

Language as a bridge to understanding in things fall apart, a novel by chinua ach...

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The prose utilized to write *Things Fall Apart* by Chinua Achebe is uniquely stylized and molded to suit its African setting. The author is largely successful in developing a blend between the English language and the culture of the Ibo people. Using this European language to define various unfamiliar words, explain customs, fabricate ways of thinking and translate metaphors creates the illusion of an African language while still being accessible to individuals in this English dominated world.

For the whole of the novel Achebe inserts Ibo words that can either be defined by the reader through evidence from the text or are defined in his writing. This technique causes the reader to reinterpret the sentence, like one would do while translating, and gives us just a taste of what this particular African language sounds like. “ The active principle in that medicine had been an old woman with one leg. In fact, the medicine itself was called *agadi-nwayi*, or old woman.” (*Things Fall Apart* pg. 11-12) The seemingly effortless blend of African words and English writing makes the story unchallenging to understand while still remaining loyal to its African roots.

Though written in English, the author explains various African customs which become familiar to the reader as the story progresses. One example of this can be found in almost every chapter with the breaking of kola nuts, the fruit of kola trees found in African rainforests, as a ritualistic metaphor and common practice of the Ibo people. ““ Thank you. He who brings kola brings life. But I think you ought to break it,” replied Okoye, passing back the disc.” (*Things Fall Apart* pg. 6) As a recurring theme it gains more meaning

throughout the plot as the Ibo culture begins to diminish due to colonialism. The use of African customs and values intensifies the culture of the story without being burdened by its English disguise.

Along with showing the customs of this African tribe Achebe also includes assorted metaphors that represent morals valued in this society. They are crafted in a way that helps familiarize the reader with the unique group-mind of the Ibo people whose ways of thinking may be different from our own. The simplicity of these stories makes them translatable and accentuate the importance of verbal continuation in Ibo culture. In one particular Ibo tale Mosquito asks Ear to marry him, upon which Ear mocks him stating, “ How much longer do you think you will live?...you are already a skeleton.” (Things Fall Apart pg. 75) Mosquito goes away humiliated, but any time he passed Ear in the future makes sure to tell her that he is still alive. Though straightforward this tale gives the reader an understanding of how the Ibo culture explains the world. That is a contrast that may be lost if it were written in the African language.

Some philosophers and deep thinkers, such as Ngugi Wa Thiong’o, may argue that using English to write about one’s culture is just enforcing colonialism and its effects. Language and communication are an essential part of culture and using a foreign tongue to craft an artistic rendition of that culture would be leaving out a substantial portion of its worth. “[In] the colonial system of education in addition to its apartheid racial demarcation... English became the measure of intelligence and ability in the arts, the sciences, and all the other branches of learning.” (Decolonising the Mind by

Ngugi Wa Thiong'o pg. 3) Language has been used to destroy connection and convert individuals to one way of thinking. So writing in one's own language can be seen as resistance to that internal colonization and injustice.

However, if the book were to be written in Achebe's native language there would be no point in explaining to the world what a rich and genuine culture was being destroyed. Most people would not understand what was being written, except those that already knew of the history. According to a study conducted by the British Council about " 25 percent of the world's population has some understanding of English." Which is drastically higher than most African dialects. Therefore, if Chinua Achebe's goal is to reach as many people as possible with his literature, the most economically resourceful and practical solution is to write in English.

Along with providing the novel with a wider audience it also educates the readers of a culture unfamiliar to most. If all books about Africa were written in African vernacular there would be no further expansion of knowledge. " I think that if all English literatures were studied together, a shape would emerge which would truly reflect the new shape of the language in the word... because the world language now also possesses a world literature." (Salman Rushdie) English has become so widely used that it no longer belongs to one culture and using it as a tool for intercommunication is necessary to our future as united nations.

Overall, language can be a barrier but it is also a bridge to understanding. Chinua Achebe's decision to write *Things Fall Apart* in English was not only intelligent but necessary. Achebe was very successful in using English in a way that assisted the story. The delicate way the novel circulates to connect to both the English-dominated world and the tales African roots is an example of a progression and rational thinking. Chinua Achebe did not feel confined by words and the stories he crafted should not be held down by something as changeable and restraining as language.