

## SPEECH STYLE-SHIFTS IN CHINUA ACHEBE'S *ARROW OF GOD*

**Chinyeaka, Laretta O.**

Department of English Language and Literature  
Nnamdi Azikiwe University, Awka  
Email: chinyeakalaura@yahoo.com

### **Abstract**

This paper examines the use of speech style shifts by interlocutors engaged in dialogues. In verbal discourse, interactants employ different speech styles in different situations. This is because no one speaks in exactly the same manner on all occasions. A number of factors inform these shifts in speech style such as the speaker, the addressee, the setting, topic of discourse and the purpose of the discourse among other factors. Using Chinua Achebe's *Arrow of God*, this study seeks to identify the speech style shifts in the dialogues of the characters and the motivations for the shifts. It also seeks to determine the way the shifts affected the relationships between the characters as well as the power structures that are at play. To achieve these objectives, eight sample excerpts purposively selected from the text were used as data. Findings revealed that the different speech style shifts identified were influenced mainly by the situation and social distance among the characters. Asymmetrical more than symmetrical relations were mostly at play.

**Key Words:** speech styles, style-shifting, speech event, social distance, power

### **Introduction**

In dialogues of characters in written prose as in ordinary face-to-face interactions, there is a tendency for display of shifts in the style of the speeches of interlocutors in different circumstances. Shifts in speech styles take place sometimes within the same conversation depending on the degree of the attention to the clarity of the discourse. A shift in speaking may be as a result of a change in the self-image that the speaker wishes to project, in the type of information to be communicated, in the situation the interactants find themselves such as a noisy background, arrival or departure of other individuals, the context of the dialogue and in the impression that the speaker has about the listener, for instance where he has a hearing impediment. These shifts depending on the occasion may be very formal, less formal or extremely formal and casual such as when the relationship between the interlocutors is very close or when they belong to different social classes. These shifts in style may be due to the speaker, the addressee, the age or the social background of the addressee, the social distance or the situation. When such necessary adjustments in speech style are not made, it would attract social sanctions in formal situations for instance or if the purpose is misconstrued by the interactants, problems such as feelings of inferiority, contempt or avoidance may arise on the part of the interactants of lower status while the one of higher status may exhibit an air of pride, arrogance or insult. In informal interactions also, if such style shifts in speech are not applied or communication. This study seeks to identify the speech style shifts in the speech styles of the characters in *Arrow of God*, what the motivation for the shifts are and how they affect the relationship between the characters. It showcases the different applications of speech style-shifts and the

speech situations and speech events that informed the shift in the speech styles of the characters. To this end, the following questions were raised: what are the speech style-shifts in the text? What are the motivations for the speech style-shifts? How did they affect the relationship between the characters?

### **Synopsis of the Novel**

*Arrow of God* is Chinua Achebe's third novel. It is set in a traditional Igbo community when the European administrative officials had taken a firm hold of the land. At the beginning of the novel, Ezeulu, the priest of the god, Ulu is performing the monthly yam ritual which culminates to the New Yam festival. After the festival the yams can be harvested from the farms. Meanwhile, the white administrators under the leadership of Mr. Winterbottom and the missionaries have gained a firm foothold in the district and their influence is all over the place. Ezeulu senses a wind of change and decides to exercise caution. While still committed to the traditional ways of the chief priest of Ulu, he at the same time sees wisdom in extending a hand of fellowship to the Whiteman. According to him, he must dance the dance prevalent in their time. He sends one of his sons, Oduche to join the church people to at least 'be his eyes there.'

In the village circle, the chief priest has an opponent in the person of Nwaka, one of the prominent men in Umuaro. He (Nwaka) is rather more in support of the priest of Idemili, a rival god. Nwaka sees Ezeulu as possessing an overbearing attitude and challenges him openly. His antagonism and stiff opposition against Ezeulu is brought to bear in a land dispute between Umuaro and Okperi, a neighboring clan. Ezeulu spoke up against the decision of Umuaro, his own village to wage war against Okperi over the disputed farmland but the people, egged on by Nwaka, a renowned orator, went to war. The white district administration under the leadership of Captain Winterbottom intervenes, collects and breaks all the locally made guns belonging to the natives. He sits in judgement over the land case and rules in favour of Okperi. Ezeulu in a forthright manner had witnessed against his own people before Captain Winterbottom. This singular event earns him great respect before the white man and strengthens their ties but further widens the rift between him and Nwaka. Ezeulu had maintained all through the dispute that the land belonged to Okperi land and that Ulu would not fight a war of blame.

Captain Winterbottom decides to appoint a warrant chief and calls on Ezeulu to take up the prestigious position but he declines the offer asserting that he would be chief only of Ulu. The Whiteman feels slighted and imprisons him. When he is freed after two months, he returns to Umuaro determined to exert vengeance on his people for abandoning him. He is torn between loyalty to Ulu who demands strict adherence to the rituals of the New Yam festival and compassion for his people who thronged his house to welcome him. The pull of his god is stronger and he refuses to eat the remaining yams and thus save Umuaro from a ruined harvest. He is an arrow in the hand of the god, Ulu. Many turn to the Christian faith as an escape route since they are offered the privilege of harvesting their yams on offering them in church and are given assurance of protection against the wrath of Ulu. Ezeulu's stubborn will is broken when his son, Obika is killed and he feels abandoned by Ulu at the climax of his struggle. This proves unbearable to him and he goes insane.

## **Conceptual Framework**

### **Speech Styles**

Speech style according to Martin Joos, an online source is “the form of language that the speaker uses which is characterized by the degree of formality.” (Accessed 11:21 September 12, 2020) Speech style is a social feature of language use. (Yule, 2010:257) Ezeifeke (2018:136) asserts that they are linguistic options open to the speech community for particular events and activity types. She notes that they include: varieties (High/Low, Standard/nonstandard, dialects, register choices, formal/informal/casual etc.) and speech events where they are appropriate – political, academic, folk literature, casual conversations; degrees of formality within one standard language. In language use, speakers usually adopt different styles of speaking. They can speak very formally or very informally depending on the circumstances. Wardhaugh (2010:47) posits that ceremonial occasions usually require very formal speech; public lectures somewhat less formal, casual conversations between intimate persons on matters of little importance may be extremely informal and casual. According to him, the level of formality chosen may be related to a variety of factors such as the kind of occasion, the various social, age and other differences that exist between the interlocutors; the particular task that is involved such as writing or speaking, the emotional involvement of one or more of the participants. Holmes asserts that “language varies according to who is using it (2013:239) She notes that the addressees and the context influence our choices of code or variety be it language, dialect or style.

Joos identified the types of speech style as frozen style, formal style, consultative style, casual style and intimate style. Frozen style according to him is the most formal communicative style that is usually used during respectful events and ceremonies. It is also used when one shows hesitation, disinterest or prejudice. Frozen speech is used generally in a formal setting, does not require any feedback from the audience and is the most formal communicative style for respectful situations. Intimate style is for very close relationships like couples, family, and best friends. It is used in conversation between people who are very close and know each other quite well because they have the maximum of shared background information. Formal speeches are straightforward speeches. In this speech style, the speaker avoids using slang terminologies. What the speaker says is something that has been prepared beforehand. Casual speech style is an informal communication between groups and peers who have shared background information but don't have close relations while consultative speech style is used in semi-formal communication. In this type speech sentences are shorter and spontaneous and the speaker does not usually plan what he/she wants to say. A change from one to the other according to Yule (2010:257) is called style-shifting.

### **Motivation for Shifts in Speech Style**

Shifts in speech style are motivated by a number of factors such as speaker, addressee, and age of addressee, social background of addressee, social distance, the situation and the speech event. Wardhaugh (2010:47) avers that speakers can adopt different styles of speaking. He posits that speaker's speech can be very formal or informal depending on the circumstances. Ceremonial occasions according to him, require very formal speech, public lectures somewhat less formal, casual conversations quite formal while

conversations between persons who are intimate on matters of little importance may be extremely informal and casual. He notes that the level of formality chosen may relate to a variety of factors. These factors include the kind of occasion; the various social, age, and other differences that may exist between the participants; the particular task that is involved such as writing or speaking; the emotional involvement of one or more of the participants and so on.

Holmes (2013:240) asserts that the addressee is an influence on style. She gives two examples to buttress her point thus:

- a) Excuse me. Could I have a look at your photos too, Mrs Hall?
- b) C'mon Tony, gizzalook

The first utterance according to her was addressed by a teenage boy to his friend's mother when she was showing the photos of their skiing holiday to an adult friend. The second utterance was addressed to his friend when he brought his own photos of the holiday. She posits that the better you know someone, the more casual and relaxed the speech style you will use on them. People according to her use considerably more standard forms to those they do not know well, and more vernacular forms to their friends. This generalization according to her holds across different languages.

Holmes (2013:241) also identified age of addressee as an influence on style. She notes that people generally talk differently to children and adults though some adjust their speech style or accommodate more than others. Talking to younger brothers and sisters, even 3-year-olds, according to her, have been heard using sing-song intonation and 'baby talk' words like 'doggie' which they no longer use themselves. She observes that when talking or writing to a 6-year-old as opposed to a 30-year-old, most people choose simpler vocabulary and grammatical constructions. She adds that many speakers also use a different style in addressing elderly people, often with features similar to those that characterize their speech to children. Such characteristics according to her include a simpler range of vocabulary and less complex grammar, the use of "we" rather than "you" to refer to the addressee and sometimes even the sing-song intonation which characterizes baby-talk.

The social background of addressee was also identified by Holmes (2013:242-243) as an influence on speech style.

She illustrates it thus:

- a) Last week the British Prime Minister Mr. David Cameron met the Australian Premier Ms Julia Gillard in Canberra... Their next meeting will not be for several months.
- b) Las' week British Minister David Cameron met Australian Premier Julia Gillard in Canberra... Their nex' meeding won't be for sev'ral months.

These utterances according to her, illustrates a number of linguistic features which distinguish the pronunciations of newsreader on different radio stations. In (b) there is simplification of consonant clusters, so [la:st] becomes [la:s] and [nekst] becomes [neks]. The pronunciation of [t] between vowels is voiced so it sounds like a [d] hence meeting sounds like meeding. The definite article 'the' is omitted before the titles Prime Minister and Premier and the honorifics Mrs and Mr disappear. Finally utterance

(b) contracts *will not* to *won't*. All these features according to her have been identified as typical of the contrasting styles of newsreaders on different New Zealand radio stations.

Holmes (2013:240) observes that the speaker's relationship to the addressee is crucial in determining the appropriate style of speaking. She points out that "how well you know someone or how close you feel to them – relative social distance/solidarity- is one important dimension of social relationship". Many factors according to her, may contribute in determining the degree of social distance or solidarity between people such as relative age, gender, social roles, whether people work together, or are part of the same family and so on. These factors, she notes, may also be relevant to people's relative social status.

Social distance according to an online source is "the perceived or desired degree of remoteness between a member of one social group and the members of another, as evidenced in the level of intimacy tolerated between them." (Accessed 10:24 October 13, 2020) It describes the distance between groups in society and is opposed to locational distance. The notion includes differences such as social class, race/ethnicity, gender or sexuality, and also the fact that the different groups mix less than members of the same groups.

On situation as an influence on style, Hudson (2001:199) notes that many of the studies carried out have considered the effects on speech of variations in the situation. In two of such instances he reports that Labov found out that shop assistants were more likely to pronounce the /r/ in fourth floor when he asked them to repeat it. He also found that people spoke differently in his interviews according to what they were talking about, and who they were talking to. He observed that their speech became less standard when they were talking about situations where they were in danger of dying than when talking about routine matters and it was less standard when talking to other members of their family than when talking to him.

Speech events can influence style. Speech event according to Ezeifeka (2018:136) is the basic unit of analysis in ethnography of speaking. She states that "it involves the particular activity or aspect of the activity that are directly governed by rules or norms of the situation." Instances she gave are lecture, inaugural speech, vote of thanks, convocation speech, sermon, welcome address etc. Coulthard (1977:39) notes that speech event occurs in a non-verbal context which is the speech situation. He observes that speech events are the largest units for which one can discover linguistic structures and so do not have the same pattern with the situation. That is to say that several speech events can occur successively or simultaneously in the same situation just as different conversations can take place in a party. Yule (2010:145) adds that in investigating what is known about participating in conversation or any other speech event such as debate, interview and other various types of discussions, it is quickly realized that there is enormous variation in what people say and do in different circumstances. He observes that in order to describe the sources of that variation, account would be taken of a number of criteria. For example, according to him, we would have to specify the roles of speaker and hearer(s) and their relationship(s), whether they were friends, strangers,

men, women, young, old, of equal or unequal status, and many other factors. All these factors, he notes have an influence on what is said and how it is said. We would have to describe what the topic of conversation was and in what setting it took place.

Power structure is another influence on speech style. Pfetsch (2011) asserts that the various forms of relations between the negotiation partners are power. A power structure is an overall influence system of influence between any individual and other individuals within a group. Longman Dictionary of Contemporary English defines it as ‘the way in which the group of people who control a country, society, or organization are organized.’ It comprises symmetrical and asymmetrical relationships. Pfetsch avers that symmetrical relationships are characterized by a balanced mutual relationship based on similar allocations of power resources. Asymmetry according to him “is a structure one can find among most social and political relations and in relations between unequal parties.” He further observes that it is a relationship between the small and the great, the weak and the poor.” The unequal allocation of power resources, he notes, can lead to a point when the most powerful party makes threats and exerts pressure.

### **Theoretical Frameworks**

This work is anchored in the theoretical frameworks of ethnography of communication (earlier referred to as ethnography of speaking) and critical discourse analysis (CDA). The work focuses on how different cultures (in this case the Igbo culture, the setting of the selected text) represent different speech communities with different speech situations, speech styles, speech events and speech acts. These are the five taxonomy of units of social communication with speech event as the minimal unit of analysis in the framework. The relevance of CDA in the study is based on the notion of ‘power’ at play in the interactions among the different characters in the literary text. Luke cited in Ezeifeke (2018) notes that “CDA usually begins with the assumption that systematic asymmetries of power and resources between speakers and listeners, readers and writers, can be linked to their unequal access to linguistic and social resources.”

Ethnography of communication was championed by Dell Hymes (cited in Ezeifeke, 2018) According to her, it is a branch of studies in linguistics and anthropology that x-rays the study of language beyond the lexicon and grammar. She asserts that it is an approach to the study of discourse which is focused on particular ways of seeing the world and how these are showcased in particular ways of speaking. She notes that ethnographers observe patterns of communication and the symbols and meanings, premises and rules applied to speaking within specific groups of people which entails culture, race, ethnic group, or speech community. Their focus according to her is “on the verbal and non-verbal ways of sense-making in different cultures in order to find out particular communication acts or codes that are important to particular groups, what types of meanings each group attach to different speech events, and how group members learn these codes. This qualitative approach to discourse analysis, she observes, is designed to increase awareness of enormous culture-bound assumptions such as what is normal, appropriate, usual and correct in human communication. Objects of study (e.g. the study of Igbo culture) according to her include:

1. Ways of speaking- distinct patterns of talk that is symbolically meaningful to that particular group within the broader spectrum of communicative behavior generally. For example: the speech situations/speech events reflected in the different excerpts from the selected literary text.
2. Speech communities defined by Hymes as people who share at least one valued way of speaking and interpretative resources within it is located.
3. Native terms of talk- group specific labels for communicative practices that index their symbolic importance and meaning, for example: words /expressions used within a specific ethnic group (in this case the Igbo tribe).

The foundational premise of the ethnography of speaking formulated by Hymes as noted by Ezeifeka, 2018:134-135) includes:

1. Diversity in the systems of language use is to be explored in all its complexity.
2. Societies differ as to what communicative resources are available to their members, in terms of language, dialects, registers, routines, genres, artistic formulae etc.
3. Societies differ in how these resources are patterned in use, in the work done (or doable) through speech and other communicative means and in the evaluation of speaking as an instrument of social class.

She also cites Hymes as arguing that any description of language of ways of speaking will need to provide data along four related dimensions, linked to judgments of situational correctness:

1. The linguistic resources available to a speaker- how many different style he/she can choose from: formal, informal, casual, distant or frozen.
2. Supra-segmental structuring – how many differently structured linguistic (speech) events like trials, religious ceremonies, debates, songs are recognized in the culture
3. The rules of interpretation by which a given set of linguistic item comes to have a given communicative value
4. The norms which govern different types of interaction, for instance, different ethnic groups, among peers and for elders in different speech communities, speech styles, speech situations and speech events for example disclosure of information of a fellow to strangers.

She notes that based on the above premise, Hymes proposed the social units for ethnography of speaking research arranged in descending order of magnitude as shown below: speech community, speech style, speech situation, speech event, speech act.

**Speech community** – This refers to a group of speakers who share both linguistic resources and rules for interaction and interpretation.

**Speech style** – These are the linguistic options open to the speech community for particular speech events and activity types. These include varieties (High/low, standard/nonstandard, dialects, register choices, formal/informal/casual etc.) and

speech events where they are appropriate – political, academic, folk literature, casual conversations, degrees of formality within one standard language.

**Speech situation** – The speech situation is the social occasion in which the speech may occur and it defines the appropriateness of speaking, the context of the speech event.

**Speech event** – This is the basic unit of analysis in ethnography of speaking. It involves the particular activity or aspect of activity that are directly governed by rules or norms of the speech situation.

**Speech acts** – Speech acts involve ways in which particular speech communities perform certain actions through speech, such as how thanking is done or requests are made in some speech communities.

Every communication is situated in particular speech community earlier described as aggregate of people with shared linguistic resources guidelines for interaction and interpretation. In this study, the Igbo speech community is regarded as the speech community in which the different speech events showcased in the excerpts are relevant. The shared social life reflected in the literary text is dotted by different speech situations which may include such group gatherings like casual meetings with friends, group labour force and other social interactions.

### **The Speaking Grid**

In order to analyse speech events, Hymes according to Ezeifeke (2018:137) proposed a classificatory grid for identifying and defining a speech event which he argues can be useful in discovering the culturally relative taxonomy of communicative units such as is reflected in the dialogues in the various speech events in the text. He calls this the SPEAKING grid: each letter representing a different possible component of communication.

- S – Setting – (i) physical circumstances (ii) scene – subjective definition of an occasion.
- P–Participants–(i)speaker/sender/addresser(ii)hearer/receiver/audience/addressee
- E – Ends – purposes and goals/ outcomes
- A – Act sequence – message form and content (discourse analysis), the words used to inform, direct, promise, request, mandate, question, invite, declare.
- K – Key – tone, manner or spirit with which a particular message is conveyed: satiric, Ironic, serious, light-hearted, joking, mocking, sarcastic, pedantic, pompous, sad, happy etc.
- I – Instrumentalities – channel (oral, written, signed, multimodal). This also includes physical forms of speech drawn from community repertoire: dialect, code, register and whether the speech is formal, informal, frozen, consultative and intimate. Code-switching may also be relevant here.
- N – Norms of interaction and interpretation: - specific properties attached to speaking interpretation of norms within cultural belief system. There are norms of greeting, addressing elders, cultural differences in loudness, silence, gaze return, body posture when talking to elders, comfortable conversational distance among strangers and among friends.



G – Genre – Textual categories such as a lecture, sermon, vote of thanks, convocation address, a market transaction, a political speech, a marriage transaction, a welcome address and numerous such other genres. These different genres are text types with their unique internal structures which accord with different social goals. For instance, there is a difference between how a lecture is structured as different from an inaugural speech or a vote of thanks. Each has its own internal patterning and schematic structures and this enables one to discover when the speaker switches from one genre to another, like when somebody in a lecture is asked to stop “sermonizing” in a situation where they digressed from lecturing which is an academic genre to a religious genre

### Research Questions

1. What are the speech style shifts?
2. What are the motivations for the style shifts?
3. How did the style shifts affect the relationship among the characters?
4. What power structure are at work?

### Methodology

The speech style-shifts in the selected literary text, chosen because of the ingenious language use of the author are identified, the motivations for the style-shifts and the speech situations and speech events that informed the shifts in the speech styles of the characters are highlighted and subjected to Hymes SPEAKING grid. In Eight sample excerpts of the speech style-shifts would be used as data.

### Data Presentation and Analysis

#### Excerpt 1

‘Shut up black monkeys and get down to work!’

Mr. Wright had a grating voice but one that carried far. Truce was immediately established. He turned to Unachukwu and said:

‘Tell them I shall not tolerate any more slackness.’ Unachukwu translated.

‘Tell them this bloody must be finished by June.’

‘The white man says that unless you finish this work in time you will know the

kind of man he is.’

‘No more lateness.’

‘Pardin?’

‘Pardon what? Can’t you understand plain, simple English?’ ... (82-83)

The speech style shift as showcased in the expression ‘Pardon what? Can’t you understand plain simple English?’ is from formal style to frozen style. The speech situation/speech event that informed the shifts in the speech style of the character in the excerpt above is calling to order of the workforce in a manual labour scene. The local workforce was engaged in a quarrel because Obika, Ezeulu’s second son and Ofoedu, his friend arrived late on the road construction site as a result of a hangover

from a drinking bout they engaged in the previous night which attracted the reprimand of Mr. Wright, the European road contractor on the entire workforce. The second shift in speech style between Moses Unachukwu and Mr. Wright was brought about by Moses Unachukwu's request of Mr. Wright to repeat what he had just said to enable him interpret well. The motivation for the style shift was social distance among Mr. Wright, Moses Unachukwu, the local interpreter and the native workforce.

### Excerpt 2

I have not come all the way from Okperi to stretch my legs.  
'Your kinsman here has told you how Kaputin Winta-bor-tom has put me in charge of many of his affairs.  
'He is the chief of all the white men in these parts.  
I have known him for more than ten years and I have yet to see another white man who does not tremble before him.  
When he sent me he did not tell me he had a friend in Umuaro.' He smiled in derision.  
'But if what you say is true we shall know tomorrow when I take you to see him.'  
'What are you talking about?' asked Akuebue in alarm. The court messenger continued to smile menacingly.  
'Yes,' he said. Your friend 'Wintabota' (he mouthed the name in the ignorant fashion of his hearers) 'has ordered you to appear before him tomorrow morning.' (138)

The speech style shift as reflected in the expression 'Your friend Wintabota' (he mouthed the name in the ignorant fashion of his hearers) is from casual to formal style. The speech situation/speech event that informed the shift in the speech style of the character in the excerpt above was Ezeulu's earlier reference to Captain Winterbottom as his friend which does not go down well with the court messenger who sees his acquaintance with the white man as an exclusive privilege over the other natives who they see as inferior to them. The motivation was social distance between the two groups.

### Excerpt 3

Where is Ezeulu's house? asked Corporal Matthew Nweke. The man looked suspiciously at the uniformed strangers.  
'Ezeulu,' he said after a long time in which he had seemed to search his memory. Which Ezeulu ?  
'How many Ezeulus do you know?' asked the corporal irritably.  
'How many Ezeulus do I know?' repeated the man after him. 'I don't know any Ezeulus.'  
... 'Why did you ask me which Ezeulu if you don't know any?'  
'Why did I ask you - '  
'Shut up! Bloody fool!' shouted the policeman in English... (151)

The speech style shift as showcased in the expression 'Shut up! Bloody fool! Shouted the policeman in English' is from informal to formal and then to frozen style. The speech situation /speech event that informed the shift in the speech of the character in the above excerpt is the display of evasive behaviour by the man carrying a pot of wine when the two policemen who were sent to arrest Ezeulu stopped him on the way and were making enquiry on the direction to Ezeulu's house. Apparently the man does not

wish to co-operate with them. They are of unequal status and so the motivation for the style-shift was social distance.

#### **Excerpt 4**

‘Which of you is called Ezeulu?’ asked the corporal.

‘Which Ezeulu?’ asked Edogo.

Don’t ask me which Ezeulu again or I shall slap okro seeds out of your mouth. I say who is called Ezeulu here?

‘ And I say which Ezeulu? Or don’t you know who you are looking for?’...

‘Alright,’ said the corporal in English. ‘Jus now you go sabi which Ezeulu.

Gi me dat ting’ This last sentence was directed to his companion who immediately produced the handcuffs from his pocket. (153)

The speech style shift as reflected in the expression ‘Alright, said the corporal in English. Jus now you go sabi which Ezeulu. Gi me dat ting...’ is from formal to frozen style. The speech situation/speech event that informed the shift in the speech style of the character in the excerpt above was the unwillingness of Edogo, Ezeulu’s eldest son to disclose the identity of his father, Ezeulu when the policemen eventually arrived in the chief priest’s compound for his arrest. The motivation for the shift in speech-style was social distance.

#### **Excerpt 5**

‘What does he look like?’ asked the corporal.

He is as tall as an iroko tree...

‘And his son?’

‘Like him no difference.’ The two policemen conferred in the white man’s tongue to the admiration of the villagers.

‘Sometime na dat two porson we cross for road,’ said the corporal.

‘Sometime na dem; said his companion.’ But we no go return back jus like dat. All dis waka wey we waka come here no fit go for nating.’...

(153-154)

The shift in speech style as reflected in the expression ‘Sometime na dem, said his companion. But we no go return back jus like dat. All dis waka wey we waka come her no fit go for nating.’ Is from casual to formal. The speech situation/speech event that informed the shift in the speech of the character in the above excerpt is the disclosure to the policemen that Ezeulu and his son had set out for Okperi in the morning when the policemen arrived the chief priest’s house to arrest him. They were conspiring between themselves to extort some gratification from them for their effort. The motivation for the speech style was social distance.

#### **Excerpt 6**

Did I not say so? He asked the other servants after their master had been removed to hospital.

‘Was it for nothing I refused to follow the policemen? I told them the Chief Priest of Umuaro is not a soup you can lick in a hurry.’ His voice carried a note of pride. ‘Our master thinks that because he is a white man our medicine cannot touch him.’ He switched over to English for the benefit of Clarke’s steward who came in just then and who did not

... speak Ibo. I use to tellam say blackman juju no be something wey man fit take play. But when I tellam na so so laugh im de laugh. When he finish laugh he call me John and I say Massa. He say You too talk bush talk. I tellam say O-o, one day go be one day. You no see am now?' (155)

The shift in speech style as reflected in the expressions 'I use to tellam say blackman juju no be something wey man fit take play. But when I tellam na so so laugh im de laugh...' is from casual to formal. The speech situation/speech event that informed the shift in the speech style of the character in the excerpt above is a casual interaction that involved John Nwodika, second steward to Captain Winterbottom, other servants and Clarke's steward who just came in and who did not speak Ibo. The occasion was when the the Captain suddenly took ill on the very day he sent policemen to arrest Ezeulu, the chief priest of Umuaro. The motivation for the shift in speech style was the situation.

#### **Excerpt 7**

Clarke shook his head and said  
'He is pretty bad, I'm afraid.'  
'Sorry sir, said the steward looking very worried.  
'Dey say na dat bad juju man for yonda wey...'  
'Go and get my bath ready, will you?'... (155)

The shift in speech style as showcased in the expression 'Go and get my bath ready, will you?' is from casual to frozen style. The speech situation/speech event that informed the shift in the speech style of the character in the excerpt above was the enquiry from Mr. Clarke, a European about the health of Captain Winterbottom by Clarke's steward when he returned from hospital. The steward was attributing the captain's ill health to the evil powers of the chief priest. They are of unequal social status and so the motivation for the style-shift was the situation.

#### **Excerpt 8**

... 'De witch-doctor from Umuaro don come!'  
'I beg your pardon.'  
'... Lock him up in the guard room till morning,' Clarke made to enter the bungalow.  
'Massa say make I putam for gaddaloom?'  
'That's what I said,' shouted Clarke. 'Are you deaf?'... (156)

The shift in speech style as reflected in the expression 'That's what I said ... Are you deaf?' is from formal to frozen style. The speech situation/speech event that informed the shift in the speech style in the excerpt above was the attempt by the court messenger to confirm the directives issued him by Mr. Clarke to lock Ezeulu up in the guard room till the next morning when the court messenger informed him of the arrival of the chief priest. The anger of Mr. Clarke was possibly heightened by the chief priest's stubborn attitude coupled with anxiety about the deteriorating health of Captain Winterbottom. The shift in the speech-style of Mr. Clarke was influenced by the social distance as well as the situation.

Applying the SPEAKING grid, we represent the speech events as follows:

### Excerpt 1

S= Setting: A manual labour seen in Umuaro and the calling to order of the workforce. The local workforce was engaged in a quarrel because Obika, Ezeulu's second son and Ofoedu, his friend arrived late on the road construction site as a result of a hangover from a drinking bout they engaged in the previous night which attracted the reprimand of Mr Wright, the European road contractor on the entire workforce. The second shift in speech style between Moses and Mr Wright was brought about by Moses Unachukwu's request of Mr. Wright to repeat what he had just said to enable him interpret well.

P=Participants: Mr Wright, the European road contractor, Moses Unachukwu, the native interpreter, the local workforce from Umuachala and Umunneora.

E=Ends: The goal is restoring of order among the workforce and the call on the native interpreter to be more attentive.

A=Act Sequence: Reprimand, informing, questioning.

K=Key: serious, abusive, and pompous.

I=Instrumentalities: There was a deviation from formal style which characterizes such interactions to frozen style which in turn depicts prejudice attitude.

N=Norms of interaction and interpretation: The Europeans are usually formal in their speech style when interacting with their African interpreters and other natives.

G=Genre: Foreigner boss and native workers' interactions.

### Excerpt 2

S=Setting: A court messenger – recipient of the summons scene. The court messenger was informing Ezeulu, the chief priest of the order by captain Winterbottom, the white district administrator to appear before him at Okperi the next morning.

P=Participants: Chief court messenger, the escort Ezeulu's sons, Edeogo and Obika, Ezeulu's friend Akuebue.

E=Ends: The goal of the dialogue is the delivery of the summons to Ezeulu to appear before Captain Winterbottom, the district administrator at Okperi.

A=Act Sequence: Informing, questioning

K=Key: Serious, pompous, pedantic and mocking

I=Instrumentalities: The communication is oral and frozen.

N=Norms of interaction and interpretation: The interaction between court messengers and recipients are usually formal.

G=Genre: Court messenger - recipient interaction

### Excerpt 3

S=Setting: The visit of two policemen to Umuaro to arrest Ezeulu, and the interrogation between them and a villager

P=Participants: Corporal Matthew Nweke, another policeman, a villager (a man) carrying a pot of palm wine

E=Ends: The goal of the dialogue is seeking to know the direction to the chief priest's house.

A=Act sequence: questioning and reprimanding

K=Key: serious, abusive and pompous

I=Instrumentalities: Oral communication with systematic turn-taking between interactants

N= The interaction is usually done in the vernacular but often mixed with English expressions or nativized English by semi-literate natives. Again, natives do not divulge information about one another to strangers.

G=Genre: Police investigation

#### **Excerpt 4**

S=Setting: The two policemen are in Ezeulu's house and are seeking to identify him among the people they found in his house.

P=Participants: The corporal, the other policeman, Edogo, Ezeulu's eldest son, Akuebue, Ezeulu's friend

E=Ends: The goal of the dialogue is the identification of Ezeulu, the chief priest of Ulu.

A=Act sequence: questioning and threatening

K=Key: Serious, authoritative and pompous

I=Instrumentalities: The communication is oral and is usually done in the vernacular with occasional English expressions.

N= The police ask questions and the person(s) addressed answer the questions put to them.

G= Genre: Police investigation

#### **Excerpt 5**

S= Setting: The policemen came to arrest Ezeulu but were informed that he and his son, Edogo had set out for Okperi in the morning to honour the summons by the district administrator. Their description was given to the policemen.

P= Participants: A police corporal, another policeman, Akuebue, Ezeulu's friend, some of the villagers

E=Ends: The goal of the dialogue is the description and Edogo, his son.

A=Act sequence: questioning, responding, and affirming

K=Key: Serious, pompous and conspiratorial

I=Instrumentalities: The communication is oral and is usually done in the vernacular interspersed with pidgin and English expressions.

N=Norms of interaction and interpretation: The police make their interrogations and the respondent(s) give the answers to the questions put to them.

G=Genre: Police investigation

#### **Excerpt 6**

S=Setting: John Nwodika, Second Steward to Captain Winterbottom and the other servants were anxiously discussing the sudden illness of their master after their master had been removed to the hospital. Clarke's steward who did not speak Ibo came in then. John Nwodika attributed Captain Winterbottom's sudden illness to the potent charm of the chief priest.

P= Participants: John Nwodika, Second Steward to Captain Winterbottom, other servants and Clarke's steward

E=Ends: The goal of the interaction is the connection of the sudden illness of Captain Winterbottom to the charm of the chief priest of Ulu.

A=Act sequence: questioning, informing

K=Key: Jubilant, light-hearted

I=Instrumentalities: The interaction is oral, informal and is done in the vernacular and code switching to English.

N=Norms of interaction: The interaction is usually done in the vernacular.

G=Genre: Servant-servant interaction

### Excerpt 7

S=Setting: Mr. Clarke a European had just returned from the hospital and his steward (a native) as anxiously enquiring after Captain Winterbottom's state of health of which he was pessimistic.

P=Participants: Mr. Clarke and his steward

E=Ends: The goal of the dialogue was the ascertaining of the state of health of Captain Winterbottom.

A=Act sequence: questioning, responding, and reprimand

K=Key: sad and serious

I=Instrumentalities: Informal and later frozen

N=Norms of interaction: The interaction is usually formal.

G=Genre: Master-servant interaction

### Excerpt 8

S=Setting: The court messenger was informing Tony Clarke of the arrival of Ezeulu, the chief priest of Ulu. He directed him to lock him up in the guardroom and the messenger was attempting to confirm the directives issued him.

P=Participants: Mr. Tony Clarke, Mr. Wade and the court messenger

E=Ends: The goal of the interaction is determination of the fate of the high priest who was summoned by Captain Winterbottom for rejecting the offer to be made a warrant chief.

A=Act sequence: informing, questioning, pronouncing, affirming, reprimand

K=Key: serious, fearful, and authoritative

I=Instrumentalities: The interaction is oral, formal and later frozen

N=Norms of interaction and interpretation: The European masters used the Standard English while the native servants used English.

G=Genre: master-servant interaction

In applying the SPEAKING grid above the difference between the speech event and the genre in each excerpt informs the speech style shifts as reflected in the instrumentalities.

## Discussion

In excerpts I, the request for a repetition of the directives of Mr. Wright, the European road contractor by Moses Unachukwu, the local interpreter who evidently was unable to fully grasp and possibly interpret accurately what he had just said when he was interpreting to the local workforce motivated the speech style shift from formal to frozen. The angry disposition of the white man as a result of the rowdy and unpleasant session he just had with the natives must have influenced his mood – a situation where he had run out of patience with him (the interpreter). The style shift may have caused a feeling of inferiority in Unachukwu and possibly eroded his confidence in his translation efforts. Asymmetrical power relation is in force here which depicts social distance.

In excerpt 2, Ezeulu's earlier reference to captain Winterbottom as his friend was not well taken by the court messenger who sees his acquaintance with the white man as an exclusive privilege over the other natives who they see as inferior to them influenced the speech style shift from a casual style to a formal one. The style shift may further

widened the social distance. There is a reflection of asymmetrical power relation which indicates social distance.

In excerpt 3, the display of evasive behavior by the man carrying a pot of wine when the two policemen who were sent to arrest Ezeulu stopped him on the way and were making inquiry on the direction to Ezeulu's house motivated the shift from formal to frozen style. Apparently the man does not wish to co-operate with them. The speech style shift was from informal to formal and then to frozen style. The sudden switch from vernacular to English is a show of power. Instead of continuing in the vernacular, the corporal veered off to English to show power which to the semi-literate Africans lie in the language they use – English. To the natives also, English is the language of power. The shift may have further heightened the social gap between the groups. Asymmetrical power relation is in force here which reflects social distance.

In excerpt 4, the unwillingness of Edego, Ezeulu's eldest son to disclose the identity of his father when the policemen eventually arrived at the chief priest's compound for his arrest motivated the speech style shift from formal to frozen. The shift accompanied by the display of handcuffs by his companion is a further show of power. The author rightly notes that "in the eyes of the villager, handcuffs or *iga* were the most deadly of the white man weapons. The sight of a fighting man reduced to impotence and helplessness with an iron lock was the final humiliation..." (AOG, 153) The social gap between the groups is further strengthened by the shift in style. Asymmetrical power structure is also at play here which signals social distance.

In excerpt 5, the disclosure to the policemen by Akuebue, Ezeulu's friend that Ezeulu and his son has set out for Okperi in the morning to answer the white man's call when the policemen arrived at the chief priest's house to arrest him motivated the speech style shift. The shift from casual to formal style rendered in pidgin is also a show power and is done in a bid to conceal their conspiracy to extort some gratification from them for their efforts. To the natives, pidgin also denotes power reflects social distance. The shift in style widened the social gap between the two groups. Asymmetrical power relation is in force here.

In excerpts 6, the entrance of Clarke's steward who did not speak Igbo during the discussion of John Nwodika, second steward to Captain Winterbottom with other servants concerning the sudden illness of the captain on the very day he sent policemen to arrest the chief priest of Umuaro motivated the shift in speech style from casual to formal (vernacular to English). Nwodika attributed the sudden illness of his master to the evil powers of the chief priest. The shift to English at the entrance of Clarke's steward who did not speak Igbo was in a show of solidarity which reflects symmetrical power relations. The shift in style strengthened their relationship further.

In excerpts 7, the inquiry from Mr Clarke, a European about the state of health of Captain Winterbottom by Clarke's steward when he returned from hospital exhausted motivated the shift in speech style from casual to frozen style. The steward was then about to attribute the captain's ill health to the evil powers of the chief priest when Clarke interrupted him. The style shift strengthened the social gap between them. This showcases asymmetrical power relations which depicts social distance.



In excerpts 8, the attempts by the court messenger to confirm the directives issued him by Mr Clarke to lock Ezeulu in the guardroom till the next morning when the court messenger informed him of the arrival of the chief priest motivated the shift in speech style from formal to frozen style. The anger of Mr. Clarke possibly was heightened possibly by the chief priest's earlier rejection of the offer to be made a warrant chief coupled with anxiety about the deteriorating health of Captain Winterbottom. The shift in style reinforced the social gap between them. There is asymmetrical power relation in force here depicting social distance between them.

From the above discussion, it is seen that language use is dynamic. The different speech events thus informed the shifts in speech style from formal to frozen, casual to formal, informal to formal and to frozen, formal to frozen, casual to formal, casual to formal, casual to frozen, and formal to frozen styles respectively. The different speech style shifts identified from the sample excerpts were influenced mainly by the situation and social distance. The shifts also depict more of asymmetrical power relations between the different characters than symmetrical.

### **Bibliography**

- Achebe, C. (1986) *Arrow of god*. Essex: Heinemann.
- Chinyeaka, L.O. (2020) Speech style-shifts as accommodation strategy in selected novels of chinua achebe and chimamanda adichie. Unpublished PhD Dissertation, Department of English Language and Literature, Nnamdi Azikiwe University, Awka
- Coulthard, M. (1977) *An introduction to discourse analysis concepts*. Essex: Longman Group Limited.
- Ezeifeaka, C. (2018) *Discourse analysis concepts and approaches*. Awka: Patrobas Nigeria Limited.
- Holmes, J. (2013) *An introduction to sociolinguistics*. Fourth Edition New York: Routledge.
- Hudson, R.A. (2001) *Sociolinguistics*. Second Edition Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Joos, M. Online dictionary. <https://elcombus.com>
- Pfetsch, F.R. Power in influential negotiations: symmetry and asymmetry DAN NEGOCIATIONS 2011 Vol 2 (no16) PP 39-56 Retrieved from <https://ww.cairn.info/reveu -negotiations-2011-2 page-39.htm> on 3 October, 2020
- Wardhaugh, R. (2010) *An introduction to sociolinguistics*. Sixth Edition West Sussex: Wiley-Blackwell.
- Longman dictionary of contemporary english. (2014) United Kingdom: Pearson Education Limited
- Oxford.com Retrieved from <https://www.lexico.com> on 13 October, 2020