

**CALQUE: A LITERARY STYLE IN CHINUA ACHEBE'S TRILOGY**

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**ABSTRACT**

Style is a distinct linguistic trait of a writer intended for a purpose. Hence every writer has his own particular style. Most of Chinua Achebe's works revolve around issues touching directly or indirectly on the traditions and culture of the Igbo people. To make his work interesting and appealing to his readers, he resorts to oral literature, idioms, metaphors and similes derived from the Igbo ethnic group. This work then tries to identify calque as a literary style employed by Chinua Achebe in his works for the purpose of showcasing the Igbo tradition and culture to the non initiates. The identification of calque expressions, proverbs, idioms and their English equivalents will aid the readers in grasping the pragmatic content portrayed in Achebe's selected novels.

**Keywords:** Calque, Style, Pragmatic, Culture.

**INTRODUCTION**

Chinua Achebe has written many novels which are widely read in Africa and are now achieving an audience in Europe and North America Killam (1975: 1). In this work, we are interested in his trilogy: *Things Fall Apart, No Longer at Ease and Arrow of God*. These novels bring news of a strange part of the world to his foreign readers. In his trilogy, he traces the Igbo society from the pre-colonial to the post colonial era. His focus is on the clash between the western and traditional African values. Chinua Achebe in his prose evokes the values and attitudes of a group of people who witnessed the trauma of foreign conquest and the imposition of an alien culture. In his narration, the Igbo oral tradition such as folk stories, proverbs, idioms are very prominent. It is important to note that Achebe, the major exponent of modern African novels is an interpreter of the cultural worth of his society. Killam (1975: 2) He adopted various novel forms from English to encompass his African experience and aspiration. This work tries to identify calque as one of the styles adopted by Achebe in order to effectively showcase his point of view. It also looks at the calque expressions in a three column table containing the calque expressions, the Igbo and English equivalents respectively.

**BRIEF DESCRIPTION OF HIS NOVELS**

His first novel *Things Fall Apart* is his magnum opus (Franklin 2008) and also one of the most important books in African literature. Booker (2003: xii) *Things Fall Apart* is the most translated African writer of all time. (Yousaf 2003:34 and Ogba 1999: 5). It chronicles the life of Ogbuefi Okonkwo a yam farmer who wanted to become one of the pre-eminent men in the village of Umuaro. He prides himself on his bodily strength and agility which he proved in a famous wrestling competition against Amalinze the Cat. At the end of the novel, Okonkwo committed suicide. This he did, not out of fear but because he believed that the society has lost its values. Chinua Achebe also describes the life of Unoka, Okonkwo's father who was the direct opposite of Okonkwo. In his novel *Things Fall Apart* Achebe exposes the various types of masculinity in the pre-colonial Igbo society. Okonkwo depicts strength and virility while Unoka his father represents weakened masculinity.

His second novel, *No Longer at Ease* reflects the changing Igbo society. *No Longer at Ease* can be said to be the continuation of *Things Fall Apart*. Nwoye, Okonkwo's son is the father of Obi the novel's protagonist. After Obi's education in London courtesy of the community, he came back home full of idealistic hopes for the building of a new society void of bribery and corruption. He failed to see that he himself cannot live up to these ideals. When he was in a fix, he eventually accepted bribe which unknowingly to him was a set up. He was caught in the act and was prosecuted.

His third novel *Arrow of God* is set in the early days of colonization. It tells the story of Ezeulu the priest of Ulu who is said to be the highest chief priest in the village. In his pride, he delayed the announcement for the planting of yam the Igbo staple crop. Through this action of his, the community lost confidence in him. In the eyes of the villagers, Okonkwo betrayed them by letting them down in a conflict with another village. This situation provoked the intervention of Captain Winterbottom. At the end, the power of ulu was broken. Ezeulu mistook pride and stubbornness for manliness and duty.

All the heroes in Achebe's trilogy ended tragically. These men in varying degrees were conscious of the fact that life turns out to be less manageable and less perfect than they had expected. They reacted to life in various ways- with courage, honesty and generosity, pessimism and cynicism in their attempt to get through life. Killam (1975: 11).

## DEFINITION OF TERMS

Style has been defined by many linguists based on their point of view. Mounin (1983:308) defines style as "*les marques des traits linguistiques d'un texte*". For him, styles are linguistic traits in a text. This definition is one sided because it does not take cognizance of its purpose, its skopos. From his definition, style in a text can be arbitrary, void of purpose. Leech and Short (1981:10) see style "*as the way in which language is used in a giving purpose*". Though this definition identifies the purposeful nature of style, it is silent about its individualistic nature just like the definition propounded by Mounin. For (Georgin 1964) cited by Kwofie (1990 :) "*le style est définitivement, la manière propre à chacun de s'exprimer mieux.*" According to him, style is an author's way or manner of expressing himself better. Here Georgin is telling us that style helps the author to bring out his "*vouloir dire*" that is, his intention. From the above definitions, the following factors are identified. a) Style is personalized, b) it is purposeful, c) it is a way or an art. Cooney and Obasi 2006:) extensively discussed the importance of style in literary translation. According to them style vehicles meaning, beautifies a text, is the replica of an author, it evokes the author's personality and it is an art. Style according to the writers is an author's unique way of communicating his ideas better for a given purpose. Calque is one of the styles employed by Chinua Achebe in his trilogy.

The term **calque** is derived from a French verb *calquer* which means to trace, to copy. (The American Heritage Dictionary of English language). It is one of the translation techniques propounded by Vinay and Darbelnet( 1977:). In calque, words or expressions are borrowed from a source language and translated to the target language. They are mostly literal word for word translation of the source language expression. Smith (2006: 29-30) identified four types of calque: phraseological calque, semantic calque, syntactic and morphological calque.

## SELECTED CALQUE EXPRESSIONS IN CHINUA ACHEBE'S TRILOGY

Things Fall Apart

He who brings kola brings life. p. 5  
 If a child washes his hands, he could eat with kings. p. 7  
 When the moon is shining, the cripple becomes hungry for a walk. p. 8  
 Let the kite perch and let the eaglet perch too. If one says no to the other let his winds break.  
 p.15  
 A toad does not run in the daytime for nothing. p.16  
 An old woman is always uneasy when dried bones are mentioned in a proverb. p.16  
 The lizard that jumped from the high iroko tree to the ground said he would praise himself if  
 no one else did. P.17  
 You can tell a ripe corn by its looks. p. 17  
 Those whose palm –kernels were cracked for them by a benevolent spirit should not forget to  
 be humble. P. 21  
 If I fall down for you and you fall down for me, it is play. P. 58  
 My hand is on the ground. p. 75  
 I am dry meat that fills the mouth. P. 75  
 I cannot live on the brink of the water and wash my hands with spit. P. 132  
 An animal rubs its itching flank against a tree, a man asks his kinsmen to scratch him. P. 132  
 A child cannot pay for his mother's milk. p. 132

### *Arrow of God*

May your face meeting mine bring good fortune. P.2  
 You will soon cry long throat. p.2  
 Perhaps I speak with water in my mouth. P. 4  
 Do you blame a vulture for perching over a carcass? P. 9  
 A new wife should not enter into an unfinished homestead. P. 13  
 When a handshake goes beyond the elbow we know it has turned to another thing. P. 13  
 Wisdom is like a goatskin bag, everybody carries his own. P. 16  
 When an adult is in the house, the she-goat is not left to suffer the pains of parturition on its  
 tether. P. 18  
 When we hear a house has fallen, do we ask if the ceiling fell with it? P. 18  
 And I think I should remind you to hold your tongue in your hands when we get there. P.20  
 When a man of cunning dies, a man of cunning buries him. P. 20  
 But there were others who, as the saying goes, pulled out their hairs and chewed it. P. 26  
 The fly that has no one to advise it follows the corpse to the grave. P.27  
 The world is spoilt and there is no head or tail in anything that is done P. 27  
 Does anybody here enter his compound through the man's gate? P. 28  
 Allow him a hand shake and he wants and he wants an embrace. P. 42  
 What the man Ezeulu will bring to Umuaro is pregnant and nursing a baby. P.52  
 Unless the wind blows, we do not see the fowl's rump. p. 59  
 A man who knows that his anus is small does not swallow an udala seed. P.70  
 No Longer at Ease  
 Anger against a brother was felt in the flesh, not in the bone. P. 4  
 If you want to eat a toad you should look for a fat and juicy one. P.  
 You have the yam and you have the knife, we cannot eat unless you cut us a piece. P. 8  
 We are sending you to learn book. P 9  
 Ours is ours, but mine is mine. P 29  
 You may laugh if laughter catches you... it does not catch me. P 56  
 If one finger brings oil it soils the other. P. 68  
 42. It is not right to ask a man with elephantiasis of the scrotum to take on smallpox as well. P  
 90

The above listed calque expressions were randomly selected from Chinua Achebe's Trilog. These selected calque expressions are of different nature. In addition to the types of calque identified by Smith, we also identified another type of calque we called **modulated calque**.

**Modulated calque:** Modulation as a translation strategy involves a change in point of view. Hence, modulated calque is a strategy in which the key words in the expression are slightly changed to buttress the inherent meaning in the expression. A good example is seen in the expressions below. The first expression contains two dreaded ailments. To bring the meaning clearer to his foreign audience, he replaced “I too afo” (swollen stomach) with “small pox”. In the case of elephantiasis of the scrotum, Achebe purposely avoided the use of the English name for “ibi” (hydrocele) because it is scientific and does not bring out the picturesque nature of Igbo expressions

In the second expression, Achebe also modulated the Igbo version. In his modulation, he kept intact the speech form of the Igbo people and then employed a scenario which will easily bring to light the inherent meaning of the expression. In the Igbo version, *Ara* and *akpu* are used. In his modulated calque Achebe made use of *river* and *spittle*. One can easily picture some one in the river who is using spittle to wash his hand. A clear picture of stupidity portrayed in the Igbo version.

It is not right to ask a man with <u>elephantiasis of the scrotum</u> to take on <b>small pox</b> as well	A na ekwu na <u>o dara ibi</u> isi ya <b>too kwuo afo</b>
I cannot live on the brink of the river and wash my hands with spittle	A gaghị m enwe ara na-añu akpu

**Phraseological calque:** In phraseological calque, idiomatic phrases are translated word-for-word from the source language to the target language. Here are some examples

He who brings kola brings life	Onye wetere oji wetere ndu
If a child washes his hands, he could eat with kings	Nwata kwuọ aka o soro ogaranya rie nri
When the moon is shining, the cripple becomes hungry for a walk	Onwa na-eti, iga ije a guwa onye ngwuro
Let the kite perch and let the eaglet perch too. If one says no to the other let his winds break	Egbe bere ugo bere, ma nke si ibe ya ebela ka nku kwa ya.
A toad does not run in the daytime for nothing	Awọ anaghi agba osọ ehie n'efu.

This can be clearly seen in the table below

The subject, the verb, object etc. of the source sentence match' with that of the target sentence.

onye	wetere	oji	wetere	Ndu
He who	brings	kola	brings	Life

**Syntactic calque:** This involves the application of the syntactic function or construction in the source language to the target language.

You will soon cry long throat	I ga ebe akwa, onye akpiri ogologo
The world is spoilt and there is no head or tail in anything that is done	Uwa emebiela. ihe a na-eme eweghi isi n'odu

The above calque expressions are literal translations of the source language idioms or proverbs. Almost all the words present in the source language expressions are present in the target language expressions.

## CALQUE EXPRESSIONS AND THEIR EQUIVALENTS IN ENGLISH

Calque expressions from the source language	Expressions from the source language(Igbo)	English equivalent
He who brings kola brings life	Onye wetere oji wetere ndu	Hospitality precludes evil
If a child washes his hands, he could eat with kings	Nwata kwuo aka o soro ogaranya rie nri	Manner maketh a man
When the moon is shining, the cripple becomes hungry for a walk	Onwa na-eti, iga ije a guwa onye ngwuro	If wishes were horses, beggars would ride
Let the kite perch and let the eaglet perch too. If one says no to the other let his winds break	Egbe bere ugo bere, ma nke si ibe ya ebela ka nku kwa ya.	Live and let live
A toad does not run in the daytime for nothing	Awọ anaghi agba oso ehie n'efu.	There is no smoke without fire
An old woman is always uneasy when dried bones are mentioned in a proverb,	A tua ilu nkirika nkata, onye tara ahụ a mara	A guilty conscience needs no accuser
The lizard that jumped from the high iroko tree to the ground said he would praise himself if no one else did.	Ngwere si n'elu daa n'ala siri na o buru na o nweghi onye toro ya, ya eto onwe ya	If no one appreciates you appreciate yourself
You can tell a ripe corn by its look.	Eji anya ama oka chara acha	Good wine needs no hush
Those whose palm-kernels were cracked by a benevolent spirit should not forget to be humble	Onye chi ya tieere aki ekwesighi ime ngala	Be nice to all you meet on your way to the top because you will meet them on your way down
If I fall down for you and you fall down for me it is play.	I dara m, m dara gi, obu uru nkita	You scratch my back I scratch your back
My hand is on the ground	Aka m no n'ala	I pledge my loyalty/ I dough my hat
I am dry meat that feels the mouth	A bu m anu kporo nku n'aju onu	Small but mighty/ the mustard seed that grows into a mighty tree
I cannot live on the brink of the river and wash my hands with spittle	A gaghi m enwe ara na-anu akpu	I cannot starve in the mist of plenty.
An animal rubs its itching flanks against a tree, a man ask his kinsmen to scratch him	Oko koo anumanu, o koo ya n'osisi, ma oko mmadu o jekwuru mmadu ibe ya	No man is an island
A child cannot pay for his mother's milk	Nwata anaghi akwu ugwo mmiri ara nne ya	A child is eternally indebted to the mother
May your face meeting mine bring good fortune	Ka ihu a ikporo m wetere m ihe oma	May our meeting be a good omen
Perhaps I speak with water in my mouth	O dika mkpu mmiri na-onu were n'ekwu okwu	Am I talking rubbish? / am I ambiguous?
Do you blame a vulture for perching over a carcass	I tara udele uta m'obere n'ozu	He goes where his bread is buttered
A new wife should not enter into an unfinished homestead	Nwaanyi ohuru adighi mma iba na ulo ana aruchaghi arucha	Be ready/ prepared before you embark on a project
When a hand shake goes beyond the elbow, we know it has turned to another thing	Ekele gafee ikpere aka, o gho ihe ozu	familiarity breeds contempt
Wisdom is like a goatskin, everybody carries his	Amamihe di ka akpukpo ewu, onye obula bu nke ya	Wisdom is relative
When an adult is in the house the she goat is not left to suffer the pains of parturition on its tether	Okenye anaghi anu n'ulo, ewu amuo n'ogbiri	The presence of an adult gives security

And I think I should remind you to hold your tongue in your hands when we get there	...Jide ire gi aka	On arrival, bridle your tongue
When a cunning man dies, a cunning man buries him	Onye aghugho nwuo onye aghugho elie ya	It takes a thief to catch a thief
...Pulled out their hairs and eat	...foro ntutu ha taa	Resolutely determined /To swear
The fly that has no one to advise it, follows the corpse into the grave	Ijiji n'enweghi onye ndumodu na-eso ozu ala n'ili	Foolishness/ignorance leads to destruction
Does anybody here enter his compound through the man's gate?	Esi n' ulo ya eje n'ulo onye?	Who is he?
Allow him a handshake and he wants embrace	I kwe ya n'aka, o choo ibi oma	Give him an inch, he will take a mile
What the man Ezeulu will bring to Umuaro is pregnant and nursing a baby at the same time	...o di ime kuru kwa nwa n'aka	It doesn't rain but it pours
Unless the wind blows, we do not see the fowl's rump	Ikuku kuo ahụ ike okuko	There is no art in the face to show a man's construction in the heart.
A man who knows that his anus is small, does not swallow an udala seed	Onye onu nsi ya di ntakiri , anaghi elo mpkuru udara	Don't bite more than you can chew
Anger against a brother was felt in the flesh	Iwe nwanne anaghi eru n' okpukpu	There is always room for forgiveness in siblings quarrels
If you want to eat a toad, you should look for a fat and juicy one	Onye choo iri awo, ya rie nke gbara agba.	What is worth doing is worth doing well
You have the yam and you have the knife, we cannot eat it unless you cut us a piece	O gi ji ji, jidekwe nma, onye i wanyere, o rie	The ball is in your court
We are sending you to learn book	Anyi na eziga gi, ka ije muo akwukwo	We are sending you to study
Ours is ours, but mine is mine	Nkem bu nkem, nke anyi bu nke anyi	Self interest supersedes group interest
You may laugh if laughter catches you, it does not catch me	Ochi jide gi I chia, ma ojigi m	It is not funny
If one finger brings oil, it soils the others	Otu aka ruta mmanu, o zuo oha nile	A bad cook spoils the broth
It is not right to ask a man with elephantiasis of the scrotum to take on small pox as well	A na ekwu na o dara ibi isi ya too kwuo afo	Going from frying pan to fire
You will soon cry long throat	I ga ebe akwa, onye akpiri ogologo	You will soon cry, glutton
The world is spoilt and there is no head or tail in anything that is done	Uwa emebiela. ihe a na- eme eweghi isi n'odu	No sense of direction

From the above table, it is observed that these calque expressions have English equivalents. Equivalent does not mean that they are identical but that they have certain things in common, and function in similar way. However, Achebe as an interpreter of the cultural worth of his own society could not have used the English equivalents in his trilogy because the aim of showcasing his cultural values could have been defeated. It is important to note that most of the English equivalents were drawn from Murphy (2012:498-513). Some expressions without equivalents and are culture specific were explained.

## CONCLUSION

Achebe in his trilogy, successfully and intentionally employed calque as a literary style to reawaken the consciousness of our cultural heritage and also portray and promote the Igbo cultural values. This is buttressed by Achebe himself quoted by Killam (1975:8)

*...African people did not hear of culture for the first time from the Europeans; that their societies were not mindless but frequently had the philosophy of great depth and value and beauty, that they had poetry and, above all, they had dignity. It is this dignity that many African people all but lost during the colonial period, and it is this that they must now regain. The worst thing that can happen to any people is the loss of their dignity and self respect.*

Achebe has done his own part of evangelism. The clarion call is on us all academics, writers traders, businessmen, and farmers etc. to continue to spread, showcase and practice our cultural heritage where necessary. It should not on any ground be allowed to die. Just as Bellos (2011:349) opines that “*language is ethnicity*”, and since culture is vehiculed by language, what Chinua Achebe tried to promote through the use of calque will die if we allow our language to die. And if our language dies, we have lost our identity. All hands should be on deck.

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