The language of Ubesie in *Jụọ Obinna*

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Abstract

Language is the substantial material available to literary artists in their bid to achieve their goals, among which are to entertain, educate and preserve cultural values. In its use, the literary artists exhibit creativity: a situation that sets them apart from others. Okoye (2007:1) evidences this by pointing out that when the literary artist discusses anything, he sometimes goes beyond the real. He does this to convince his readers of his imaginative art. Going beyond the real has an implication for the specialized features of the language of literary artists. This paper reveals some of such features as are manifest in Tony Ubesie's Jụọ Obinna. The features are represented in sentence types and their functions. They are also represented in figures of speech and related devices, among which are metaphor, irony, euphemism, hyperbole, proverbs (classified here as functional and cosmetic), personification, and synecdoche. Uzochukwu (2007:1) is indeed right in commenting, "language is always more fundamental in the appraisal of literary texts".

1.0 Introduction

Jụọ Obinna by Tony Ubesie is an Igbo novel not only by the fact that it is written in the Igbo language but also by the fact that it chronicles events associated with the Igbo people. Particularly, it tells the story of the exploits of a young Igbo boy, Obinna during the Nigerian/Biafran war. He boasts before this war that he will fight on the Biafran side. However, when the war begins he does all he can to avert being conscripted into the Biafran Army. Some of his actions are intriguing. Obinna, the chief proponent, was endeared to the readers of the novel by the way Ubesie crafted Obinna's intelligence into actions using a good command of the Igbo language. He represents the exceptional skill of Ubesie in literary artistry.

Part of Ubesie's literary artistry is his language use. Many a scholar has been attracted to study it. Many of the studies end with complimentary remarks. For instance, Nnabuihe (2006:172-73) comments:

> Ubesie is noted for his sound Igbo phrases, which are couched in rib-cracking humours and expressions too deep to gloss over. This quality is commendable and ranks him among the greatest Igbo writers of our time. His excellent command of the Igbo language and usage in literary crafting naturally endears him and his works to critics, students, and teachers of Igbo language and literature...Ubesie remains an Igbo literary artist whose mastery of the Igbo language as a novelist, a playwright and a poet is hard to equal.

This paper is another study of Ubesie's language. It is divided into five sections. The first section introduces the work. The second section handles the sentence types in the novel and their implications. In the third section, the figurative language used is handled. The fourth section is devoted to the proverbs in the novel. The target here is to reveal the relevance of proverbs in the Igbo literary tradition and the Igbo language as a communicative norm. The fifth section is the conclusion of the paper.

2.0 Sentence types

2.1 Simple and complex sentences

In *Jụọ Obinna,* Ubesie employs different sentence types such as simple sentences and complex sentences. We see that he mixes the two sentence types. We strongly feel that he does this to add more flavour to his writing since a monotonous sentence type is usually a source of boredom to readers. The text below shows a few complex sentences used in the novel.

> Nanị ihe dị iche n'etiti mbe na Obinna bụ na mbe bụ anụmanụ, Obinna bụrụ mmadụ na-ekwu okwu. Nke ọzọ, ma nke mbe mere, ma nke mbe emeghi, ọ bụrụ na aghụghọ adị n'ime ya, e bo ya mbe. (The only difference between tortoise and Obinna is that the tortoise is an animal while Obinna is a human being that talks. Another, both the ones done by the tortoise and those not done by him, once cunning is involved the tortoise is blamed) (2).

He follows them up with a simple sentence:

Mbe anaghị ekwu okwu (The tortoise does not talk)

He then continues with complex sentences. On page 5, Ubesie uses a few complex sentences in trying to say how people are chasing Obinna to get back from him the fowl he has taken. He comes down to add flavour to this usage by weaving in these simple sentences:

Ọchịchịị gbara. Ụzọ dị njọ (There is darkness. The road is bad)

When Obinna, in his course of running away from the army, comes to Ụmụnze, he sees that the Nkwọ market is deserted. He does not see anybody around the market and this makes him know that something is wrong. Ubesie explains this with complex sentences and then adds some simple ones (120). He writes:

O nwere ihe mere. O nwere ihe na-esi! (Something happened. Something smells).

We do not mean that Ubesie used complex and simple sentences in equal proportion. He used more of complex sentences. Thus we have a series of complex sentences with just a few simple sentences following; after which complex sentences continue. For instance, when Ogbenyeanụ is telling Obinna to go and enroll with the army, she says:

Obinna, ị sị na ọ bụ gịnị jị gị ịbanye soja jee soro ibe gị kwawa mgbọ? Mgbe ọgụ ebidobeghị, gị bu mmadụ nile bi n'ogbe a ụzọ tuwe ọnụ ihe ị ga-eme na soja, ka ị ga-esi lụgide ọgụ, e mee gị ọchị agha, nà ka ị ga-esi si na nkwụ fere n'ọjị, si n'ọjị fere n'akpaka, si n'akpaka wụtuo n'ala, buru isi mmadu lọta. Ọọ kwa ọnwa isii bụ ihe a ọgụ malitere, ị ka nọrọ n'ebe a soro ụmụ agbọghọ na-akwọ garị, n'eleghị anya n'ọnụ nile i turu? (Obinna, what did you say prevented you from joining the armed force? Before the war broke out, you were the first that boasted of what you would do in the force, the way you would so gallantly fight and be promoted to the rank of a commander, and how you would climb from the palm tree to the iroko and from the iroko to the oil-bean and from the oil-bean to the ground; returning with human heads) (2).

After these, the conversation continues in complex sentences up till page 3. Then a simple sentence follows thus:

Chukwugaekwu bụ Kaptịn (Chukwugaekwu is a Captain)

Then complex sentences follow. On page 16-17, Ubesie uses up to two simple sentences at a stretch and then a chain of complex ones. Turning to page 21, we see a series of complex sentences lined up without any intervening simple sentence thus:

> Ka Obinna na-ekuda ume, o nwee ahịhịa kpọrọ nku ikuku si ya n'imi kutere, ọ gara inwu ọkụ. Ebe ọ na-atụ anya ọnwụ ka ọ hụrụ ihe yiri ndụ! Agadi nwoke ka aharaja gbanyere n'agada, ọ na-enye onwe ya nsogbu. Aharaja wee sị ya zuo ike, n'ihi na ọ bụrụ na ya bụ akpụ, na apa mma gara ịjụ ya ahụ. O teela ndị sụ uwe soja ji na-emekpa Obinna ahụ, nke mere yá o ji na-agbará ha ọsọ. Ma ọ maghị na ọ bụ ezi okwu na icheku ọkụ na-adasa ndi mmadụ, mana onye gbawara ihe nile dị ka ichekụ ọkụ ọsọ, ọ gbaghara mkpụrụ akwụ ọsụkwụ.(As Obinna breathed out, if his breath had touched any dry grass, the grass would have been set ablaze. Where he expected death, he sees something that looks like life! An old man ...)

A simple sentence comes after these, followed by another chain of complex sentences.

Some of the complex sentences represent Ubesie's input of his creativity which does not directly bear on any situations outside. However, there are cases of complex sentences which draw from sources outside. They are either proverbial or idiomatic. The pattern of simple sentences touches on the fancy of readers on the grounds that at one point or the other they have used such pattern. Strangeness of situations is therefore curbed. Similarly, the proverbial or idiomatic complex sentences capture situations that do not only exist in the world of the novelist but exists also in the world of his target readers. It is possible to aver that Ubesie uses such mix of sentences on one hand to capture readers' cultural and social experience and on the other hand to bring them into his own world of creativity: a situation that can make them get easily involved in the narration.

2.2 Declarative, imperative and interrogative sentences

The sentence types discussed above are structure-defined. Sentence types can be function-defined. Here the terms declarative sentence, imperative sentence and interrogative sentence apply. The novel is replete with declarative sentences. The examples of simple and complex sentences above are illustrative of this. They have

been used as ordinarily as should be to describe actions performed by the characters and their feelings at one point or the other. This purposes to create in the readers vivid mental pictures of the world created in the novel. Imperative sentences are also used in the novel. This has an implication for the dialogue device existent in the novel and enhances the dramatic flavour necessary in a novel. For instance:

> Chọọrọ m mmadụ abụọ ga-eje ichere m ụgbọ ala m nche n'ebe o mebiri
> (Find me two persons that will go to look after my spoilt car) (93).

Interrogative sentences are adequately represented. Ubesie uses them appropriately in achieving the best result. See page 33 where a conversation ensued between Ikechukwu and Obinna. Obinna uses interrogative sentences to show the validity of his point:

> Ikechukwu, ọ dị mma na anyị ga-anọ n'akụkụ osimiri jiri aja na-akwọ aka? Anyi aga-ahụ ụzọ ndu, si na nke ọnwụ ka anyị mma? (Ikechukwu, is it good that we who are at a river bank should wash our hands with spittle? Shall we see a way of life and prefer a road to perdition?)

Later, when he has told Ikechukwu that he (Obinna) seems to have found a means through which they can be getting money, Ubesie uses an exclamatory sentence for part of Ikechukwu's answer to show how much interest Ikechukwu has in the matter. Ikechukwu says:

> Gịnị ka ị na-agwa m! Kwuo ozugbo... (What are you telling me! Say it immediately...)

On page 63, we see where a captain is addressing the soldiers. He uses interrogative sentences which are answered by his subordinates with an emphatic 'No' or exclamatory sentences, thus:

> Onye be ya na-agba ọkụ,ọ na-achụ oke? -Mba!
> Onye ndị ịro gbara gburugburu, ọ na-arahụ ụra? -Mbaa!
> Gịnị ka ọ na-eme?-Ọ na-eche onwe ya nche mgbe dum!
> (Somebody whose house is on fire, does he chase rats? - No!
> Somebody who is surrounded by the enemies, does he sleep? –No o!
> What does he do? -He always keeps watch over himself!)

This combination of both sentence types makes the reader an active participant. He pictures the soldiers being addressed by the captain and the soldiers' reaction to his speech.

It is worthy of note that the interrogative sentences in the example from page 33 are rhetorical. That is, they suggest their answers and do not need to be answered. This is not the case with the example from page 63. This variety increases the interest of readers while involving them. For instance, they will provide answers to the unanswered questions and justify the appropriateness of the answers for the other group of questions.

3.0 Figurative language

As stated earlier, there is Ubesie's input of his creativity in the novel. This is represented in a good number of ways in the figurative expressions he has employed. A few of them have been identified. They include among others synecdoche, irony, euphemism, personification, and simile.

3.1 Synecdoche

Most of the synecdoches used by Ubesie involve using head (isi) to refer to all the body:

... ihe chọrọ iri isi ya (...what wants to consume his head) (26)
... ha ji isi ha pụta (...they came out with their heads) (37)
... ndị ga-eji isi ha pụta (...those that will come out with their heads) (64)
... ebe i ji isi gị lọta (...since you returned with your head) (171).

In the expressions, *isi* 'head' refers to the whole human body. Ubesie uses the expression to point out the importance of the head in the body; a situation that makes it a better candidate to represent the human body.



3.2 Irony

Look at the irony which Ubesie uses to tell us the physical appearance of Mazi Ọnyịdo:

> Unu mara na udele bụ nwa mara mma. Ihe ọ masịrị ndị mmadụ ha na-ekwu. N'ebe mma ya pụtara ihe bụ n'etiti isi ya, na ogologo olu ya. Ma, ọ bụrụ na mmadụ ahụbeghị ụdị mma udele na-ama ma mmiri mabọọ ya chi, onye ahụ agaghị aghọta ihe m na-ekwu maka Mazị Ọnyịdo. Ọ bụrụ na eze ya pịkwuru apị, ọ gara ịmaru mma ka ụsụ. (You know that the vulture is a beautiful child. Whatever pleases people let them say. Its beauty is more at the centre of its head and its long neck. If one has not seen a vulture beaten by the rain all night, one will not understand what I am talking about Mazi Onyido. If his teeth were very long, he would have been as beautiful as the bat.) (73).

The mental picture evoked by 'vulture' and 'bat' makes the irony not only literal but also situational. In this case, you need to know the animals he uses in referring to Mazi Onyido's appearance in order to get the true picture he is painting about Mazi Onyido.

3.3 Euphemism

An instance of euphemism can be seen on page 53-54. Here we see Ubesie employ a euphemistic term rather than mention the name of the ram's male organ thus:

> ... onye tara ihe ebule ji na-aza nwoke ji ibi ụgwọ.(...he who eats what makes the ram a male has a date with hydrocele)

3.4 Hyperbole

> Ụzụ ụgbọ elu ahụ na-eme wee na-abja egbuolarị Obinna egbuo... (The noise with which the (war) plane approaches has already killed Obinna) (55)

> ... ndị soja ha gafere n'ụzọ ebe ha na-eche nche dị ka aja dị n'ala.(The soldiers on guard they passed are like sand - numberless.) (69).

While the former expresses how fearful Obinna is when he hears the sound being made by an approaching war plane, the latter expresses the exceeding number of soldiers that are on guard on the road.

3.5 Personification

Ubesie's application of personification in this novel portrays his thoughts in clearer ways. On page 25, we see hunger personified. Ubesie is describing how fat the man Obinna and Emeka met in the office is. The man is too fat and Obinna knows that:

> Ihe ọzọ emeghị, agụụ amaghị ụzọ be nwoke a. Ọ bụrụ na ọ ka na-achọ ụzọ be ya achọ, ọ chọtabeghị ya. Ọ gaghịkwa achota ya nsọ nsọ (If nothing happens, hunger does not know the way to this man's house. If he is still searching for the way to his house, he has not found it. He is not going to find it soon)

On page 69, Obinna is thinking of how to run away before they could reach the war front. He thinks it would be better for him to escape through the bush when the commandos hear the sound of shell and run into the bush. He later thinks otherwise because, according to him,

> ... nke a bụ ije kụrụ ọnwụ aka n'ụzọ" (...this is knocking on death's door)

Here, we see death personified; as if it has a door somewhere!

3.6 Simile

Ubesie compares certain things with some other things. This helps the reader to visualize how the thing Ubesie is talking about is like. On page 5, he compares Obinna with two nocturnal animals - cat and cockroach - by saying:

> ... o [Obinna] mụtala jhụ ụzọ n'abalị ka nwa mba na ọchịcha. (Obinna had learnt to see in the night like a cat and cockroach)

Ubesie tells us how Emeka's brain was working when he reached home after seeing Obinna:

> Ka Emeka ruru ụlọ, ụbụrụ ya na-akụ ka elekere (When he reached home, his brain was ticking like a clock) (23).

When Obinna and two others were commanded to stop running round the person giving them their military training,

> Ha na-eku ume ka ndị jere gbaa enyi mgba. (They breathed like those who went to wrestle with the elephants.) (59).

Obinna, and two others open the box they think is filled with money and are disappointed to find a child's corpse; Ubesie describes the facial appearance of Obinna at this period thus:

> ... ihu ya jie ka ube, mkpụrụ anya ya jie ka igwe mmiri ruru. (His face darkened like pear; his eyes darkened like the clouds before the rain.) (105).

3.7 Metaphor

Ubesie's use of metaphor, like his use of simile, helps in generating the humour which characterizes the greater part of this novel. He portrays Obinna as a boastful person and describes him metaphorically thus:

> ... Obinna bụ 'o ji ọnụ abatu ukwu ọji'. (Obinna is one who cuts the iroko with his mouth.) (3).

On page 57, Obinna meets another boy who, like Obinna himself, wants to run away from commando. Then Ubesie uses a metaphor to say that the two boys have a common objective:

> ... ha abụọ bụ ụmụnna n'igba ọsọ soja. (...two of them are brothers in running from being conscripted into the army.)

Ubesie also uses metaphor when he is explaining that the sneaking out from the army which Obinna and Mazi Onyido plan to undertake is a risky affair. Either they benefit or they lose:

> Ihe ha na-akwado ime ugbu a bụ mma ihu abụọ; o gbughị onye ọjọọ, o nwere ike igbu onye ọma. (The plan they have is a double-edged sword; if it does not kill an evil person, it may kill a good person.) (78).

After Obinna has eaten his supper at Ụmụnze, he sits down to discuss with another young boy there about their common problem. Ubesie tells the reader about this thus:

> Ka ha richara nri, ha abụọ malitere akụkọ maka ihe bụ isi ọwụwa ha: ọsọ a na-achụ ndị mmadụ maka ịbanye soja. (After meal, both told the story about their headache, the search for people to be conscripted into the army.) (90).

Ubesie takes *ọsọ a na-achụ ndị mmadụ maka ịbanye soja* (the search for people to be conscripted into the army) to be the *isi ọwụwa* (headache) of Obinna and his friend.

3.8 Idioms

The idiom communicates ideas other than those which they literally embody. In other words, it is not compositional: its meaning cannot be deciphered from its lexical constituents.

Ubesie's good use of idioms helped in enhancing the beauty of the narrative. On page 18, we see Obinna using a charm and the Bible simultaneously. This keeps his mind in a confused state because

> ọgwụ na akwụkwọ nsọ abụghị akụ na ụkwa. (Literal: Charm and the Bible are not kernel and bread-fruit; Real meaning: Charm and the Bible are not compatible.)

In other words, the two cannot be used at the same time for they do not go together.

After Obinna and Ikechukwu have stolen some petrol, the authorities change the army guards and put a different group of army to mount guard, Ubesie writes:

> Ndị nke e wetera ugbu a kpụ ọkụ n'ọnụ (Literal: The ones they brought have fire
> in their mouth; Real meaning: The ones they brought are tough.) (38).

When Obinna and others are carried to the war front at Ufuma, Obinna is stricken with fear:

> Osisi dị n'ọhịa megharịa, Obinna achịrị mkpụrụ obi ya n'aka (Literal: If the trees swayed, Obinna would carry his heart in his hand; Real meaning: Even the swaying of trees frightened Obinna.) (76).

The first night Obinna is staying in Uli, he meets a dwarf who gives him two kolanuts. Obinna takes these kolanuts, blesses them and, instead of eating them, throws them away. Ubesie says:

O nye ya ọnọdụ n'ime ọhịa (Literal: He gives it a place in the forest; Real meaning: He throws it away.) (132).

3.9 Parallelism

In trying to explain why people are asking Obinna why he has not gone into the army, Ubesie employs these parallelisms:

> Maka na ihe bara mmadụ n'ọnụ arapụtaghị ya, nke si ya n'ọnụ pụta achịpụta ya ụkwụ n'ezi... Lee ya jide na ọ bụ oke, hapụnụ ya na ọ bụ nkakwụ. (If what enters someone's mouth does not implicate him, the thing that comes out from his mouth will...See him; catch him for he is a rat; leave him for he is a foul-smelling mouse.) (1).

He uses another parallelism in saying that Obinna is determined not to go to war:

> A gaghị eji maka mgbagbu ghara ọgụ. Mana mgbagbu buru mmadụ igbata Obinna egbe, mmadụ akpọkwala ya aha, kpọọ ije ọgụ.(One will not stay away from war for fear of being shot. However, if shooting one is shooting Obinna, nobody should mention going to war to him.) (11).

Then Ubesie comes down to explain, using parallelism, that Obinna's mother and sisters have started hiding their money from Obinna. He could not steal their money any longer and so:

> Afụ adịghị ya n'aka nke kọbọ ji adị ya n'aka. (There is neither half-kobo nor kobo in his hand.) (11).

All the figurative expressions identified here serve to create mental images with a permanent impression. It is not easy therefore for readers to forget events or characters.

4.0 The use of proverbs

In *Juọ Obinna*, Ubesie makes use of a great number of proverbs. This is not surprising judging by the fact that the proverb "enables the speaker to present a speech in a more concise and more picturesque manner than in ordinary expression. It enables the speaker to avoid hackneyed expression and gives a certain account of wit

and freshness to his speech" (Ashipu, 2006). We shall distinguish between two uses which he makes of these proverbs. They are functional use and cosmetic use.

4.1 Functional use of proverbs[1]

The use of the proverbs is functional if the proverbs have been used in the right contexts. Most of the proverbs used in the novel could be regarded as functional. For instance, on page 5, Obinna is being chased around by women to retrieve from him his mother's fowl. The women's effort would be futile. Ubesie describes this fruitless venture using a functional proverb:

> Ọ dịghị mkpa na mbe ga-ehi aka n'anya na-awakwa ọgọdọ ka ya je gwuwe mmiri nyịrị enyi ogwugwu. (There is no need for one to prepare to do what one will not succeed in.)

Obinna is stranded and this forces him to go to his arch-enemy, Mazị Ọnyịdo, to get a charm that will protect him from conscriptors. Ubesie describes this situation by saying that:

> O ribido ochie dibịa n'ajọ ọhịa, o rie ihe o na-asọ nsọ. (If a strong native doctor encounters difficulty, he does what he forbids.) (7).

Concerning the incident on page 13, we see Obinna singing praises of Mazị Ọnyịdo for the charm he prepared for him because Obinna greeted and passed a group of conscriptors and they made no move to conscript him. But, moving on, he hears them calling him back. Obinna knows he will be in trouble if they get at him because their call on him is so intense that it suggests an event from which the charm he h. will not protect him. Ubesie says:

> Mgbe onye ahụ malitere kpọsiwe ya oku ike ka o ji mara na *nwunye mbe dị ime asụwala ụdị ude ọ na-abụ ọ sụọ, ọ mụọ nwa yiri nshịkọ.* (When the call was intensified, he then knew that something serious was about to happen.)

In another instance, Mazị Ọnyịdo prepares a charm for Obinna. This charm is believed to be able to protect him from conscriptors. But when Obinna goes to reactivate the charm in Mazị Ọnyịdo's residence, he is told that Mazị Ọnyịdo has been conscripted into the army. This makes Obinna to realize that

... onye na-akwọnwughị onwe ya anaghị akwọta mmadụ.(He who is incapable of protecting himself cannot protect another.) (16).

In other words, Mazị Onyịdo who is not able to protect himself cannot protect Obinna. This proverb is functional as it best explains what Ubesie wants to explain. When Obinna is employed to work in the petrol station, he is very happy. Ubesie explains this with the proverb:

Ihe ahụ dị wọrọ ogoli ya azụọla n'ahịa: (That which one longed for is within reach.) (27).

Ubesie, on page 38, wants to tell us that the authorities of the petrol station are suspecting the people working there as the thieves stealing petrol; or that they tell outsiders how to be able to steal petrol and go free. But he does not say this plainly. He uses an appropriate proverb thus:

...ọ ga-abụ oke bi n'ụlọ maara ebe azụ dị na ngiga, jẹ na-ata ya. Ọ bụrụ na ọ bụghị ya na-ata ya, ọ bụ oke bi n'ụlọ gwara nke bi n'agụ na azụ dị na ngiga, na-egosi ya ụzọ e si na-eje na ngiga.(It is either the petrol thieves are from within or they have accomplices within.)

Obinna is suspected by the other inmates of the hospital because he is always carrying a large sum of money. They know he must have a secret surrounding how he gets his money:

Ma o doro mmadụ nile anya na ọkpọ nọ n'ime mmiri anaghị agba egwu na nkịtị n'ala mmiri. (It is clear that nothing happens without a cause.) (47).

The way these functional proverbs occur in contexts clearly shows proverbs to be an integral part of Igbo rhetoric. Thus, "in their usage, proverbs are aesthetically satisfying and functional to the Igbo" (Ụkaegbu, 2006).

There are proverbs used by Ubesie which, though functional, can be said to stick out their heads from the context. This happens when Ubesie draws the attention of the reader to a proverb. He does this by using one of these phrases introducing phrases:

Ndi Igbo na-atụ ilu sị....(Igbo people say the proverb that...)
Ndi Igbo na-ekwu okwu sị... (Igbo people say that...)
Ndi be anyị na-atụ ilu sị ... (Our people say ...
A si na .... (They say that ...)



These proverbs draw the reader's attention to themselves:

... ndị Igbo... na-atụ n'ilu na-asị na ***abalị kpu okpu*** (The is covered) (7)

Ndị be anyị na-atụ ilu sị na ***a chọwa a hụ anaghị akọ n'ákpá dịbja*** (There is hardly what cannot be found in the witch doctor's bag) (10)

Ndị Igbo na-ekwu n'okwu sị, na a ***gaghị eji maka mgbagbu ghara ọgụ*** (Death does not deter people from fighting a war) (11)

Ndi Igbo sị na ***a nọrọ n'ụzọ tụrụ ime, a mụtaghị onye ara, a mụta onye agwụ.*** (Sudden pregnancy produces mad or possessed people) (17)

... a sị na ***onye rie mbụ rie ịbọ, mbụ egbughị ya, ịbọ egbuo ya*** (One who eats everything dies from any of the things) (18).

You must have noticed that these proverbs occur in the contexts as if they are afterthoughts and they do not make the reading of the narrative flow smoothly in the places they occur.

Another form of functional proverbs found in the novel is wellerisms. Ubesie uses them to make his explanations clearer, or to tell us what the person he is talking about has in mind.

On page 38, Ubesie tells how the man to whom Obinna and Ikechukwu sold the petrol they stole from the petrol station promised to give them more money if they can steal out more petrol for him. He says,

> Ma, mmọnwụ Akọkwa jere ahịa mmọnwụ n'Uburu ka ndị otu ya kụrụ ekwe, jụọ ya sị ya, "oke mmọnwụ, a ga-ejezikwa Uburu ọzọ?" O cheta ọgwụ a kọrọ ya na ihe nile e mere ya n'Uburu, za ha sị ka ha lọta nke ha jere eje. (Certain risks are too grievous to be taken twice.)

This portrays the inner feelings of Obinna and his friend concerning the risks they encountered in order to have been able to steal out some gallons of petrol.

The wellerisms Ubesie uses on pages 21, and 40 help him to make his explanations clearer. On page 21, when Obinna sees a soldier standing in front of his door, he thinks the solider has come to conscript him into the army. He is shocked. But he later finds out that the solider is his friend and so Obinna is revived because he knows he would not have given any excuse to save himself if the solider were an enemy. This, Ubesie uses wellerism to explain,

> Agadi nwoke ka aharaja gbanyere n'agada, ọ na-enye onwe ya nsogbu. Aharaja wee sị ya zuo ike, n'ihi na ọ bụrụ na ya bụ akpụ, na apa mma gara iju ya ahụ nile. (One confronted with a problem he cannot solve sits back to face the consequences.)

Obinna's friend is shot dead during their commando practice. This makes Obinna uncomfortable because he is aware that this thing that happened to his friend can equally happen to him one day. For further clarification Ubesie adds,

> ...ọgazị a na-ahụ n'ọkụ hụrụ ebe ọkụkọ na-achị ya ọchị wee kpọọ ọkụkọ sị ya kwụsị ịchị ya ọchị, n'ihi na ha abụọ bụ ụmụnne; ma nanị ihe dị iche bụ na otu bi n'ọhịa, nke ọzọ biri n'ụlọ. Ihe na-eme ọgazị ga-emechaa mee ọkụkọ. (No one should rejoice at another's misfortune for misfortune could come to anyone.) (61-62).

4.2 Cosmetic use of proverbs

Apart from the places where the functional proverbs we have discussed above occur, in certain places we see Ubesie using a proverb or a pile of proverbs not related to the context. In some places he uses proverb(s) to repeat what he has already said in plain language, while in others he uses chains of proverbs to express just one idea. We have called these redundant proverbs cosmetic proverbs.

On page 1, we see where Ubesie is telling us that after one has said that one must do something and later fails to do it, that person becomes ashamed whenever that thing he said he would do is mentioned. In the case of Obinna, he said he would go to war if the war starts, but when the war actually starts, he refuses to go. This is why Ubesie says,

> ... Obinna amabeghị na *ọgaranya kechaa ekpe hapụ ịnwụ, ihere ọnwụ egbuo ya,* maka na *ihe bara mmadụ n'ọnụ arapụtaghị ya, nke sị ya n'ọnụ pụta achịpụta ya ụkwụ n'ezi.* (Obinna doesn't know that the rich man is filled with shame if he eventually does not die, besides if what is injected doesn't implicate one, what comes out from the mouth might.)

This conveys the idea but Ubesie does not stop at that. He comes down and piles up several proverbs, all of which become cosmetic, for they have nothing doing in the context. They continue thus:

...ọ kpata, ọ dị ka ọ gaghị cricha, o richaa ... Lee ya jide na ọ bụ oke; hapụnụ ya ... *Oke mmọnwụ na-eti onwe ya, ma ọ.hụ mmọnwụ ụmụaka, ya na ọsọ ana-eme! Onye duuru mmụọ je gbuo mmadụ, duru mmadụ bịa ụlọ akwa, pụta n'ụzọ jụwa ndị o dugara ụlọ akwa ebe ha sị*! (If one earns, it looks as if one will not consume all but one would; catch it, it is a rat; leave it. The great masquerade that leads itself but encounters a small masquerade and runs; the one who led the spirit to kill, leads people to the funeral but on the way back asked his companions where they were coming from)

On page 7, we are told that Obinna greets the army officer and so the man does not bother to harass him. Ubesie comes to add: "Afọ atụtala ime, otube agbaa ama... (The belly has conceived; the navel revealed it)" This proverb is cosmetic as it has got nothing to do in the context. Coming down to page 31, we see proverbs piled up cosmetically just to express the idea that life is full of struggles:

Nsogbu adịghị! Nwoke na ihe ga na-eme, *maka na enyi nọrọ ndụ, ya na dinta ana-agbari. Enyi nwụọ anwụọ, ya na ijiji ana-ekpe.* Ha nile bụ nhụsi anya nhụsi anya. *Ma abụzụ hụ nke anya ya na-ekwesighị ihụ, o were ụkwụ gbapuo onwe ya afọ*, gba ụmụ ụwa nkịtị. (There is no trouble! Man must continue to struggle: so long as the elephant is alive, it will attract the hunter; if it dies, it will attract the flies: all is suffering, but if the cricket sees a strange thing, it bursts its belly.)

These proverbs cannot be said to be related to what comes before or after them. Again, on page 65, Ubesie employs a series of proverbs for the explanation of one idea that the soldiers are not far from reaching the war front once they have set off from their camp. He writes,

Na egwu enweghị isi bụ na a malitebeghị igba ya. Na ụzọ etegbuola onwe ya n'aka bụ na a malitebeghị njem. Na nwa mgbeeke amaghị akpụ isi bụ na agụba adịghị nkọ... (That the dance is meaningless is because it is not open yet; that the journey is too far is that it has not commenced; that a young woman does not know how to cut hair is that the blade is blunt.)

One of these proverbs would have comfortably explained this. Lastly, on page 171, Ubesie repeats what he has already told us. This he does by saying it first in plain

language only to come down to say it again using a proverb. This usage is cosmetic. The repetition is:

> Ọ na-achọbụ ụzọ ọ ga-esi ghara ha ụgha maka ike ya kpara n'agha ha wee jiri ọnụ ha juọ ya. *Ebe mbe na-achọ ụzọ ọ ga-esi taa ihe siri ike ka nwunye ya jere siere ya ọna tara akụ.* (He was looking for a way to tell them lies about his exploits in the war when they gave him the opportunity by asking him; where the tortoise was looking for a way to chew solid food; his wife cooked palm kernel for him.)

5.0 Conclusion

This paper has focused on the language of Tony Ubesie in his novel *Juo Obinna*. The language studied is represented in types of sentences, figures of speech, and proverbs used. The sentences in the novel are simple and complex as it is normal with every work in prose. However, it is observed that the simple sentences are primary ones, the ones typical users of the Igbo language will employ in their day-to-day communication. It is only the complex ones that represent the creativity of the writer. Still, a good number of them are idioms and proverbs which are in primary usage. The sentences, simple or complex, are either declarative or interrogative. Many are declarative as expected ordinarily. It is by their means that the actions and feelings of the characters have been expressed. The interrogative sentences are rhetorical or non-rhetorical. They, as has been pointed out in the paper, have been employed to make the readers participants in the narration.

The figures of speech identified in the novel include parallelism, metaphor, simile, personification, hyperbole, irony and synecdoche. They have served to create mental images with long-lasting impression. Idioms and proverbs are resources the Igbo language has, which have been adequately used in the novel. It is important to restate the classification of the use of the proverbs. It may be functional or cosmetic. Functional if the proverbs used logically correspond with contexts; and cosmetic if the proverbs illogically apply in contexts of use or repeat an idea stated in plain language or if they are in a series denoting the same idea.

On the whole, the language of *Juo Obinna* is commendable even though, as pointed out, the cosmetic use of proverbs is a problem. Other problems may exist with the language just as other commendable features may exist. We recommend, therefore, that more study be done to discover them. The target is usually to make the

writer appreciate his work; know areas of strength and those of weakness for improvement. Moreover, it creates a standard that should appeal to other writers and can provide information for readers to understand the work.

Note

1. The gloss for the proverbs is not compulsorily compositional. That is, only their literal meaning in the Igbo language has been given in most cases. Proverbs with text that is not part of them are in bold-face italics.

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