

The Rhetoric of Interrogative Structures in *Arrow of God*

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Abstract

Interrogatives are grammatical structures which are employed to ask questions and to elicit responses. Intricately woven into the discursive framework of Achebe's *Arrow of God* are interrogatives which appear to be performing more than the traditional functions in the text. Questions are used by characters and the narrator in communicative contexts that clearly indicate that the purpose is not to seek for information or to make request. This study, therefore examines the rhetorical uses of interrogatives from a pragmatic perspective with the aid of Conversational Analysis. Information from the study indicates that questions as used in the novel do not just mark a stylistic feature but are significant in achieving rhetorical impulse and meaning. Interrogatives in *Arrow of God* also serve to encapsulate the exact nuances of the rich cultural speech mannerism of the Igbo society depicted in the novel. The peculiar usages of this form in *Arrow of God* highlight the variations that exist in the linguistic structures of languages and in particular, in the English language in Nigeria.

Keywords: rhetoric, interrogative structures, conversational analysis, meaning, style

Introduction

Rhetoric as an art of discourse aims to improve the writer's or speaker's ability to inform, persuade or motivate particular audiences in specific situations (en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Rhetoric).

The strategies used to achieve rhetorical force in discourse may differ from one culture to another and from one communicative context to another. However, one important characteristic of language, which assists the users in achieving rhetorical force in diverse communication settings across time and space, is its ability to adapt to varied contexts of communication, perform peculiar functions and still maintain its basic structural properties.

One context of communication in which peculiar instances of the compelling force of language can be demonstrated is the literary text. Using any of the three major genres – poetry, prose, drama – literary artists often employ language in ways that remain persuasive and memorable in all ages. Their forms of usages sometimes violate some basic language rules but, the resultant variations serve to reflect the variations that exist in a language.

Achebe stands out as one of the notable literary artists whose use of language in creative writing can be described as possessing rhetorical force. This justifies the need to examine the diverse strategies that he employs in achieving this. In general terms, Achebe's use of the English language in writing demonstrates the dynamism of English in the Nigerian situation. Thus, while reading some of Achebe's novels which are set in typical Igbo society at the threshold of western domination and colonization – *Things Fall Apart* and *Arrow of God* - one can clearly experience how English has been adapted to encapsulate the exact nuances of communication and narration in Igbo culture. His strategy has been acknowledged as an important element that elucidates the various paradigms of socio-cultural reality and human experience (Dutta 2010: 1). While some of the grammatical forms employed to achieve this end, for example, the use of interrogatives may mark a shift in English structure, yet the forms as they are used in the text effectively serve to clarify the thematic conceptualization, add to the rhetorical as well as the aesthetic appeal of the novel and encapsulate the exact

nuances of the speech pattern of the Igbo society which the novel aims to depict.

Grammatically, interrogatives are structures which are used to indicate request for information; beyond this, the type known as rhetorical question is used to evoke profound thoughts from the audience (wiki.answers.com). In *Arrow of God*, the interpretation of the interrogatives used in conversations in the text indicates that the intent is not to make a request or to elicit information but to achieve rhetoric. Various forms of interrogatives – yes/no, Wh, tag questions – are knitted into the discursive framework in the text obviously to achieve communication purposes which include confrontation, altercation, phatic communion, and persuasion. Interrogatives also serve as discourse strategies to introduce topic, to mark a shift in topic and to achieve topic development. This study, therefore, aims to examine and to record the various usages of interrogatives in achieving diverse communication ends, highlight the variations in usages and attempt to account for the socio-cultural variables that provide the interpretation of meaning. This investigation further reflects the forms as veritable cultural and stylistic strategies that are used in achieving compelling speeches and narratives in the novel and in natural communication among the Igbo.

Justification for the Study

Achebe's use of language in *Arrow of God* has received wide scholarly attention (Lindfors 1971; Nwachukwu-Agbada 1997; Mbisike 2002; Ahmed 2012). Earlier critical works such as Lindfors (1971) focused on the use of proverbs. Other works such as Dutta (2010) contributed additional insights on the cultural properties embedded in Achebe's use of language. Dutta (2010) for example, identified the elements which Achebe employed in the novel to look at his society 'from the inside.' The study recognizes the gripping force of the language of the novel but did not pay

significant consideration to the use of interrogatives, which this present study identifies as an important communication strategy in the novel.

This study on the significance of interrogatives in achieving rhetorical impulse in *Arrow of God* adds to the data bank on critical studies on the text, especially from the linguistics and ethnographic perspectives. Among other factors, this study contributes information on Achebe's style of language usage and the meaning embedded in the text. The analysis of this novel from a pragmatic perspective provides additional insights on the dynamism and variability of language as a living phenomenon. It serves to highlight the linguistic practices of the people and the dynamism of the English language in adapting to non native culture while still retaining its structural properties and intelligibility with other varieties.

Conceptual and Theoretical Clarification

Aristotle explains rhetoric as the faculty of observing in any given case the available means of persuasion (en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Rhetoric). Ability to employ the appropriate strategies in rhetoric often makes a speech compelling and persuasive. The study of the rhetoric of a discourse (spoken or written), therefore, provides the tool for understanding and interpreting how arguments are developed and explored in a text. Each particular speaker or writer employs peculiar or common strategies to introduce argument, develop and conclude his/her thesis. Sometimes, these strategies are derived from the cultural context of the language users. Some common strategies employed in achieving rhetoric include the use of symbols and short catchy expressions and the use of interrogative structures. Interrogatives are used to draw acknowledgement from a listener that he/she understands the message; to achieve comic effect; to persuade the audience to

adopt the position of the speaker; to produce an effect and not just to summon an answer (en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Rhetoric).

The study of rhetoric was formerly restricted to political discourse but in modern times, the term accommodates a wide range of domains including fiction. A cursory analysis of the strategies employed in *Arrow of God* to achieve rhetorical ends highlights the use of symbols as encapsulated in proverbs and metaphoric expressions as well as the use of interrogatives. The attention of this study is on the interrogatives. As stated in the introduction, this study examines the different forms of interrogatives which are infused into the stream of consciousness and in various communication contexts – public speeches, monologue, dialogues – to achieve various ends in the novel. The study adopts a pragmatic approach. Conversation Analysis by Schegloff (1968, 2007) Sacks (1972, 1992) provides the tool for examining the variations inherent in the use of interrogatives in *Arrow of God* and to justify the thesis that the interpretation of the meaning enshrined in the variant usages can only be achieved with the aid of socio-cultural variables within the context of the narration.

The use of pragmatic models in the study of language usage, which is often situated in interactional sociolinguistics, involves the interpretation of meaning of an utterance in interaction with close reference to the context in which it is used (Holmes, 2008: 372). Context is crucial in Pragmatics because it 'extends the analysis of meaning beyond grammar and word meaning to the relationship between the participants and the background knowledge they bring to the situation' (Wardhaugh 2010: 357).

Pragmatic analysis of conversations both in fiction and real life can be achieved with the aid of Conversational Analysis (CA). The major objective of CA is to uncover the tacit reasoning procedure and sociolinguistic competencies underlying the production and interpretation of talk in organized sequence of interaction (Hutchy

& Woofitt, 2008). CA as an explanatory tool posits that human communication such as conversation involves an orderly sequencing of expressions; an utterance depends upon an utterance made by another speaker. The interlocutors take turns. The turns produce sequences of two related utterances by different speakers described as Adjacency pairs. The pairs provide the principle for examining conversation. In this arrangement, the second part of an utterance is functionally dependent on the first: greeting – response; invitation – response; question – answer, complaint – apology, summon – response. The first and second parts are described as ‘pair parts’.

According to CA, speech, planned or unplanned, has certain characteristics that help in achieving order and these ‘orders’ we ignore or violate ‘at our peril’. The ordering or pairing of expressions enables the parties involved in the conversation to make meaningful and related contributions, which could be positive or negative, preferred or dispreferred, but the violation of the pairing often results in the disruption of the conversation (Wardhaugh, 2010: 316-317). The structuring of conversation in this form helps to shape participants ‘co-construction and conduct in the interaction’ (Schegloff, 2007: 64). The argument is that a conversational analyst can only understand how the social lives of the participants are shaped, if he observes the overall organization of the described structure of conversation without recourse to extra-textual information (Holmes, 2008: 381).

Holtgreaves (2002: 199) observes that the generalization of findings in CA is one of its weaknesses. This present study in line with Holtgreaves (2002) seeks to show that there could be specific instances where the prescribed sequencing of conversation is influenced by cultural variables and an analyst can use information from the context to achieve interpretation. In *Arrow of God*, the Adjacency pairs which CA posits, especially as it relates to question and answer, is absent. Yet communication among the interlocutors

was not 'at peril'. Cultural variables from the context provided adequate interpretation of meaning and sustained conversation. It is worthy to note here that CA does not impose any preconceived theory on data (Wardhaugh, 2010: 315). CA can also be used to examine 'unusual' conversations such as monologue and drama (Wardhaugh 2010: 326). There are also 'unusual' conversations in *Arrow of God* such as monologues and interaction between Ezeulu and the deity, Ulu, and Ca will be applied in this study CA to examine these.

Analysis of Data

As stated in the introduction, this study aims to examine the use of interrogatives as a strategy for achieving rhetorical force in Achebe's *Arrow of God*. Excerpts where interrogatives were employed in communication in the text serve as the primary source of data. The analyses of data highlight the various communication and discourse purposes which interrogatives were employed to achieve in the text.

Interrogative Structures in *Arrow of God*

This section examines the different ends to which interrogatives are employed in the text.

A. Interrogative as a Device for Confrontation/Altercation

The thematic thrust of *Arrow of God* centers on conflict. The text is rife with diverse conflicts, rivalries and disputations – the rivalry between Idemili and Ulu; the rivalry between Ezidemili/Nwaka and Ezeulu; the domestic conflicts in Ezeulu's household, especially between Ezeulu and Edogo; the chaos that results from Ezeulu's rejection of the British offer of paramount chieftaincy and his consequent detention by the colonial authority, among others. Some characters in the novel employ interrogatives for confrontation as seen in the conversation between Ezeulu and his

first son Edogo, whom he disagrees with over sundry issues. Consider this excerpt:

‘What is this story I hear that you are carving an Alusi for a man of Umuagu?’

‘Who told you?’

‘Is it true or not is what I want to know not who told me?’

‘I want to know who told you because I don’t think he can tell the difference between the face of a deity and the face of a mask’ (4-5).

The first speaker, Ezeulu, confronts his son with a question. Edogo, instead of providing the correct pair part which should be an explanation, retorts with a question that also generates another pair of questions. It is apparent that the questions do not have pair parts yet communication is not bridged. The pragmatics of questioning in this altercation indicates this form as a strategy of attack and defence.

This form, which was used to introduce and develop arguments in the altercations between Ezeulu and his son Edogo serve as a major strategy for driving conflicts and arguments in the novel and in Ezeulu’s household in particular. In another dissension between Ezeulu and Edogo, this form serves to highlight the contrast between Ezeulu’s disposition and that of his son during the commotion generated by Oduche’s overzealous act of locking the royal python in a box:

And what did you do when you heard that?

What should I have done? Edogo was surprised and a little angry at his father’s tone.

Don’t you hear him? asked Ezeulu to no one, my first son, somebody says to your hearing that your father has committed an abomination and you ask what you should have done?

...When you were my age your father did not send one of his sons to worship the white man’s god (53)

Ezeulu in this instance uses direct questioning to confront his son over what he considers as weakness, including a question directed to no one in particular. His son, Edogo in turn, uses questions to defend himself and at same time attacks his father for always considering him a weakling.

The use of question as a strategy for confrontation and defence is also evident in the interaction between Ezeulu and his in-laws:

‘What is this story we hear about?’

‘You should have seen her (Akueke) the day she came home. Is this how you marry women in your place? Is it your way? Then I say you will not marry my daughter like that.’

The men agreed that Ibe had stretched his arm too far and no one could blame Obika for defending his sister (12).

Again the interpretation of this discourse lies outside the text. Ibe’s kinsmen had clearly come to confront Ezeulu over his manhandling by Obika. Ezeulu amongst other factors is the chief priest and a revered member of the community, these factors influenced the indirect approach to the issue through questioning. Ezeulu rather than answer their question tactically dodges the blame with another question. In response, the men withdraw the confrontation and rather concede blame.

B. Interrogatives as Comments

In *Arrow of God*, some characters utilize questions in monologues as well as in conversations to remark on their personal ideas and perception of issues. In the example below, Ezeulu in a monologue uses questions to reflect his feelings of disgust over Obika’s recklessness especially in relation to drinking, considering the fact that he is about to marry:

...When she arrives what a husband she would find. A man who could not watch his hut at night because he was dead with palmwine? Where did the manhood of such a husband lie? A man who could not protect his wife if night marauders knocked at his door? A man who was roused in the morning by the

women? Tufia! Spat the old priest. He could not contain his disgust (79).

Also in this conversation between Ezeulu's eldest wife, Matefi's and her daughter on the subject of the new moon, Matefi first uses a question before using a declarative to register her comment about the new moon.

But, how is it sitting? I don't like its posture (2)

The interrogative expression has no pair part and the speaker does not allow the listener to take her turn to provide an answer before she introduces her opinion of the moon. In this instance, one can clearly see a shift in the use of interrogatives but the meaning can be deduced from the context where speakers understand that interrogatives can be employed directly to make comments.

C. Questions as a Strategy for Instigating Revolt

In *Arrow of God* questioning serves as a persuasive strategy for instigating revolt, especially against the traditional authority – the deity, Ulu, as well as his chief priest. This form appears to be a major linguistic device employed to fuel the internal conflict in Umuaro. In the secret meeting which Nwaka holds with some selected members of the community, he drives his agitation over Ezeulu's authority with series of rhetorical questions:

My father told me many things but he did not tell me that Ezeulu was king in Umuaro. Who is he anyway? Does anybody here enter his compound through the man's gate? If Umuaro decided to have a king, we know where it would come from. Since when did Umuachala become head of the six villages? And we have all heard how people of Aninta dealt with their deity when he failed them. Did they not carry him out to the boundary between and their neighbours and set him on fire? (28)

The sequence of interrogatives interspersed with declarative structures also marks a speech pattern that is used to characterize Igbo traditional orators, as typified in Nwaka, who in this novel is portrayed as a major antagonist of Ulu and his chief priest. The

intent is to achieve rhetorical force and strategic persuasion. Dutta (2010: 4) also notes that the complex rhetoric which marks the speech of clan elders like Ezeulu and Nwaka signifies the well-developed conversational skill among the Igbo. By the use of these interrogatives, the speaker engages the audience to critically consider the authority of Ezeulu in Umuaro.

D. Interrogatives as Directives

Interrogative in this text serves the communicative function of giving directives or counsel. In the scene where Ezeulu threatens to kill Oduche for imprisoning the royal python in a box, their neighbour Anosi, in counselling Oduche's mother uses interrogative structures:

What is the profit of crying? Anosi asked Ugoye. Won't you find your son and ask him not to return home today? (45)

Ugoye understands the import of the expression and does not attempt to provide a pair part which ought to have been a verbal response to the questions but rather acts as advised.

E. Questions as Condolence Message

Interrogatives are used in *Arrow of God* to express condolence. Still in the same scene, the people who came to condole with Ugoye, Oduche's mother used questions:

Euu! What shall we do to children of today?

Ezeulu strode into the compound and ordered them to leave...What harm have we done in coming to console another woman? (52)

The reaction of Ezeulu and the retort of the sympathisers indicate that the interlocutors understand the communicative import of the structure.

Also Ezeulu's friend, Akuebue, uses question to condole with him over the flogging of Obika by the Whiteman.

Did they say Obika was whipped by the white man? Ezeulu opened both palms to the sky and said nothing (94).

Here, a yes/no question which ought to have a verbal answer as a pair part does not elicit that response, but a gesture. It reflects a linguistic practice among the people. Ezeulu understands that his friend is not asking a question but trying to open a conversation on the matter in order to get first-hand information and to empathize with him.

F. Questions in Phatic Communion

Interrogatives are employed in diverse instances of communication in the novel to achieve phatic communion. In most traditional African societies, the cultural patterns of greeting often involve interrogatives. However, the pattern in this context is peculiar as the questions are answered with another question. Sometimes, a polar question does not elicit the expected response yet communication is not bridged as seen in the following interactions:

Is our wife well?

Your wife? She is well, nothing troubles her but hunger... (61)

In another scene, Ezeulu and his friend Akuebue also used questions as a form of greeting:

Is the owner of this house still alive?

Who is this man? asked Ezeulu, did they not say that you died two markets come next afo? (93)

In the interaction between Adaeze, Ezeulu's daughter and his wife Ugoye, Adaeze uses questions to identify with Ugoye's burden over Oduche's act.

How are the children? asked Adaeze. Is it true you have been teaching them to eat python?

You think it is something to make people laugh? Ugoye sounded hurt. No wonder you are the only person in Umuaro who did not care to come and ask what was happening.

Was anything happening? Nobody told me, was it fire or did they say someone died? (74)

It can be inferred from the discourse that the communication intent of Adaeze is to identify with Ugoye in her predicament but she uses questions as euphemistic device to play down on the gravity of the offence and to achieve phatic communion.

G. The Use of Interrogatives to Initiate Gossip

Some characters in the text employ questioning to introduce and develop a subject of gossip. Akueke initiates a gossip with Ugoye about Matefi with questions:

What do you think was Matefi's annoyance this morning?

I should ask you, is she not your father's wife? Her face was as big as a mortar. Did she ask if you were ready to go? (67)

Matefi also uses questions to gossip about Ugoye. When her daughter Ojiugo reports to her that Nwafo, Ugoye's last son had eaten up the remaining food she had given to Ezeulu, she scorns:

Do you blame a vulture for perching over a carcass? said Matefi.

What do you expect a boy to do when his mother cooks soup with locust beans for fish? (9-10)

The use of the word, 'said' instead of 'asked' explains the fact that declarative ought to have been used instead of an interrogative because the speaker is not just asking a question but aims at deriding the co-wife.

H. Questions as Strategy for Hiding Information

Questions are also employed in *Arrow of God* as a cultural strategy for hiding information in a context that requires discreetness. Consider the interaction between the people of Umuaro and the messengers of the whiteman sent to summon Ezeulu:

Where is Ezeulu's house? asked the leader...

Which Ezeulu?

How many Ezeulu's do you know? asked the Corporal irritably.

How many Ezeulu's do I know? repeated the man after him. I don't know of any Ezeulu.

Why did you ask me which Ezeulu if you do not know any?
Why did I ask you?
Shut up you bloody fool, shouted the policeman in English
(151).

This cultural speech habit is depicted in another scene, in Ezeulu's compound, when the messengers finally manage to find the place.

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 seed out of your mouth. I say who is called Ezeulu?

And I say which Ezeulu? or don't you know who you are looking for? (153)

It is clear from these questioning that there is an attempt to hide information, Umuaro has only one chief priest whose identity is known to all. As also indicated in the text, people consider it an act of betrayal for a man to show a stranger his neighbour's house.

In the second discourse, which involves an altercation between Ezeulu's first son and the white man's messenger, the speaker shows aggression and unwillingness to provide information on the identity of his father. This speech pattern reflects the culture of caution among the people towards revealing information to a stranger; thus questioning becomes the strategy to avoid providing the information.

I. Questions as Rebuke/Imperatives

Rebuke as well as imperatives can be achieved with declaratives.

For example, in this excerpt:

How does it concern you what I do with my son? You say you do not want Oduche to follow strange ways. Do you know that in a great man's household, there must be people who follow all kinds of strange ways? (46)

Ezeulu would have used declaratives to rebuke the wife for questioning his action of sending Oduche to join the church, but Ezeulu rather employs interrogatives which appear to achieve

greater semantic import in directly inviting Ugoye to consider the questions and reason along his lines.

Again, in another domestic argument with one of his wives, Matefi, Ezeulu adopts interrogatives instead of imperatives:

You were telling me to go and find cassava for you? What has Akueke to do with it? Is she my wife? I have told you many times that you are a wicked woman... (62)

Here Ezeulu employs a series of rhetorical questions with no pair part to chide his wife over her 'wickedness' and to make her carry out his directive. Questioning a necessity or an obligation is an indirect way to give a negative command (Aikhenvald 2010: 258). By asking her series of rhetorical questions, he directs her to perform her duties and indirectly invites her to judge her actions.

Another form of rebuke that is conveyed with question can be seen in Ezeulu's expression of anger towards Ezidemili's message to him in respect of the attempted killing of the python by his son, Oduche. To the messenger of Idemili who brings the message, Ezeulu retorts,

That what happened? asked the chief priest, holding his rage firmly with two hands.

Should I repeat what I have just said?...

Go and tell Ezidemili to eat shit. Do you hear me? Tell Ezidemili that Ezeulu says he should go and fill his mouth with shit (54).

J. Questions as a Strategy for Introducing and Developing Propositions

Another function of interrogatives in the text is as a discourse strategy for introducing, explaining and developing a proposition in an argument. In public speeches, monologues as well as dialogues in *Arrow of God*, interrogatives are used to introduce a topic of discussion, mark a shift in the subject for discussion, state a proposition or provide explanation for actions and to achieve strategic persuasion. Consider the following:

I want to tell you that Umuaro heaved a sigh of relief the day you set foot in your hut once again... Why do I say so? Because I knew the frame of mind in which you went away... I am one of those who said that we shall not come between you and the Whiteman... Why then did we agree with him? It was because we were confused. Did you hear me? The elders of Umuaro were confused (188).

Interrogatives are used to provide explanation and develop argument as seen in the speech Ezeulu makes to try and persuade Umuaro against fighting the people of Okperi:

Men of Umuaro, why do you think our father's told us the story? They told it because they wanted to teach us that no matter how strong or great a man was he should never challenge his *chi*. This is what our kinsman did – he challenged his *chi*. We were his flute player, but we did not plead with him to come away from death. Where is he today? The fly that has no one to advise him follows the corpse to the grave... (27)

In these speeches, the speakers pose some questions and provide answers. Although the questions have answers the model of adjacency pairing is not realized as the same speaker provides answers to the question. The questions are used to achieve theme-rheme progression.

Apart from achieving topic progression with the aid of questioning, interrogatives can serve as attention getters and mark a change in topic. This can be seen in the conversation between Akueke and her sister over her husband:

What am I telling you? asked Akueke changing the subject.
 My husband and his people came the other day.
 What did they come for?
 What else would they come for?
 So they are tired of waiting? (75)

K. Interrogatives as Protest

Characters in *Arrow of God* use questions to register protest. This can be seen in Matefi's reaction toward the beating of her daughter Ojiugo by her half-brother Oduche:

You tell me to shut my mouth? screamed Matefi, 'when Oduche takes my daughter to the stream and beats her to death. How can I shut my mouth when they bring corpse to me?...

I say shut your mouth! Are you mad? Matefi stopped her screaming. She mourned resignedly: I have shut my mouth. Why should I not shut my mouth? (129)

Here, the status of the interlocutors has some impact on the interaction. Ezeulu is her husband and a revered man. Matefi cannot directly challenge Ezeulu, she uses questions as an indirect way of registering her protest.

L. Interrogatives as Expressions of Grieve

Questions are used to express grief in *Arrow of God*. This can be exemplified in the lament of the protagonist, Ezeulu, over the problems in Umuaro.

What troubles me is not what the whole clan is saying, who tells the clan what it says? What does the clan know? ...Did I not stand up and tell Umuaro what would happen to them? And who was right at the end? What I said did it happen or did it not happen (131).

M. Interrogatives as strategy for Exploring Conflicts

In the diverse arguments and altercations in *Arrow of God*, questioning serves as a major persuasive device. In arguments involving the new converts in Umuaro over issues such as the killing of the royal python each side uses questions to argue their stand:

Was it for nothing that God put a curse into its head? he asked and then turned abruptly into the traditions of Umuaro (47)...

It is not true that the bible does not ask us to kill the serpent. Did not God tell Adam to crush its head after it had deceived his wife? Many people clapped for him (49)

In these two propositions by Moses and Oduche respectively, the speakers with questions aimed to provoke the thoughts of their audience toward reasoning along their divergent views.

The narrator also stylistically explores the conflicts that revolve around the central theme and the title of the novel through the psychological probing of the major characters – Ezeulu, Captain Winterbottom, and Edogo – with the use of rhetorical questions. As each of the main characters engages in intrapersonal conversation to interrogate his dispositions and contributions towards the conflict, the audience is guided to judge and interpret the text.

The Captain and Mr. Clarke use questions to probe their inner thoughts and expose the confusions in the colonial policies, which contribute to the fall of a deity, the chief priest and the society it protects. Winterbottom here reflects:

He would wonder what unspeakable rites went on in the forest at night, or was it the heart-beat of the African darkness? ...Could it be that the throbbing from his own heart-beaten brain? (29-30)....

What do we British do? We flounder from one expedition to its opposite. We do not only promise to secure savage tyrants on their thrones – or more likely filthy animal skins – we do not only do that, but we now go out of our way to invent chief's where there were none before (36)

In the first paragraph, the audience encounters a man who is confused about his rationality. With the last question, he invites the audience to judge the British government whose experiment in the appointment of a paramount ruler finally results in the collapse of a society.

During the Captain's sick leave, Ezeulu is invited and detained. This yields to a deeper fragment in the fragile walls of the government of a society tottering under the weight of rival cults. Clarke, who is charged with overseeing colonial affairs also uses

interrogation to invite the audience to judge the contribution of the British government to the quagmire:

What worried him was this. If he kept this fellow in jail what would he say was his offence? What would he put down in the log? For making an ass of the administration, or for refusing to be a chief? (177)

Interrogative structures also serve as the major linguistic device, which the narrator uses to explore Ezeulu's psychological battles over the limits of his authority in Umuaro. When he first toys with the idea of exerting his influence on the people, he employs interrogatives to consider the possibility of refusing to name the day for the festival of pumpkin:

... if he should refuse to name the day there would be no festival – no planting and no reaping. But could he refuse? No chief priest had ever refused, it could not be done.

He questions further:

'What kind of power was it if it could never be used? (3-4)

With these questions, the narrator directly exposes the inner battles of the messenger of the powerful deity, Ulu. This interrogation also serves as a lead to the central theme of the novel.

The conflict within the clan as well as Ezeulu's stance is projected through his inner probing as depicted in the same setting:

Each time he prayed for Umuaro bitterness rose in his mouth, a great smouldering anger for the division which has come to the six villages and which his enemies sought to lay on his head. And for what reason? Because he had spoken the truth before the Whiteman. But, how could a man who held the holy staff of Ulu know that a thing was a lie and speak it? How could he tell the story as he heard it from his own father? (6-7)

The narrator uses the psychological interrogation of Ezeulu to further unravel the theme, develop the plot and engage audience participation in the narrative:

Who would have thought that Umuaro would go to war sorely divided?

Who would have thought that they would disregard the warning of the priest of Ulu who originally brought the six villages together and made them what they were?

... Umuaro challenged the deity which laid the foundation of their villages. And what did they expect? He thrashed them and thrashed them enough for today and tomorrow (14)

As seen in these excerpts, Ezeulu uses questions for self-assessment and to absolve himself of the accusation of the people that he is fighting a personal war. However, it is unlikely that he will be exonerated, as some members of his household even question his actions. This can be exemplified in Edego's reflection on the extent of Ezeulu's interference in the affairs of the deity, especially in choosing his successor:

Could it be that their father had deliberately sent Oduche to the religion of the Whiteman so as to disqualify him for the priesthood of Ulu? ...Why did he not send Nwafo who was close to his thoughts? No, the chief priest wanted to have a hand in the choice of a successor. It was what anyone who knew Ezeulu would expect him to do. But, was he not presuming too much? The choice of a priest lay with the deity. Was it likely that he would let the old priest force his hands?

Edego's interrogation is in contrast to Ezeulu's stance. This further highlights the misinterpretation by the people that Ezeulu is an ambitious messenger.

The popular proposition that Ezeulu manipulates the deity appears to be refuted by the strange conversation between Ulu and his priest in which interrogatives were used to reflect the position of Ulu over the clash between his priest and the clan.

Taa! Nwanu! barked Ulu in his ears as a spirit would in the ear of an impertinent child, 'who told you that this was your fight?'... I say who told you that this was your own fight to

arrange the way it suits you? ...Do you know what happens when two elephants fight?

After these, there was no more to be said, who was Ezeulu to tell this deity how to fight the jealous cult of the 'sacred python?' It was the fight of the gods. He was no more an arrow in the bow of gods...

'Why did Oduche imprison a python in his box? It had been blamed on the Whiteman's religion, but what if the boy was also an arrow in the hand of god?

And what about the white man himself? (191-192)

The narrator uses these series of questions to lead to the debate on the character that serves as the arrow in the hand of the god, Ulu.

To further show Ezeulu's lack of total comprehension of Ulu's tactics in this war against a rival deity and to exonerate Ezeulu of the blames that are heaped on him by even members of his household, Ezeulu uses sequences of questions after the death of his son Obika to attempt to understand:

But why? He asked himself again and again! Why had Ulu chosen to deal thus with him, to strike him down and then cover him with mud? What was his offence? Had he not divined the god's will and obeyed it? When was it ever heard that a child was scalded by the piece of yam its own mother put in its palm? What man would send his son with a potsherd to bring fire from a neighbour's hut and unleash rain on him? Whoever sent his son up the palm to get nuts and then took an axe and felled the tree? (229)

These questions throb in the mind of the Chief priest until he loses his sanity. The device directly has persuasive import in luring the audience to judge Ezeulu, Ulu and other major characters who play key roles in the conflict. The questioning also draws pity and fear on the tragic experience of this messenger and his deity.

Conclusion

This study has examined the different forms of interrogative structures that are employed in narratives, speeches, monologues and conversation in *Arrow of God* and has highlighted the various ends to which they are employed. From the analysis, their usages in conversation in the novel mark a shift from Sack (1992) and Schegloff (1968 and 2007) model of Conversational Analysis as the cultural context in which the forms are used provide their justification and interpretations. It is important to reiterate that although the interrogatives in *Arrow of God* do not align with the conventional usage in English it nonetheless demonstrates the dynamism of English as a world language that is capable of being manipulated to encapsulate and communicate the cultural needs of the users.

Among other linguistic and stylistic devices which Achebe utilized in *Arrow of God*, interrogatives appear to be effective persuasive strategy that heightens the rhetorical impulse of the novel. The interrogative structures, which the novelist intricately embeds in various discourses in the novel, serve as linguistic and discourse strategies to engage the audience and lure them into direct participation in the exploration of the complexities of the conflict in Umuaro that results in the disintegration of Umuaro and the entrenchment of Christianity. With the use of questions, the narrator invites the reading audience to participate in the discourse of determining the arrow that the god, Ulu uses in the fight with a rival cult – Idemili, which is metaphorically captured in the novel as ‘the battle of two elephants’ and ‘the battle of the anklets’.

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