

# Heteroglossia in Chinua Achebe's *Things Fall Apart*

Yao Jung Lin, Ph. D.

Graduate Institute of Education, National Changhua University of Education

[a8413003@gmail.com](mailto:a8413003@gmail.com)

**Abstract-** *Things Fall Apart*, Chinua Achebe's first African novel, is a story about the traditional Igbo life in the pre-colonial period. It is often seen as an African national epic by literary critics because of its characterization of a bellicose hero, Okonkwo. These critics pay attention to the unitary epic viewpoint represented by the hero but ignore the diverse opposing viewpoints in the Igbo society of Umuofia. Hence, this paper aims to represent the double-voiced discourses in the novel by adopting M. M. Bakhtin's theory of heteroglossia. Bakhtin's four fundamental forms for incorporating heteroglossia in the novel are utilized to reveal the double-voiced discourses, the voices of the masculine and feminine traditions, in the languages of the novel.

**Keywords-** Achebe; Bakhtin; dualism; heteroglossia

In order to restore their denigrated images in the colonial discourse, some African writers began to write their own African stories or history from a native perspective. Among these writers, one of the most influential and well-known is Chinua Achebe. Chinua Achebe, a native African, was born in an Igbo<sup>1</sup> village of Nigeria in 1930. In order to write back to colonial discourse, Achebe ethnographically depicts the traditional life of the pre-colonial Igbo society in *Things Fall Apart*. Owing to its setting of an ancient warlike society and its characterization of a bellicose hero, the novel is often compared to western classic epics or tragedies by critics. As Charles Nnolim indicates, *Thing Fall Apart* is "an Igbo National Epic [...] modeled on the celebrated Anglo-Saxon epic, Beowulf, although it at the same time shows certain basic affinities with other classical epics like Homer's the *Odyssey* and Virgil's the *Aeneid*" (55). In contrast to the unitary epic view of the Igbo society embodied by the heroic protagonist Okonkwo, some critics discern diverse views in the novel. For example, Iyasere argues that there are dual viewpoints represented by the Igbo society and Okonkwo:

*Things Fall Apart seems a simple novel, but it is deceptively so. On closer inspection, we see that it is provocatively complex, interweaving significant themes: love, compassion, achievement, honor, and individualism. In treating these themes, Achebe employs a variety of devices, such as proverbs, folktales, rituals, and the juxtaposition of characters and episodes to provide a double view of the Ibo society of*

*Umuofia and the central character, Okonkwo. (60-1)*

Furthermore, Achebe's works, especially those concerning the traditional Igbo life, always include the concept of Igbo dualism. As Anthonia C. Kalu explains, "[b]eginning with *Things Fall Apart* Achebe's works maintain a consciousness of duality" (59). In *Things Fall Apart*, Umuofia is a typical Igbo world of dualities, depicting the coexistence of the natural and supernatural worlds, of the Igbo religion and Christianity, of individual and community, and of male and female principles. In reality, the consciousness of duality in the novel is appropriated from Igbo dualism, one of the fundamental concepts in Igbo cosmology. There is a famous Igbo saying regarding dualism: "Wherever something stands, something else will stand beside it (Achebe, "Misunderstanding" 33). In an interview with Bill Moyers, Achebe himself interprets the saying: "The Ibo people who made that proverb are very insistent on this – there is no absolute anything. They are against excess – their world is a world of dualities. It is good to be brave, they say, but also remember that the coward survives" (Moyers 333).

Some critics, such as Zohnreh T. Sullivan and Kwadwo Osei-Nyame, examine the confrontation of dual oppositions in *Things Fall Apart* through M. M. Bakhtin's theories of heteroglossia<sup>2</sup> because Bakhtin's thought concerns the importance of difference and heterogeneity rather than sameness and homogeneity. Sullivan adopts Bakhtin's theory of heteroglossia to discuss the opposition between the "privileged masculine" narrative voice and the "unofficial female" voice in the novel (105). Like Sullivan,

<sup>1</sup> Igbo or Ibo is one of the largest ethnic groups in Nigeria, deriving mainly from southeast Nigeria. As an Igbo, Chinua Achebe sets many of his novels in Igbo land.

<sup>2</sup> Mikhail Mikhailovich Bakhtin was a Russian philosopher and literary scholar, whose works, inclusive of *Problems of Dostoyevsky's Works*, *The Dialogic Imagination*, and *Speech Genres and Other Late Essays*, have been very influential in 20th-century structuralism, poststructuralism, social theory, and the theory of the novel.

Kwadwo Osei-Nyame also utilizes heteroglossia to associate the issue of gender with that of tradition. He maintains that there is an oppositional contestation between the “dominant masculine tradition” and the oppositional feminine tradition in the novel (152). Inspired by these two critics’ arguments, in this thesis, I will also make use of Bakhtin’s heteroglossia to reveal the Igbo dualism embedded in the novel. The feminine tradition hidden under the surface of the masculine tradition and the duality of gender traditions in the novel will be both uncovered.

## **BAKHTIN ‘S THEORY OF HETEROGLOSSIA IN THE NOVEL**

In literary language, the phenomenon of the diversity of language is referred to by a specific term created by Bakhtin, *heteroglossia*. Bakhtin himself has explained *heteroglossia* as “the internal stratification of any single national language into social dialects, characteristic group behavior, professional jargons, generic languages [...] languages of the authorities, of various circles and of passing fashions, languages that serve the specific sociopolitical purposes of the day” (DI 262-3). For Bakhtin, any language consists of specific social worldviews coexisting, encountering, and conflicting with each other “in the consciousness of real people” (DI 292). This phenomenon of heteroglossia is the basic feature of the novel genre: “this internal stratification present in every language at any given moment of its historical existence is the indispensable prerequisite for the novel as a genre” (DI 263). To be specific, heteroglossia means that diverse voices enter the novel and “organize themselves within it into a structured artistic system” (DI 263). In other words, heteroglossia is constituted by the coexistence of various voices or speech types within the languages of the novel genre which embody contesting social values, worldviews, ideologies, and consciousnesses.

Bakhtin’s concept of heteroglossia develops from his own theory of language, dialogism. For Bakhtin, the study of language should be focused upon the common concrete everyday language instead of the abstract linguistics system of language. Language, regarded as “inherently dialogic,” can only be comprehended by virtue of “its inevitable orientation towards another” (Eagleton 117). Thus, the language grounded by Bakhtin’s thought is presented as dynamic, dialogic speech communication between individuals. Heteroglossia in the novel is formed by parodic stylization, the language used by narrators, the language used by characters, and incorporated genres. According to Bakhtin, these four forms are all double-voiced discourses and can reveal the authorial intentions.

According to Bakhtin, there are four fundamental forms for incorporating or representing heteroglossia in the novel: *parodic stylization*, *the language used by narrators*, *the language used by characters*, and *incorporated genres* (McCallum 26). Heteroglossia, “once incorporated into the novel (whatever the forms for its incorporation), is

*another’s speech in another’s language*, serving to express authorial intentions but in a refracted way” (DI 324). Owing to the characteristic of direction toward another in the four forms of incorporating heteroglossia in the novel, these forms are double-voiced discourses because there are two voices or intentions in one speaker at the same time: “the direct intention of the character who is speaking and the refracted intention of the author” (DI 324). That is to say, the character’s languages can not only express his or her own intention but refract the author’s intention as well. These two voices, dialogically interrelated, are always mutually interacting as if “they really hold a conversation with each other,” constituting an internal dialogization (DI 324). Thus these four fundamental forms for incorporating heteroglossia not only represent internal dialogization but express the intentions of the author as well.

First, parodic stylization refers to the comic form for incorporating heteroglossia, playing with multiple languages and belief systems, such as “generic, professional, class-and-interest-groups (the language of the nobleman, the farmer, the merchant, the peasant), tendentious, everyday language” (DI 311). When utilized to refract the author’s intention, these languages, usually officially or authoritatively recognized, would be subverted and “doomed to death and displacement” (DI 312). Second, the language used by the narrators, or authorial figures, can be divided into two particular discourses, the narrator’s and the author’s. These two discourses, belief systems, points of view, or social ideologies will clash and set against each other dialogically. Then the author’s intentions can be refracted in the dialogical interaction of the two discourses.

Third, as Bakhtin indicates, characters in novelistic discourse have their own languages, belief systems, and points of view, equal to an author’s. Because the language used by characters can be viewed as a double-voiced discourse, it represents not only the voice of characters but also that of an author. The character’s voice and the author’s will dialogically interact and intersect with each other and constitute internal stratification within the language in the novel. Fourth, heteroglossia can also be discerned when other genres are incorporated in the novel, including both artistic ones and extra-artistic ones. According to Bakhtin, artistic genres mean “short stories, lyrical songs, poems, dramatic scenes, etc.” while extra-artistic ones include “everyday, rhetorical, scholarly, religious genres and others” (DI 320). Entering the novel, these genres will instill their own languages into the novel, producing internal stratification and diversity of speech in the novelistic discourse. Besides, like the preceding three forms, the incorporated genres in the novel can also refract the author’s intention to a certain degree. Since all these forms are directed toward another language, belief system, or point of view, they permit not only “languages to be used in ways that are indirect, conditional, distanced” but also “a multiplicity of social voices and a wide variety of their links and interrelationships (always more or less dialogized)” (DI 323, 263).

## PARODIC STYLIZATION: THE PARODY OF THE DISCOURSE OF THE MASCULINE TRADITION

As we have seen in the introductory part, *Things Fall Apart* is sometimes regarded as an African epic by critics. It is indeed true that the society of Umuofia is portrayed as a land of men or war on the surface as a result of the languages and belief systems of the masculine tradition. In the novel, the languages and belief systems of the official reigning masculine tradition are represented in the impersonal form of the setting of a powerful land of war and men. The setting of *Things Fall Apart*, Umuofia, composed of nine small villages, is noted for its masculine power in war and magic because, according to the literal meaning of Umuofia, its Igbo name *obododike* means the "land of the brave" (Ogbaa, *Gods* 83). Regarding the gender politics of Umuofia, the Igbo clan should be viewed as male because the nine villages, descended from the same ancestor, are "male lineage[s]" (Wren 33). All the neighboring villages fear Umuofia because of its masculine power and dare not open war with it. For example, in the second chapter of the novel, a woman of Umuofia, the wife of Ogbuefi Udo, is killed by the people of Mbaino. Umuofia asks Mbaino to respond to their anger either by going to war or offering a young boy and virgin as compensation. Because Mbaino is afraid of Umuofia's power in war, she decides to choose the latter in order to avoid battle. Thus, from the fear of the Mbaino people, we can see that Umuofia is indeed a powerful land of war.

Furthermore, because Umuofia is a land of war, the strong male warriors are greatly respected and revered. Okonkwo, the protagonist of the novel, is such a typical heroic wrestler and warrior well-known for his physical strength in Umuofia. At the very beginning of the novel, Okonkwo is described as a great wrestler in Umuofia. In a famous wrestling match, he has successfully thrown Amalinze the Cat, a great wrestler who had never been beaten in seven years. Such a feat not only brings honor to Okonkwo's own village but also wins the heart of the village beauty, Ekwefi. Ekwefi, as the second wife of Okonkwo, falls in love with him just for his lusty brutal strength shown in the sharp wrestling contest. Aside from being a great wrestler, Okonkwo is also a man of war because of his valiance and lack of fear of blood and war. In battles with neighboring villages, he is the first warrior who brings home the head of an enemy. In the negotiations with Mbaino, he is chosen as the emissary of war because of his bravery and physical strength. In Mbaino, he is treated with "great honor and respect" as a great warrior and successfully brings home the war trophies of a young lad and a virgin (TFA 12). By means of the portrait of Umuofia as a land of war and of great warriors and wrestlers, the belief system of the masculine tradition is explicitly represented in the novel.

Grounded by Bakhtin's theory of parodic stylization, however, the socio-ideological belief system of the hegemonic masculine tradition within the novel, in reality,

can be shown to be false or limited by placing it within the Igbo ethnographical context in the novel. It is the authorial intention of Achebe to parody the social ideology of the masculine tradition and reveal the significance of the Igbo principle of duality.

Though Umuofia is a land of men and war feared by her neighbors, if we scrutinize the ethnographic context of the masculine tradition in the novel, we find that the power and magic of Umuofia ironically derive from a female figure rather than a male one:

*Umuofia was feared by all its neighbors. It was powerful in war and in magic, and its priests and medicine men were feared in all the surrounding country. Its most potent war-medicine was as old as the clan itself. Nobody knew how old. But on one point there was general agreement - the active principle in that medicine had been an old woman with one leg. In fact, the medicine itself was called agadi-nway<sup>3</sup> or old woman. It had its shrine in the center of Umuofia, in a clear spot. And if anybody was so foolhardy as to pass by the shrine after dusk he was sure to see the old woman hopping about. (TFA 11-2)*

As we have seen, the language of the first half of this quoted paragraph can be viewed as embodying the belief system of the masculine tradition regarding the depiction of the powerful land of men while that of the latter half reflects the ethnographical delineation of the source of the strong power and magic of the masculine force. The ethnographical study shows that the masculine power and magic of Umuofia unexpectedly originate from a female, an old woman. The shrine of the old woman is built in the center of the land, and its central position symbolizes the significance and authority of the female figure. In consequence, the hegemonic masculine power of Umuofia, referred to as a parody, is shown to be limited and false, inadequate to reality. The genuine authorial intention of Achebe is to put emphasis upon the equal importance of the feminine power and the duality of gender.

On the whole, the society of Umuofia in *Things Fall Apart* is permeated by the belief system of the masculine tradition through the depiction of it as a powerful land of war and men. However, this language or belief system of the masculine tradition is not the authorial discourse or intention in reality. If we pay attention to their ethnographical context and background, we can see that the official reigning masculine discourse is parodied and destroyed as something false and limited, a parody which refracts Achebe's intention of representing the Igbo principle of duality, the equal significance of men and women.

<sup>3</sup> *Agadi-nwayi*, an Igbo word, refers to an old woman.



## THE LANGUAGE USED BY THE NARRATOR: THE OPPOSITION OF THE NARRATOR AND THE AUTHOR

As C. L. Innes has well demonstrated, the primary narrative voice of the novel is the epic voice of the masculine tradition (32-5). From the very opening paragraph of the novel, we can see how the narrator introduces the protagonist Okonkwo as a heroic epic figure:

*Okonkwo was well known throughout the nine villages and even beyond. His fame rested on solid personal achievements. As a young man of eighteen he had brought honor to his village by throwing Amalinze the Cat. [...] It was this man that Okonkwo threw in a fight which the old men agreed was one of the fiercest since the founder of their town engaged a spirit of the wild for seven days and seven nights. (TFA 3)*

As a matter of fact, the opening paragraph is like the prologue in the epic genre. There is a great hero who lives in a mythic legendary village. He shows his courage and power in a keen wrestling battle with an evil but powerful enemy, Amalinze the Cat. Although the enemy is very hard to deal with, the hero Okonkwo eventually defeats him and wins the game through his masculine power and physical strength. Because this wrestling match is as keen and fierce as the ancient battles between the spirits in the old days, the hero thus earns enduring fame and respect from the whole village on account of the match. From this introductory narration, we can discern that the language of the narrator is an epic voice of the masculine tradition for the molding of a male hero. Okonkwo is depicted as a hero in order to mold the image of masculine warriors. Accordingly, the introductory paragraph of the novel is the beginning of the narrator's masculine epic story. The belief system of the masculine tradition will be further revealed in the languages of the narrator through the motif of wrestling and the depiction of an effeminate man, Unoka.

First of all, as we have seen, the wrestling symbolically refers to masculinity, manhood, and courage in the masculine tradition of Umuofia. In the first several chapters, the motif of wrestling recurrently emerges from the narrations of the traditional customs and the village life. Apart from the opening scene of Okonkwo's wrestling feat, the narrator spends the fifth and sixth chapters describing another spectacular wrestling match. In the fifth chapter, the match comes one day after the new Yam Festival, one of the most important ceremonies for the approach of the New Year. The narrative voice highlights the significance of the wrestling match by juxtaposing these two events: "it was difficult to say which the people enjoyed more – the feasting and fellowship of the first day or the wrestling contest of the second" (TFA 39). Subsequently, the narrator gives a short passage describing Ekwefi's hero worship of the young wrestler Okonkwo:

"Many years ago when she was the village beauty Okonkwo had won her heart by throwing the Cat in the greatest contest within living memory" (TFA 39). Through the depiction of the female adoration for the masculine power shown in the wrestling contest, the narrator intends to highlight the significance of the masculine tradition.

In the sixth chapter, the detailed description of the villagers' zeal for wrestling contests is presented explicitly:

*The whole village turned out on the ilo,<sup>4</sup> men, women, and children. [...] There were seven drums and they were arranged according to their sizes in a long wooden basket. Three men beat them with sticks, working feverishly from one drum to another. They [the villagers] were possessed by the spirit of the drums. [...] At last the two teams danced into the circle and the crowd roared and clapped. The drums rose to a frenzy. The people surged forward. (TFA 46-7)*

The narrator's emotional expressions "feverishly," "roared," and "frenzy," fully reveal the villager's craze for the match. Such an emotional narration not only echoes the portrait in the opening episode of Okonkwo's wrestling feat but also implies the importance of the social value of wrestling within the community of Umuofia. The wrestling match symbolizes masculinity and manhood in the belief system of the masculine tradition, shared both by the hero Okonkwo and the whole clan. Through the feat of wrestling, the individual can bring honor to his community, a fact which manifests "the close tie between individual success and the welfare of the community" in the social value of the masculine tradition (Innes 32). Thus, we can see that "the narrative voice is primarily a recreation of the [heroic] persona heard in tales, history, proverbs and poetry belonging to an oral tradition; it represents a collective voice through which the artist speaks for his society" (Innes 32). Through the selective and recurrent narrations of the wrestling matches, the language of the narrator coincides with that of the masculine tradition of Umuofia.

Owing to the belief system of the masculine tradition reflected in the narrator's language, an effeminate man like Unoka who shows no manhood at all is despised by the narrator. In contrast to the heroic portrait of Okonkwo as a "tall" or "huge" man with a "severe" look, Unoka is depicted as an indolent inactive man, who is "tall but very thin" and who has "a slight stoop" and "a haggard and mournful look" (TFA 3-4). The image of thinness or stoop can apparently represent Unoka as a cowardly effeminate man, that is, as a failure in the masculine tradition of Umuofia. Unoka's thin figure reveals his

<sup>4</sup> Ilo, an Igbo word, refers to the lawn in a village where the assemblies or gatherings for sports or discussion can hold.

weakness in physical strength so that his wife and children have “barely enough to eat” (TFA 5). The fact that Unoka walks with a stoop manifests his cowardice because he cannot “bear the sight of blood” (TFA 6). In the narrator’s masculine language, the characterization of effeminate men like Unoka is malicious.

Nevertheless, according to Bakhtin, the authorial story can be sensed in a refracted way by means of or through the narrator’s story. Here I will explore how the authorial language, *another’s speech in another’s language*, is refracted from the language used by the narrator. Through the masculine or patriarchal narrative voice, Achebe’s opposing and contrasting voice can be heard. It is of great importance for readers to perceive the voice, “the intentions and accents of the author himself”; otherwise, “one may ha[ve] failed to understand the work” (DI 314).

According to Bakhtin, the language of the narrator can be distinguished from that of the author because “the author manifests himself and his point of view not only in his effect on the narrator, on his speech and his language but also in his effects on the subject of the story—as a point of view that differs from the point of view of the narrator” (DI 313-4). In *Things Fall Apart*, the language of the narrator is characterized by “the unquestioning and integrated culture which Okonkwo fights desperately to preserve,” while the language of the author is characterized by a “questioning and alienated vision” like Nwoye (Innes 35). Through the authorial effect on the narrator’s language, Achebe continually disturbs the narrator’s unified masculine collective discourse and turns it into self-contradiction so as to subvert the narrator’s unitary singular monological masculine language and to reveal Achebe’s authorial intention regarding the Igbo principle of duality. Therefore, here I will reveal the author’s discourse through the description of the Okoye-Unoka encounter and Okonkwo’s chi.

First of all, in the first chapter of the novel, the narrator depicts Unoka as a debtor in Umuofia. Unoka always borrows money from his neighbors and never pays them back. One day, one of his creditors, Okoye, visits him and asks him to return the two hundred cowries that he owes. In the language of the narrator, Okoye is portrayed as a model of the successful man because he “had a large barn full of yams,” “three wives,” and had taken the third highest title, Idemili (TFA 6). He is the symbol of a traditional man of labor and action in the masculine tradition of Umuofia. The narrator also compliments Okoye for his great eloquence by depicting him as a great orator and by relating him to the proverbial tradition of his clan: “Having spoken plainly so far, Okoye said the next half a dozen sentences in proverbs. Among the Ibo the art of conversation is regarded very highly, and proverbs are the palm-oil with which words are eaten. Okoye was a great talker [...]” (TFA 7). However, in spite of the narrator’s compliment, ironically, Okoye is not able to persuade Unoka with his great eloquence filled with proverbs:

*“[H]e spoke for a long time, skirting round the subject and then hitting it finally. [...] As soon as Unoka understood what his friend was driving at, he burst out laughing. [...] Our elders say that the sun will shine on those who stand before it shines on those who kneel under them. I shall pay my big debts first. [...] Okoye rolled his goatskin and departed” (TFA 7-8).*

It is self-evident that Okoye’s eloquence is of no use at all in the confrontation with Unoka, a fact which reveals the self-contradiction in the narrator’s complimentary language. The self-contradiction, in reality, results not from the narrator’s mental disorder but from the authorial effect upon his language. According to the intention of the author, the one who has mastered the art of conversation is Unoka rather than Okoye. Unoka, who is a man of words, can defeat Okoye, who is a man of labor or action, in eloquence. The art of conversation is attributed to femininity while labor and action are emblematic of masculinity. Achebe’s deliberate highlighting of the art of conversation tends to put emphasis upon the significance of femininity in the society, to subvert the manhood and masculinity represented by Unoka, and thus to counter the narrator’s masculine viewpoint in his authorial language. In other words, Achebe’s effect on the narrator’s language intends to reveal the Igbo principle of duality, the equal significance of masculinity and femininity in the Igbo society.

The authorial influence upon the narrator’s language is also manifested in the description of Okonkwo’s chi. The narrator praises Okonkwo’s material success by alluding to the concept of chi, one’s personal god in the Igbo cosmology: “At the most one could say that his chi or personal god was good. But the Ibo people have a proverb that when a man says yes his chi says yes also. Okonkwo said yes very strongly, so his chi agreed. And not only his chi but his clan too, because it judged a man by the work of his hands” (TFA 27). In the language of the narrator, Okonkwo “exerts force to mold his chi to his will” in order to meet the masculine social values of Umuofia (Iyasere 68). Nevertheless, though the narrator depicts Okonkwo as a man who has a good chi helping him win prosperity, at the end of the novel he meets a disastrous end like his father. In actuality, Okonkwo has a bad chi rather a good one. For instance, Okonkwo’s misfortunes begin from the start of his life because, unlike the other young men in Umuofia, he has no heritage from his poor father Unoka. When he borrows yam seeds from Nwakibie, Okonkwo cannot get rid of the influence of his bad chi: “The year that Okonkwo took eight hundred seed-yams from Nwakibie was the worst year in living memory. Nothing happened at its proper time; it was either too early or too late. It seemed as if the world had gone mad” (TFA 23). Right after this the murder of his adopted son Ikemefuna happens to him. In spite of trying to avoid killing Ikemefuna by withdrawing to the rear of the column,



Okonkwo still has to “cut him down” himself in order to keep from “being thought weak” when the poor young lad fatefully runs to his position (TFA 61). As an Igbo proverb says, “bad chi torments a man at the time his life is sweetest to him” (qtd. in Nwabueze 170). At the height of his wealth and fame, Okonkwo unfortunately kills Ezeudu’s son by accident when his gun explodes and a piece of iron pierces the boy’s heart. For this inadvertent crime, Okonkwo has to be exiled for seven years. Even the narrator himself acknowledges that his bad chi is the cause of his “past disaster” (TFA 172). However, after his return to Umuofia, his bad chi still conspires against his efforts continuously. During his exile, he plans to initiate his two sons into the *ozo* society. However, his plan is eventually abandoned as impracticable: “And it was the wrong year too. [...] But the initiation rite was performed once in three years in Umuofia, and he had to wait for nearly two years for the next round of ceremonies” (TFA 183). Okonkwo’s misfortune does not end until he finally commits suicide as a result of the killing of the court messenger. Like his father, he is also buried “like a dog” in the evil forest (TFA 208).

As Achebe himself observes regarding the concept of chi, “the Igbo believe that when a man says yes his chi will also agree; but not always” (Morning 136). A man turned down by his chi is called *Chie Ekwero*, which literally means “his chi does not agree” (Morning 137). The bad chi relates more to one’s fortune than to one’s character because “a man of impeccable character may yet have a bad chi so that nothing he puts his hand to will work out right” (Morning 137). Thus, it is obvious that the concept of chi has to do with one’s success or failure. Obviously, Okonkwo actually suffers from *Chie Ekwero*, is refused by his chi, and therefore becomes an unsuccessful man. The narrator’s attitude toward Okonkwo’s good chi in the narrative apparently appears self-contradictory. On the surface, Okonkwo is endowed with a good chi because of his prosperity. Nevertheless, by scrutinizing his whole life, we can easily see that Okonkwo does not have a good *chi* at all but a bad one. Accordingly, like the episode of the Okoye-Unoka encounter, it is “the authorial voice” that “continues to intrude into the omniscient voice to keep the reader abreast of the influence of chi in counteracting Okonkwo’s efforts” (Nwabueze 169). In other words, it is the effect of the author that makes the narrator’s language self-contradictory and false. The authorial intention refracted through the self-contradictory narrator’s language is in opposition to Okonkwo’s strong masculine force imposed upon his personal fate. In the Igbo cosmology, one is unwise and doomed to fail when he challenges and defies his chi. Okonkwo is the one who is not willing to accept his personal fate and who exerts his masculine power to challenge his bad chi. However, his excessive masculine disposition does not successfully change his misfortune but causes even more trouble for him. As a result, through the narrator’s language, the opposition to excessive masculinity and the advocacy of maintaining the balance

between masculinity and femininity in Achebe’s authorial language can be discerned.

On the whole, from the two examples above, we can see that the language of the narrator is distinct from that of the author. In the former, the narrator represents the viewpoint of the masculine tradition of Umuofia, where the man of action or labor like Okonkwo and Okoye is the model of successful men with good chi and where the man of words or music like Unoka is the symbol of failure. In contrast, the latter, as *another’s speech in another’s language* refracted from the former, reveals the authorial intention of countering the excessive masculinity and of promoting the concept of the Igbo principle of duality, that is, the maintenance of balance between manhood and womanhood. In other words, the feminine traits of gentleness and eloquence represented by Unoka are stressed the same as the masculine traits of harshness and action represented by Okonkwo and Okoye in the language of the author. Consequently, the language of the author is in opposition to that of the narrator, making the unitary singular monological language of the masculine tradition impossible and manifesting the phenomenon of heteroglossia in the novel.

## THE LANGUAGE USED BY CHARACTERS: MARGINAL VOICES VERSUS CENTRAL VOICES

In *Things Fall Apart*, the powerful and wealthy male characters like Okonkwo or Okoye represent the dominant hegemonic masculine tradition. However, the minor characters like Unoka and female characters like Ekwefi or Ezinma possess their own belief systems which constitute an opposing feminine tradition to counter and resist the dominant masculine tradition. Though they are marginalized in the discourse of the masculine tradition, these marginal characters in fact have the capacity to undermine and challenge the hegemonic patriarchal discourse. Through Bakhtin’s theory of heteroglossia in the novel, I would like to unveil the authorial intention of dramatizing the Igbo principle of duality embedded in the languages of these three marginal characters, Unoka, Ekwefi, and Ezinma.

First of all, because Unoka is lacking in manhood, he is always regarded as a cowardly, effeminate man in the dominant masculine tradition. As a result of his idleness and laziness, he cannot support his family sufficiently and becomes a debtor. In the eyes of his successful male clansmen, he is identified as a failure, an unimportant marginal man. Nevertheless, such a loafer can voice an oppositional utterance to challenge and deny the authority of the hegemonic masculine tradition. For instance, as we have seen, in the episode of Okoye’s visit, Unoka successfully discourages Okoye from retrieving money owed to him: “I owe that man a thousand cowries. But he has not come to wake me up in the morning for it. I shall pay you, but not today. Our elders say that the sun will shine on those who stand before it shines on those who

kneel under it. I shall pay my big debts first” (TFA 7-8). In order to defer the debt he owes, Unoka utilizes the ancestor’s wisdom in the Igbo proverbial language to respond to Okoye.

Unoka’s response touches one significant issue, “the general issue of survival within the culture” (Osei-Nyame 153). Because of his poverty and need in material things, Unoka has to strive for a strategy of survival to evade his debt. The ancient wisdom expressed in the proverb is the strategy utilized by Unoka to ensure his survival. In renegotiating the perception of a debtor, Unoka’s rhetoric manifests a potential for challenging the authority of the masculine tradition represented by Okoye. Thus, in spite of being “a great talker” and able to speak “half a dozen sentences in proverbs,” Okoye cannot refute Unoka’s subversive discourse but, “roll[ing] his goatskin,” leaves without the two hundred cowries (TFA 7-8). Through Unoka’s speech, the authorial intention of constituting the opposing voice to the hegemonic voice of the masculine tradition is explicitly revealed. By means of Unoka’s subversion of the authoritarian discourse of Okoye, we can see that Achebe intends to destroy the unitary singular monological language of the masculine tradition.

Like Unoka, although on the surface they are marginalized and ignored in the patriarchal society of Umuofia, the languages of the female characters in reality not only threaten and undermine the authority of the single unitary discourse of the masculine tradition but also are positioned in equal importance with those of the male characters in the representation of the significant cultural or historical aspects of Umuofia. Though male characters are dominant in the narrative of the novel, Ekwefi, and her daughter, Ezinma, are two female characters who are developed fully and endowed with the potential to challenge the patriarchal authoritarian discourse. For example, in the episode of the feast of the New Yam, Ekwefi is the only woman who dares to offend the fiery Okonkwo. In the beginning, she irritates him by cutting leaves off the banana tree to wrap food. Her straightforward words of confession when questioned by Okonkwo bring her a violent beating. Even though she is frustrated by Okonkwo’s violence, however, Ekwefi still endeavors to challenge his masculine authority by deridingly murmuring something about his “guns that never shot” (TFA 39). In addition, Okonkwo also threatens to beat Ekwefi when she continues to offer her beloved daughter Ezinma delicacies like eggs, “which children were rarely allowed to eat” (TFA 76). Despite his threats, Ekwefi insistently allows Ezinma secretly to enjoy the pleasure of eating eggs in the bedroom, and the conspiracy of Ekwefi and Ezinma “partially den[ies] Okonkwo some of the authority he seeks to wield over them” (Osei-Nyame 155).

Aside from Ekwefi, Ezinma is another female character who can frustrate the masculinity of Okonkwo and instead elicit the feminine personality from his masculine mind. After the murder of Ikemefuna, Okonkwo tastes nothing for two days until Ezinma enters his hut to

bring him food. In the words of seeming motherhood, Ezinma orders him to eat: “You have not eaten for two days. [...] So you *must* finish this” (TFA 63). The commanding tone of her auxiliary verb *must* softens his hardened heart and makes him “tender, nurturing, and submissive” (Aji 173). Through the characterization of Ezinma’s relationship with Okonkwo, it is evident that she can “subdue his manhood, balancing the masculine and the feminine attributes to make him a full person” (Aji 173).

In his interview with Raoul Granqvist, Achebe himself observes regarding the Igbo women in the traditional society: “If you look carefully, the women were never really dealing alone with issues pertaining to women; they were dealing with issues pertaining to society” (18). Some female episodes in *Things Fall Apart* like Ekwefi’s pursuit of Chielo are equally important as the male ones and concern rituals and customs central to the Igbo cosmology. These episodes manifest not only the Igbo traditional religious life but also the greatness of womanhood, viewed as a counterpoint to the manhood represented by the titled men like Okonkwo.

In the episode of the Chielo-Ezinma-Ekwefi encounter, Ekwefi’s pursuit of the priestess Chielo can be seen as a challenge to “the masculine traditions of the clan, for Chielo is merely the messenger of Agbala, the male deity whom Ekwefi defies” (Osei-Nyame 157-8). When told the news that the god Agbala would like to see Ezinma, Ekwefi is determined to follow the priestess of Agbala, Chielo, to the cave. However, her determination is frustrated by the warning of Chielo’s patriarchal language: “How dare you, woman, to go before the mighty Agbala of your own accord? Beware, woman, lest he strikes you in his anger. Bring me my daughter” (TFA 101). In spite of the warning, Ekwefi still firmly sticks to her determination of protecting her daughter from hurt, announcing that “I am following Chielo” (TFA 103). When Ezinma and Chielo disappear into the cave, Ekwefi speaks to herself in an inner monologue: “if [I] heard Ezinma cry [I] would rush into the cave to defend against all the gods in the world. [I] would die with her” (TFA 108). Her firm defiant speech challenges the authority of the masculine tradition symbolically embedded in the male deity Agbala. Apart from Agbala, Ekwefi’s pursuit also symbolically violates Okonkwo’s code of manliness. After Ekwefi eagerly rushes to chase after Chielo, Okonkwo yields to Chielo’s threat by delaying his pursuit until in the end he appears with a machete in his hand. As Carole Boyce Davies indicates, Okonkwo’s “machete, the symbol of his male aggression, is of no use at all in this context” (247).

In contrast with Okonkwo’s cowardice, Ekwefi’s bravery and fearlessness symbolically anticipate the emasculation of Okonkwo’s masculine authority. The episode of the Chielo-Ekwefi-Ezinma encounter “prefigures the displacement of Okonkwo and to a large degree masculine authority within the clan as a whole” (Osei-Nyame 159). Thus, as Ato Quayson has well demonstrated, the characterization of the two females, Ezinma and Ekwefi, has the potential for “subverting the



patriarchal discourse of the text” (241). Like Unoka’s language, the languages used by Ekwefi and Ezinma, which challenge the power and authority of the masculine tradition, also reveal the authorial intention of Achebe, who creates the feminine counteracting voice to stand in opposition to the hegemonic masculine voice.

On the whole, although Unoka, Ekwefi, and Ezinma are marginal characters in the masculine tradition of Umuofia, they are not ones who submit to the authority of patriarchy but who can challenge and subvert the belief system of the masculine tradition. Unoka successfully uses his proverbial language to counter the patriarchal language of Okoye so as to defer his debts. Through her subversive language, Ekwefi is bold in challenging the masculine threat of Okonkwo and shows her feminine courage in defiance of the power of the male deity Agbala. Besides Ekwefi, Ezinma is another female character who can exert her feminine language to frustrate and challenge Okonkwo’s hegemonic patriarchal discourse. Hence, the languages of all three characters refract the authorial intention of Achebe, molding the female characters into an opposing feminine force or tradition against the masculine one represented by Okonkwo and the male deities. Through interaction and conflict between the two forces or traditions, the Igbo principles of duality are constructed and the phenomenon of heteroglossia in the novel is revealed, making the unitary singular monological language of the masculine tradition impossible.

## THE INCORPORATED GENRE

The Igbo folk stories in *Things Fall Apart* not only reveal the knowledge and wisdom of the traditional Igbo society but, what’s more important, “make subtle and indirect comments on the behavior of characters” and “authorial observations on particular events and episodes” (Ogbaa, *Gods* 144-5). In the novel, most of the folk stories are women’s tales. These feminine tales, always deceptively simple, “are usually of extraordinary emblematic, subversive resonance to the central narrative of Okonkwo’s obsession with his father and his sons” (Jeyifo 185). Thereby Achebe uses these women’s stories to reveal his authorial intentions of countering the hegemonic patriarchal discourse of the masculine tradition represented by Okonkwo and the titled men. Here I will examine four Igbo female folk stories appropriated by Achebe in the novel: the story of the little bird *nza*, the bird *eneke-nti-oba*, the *Ear* and *Mosquito*, and the *wrestling of the Tortoise* and *Cat* with *Yams*.

During the *Week of Peace*, Okonkwo is to blame by his clan for his violent deed of beating one of his wives, violence which may offend the goddess of Ani and bring about the destruction of the whole clan. The clan allude to a folk tale, the story of the little bird *nza*, to denounce Okonkwo’s act. There is a little bird called *nza* who “so far forg[ets] himself after a heavy meal that he challenge[s] his *chi*” (TFA 31). In another version of the tale, the little bird overeats so much that he forgets how little he is and

provokes the hunter to shoot him. In this story, Okonkwo is seen as the little bird, whose small figure implies he “has a false sense of his momentary affluence” or “has not yet escaped his poor parentage completely” (Ogbaa, *Gods* 145). As a matter of fact, whether Okonkwo gets rid of his poor parentage or not, it is unwise for a man to challenge the supreme goddess as the little bird challenges the powerful *chi* or the hunter. Hence, this allusion to the folk story ironizes and comments on the excess of masculinity represented by Okonkwo.

Another female folktale, the story of the bird *eneke-nti-oba* told by Nwoye’s mother, is quite similar to that of little bird *nza*. The bird in this story “challenged the whole world to a wrestling contest and was finally thrown by cat” (TFA 53). According to Ogbaa’s study, the bird *eneke-nti-oba* has the courage to challenge the world just because of his special ability to escape hunters: “he can hear in advance hunters who approach stealthily even before they have time enough to aim and shoot at him” (*Gods* 146). With this special listening capability, he turns into being proud and is confident that nobody can defeat him in the wrestling contest. However, the bird eventually is beaten by a cat due to the fact that a cat can move without making noise. According to Ogbaa, this bird can be “a fitting metaphor for Okonkwo who literary wrestles with everybody” and who is “figuratively thrown by his own effeminate son Nwoye who for doing so, becomes a Cat” (*Gods* 146). Nwoye’s eventual defection to Christianity in actuality undermines his succession to Okonkwo’s masculine tradition. In actuality, this feminine story is juxtaposed with the “stories of land - masculine stories of violence and bloodshed” told by Okonkwo to direct Nwoye toward the masculine tradition of Umuofia (TFA 53). The juxtaposition of the two stories manifests Achebe’s authorial intention to criticize the limitations of the authoritarian masculine tradition represented by Okonkwo. Although Okonkwo endeavors to induct Nwoye into the masculine tradition through his masculine stories, he eventually fails because Nwoye still prefers those feminine stories like the tales of birds told by his mother.

Three days after the violent murder of Ikemefuna, Okonkwo thinks of a folk story told by his mother while he sleeps. It is also one of the women’s stories, about the *Ear* and *Mosquito*: “Mosquito, she had said, had asked Ear to marry him, whereupon Ear fell on the floor in uncontrollable laughter. ‘How much longer do you think you will live?’ she asked. ‘You are already a skeleton.’ Mosquito went away humiliated, and any time he passed her way he told Ear that he was still alive” (TFA 75). For Okonkwo, it is no more than a silly women’s folktale told by his unnamed mother. Nevertheless, it is deceptively simple if we focus our attention upon the issue of gender. In the story, “the structure of reversals of gender hierarchy between the respective female and male personas” can be easily discerned (Jeyifo 185). In the conflict between *Ear* and *Mosquito*, the former, the female character, possesses the dominant role while the latter, the male persona, is depicted as a weak diminished suitor in the image of a



“skeleton.” The male inferiority embodied in the characterization of Mosquito explicitly represents “the male’s neurotic fear of female power as the nemesis of male potency and life force” (Jeyifo 185). Thus, though Okonkwo strives to suppress the femininity within him, the female power emerging from the mother lore conquers him when he inwardly feels repentant of his killing of Ikemefuna. This women’s story implicitly not only reveals the significance of femininity but challenges the view of man-centered authority in Umuofia as well.

Another animal tale told by Ezinma is similar to that of Okonkwo’s mother in its resistance against the hegemonic discourse of the masculine tradition. It is an unfinished story about how “Tortoise and Cat [go] to wrestle against Yams” (TFA 100). The symbolic value of yams contextualized within the masculine tradition in Umuofia is noteworthy. The yam, looked upon as the king of crops or a man’s crop, embodies manliness and masculinity. The story that “Yams” are wrestled against by Tortoise and Cat in reality challenges the hegemonic masculine authority. As Osei-Nyame argues, “Ezinma’s tale supplies a contrastive paradigm for questioning not only Okonkwo’s authority but also the masculine traditions of the clan as a whole” (160). This short unfinished feminine story “open[s] up possibilities for renegotiating reality and identity within the clan” and “for undoing the hierarchies of power and authority within a tradition where masculine authority is supplanted by female insights and indigenous folk wisdom acquires not only subversive and residual but even dominant potential” (Osei-Nyame 160-1).

On the whole, we can see that a common motif of resisting the discourse of the masculine tradition is revealed from the incorporated folk stories. The languages of the four Igbo women’s folk stories, deceptively simple on the surface, in actuality reveal the resistance to the hegemonic authority of the masculine tradition in the society of Umuofia. This resistance represents Achebe’s authorial intention of expressing the Igbo principle of duality, the equal significance of femininity and masculinity. Achebe’s incorporation of the Igbo folk stories into the novel indeed stratifies the novel itself, intensifies the diversity of speeches, results in the coexistence of masculine and feminine discourses in the novel, and leads to the phenomenon of heteroglossia in the novel.

After the examination of *Things Fall Apart* through Bakhtin’s four fundamental forms for incorporating heteroglossia in the novel, *the parodic stylization, the language used by the narrator, the language used by characters, and incorporated genres*, we can see that the novel represents the phenomenon of heteroglossia and is composed of diverse speeches rather than one unitary singular speech. According to Bakhtin, when heteroglossia is incorporated into the novel, it is *another’s speech in another’s language* and always expresses “authorial intentions but in a refracted way” (DI 324). In *Things Fall Apart*, in contrast to the languages of the dominant

masculine tradition, the language of the opposing feminine tradition is represented by Achebe through the incorporation of heteroglossia in the novel. For Bakhtin, “such speech constitutes a special type of double-voiced discourse,” serving two different voices, meanings, or intentions (DI 324). *Things Fall Apart* can be seen as such a Bakhtinian novel constituted by the double-voiced discourses, serving two distinct voices, the masculine voice and the feminine voice.

## CONCLUSION

Through the use of Bakhtin’s concept of heteroglossia in reexamining *Things Fall Apart*, we can see that the society of Umuofia is a dynamic world where the social languages are internally stratified and the diverse social ideologies and forces interplay and interact. In actuality, such a world in the novel is a typical authentic Igbo one which Achebe intends to portray from his African insider view. The coexistence of the dominant masculine language and the recessive feminine language in the phenomenon of heteroglossia in the novel represents the concept of Igbo dualism. That is, in the Igbo dualistic view, the world is a world of dualities in which there is nothing absolute and complete. Accordingly, in the society of Umuofia, though dominant, the discourse of the masculine tradition is still confronted by the challenge of the discourse of the feminine one. On the whole, the Igbo society portrayed by Achebe in the novel manifests the Igbo concepts of dualism, conforming to the authorial intention of Achebe to re-write the African world in his works of art through the African insider perspective.

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### Author Biography

**Yao Jung Lin**, Ph. D., employed at Graduate Institute of Education, National Changhua University of Education has been interested in and persistently conducted the postcolonial studies on literature and education after he got the master's degree of literature and doctoral degree of education.