changed. They, moreover, have jeopardized the position of Okonkwo and therefore Okonkwo as a dazzled man starts to ask questions for the sake of information:

"Let us not reason like cowards," said Okonkwo. "If a man comes into my hut and defecates on the floor, what do I do? Do I shut my eyes? No! I take a stick and break his head. That is what a man does. These people are daily pouring filth over us, and Okeke says we should pretend not to see." Okonkwo made a sound full of disgust. This was a womanly clan, he thought. Such a thing could never happen in his fatherland, Umuofia. (Achebe, 2690)

The second part of the work, as an intermediary part, is a dangling part where the overall paradigm of the whole land is in a state of oscillation. Okonkwo no more shows that manly character he used to show earlier in the first part of the story. That is, the first part of the story, thus to speak, is more that of an introductory chapter to Okonkwo and his position in the family and village. In the second part, the introduced position is in danger; hence, we see this change through the way of questioning. The writer of the story has ideologically put this state of oscillation in the form of questions and replies (Adendorff, 2004).

### 2.2.3 Part Three (chapter 21 through 25)

We understood that in the second part of the story, the mode of questioning changes and the questions that have Okonkwo at their axis, start to differ in tonality and purposes. We also realized the position that Okonkwo is holding is in a state of danger, hence he is confused about the Christian intruders, and starts asking questions for the sake of information. Under this part, the analyses of the questions will again further have Okonkwo at their axis. For a starter, consider the following questions asked about Okonkwo:



"We cannot bury him. Only strangers can. We shall pay your men to do it." (Achebe, 2707-2708)

Figure 2. Questions raised by those at the center

The newcomers who now are authoritative pose the final questions, in a place from whence Okonkwo had asked questions with authority. The indigenes of the area, so to speak, answer the questions thoroughly, which brings to one's mind a kind of master-slave hierarchy. The concepts of the questions, moreover, are for transformation of cultural differences, "will you bury him like any other man?" The writer of the story has tried to show the shift of a center and the authority of the protagonist through the exchanges of certain questions throughout the three parts of the story. This gesture has ushered the generation of the colonized and the power of the colonizer.

#### 2.2.4 Imperatives

Under imperative, as they are more used by the religious figures of the story, we touch on matters of religion in analyzing them. In a functional-grammatical approach to the notion of imperative as a MOOD, Hewings et al. (2005) maintain that "In an imperative clause, English uses the base form of the verb, without a subject" (6). That is to say, one initiates a clause with a verb, rather than a subject. Generally for the MOOD, as Hewings et al. maintain, the "[d]eclaratives, interrogatives and imperatives typically position the speaker/writer as, respectively, the provider of information, the requester of information, and the person asking the listener/reader to do something" (Hewings & Hewings, 2005, pp. 59-60).

There are a number of imperatives in the story. One of the blatant ideological usages is nonetheless in the following excerpt:

"How dare you, woman, to go before the mighty Agbala of your own accord? *Beware*, woman, lest he strike you in his anger. Bring me my daughter." (Achebe, 2666- 2667)

The religious figure of the area talks to Okonkwo about a ritual. She has to get Okonkwo's daughter with her for the sake of an observance, whatever, of which she has been prophesized by Agbala. Okonkwo refrains from observing Agbala's quest, insofar as his daughter is sick and hence asleep. She reprimands Okonkwo for his disrespectful action. In fact, Okonkwo is not observing a religious ritual; therefore, he is warned for his imprudence by the religious figure.

Achebe, in fact, is to suggest a set of religious ideas about the people of the story. Hence, he needs to bring verbally a context that readers are familiar with well, so as to concretize the ideas in this context. However, the reader must already be 'in possession of the ideas', in order to be able to "decipher the ideological system of discourse" (Eagleton, 1991, p. 14). Achebe,

therefore, firstly is in possession of Christian ideas and methodology. He is then able to use it for this purpose. This is the writer who communicates his intention through the Christian reader's background.

### **2.3 "What Expressive Values Do Grammatical Features Have?"**

This study, for question three together with the two subquestions of question two, aims at analyzing the expressive values of grammatical features of the dialogues between the two parties, the Ibo and the Christians. The reason in doing so is to find the ideological voice of the writer in the talks of the two. This debate in the final part of the story (chapter twenty-one) is of great importance, as the two parties meet and they, in a form of liberal debate, exchange ideas.

Here the novel seeks out to introduce two voices, one from the Ibo society, and the other from the Christians. The writer, nonetheless, has practiced upon a monologic form of storytelling, in which the author is at the control of the whole 'verbal give-and-take'.

Achebe, in fact, has put one voice in the novel and the two people are talking one thing. The dialogues, as was pointed out, are of few modals of any kind. In the process of the turn taking, neither of the parts interrupts the other in order to add up more explanation, to argue, or to practice autonomy. The dialogues are thus in equal turn-takings, and in this way the writer has equalized the two parties' participatory roles. The writer, from the beginning, is inculcating the idea that the two parties are having one same viewpoint, though with different methods. He has not left room for the reader to think and decide upon it through the dialogues of the two groups.

### **2.4 "How Are (Simple) Sentences Linked Together?"**

Question four of this study 'focuses on the connective (as opposed to experiential, relational and expressive) values of formal features of text' (Fairclough, 1989, p. 129). This question is followed by three subquestions, the first and second of which will be drawn upon briefly under the third sub-

question. However, on the other hand, the third subquestion will briefly study the pronouns as "means used for referring inside and outside the text". There are a number of 'grammatical devices' used "for referring in a reduced form to material previously introduced into a text"; thus to stop repetition. The most important ones are "the pronouns (*it, he, she, this, that, etc.*) and the definite article (*the*)" (Fairclough, 1989, p. 132). Another important subject that should be regarded in this part is, the writer's observation of the rules of spelling and grammar in referring to the word God (with an uppercase g) as He with an uppercase h. Here the grammatical features of this use of the pronoun 'He', with an uppercase h, together with he, with lower case h will be analyzed.

The lemma God in the debate (and generally in the story) is unique in itself. It begins with an uppercase g, and all the pronouns referring to it are, too, with uppercase h. It ideologically suggests that this entity is always one, and always capable of being distinguished at any place or part. For instance, the pronoun "he" and the "possessive pronoun his need pronouns to specify their reference and clarify the theme:

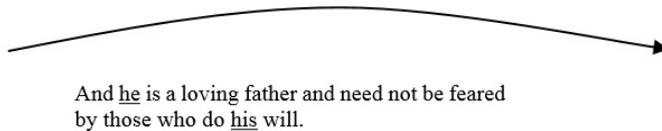
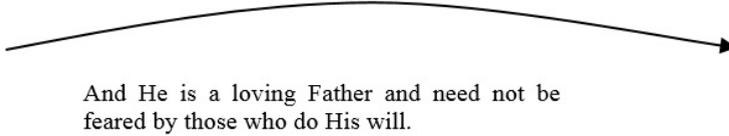


Figure 3. Referent to be defined by speech situation

The above line as an entity in itself is incomplete, since it demands aforementioned nouns, to which the pronouns refer. The referent to a pronoun (here he) is defined interpersonally, by the speech situation" (Halliday and Matthiessen, 2004, p. 325). Hence, the theme of the sentence without any pronouns is ambiguous; therefore, the theme of the sentence remains unspecified. Now consider the same sentence from the debate with pronouns starting with uppercase letters:



*Figure 4.* Referent implied by highlighted pronouns

This line is unique in itself. Although there are used pronouns without referent, the pronouns are themselves highlighted in a way that the referent is implied. The choice of this type of pronoun (He with an uppercase h) is due to the choice of the social situation. That is, "interpreting is a matter of assigning an actual situation to a particular type". The reader would understand the referent of this pronoun not because of the context, but for what Fairclough (1989) calls members' resources (MR). In fact, these cues refer to the aspects of the readers' MR in terms of which they interpret such representations in the text (Fairclough 1989, 150). Such a choice is thus situationally and societally based. On the other hand, the society that pays credence to the centrality of one Supreme Being, and acts upon meaning in a logocentric base, approves of those others who practice the same ideology. As it was already mentioned, the Western society is logocentric. Achebe, in order to make a meaningful concept of the Ibo society to the West, tries to show how they, too, have one structure, which legitimates and mediates: "It is the same with God, or Chukwu. He appoints the smaller gods to help Him because His work is too great for one person" (Achebe, 2697). So, it can be concluded that wording and the choice of grammar for highlighting the ideas are of great importance.

### **3. Conclusion**

Most of the so-called practitioners of Postcolonialism who have chosen English as the primary language of their text, this study concludes, have practiced intentionally or unintentionally the very process of Anglicizing the colonies. As they are still under the privileges of the Empire, they are using

the Empire's language with all its components and implications in order to express their true standpoints. To sum up, the primary goal of African novel is to focus on some of the confusing moral, ethical and political problems that native people of the continent face, whether the African author himself or herself was going to be a follower of the Western cultures and ethics as an isolated figure, or if he or she would closely identify with his or her own culture and ethics. Throughout the story it was understood that Achebe, in order to attract attentions of the English readers, followed the Imperial method both in narrative and in the use of language. The language, thus to say, had imposed its ideology on such writers whether consciously or unconsciously. Therefore, these writers especially Achebe, bear the name of the previously – directly – colonized nationalities as a link to transfer the underlying ideologies of the Colonizers into their nations. That is, they are originally from the colonized countries, but mentally, logically and academically very much English. They are, in fact, very much Western in practice. This contradicts Achebe's self-imposed mission; the same African stereotypes still reiterate in his world famous novel. It is true that language might be used as a means or weapon but one should not feel redundant and aim it at and shoot himself.

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