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A Sociolinguistic Study of the Nigerian Proverbs in Zainab Alkali's *The Stillborn* & *The Virtuous Woman*

Mahfouz A. Adedimeji

Department of English, University of Ilorin, Ilorin.
mahfouzade2@yahoo.com

Language and society are symbiotically related, such that it is technically impossible to divorce one from the other. In paremiology (the study of proverbs) and some other areas of scholarly interest, the sociolinguistic framework is helpful in determining "who says what to whom, when, where, why and how?" (Ayodabo, 2007:99). A powerful theory of sociolinguistics is Dell Hymes' "ethnography of communication" (1977) which conceptualises **speaking** as an acronym by which a sociolinguist analyses and accounts for such variables as setting, participants, ends, act sequences, keys, instrumentalities and genre underpinning discourse. This paper deploys Hymes' speaking model to the analysis of twenty proverbs from the total of twenty-nine proverbs in Zainab Alkali's *The Stillborn* and *The Virtuous Woman*. It is found that proverbs are used to reinforce themes, instruct and teach, persuade and depict characters as well as serve rhetorical functions in 'lit-orature', all of which make the two works compelling both in functionality and aesthetics.

1. Introduction

The question of which precedes the other between language and society is an academic puzzle analogous to the old debate on the egg and the cock: which 'produces' the other? What is, however, incontrovertible is that language and society have a symbiotic relationship. This is because "every language is a social product, and every society constitutes itself through language" (Coulmas, 2003:363). Ferdinand de Saussure, the pioneer of modern linguistics, thus referred to language as a social fact and distinguished between what he called 'langue' and 'parole', thereby giving impetus to sociolinguistic enquiry. Langue is the internalized linguistic culture, or simply the FORM – characterized by synchrony (i.e. it changes little over time) and parole is the actual use of language to achieve a purpose or simply the FUNCTION – characterized by diachrony (i.e. it changes from situation to situation) (cf. Littlejohn and Foss, 2005:103-4).

As a linguistic *form* that *functions* in various ways in socio-cultural interactions, the term 'proverb' is characterised as "a phrase, saying, sentence, statement or experience of the folk, which contains above all wisdom, truth, morals, experience, lessons and advice concerning life, and which has been handed down from generation to generation" (Meider, 1985:117). Proverbs, generally considered as oracular or enigmatic sayings that require interpretations allegories, parables (*The Oxford English Dictionary*, 1970:1570), are typical examples of language in use or language at work. They are used in many societies and cultures to garnish speech and spice discourse in order to achieve divergent purposes. Proverbs are considered so important in several African, especially Nigerian, cultures that an inability to interpret them in discourse is considered silly and objectionable, which easily makes an individual lose his respect (cf. Ogunjimi and Na'Allah, 2005:85). An instance of this in literature is King Odewale's reproving rhetorical question in Ola Rotimi's *The Gods are not to Blame*: "What is the matter,

fellow, aren't you a Yoruba man? Must proverbs be explained to you after they are said?" (Rotimi, 1979:35).

Also, among the Ibo who culturally regard the art of conversation "very highly", "proverbs are the palm-oil with which words are eaten" (Achebe, 1994:7). Adewoye (1988:58) observes, in relation to Chinua Achebe's *No Longer at Ease*, that "the novel is rich in proverbs.... one can say there is perhaps no page where there is no proverb". They are thus so crucial that they have generated a lot of interest among several categories of paremiologists (researchers interested in the study of proverbs) including paremiographers (collectors of proverbs), philosophers, linguists, ethnologists, ethnographers, anthropologists, psychologists, sociologists and literary artists, among other scholars.

As every writer is a product of his/her society, as influenced by its language, the sociolinguistic theoretical framework, particularly Dell Hymes' ethnography of communication or *speaking* model, is adopted to the study of twenty-nine Nigerian proverbs in Zainab Alkali's first two works, *The Stillborn* and *The Virtuous Woman*. The first ten proverbs in both works are analysed, making twenty proverbs in all. In the novels, the conventions of orature (dreams, proverbs, etc.) are distilled into written literature such that the dynamism and dialectics of the Hausa culture and society are manifested in the author's use of language, especially proverbs, which are translated from Hausa idiom. This phenomenon of imposing elements of oral literature on written literature that characterizes most Nigerian literary works has made Fashina (2005) to jettison such dichotomy (between oral and written literature) and coin the term "Lit-Orature" to classify the genre to which such works as Zainab Alkali's belong.

The dichotomy between 'oral' and 'written' literatures, "separated by a gulf...requiring totally different critical approaches" (Barber, 1981) has been found to be wrong and unacceptable in some quarters. The notion of 'lit-orature' thus emerged from the "need to explore the symbiotic relations of oral to written literature with a view to establishing inter-literary harmony of discourse" (Fashina, 2005:102). The implication of this is that as indigenous oral traditions are distilled into African written literature, a synthesis is desirable to counteract the connotations of "past", "ancient", "inferior" that seem to be often foregrounded in reference to oral literature as opposed to its written counterpart. It is agreeable to us that true African/Nigerian literature is ideally "lit-orature" as it is composed of several forms of orality/orature among which are proverbs.

2. The Nature of Proverbs in Nigerian Lit-Orature

Proverbs are pervasive, with varying degrees of proficiency in Nigerian lit-orature – myths, legends, stories, fiction, poetry, drama/performance. Nigerian writers in English across ethnic groups thus make recourse to the use of proverbs in their artistic enterprise so as to make their works realistic and relevant. This is borne out of their realisation that "of all the varied oral literary forms, the proverb is the form which has proved itself to be of great continuing relevance to modern man" (Akporabaro and Emovon, 1994:1). Since the relevance of literature is constrained by the form it takes, Nigerian writers, regardless of their ideological trappings, often use forms that would allow them to teach people or make them imbibe certain values, consciously or unconsciously (Ogunjimi, 1994:6). The functions of lit-orature are thereby served tremendously by proverbs. According to Akporabaro and Emovon (1994:6), the proverb has been and still remains a most powerful and effective instrument

... for the transmission of culture, social morality, manners and ideas of a people from one generation to the other. The reason behind the efficacy of the proverb as an instrument of cultural transmission is that the proverb... is a reflection of the social values and sensibility of the people.

Proverbs in Nigerian lit-orature are wise sayings and aphorisms conditioned and determined largely by the Nigerian socio-geographical experience. Thus, the proverbs of each Nigerian writer are tapped primarily from his/her experiences based on the culture, society or geographical location he/she is rooted in. Each culture or society observes and perceives the world in a way. Such observations and perceptions then lead to certain conclusions around which conventional truths, aphorisms and wise sayings are articulated (i.e. "we can't be so elegant in walking without moving the head"; "one cannot be so beautiful that one doesn't excrete: the Queen of the whitemen does"). It is observed that proverbs are not just to teach morals or highlight discourse, they are essentially structures developed for the transmission of the wider lessons of life.

In general, proverbs combine two layers of meaning, the literal meaning (the forms they take) and the transferred meaning (the ideas they convey). Based on this nature, Valdaeva (2003:379) submits that in speech or writing, proverbs

... are easily recalled and recognized based on different stylistic devices, such as alliteration, rhyme, paronomasia, metaphor and many others and, thus, have a more advantageous form than other set expressions and are very effective for carrying different ideas to the society.

Three factors appear to determine the use and coining of proverbs: the universal/general, the local/cultural and the attitudinal/personal.

The universal/general nature of proverbs concerns the universality of certain natural phenomena. According to Oseni (2003:xii), the sky, the earth, the sea, fire, air, people, parts of the body, animals, etc. are natural entities of which no nation or race can justifiably claim exclusive ownership. As such, different people in different places coin proverbs around such natural entities and this reality accounts for the equivalent and near-equivalent forms of proverbs. Based on this factor, ideas expressed in many Nigerian proverbs are universal – and 'our' proverbs are not only but "miniature literary forms which appeal to the wide public and the generality of mankind because they exploit the common reservoir of human experience and common sense" (Akpobaro and Emovon, 1994:10). Proverbs like "fingers are not equal", "the illness of death has no medicine", "one who trusts God will never fail", "if a young dog doesn't know how to steal, the others teach him", "misfortune and fortune are sisters", "we are what our thinking makes us", "what is sweet kills", etc. have equivalent and near-equivalent forms not only in many several Nigerian/African cultures but several world cultures at large.

The local/cultural factor accounts for the distinctiveness of some proverbs to certain cultures, based on their peculiar experiences and socio-geographical location. For instance, African proverbs are distinguishable with reference to the plants and animals that are abundant in Africa. In Nigeria, the pragmatics and ethnography of the different Nigerian cultures/ ethnic groups would make one know or believe when told that "Allah does not create the expert in chewing any grain" and "if you see your brother's beard on fire, seek water to pour on your own" are Hausa proverbs; that "when a man says yes, his *chi* also says yes" and "money has no end in giving satisfaction" are Igbo sayings, while

"what is to be done should be done at the right time; we don't invoke the spirit of Sango in harmattan season" and "the person on whose head a coconut is broken does not wait to partake in eating it" are Yoruba. Historical and anecdotal proverbs relating to specific personages and cultural events also belong to, and are conditioned by, this category. For instance, the cultural practice of a sacrificial fowl in Yoruba funeral rites and rituals underlines the proverb, "Is it not better to die young than to die in old age without being able to attract a sacrificial fowl?" (Omoloso, 2006:34).

The attitudinal/personal factor concerns individuals' reactions to issues and people. Here, proverbs may not have universal applicability and may not be borne out of cultural values. Rather, they would show some people's attitudes to others, which are often subjective and idiosyncratic, derived usually through hasty generalizations and faulty conclusions. Among several Nigerian ethnic groups, there are proverbs and proverbial expressions that are used to characterize, praise and lampoon others. Even within the same large culture, Yoruba for instance, there are proverbs that portray people's attitudes to themselves and others. For example, "we only those who imitate the Oyo, the Oyo imitate no one" evidently shows how highly the people of Oyo regard themselves. Another proverb, in this category – mischievously attitudinal – is, "An Ibadan man that does not steal is only persevering" where it is entailed there is a limit to human endurance/perseverance. Proverbs of this nature also abound to characterise or denigrate Islam and Christianity, considered to be foreign to several Nigerian cultures, as well as their adherents, especially among the Yoruba, who the present writer knows best. Examples of this are: "An Aafaa (Islamic scholar) gets burnt, you ask for his beard; what ignited the fire in the first instance?" and "A thousand Saamu (Samuel, a Christian name) cannot *sa* (escape) from God's wrath", etc.).

This universal, local and attitudinal triad appears to us to depict the nature of proverbs more than the universal, geographical and local categories, the last two of which are mutually inclusive, given by Oseni (2003). The proverbs of each Nigerian community in essence go a long way in determining their lifestyles and those proverbs – "sententious sayings in which a larger message is compressed, rather than expressed" (Abubakre, 2004:233) – engender their social outlook as a people, communicating their feelings and emotions, beliefs and practices.

3. The Sociolinguistic Framework: An Overview

The Saussurean distinction at the beginning of the twentieth century between "langue" and "parole" marked a significant watershed in the study of what would later be referred to as sociolinguistics. So profound was that dichotomy that few years after, Edward Sapir in 1921 commented that "everyone knows that language is a variable" (cited in Milroy and Milroy, 1990:467). By 1928, in his *The Evolution of the English Language*, Mcknight made a notable contribution to the external (social) history of English, whereas the practice had been to pay attention to the internal (linguistic) aspect. Building on the strands of what started from Saussure and expounded by scholars like G. Mcknight and H.C. Wyld, H.C. Currie coined the term sociolinguistics in 1952 and thus entrenched it as a distinct field of academic study. The study of language in relation to society thus started to grow tremendously a decade after from the 1960s (Hudson 1996:1). It has since then received accelerated development through advances in technology and rigorous scholarly attention from sociolinguists like William Labov, Joshua Fishman, John Gumperz, Peter Trudgill, Dell Hymes, Richard Hudson and more recently by Janet Holmer, Suzanne Romaine, James Milroy and Leslie Milroy, Jaworski and Coupland

among others (Milroy and Milroy, 1990). Sociolinguistics combines linguistic and sociological theories and methods to study the "variability of language and to the multiplicity of languages and language forms in a given society" (Coulmas, 2003:263). It investigates how language relates to social categories of class, age, sex, identity, age, ethnicity, speech situation, network, etc.

As a branch of applied linguistics, the twin counterpart of core linguistics, sociolinguistics studies the norms of the society at large and examines how an individual exploits his awareness of the societal norms in order to achieve particular effects (Sotiloye, 1992:134; Ayodabo, 2007:100). It is therefore a precursor to communication theory, (the process of transferring message from a source to a destination), pragmatics (the study of language use in relation to the user and context) and stylistics (the linguistic study of style). Since the Saussurean dyadic distinction, various terms have been used to refer to the linguistic form and its functional dimension, the two of which are complementary. The following schema summarises the interrelationship and the terms:

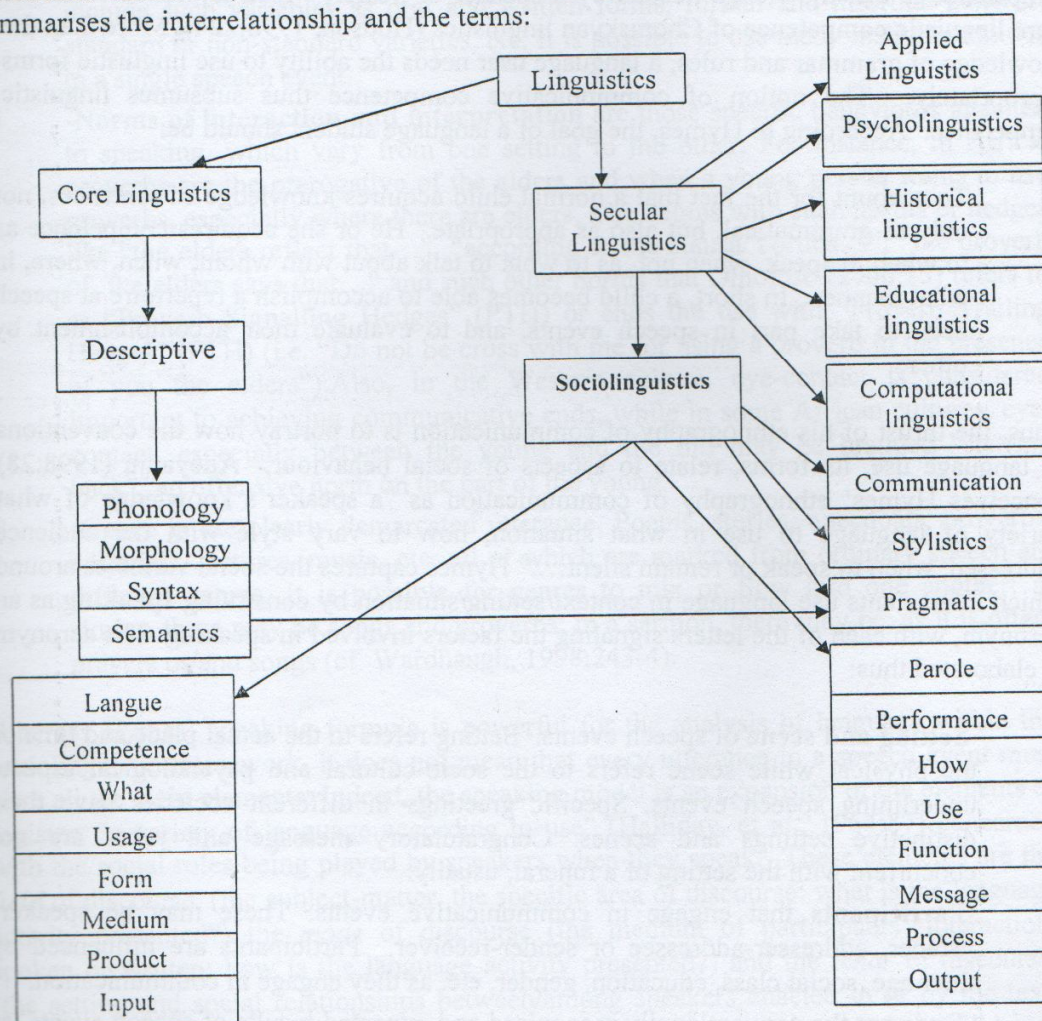


Fig. 1: The Place of Sociolinguistics in Language Study

To answer the fundamental question of sociolinguistics, which Fishman (1972) captures as "who speaks what language to whom and when?" recast further by Ayodabo (2007) as "who says what to whom, when, where, why and how?", different sociolinguistic theories have been developed. Prominent among such theories are the Deficit Hypothesis of Basil Bernstein, the Variability Concept of William Labov, the Speech Act Theory of John Austin, the Linguistic Relativity Hypothesis of Edward Sapir and Benjamin Whorf, the Restricted and Elaborated Code also of Basil Bernstein and the Ethnography of Communication model of Dell Hymes. All these have been treated in varying depths or applied by researchers (Adeyanju, 1998; 2007; Dittmar, 1976; Hudson, 1996; Coulmas, 2003; Labov, 1972; Hymes, 1977)

4. Ethnography of Communication: The Theory

The theory of Ethnography of Communication derives from Hymes' earlier theory of communicative competence (Hymes, 1971). Hymes contends that communicative competence is the knowledge needed by a speaker or hearer, which is broader than the mere linguistic competence of Chomskyan linguistics (Hudson, 1996:224). More than the knowledge of grammar and rules, a language user needs the ability to use linguistic forms appropriately. The notion of communicative competence thus subsumes linguistic competence. According to Hymes, the goal of a language student should be:

To account for the fact that a normal child acquires knowledge of sentences, not only as grammatical, but also as appropriate. He or she acquires competence as to when to speak, when not, as to what to talk about with whom, when, where, in what manner. In short, a child becomes able to accomplish a repertoire at speech acts, to take part in speech events, and to evaluate their accomplishment by others.

Thus, the thrust of his ethnography of communication is to portray how the conventions of language use, its forms, relate to aspects of social behaviour. Adeyanju (1998:28) conceives Hymes' ethnography of communication as "a speaker's knowledge of what variety of language to use in what situation, how to vary style with the audience addressed, when to speak or remain silent..." Hymes captures the social variables around which interactants use language in context/setting/situation by construing **speaking** as an acronym, with each of the letters signaling the factors involved in speaking. The acronym is elaborated thus:

- S **-Setting and scene** of speech events. Setting refers to the actual place and time or the physical while scene refers to the socio-cultural and psychological aspects underlining speech events. Specific greetings in different societies have their distinctive settings and scenes. Congratulatory message and jokes are not concurrent with the setting of a funeral, usually.
- P **-Participants** that engage in communicative events. These may be speaker-listener, addresser-addressee or sender-receiver. Participants are influenced by their age, social class, education, gender, etc. as they engage in communication.
- E **-Ends** are the conventionally recognised and expected results of speech events, as well as the specific goals of participants in certain settings. All speech acts serve certain ends whether intended or unintended.

- A -**Act sequence** means the actual form or content of speech. It refers to the precise diction or actual words used to communicate. There are many ways of greeting for instance (good morning; good day; hello; how are you? How do you do? etc.) but the choice of each act sequence is susceptible to different ends or interpretations.
- K -**Key**, referring to the tone and manner of how something is said, is the attitudinal dimension. Whether one is serious, sarcastic, mordant, light-hearted, authoritative, or detached, etc. or not would be marked by the key employed, which includes nonverbal aspects of communication. According to Wardhaugh (1998:243), "when there is a lack of fit between what a person is actually saying and the key that the person is using, listeners are likely to pay more attention to the key than to the actual content". In the proverb, "actions speak louder than words", there is a justification that *key* may be more important than *act sequence* in communicative events.
- I -**Instrumentalities** as a concept refers to the choice of channel. Instrumentalities include such variables as oral and written forms, formal and informal patterns, standard or non-standard varieties, etc. It is possible to use many instrumentalities in a single speech event.
- N -**Norms of interaction and interpretation** are those specific behaviours attached to speaking, which vary from one setting to the other. For instance, in Africa, proverbs are the prerogative of the elders and when a young person wants to use proverbs, especially where there are elders, s/he begins with such norms or hedges like "the elders reflect that...", "according to the Hausa/Yoruba...", "the proverb of the elders says that..." and such other norms that Omoloso (2006:15) refers to as "Proverb Signalling Hedges" (PTH) or ends the use with "Proverb Trailing Hedges" (PTH) (i.e. "Do not be cross with me for using a proverb in the presence of you the elders"). Also, in the Western culture, eye-contact is considered important to achieving communicative ends, while in some African cultures, eye-contact, especially between the young and the old may be branded "starring back", an offensive norm on the part of the young.
- G -**Genre** is the clearly demarcated utterance. Poems, stories, anecdotes, proverbs, editorials, lectures, music, etc. all of which are marked from ordinary speech are different genres. It is possible for genres to mix or flow into one another: in stories, there may be songs and proverbs; in a sermon, there may be, as it is often, prayers or/and songs (cf. Wardhaugh, 1998:243-4).

Whereas Hymes' speaking formula is powerful for the analysis of language within the sociolinguistic framework, it does not mean that every utterance in a speech event must have all the eight elements. Indeed, the speaking model is an expansion of the elements of register, "a variety of language according to use" (Halliday, et al., 1964:87) concerned with the social roles being played by speakers when they speak. These elements are the *field* of discourse, (the subject-matter, the specific area of discourse: what is the language activity presented?) the *mode* of discourse (the medium of participants' interaction, spoken or written: how is the language activity presented?) and the *tenor* of discourse, (the setting and social relationships between/among speakers enacted in or by the text: what is the relation between the persons involved in the language activity?) (Halliday et al., 1964:87; Bamgbose, 1970:81; Lamidi, 2000:116-117).

In other words, if communication is considered to be a bicycle wheel with the speaking formula its spokes, the absence of one or two in a given context does not render the wheel useless; the communication/analysis will still 'roll on'. As applicable in soliloquy, a person may not talk to another person. Also, the same person may just talk for talking sake, not because s/he has an identifiable end to achieve with what he says. A typical example is singing.

5. *The Stillborn and The Virtuous Woman: The Social Realism*

Zainab Alkali, the best known female writer in Northern Nigeria, projects her vision for social emancipation for her people, especially the females, in a rapidly changing Nigerian society in her works under consideration. In *The Stillborn*, the story centres around Li, the protagonist, Awa, her sister and Faku, her friend, all adolescent girls having dreams of a bright future within their complex local Hausa setting. Education is presented as the ultimate need of the girl-child to a blissful life. Despite all their struggles, as accentuated by their dreams, contextual constraints and obstacles within their culture and the larger Nigerian society make them all grow almost unfulfilled and disillusioned. Li's quest for self-emancipation makes her strive "to arm herself with education and transform the society into a virile one" (Joseph, 2007:111). The philosophical thrust that engenders human predicament along which the story is woven is presented aptly by Li:

Everybody does, and as long as we live, we shall continue to dream. But it is also important to remember that like babies dreams are conceived but not all dreams are born alive. Some are aborted. Others are stillborn (Alkali, 1984:104).

In *The Virtuous Woman*, the journey metaphor is used to highlight the deplorable nature of the Nigerian social infrastructure and its human costs. Based on the sociology of the Hausa society in which the story is set, Nana Ai is presented as an ideal girl: the archetypal virtuous woman, morally upright, shy, knowledge-drive, and submissive to culturally defined gender roles as evident in her college verse (Alkali, 1986:86):

Who can find the virtuous woman?
For her price is far above rubies
The heart of her husband doth
Safely trust in her
S that he shall have no need for spoil
She will do him good and not evil
All the days of her life....
Strength and honour are her clothing
And she shall rejoice in time to come.

Despite her amorous feelings towards Bello, she exercises restraint, in conformity to the gender expectations of her culture, and does not lose her self-control. She is contrasted from Laila, who would easily violate cultural taboos at any slight opportunity (like accepting free rides from strangers and making suggestive passes at men). The two works are garnished with proverbs and aphorisms employed to drive home the themes and make the forms socially relevant. *The Stillborn* and *The Virtuous Woman* have eighteen and eleven proverbs/proverbial sayings respectively, making a total of twenty-nine proverbs (as serially presented in the appendix).

The two works accentuate Zainab Alkali's commitment to the social awakening of the audience, especially the female gender that is presented as repressed by the socially-conditioned patriarchal hegemony. She does this within the realist mode by which she develops the experiences of individuals as "shaped by the economic, political and social circumstances" of their existence, with such experiences either limiting or enlarging their opportunities (Babatunde, 1997:120). As a product of the Hausa society, nurtured largely by that society too, Zainab Alkali shows how deeply rooted she is in her immediate environment by allowing the various social, cultural, historical, political, psychological, economic, religious and linguistic contextual features of her society flow in her works (Babatunde, 2000:149). She thus succeeds in aptly demonstrating what Sekoni (2007) calls "indigenous relevance" despite the use of a non-indigenous language. This cultural sensitivity, linguistic dexterity and functional utility make her works, at the micro level, be to the Hausa, what Chinua Achebe's and Wole Soyinka's works are to the Igbo and the Yoruba respectively; and at the macro level, the Nigerian/African society.

6. The Sociolinguistics of Nigerian Proverbs: Data Analysis

In Hymes' model, and as previously indicated, all the elements need not be applicable to a single act sequence. The instrumentalities at force may not allow keys to be determinable. For instance, the written medium may not allow (if not indicated) the nonverbal aspects of meaning in a setting. Also, our study reveals that it is also possible for all data to have uniform or multiple genres. It is not as well automatic for the SPEAKING elements to be serial; the pattern is just for convenience. We shall begin by discussing the elements that are constant in all the data, which are genre, instrumentality and norms of interaction and interpretation.

Genre: All the data belong to a single genre of proverbs. Following our typology of proverbs (Adedimeji, 2003:61-72), the proverbs are found to be largely rhetorical and philosophical/analytic with few being didactic while no epistemological proverbs are represented.

Instrumentality: Given the nature of our data, they all belong to the written mode/channel/ medium /form. And as proverbs constitute an aspect of the pragmatic variation of English use in Nigeria, they reflect the standard Nigerian English expressions (e.g. "blood could recognise blood even in the dark"; "the child has a lot of growing up to do", etc.).

Norms of interaction and interpretation: It is expected that when proverbs are used, the issue being discussed is successfully interpreted and reacted to appropriately. There is no instance of pragmatic failure by which a participant fails to interpret the proverb used by another. There are few instances of Proverb Signalling Hedges (PSH) while Proverb Trailing Hedges (PTH) are not featured.

The remaining five variables will now be used to analyse the data, grouped into A (*The Stillborn*) and B (*The Virtuous Woman*).

6.1. Analysis of Group A Data

1. Act sequence: "A heathen woman can only have heathen children" (p. 13).

Analysis - In a society where paganism is despised that it can even attract capital punishment, referring to someone as a heathen woman is the most offensive kind of

degradation and contempt. The proverb means nothing good can ever come from the addressee as well as her children.

Participants: Addresser: Baba, Li's father, in his forties.

Addressee: Mama, Li's mother, thirty-two years old.

Setting: Place and time: their home; most likely evening.

Scene: Anger; displeasure. In the culture, wives are expected to be submissive to their husbands.

Ends: To rebuke her and make her feel unwanted; and that she has infected her children with her bad and uncultured habits. He wants to make her know that she is neither a good wife to him nor a good mother to her children.

Key: Harsh tone, hostile disposition.

2. Act sequence: *The lion cub takes after its mother* (p. 13).

Analysis - Conventionally, children imitate their parents, being the first school they learn from. It is thus believed that if a child is good, it shows that the parents are good, but if the child is bad, it is the mother especially who has influenced him/her negatively.

Participants: Addresser: Baba, Li's father, in his forties.

Addressee: Mama, Li's mother, thirty-two years old.

Setting: Place and time: Their home, most likely evening

Scene: anger, displeasure. In the culture, men don't have much respect for their wives.

Ends: To make her realise that he regrets marrying a person like her from a heathen village; to inflict more emotional pains on her by extending the abuse and condemnation to her parent, and by implication, her entire clan.

Key: Harsh tone, hostile attitudinal disposition.

3. Act sequence: *The chick (is) telling the hen what to do* (p. 15).

Analysis - The elders know better by virtue of their experience and as such, it is absurd and ridiculous in the culture for the young (the chick) to assume that he can teach the elderly (the hen). The addresser feels that the addressee should appreciate the absurdity of her suggestion and thus keep quiet about what she knows less.

Participants: Addresser: Awa, Li's sister; eighteen years old.

Addressee: Reference is to Li, thirteen years old.

Setting: Place and time: Their home, in the evening.

Scene: Amusement at being taught what to do by a younger person, her sister Li. The act sequence is her thought. Socio-culturally, the participants are expected to obey their father who does not want them to watch a new dance they want to watch.

Ends: To assure herself that by being older, she is more intelligent and world-wise than her younger sister, referred to as "the chick".

Key: Wry thinking; amused feeling, reflective tone.

4. Act sequence: *Children shouldn't be caged... for if the cage got broken by accident or design, they would find the world too big to live in* (p.25).

Analysis - When one is over-protective of what one has, the tendency is there for one lose such an entity. Over-pampered and over-protected children tend to be incapable of coping

with the challenges of the world later because they were not allowed to learn the realities of life while they were young.

Participants: Addresser: Kaka, Li's paternal grandfather, most likely in his seventies.

Addressee: his private thoughts; meant for his son regarding his son's children.

Setting: Place and time: At home, in his hut; in the evening.

Scene: Concern about his son's mad obsession with discipline, the condition of which the children are easy victims.

Ends: To make Baba realise, when he talks to him at a later time, that he is too harsh and strict to his children; to make Baba change his hostile attitude to his family.

Key: Private thoughts; mental speech outline, reflective tone.

5. Act sequence: *The body grows fat on what the heart desires* (p. 47).

Analysis - An individual becomes used to whatever he conditions his mind to, good or bad, positive or negative.

Participants: Addresser: Li, the protagonist, thirteen years of age.

Addressee: Herself, what she thinks of Faku,

Setting: Place and time: In the woods, around the Hill Station; afternoon.

Scene: Concern about Faku's relationship with Garba, a city man who is thirty-two years old, her mother's age-mate.

Ends: To predispose herself to what her friend Faku wants, which she thinks may not be in Faku's long term interest. She wants to put herself in the right frame of mind that a person's decision about marriage is best left to him/her.

Key: Soliloquy; reflective tone.

6. Act sequence: *The deaf can see the blind hear* (p. 50).

Analysis - Nature does not allow a vacuum: a person who lacks something has something else to serve his purpose. Usually, if one is deaf, one can see and thus gain knowledge; if one is blind, one can hear very well and would thus not be shut completely from the happenings of the world.

Participants: Addresser: Audu, a middle-aged townsman.

Addressee(s): Manu primarily and other towns people like Mairama, Hauwa and Audu all belonging to the same age group.

Setting: Place and time: in the neighbourhood, a little distance from Li's household; in the early morning.

Scene: Emphasis on the spread of a supposed secret: Fama is getting married to a local girl (from the village).

Ends: To reiterate the extent to which a so-called secret has spread across the village; to serve a rhetorical purpose.

Key: Serious tone.

7. Act sequence: *Whatever remains secret has not happened* (p. 50).

Analysis - The term "secret" is a relative term and thus nothing is secret when it has happened. The truth is that a supposed secret will be revealed to some people or the world at a point now or in future.

Participants: Addresser: Audu, a middle-aged townsman.

Addressee(s): Manu primarily and other townspeople like Mairama, Hauwa and Audu all belonging to the same age group.

Setting: Place and time: in the neighbourhood, a little distance from Li's household; in the early morning.

Scene: Emphasis on the spread of a supposed secret: Fiamma is getting married to a local girl (from the village).

Ends: To reiterate the extent to which a so-called secret has spread across the village; to serve a rhetorical purpose.

Key: Serious tone.

8. Act sequence: *The chicken is better left in its feathers* (pp. 54-55).

Analysis - Things are best in their natural state. Uncovering what is naturally covered and opening up what circumstances have rendered closed only lead to unexpected consequences and avoidable complications.

Participants: Addresser: The narrator.

Addressee: The reader.

Setting: Place and time: A little distance from Li's neighbourhood; in the morning.

Scene: Flashback on Manu, one of the characters/ participants in the story.

Ends: To highlight the regret of the village elders after asking Manu's departing wife why she was leaving her husband. They reasoned they should not have asked her so that she would not reveal that her husband, Manu, was impotent, thereby subjecting their clansman to ridicule.

Key: Serious and regretful tone.

9. Act sequence: *Where there is a rope, there is no load and where there is a load, there is no rope* (p. 57).

Analysis - Life is a complex phenomenon: those who want some things don't have them and those who need those things may not have them. Illustratively, a brilliant child may not have rich parents that will sponsor his education that he is so zealous about. A rich man's son may not want to trouble himself with schooling, despite his father's entreaties and encouragements.

Participants: Addressers: Village men.

Addressees: Villagers; no one in particular.

Setting: Place and time: village, wherever Li goes within the village; any time.

Scene: Commenting on the unfortunate situation of how Li, now nineteen, is abandoned at her prime in the village, waiting endlessly for Habu, her husband working in the city. Socio-culturally, it is anomalous for a newly married beautiful girl to be abandoned by her husband.

Ends: To emphasise the irony of their situation: they are ready to marry and take care of Li, out of their appreciation of her personality, but she does not yield to them; her heart is inclined to the uncaring Habu, far away in the city, while capable men like Alhaji Bature are wooing Li to no avail.

Key: Serious, philosophical tone.

10. Act Sequence: *It is a bad family that ruins a man's pride* (p. 61).

Analysis - People are naturally proud of the achievements of their family members and relations. In the same vein, a person would be ashamed of his family members' misdemeanor, which makes him to lose face when reference is made to that person's crimes or misdeeds.

Participants: Addresser: Manu, a villager.

Addressees: Villagers, Li's neighbours, including Mairama, Hauwa and others.

Setting: Place and time: The way to the market; in the morning.

Scene: A reflection on the gossip on his family, with particular reference to his father. In the culture, without a good family, an individual loses the respect or pride s/he deserves.

Ends: To portray Li's family in a bad light; to reiterate that the problem with Baba's family is not that of Baba originally, Baba is only a victim of his own family - which has a supposed witch.

Key: Serious tone.

6.2. Analysis of Group B Data

11. Act Sequence: *To die is better than to commit a disgraceful act* (p. 14).

Analysis - Nobody really wants to die but a life of disgrace and ignominy is worse than actual death. It is conventional wisdom therefore that as despicable as death is, dying is much better than living in odium that results from committing disgraceful acts.

Participants: Addresser: Baba Sani, Nana Ai's grandfather, sixty years old.

Addressee: Nana Ai, the protagonist, seventeen years old.

Setting: Place and time: At home, in front of the hut; at night.

Scene: Giving advice to Nana, who would soon be leaving home for school. Socio-culturally, such is a period for counselling and exhortation so that a traveller would not derail and forger her roots. Grand-parents admire and love their grandchildren and they always want to keep them (their grandchildren) away from harm.

Ends: To ensure that Nana Ai has internalized all he has always been telling her; to make her remember to always safeguard her honour and insulate herself from immoral behaviour. He wants her to maintain the high moral standard with which she is brought up.

Key: Serious tone.

12. Act sequence: *A docile lamb makes a pleasant companion for the wayward goat* (p. 15).

Analysis - This proverb is equivalent to the English proverb, "birds of a feather flock together". Those who share similar characteristics always attract and interact with one another even if they are not from the same race or family background.

Participants: Addresser: A short village girl, about seventeen years old too.

Addressee: Nana Ai.

Setting: Place and time: At the fountain; in the morning.

Scene: Taunting Nana Ai, who is successful enough to be granted admission into the best secondary school in the North. Age mates are often jealous of their peers'

achievements. Reference is to Nana Ai's friends "the wayward goat" with whom she would be travelling.

Ends: To embarrass Nana Ai; to make her feel bad, especially as she has not done anything wrong to deserve the uncomplimentary remark.

Key: Sarcastic, mordant tone.

13. **Act sequence:** *When patience exceeds its bounds, it becomes cowardice, not strength* (p. 16).

Analysis - Everything has its limit, beyond which it becomes objectionable. As it is said, "excess of everything is bad". Though patience is a virtue, when one becomes excessively patient, one is deemed weak, frail and dull.

Participants: Addresser: The narrator.

Addressee: The reader.

Setting: Place and time: At the fountain; in the morning.

Scene: Accentuation of Nana Ai's reasoning that 'there is a limit to what one can take' when the two girls keep taunting/hurting her with bad words, now shifted to her grandfather. Culturally, to defend the honour of one's clan or family is courageous and commendable.

Ends: To justify Nana Ai's challenge, her threatening voice directed at the girls; to heighten Ai's preparedness to pick a fight to defend her grandfather's integrity.

Key: Serious tone, candid feeling.

14. **Act sequence:** *The gods are not asleep* (p. 48).

Analysis - In African cosmology and traditional belief, the gods are superior to human beings and they are appeased to and sought for assistance. The gods are thus all-knowing and are always in control of situations, no matter how challenging they are to ordinary mortals who sleep, forget and lose grasp of things.

Participants: Addresser: Taltu, a passenger, a young woman in her late thirties (quoting people).

Addressee: Nana Ai, seventeen years old.

Setting: Place and time: In the lorry; at night.

Scene: Telling the story of Dogo, the clownish entertainer in the lorry, (whose new wife could not conceive after five years) that sent his first wife away for giving birth to many girls and a boy. His attitude was considered culturally reprehensible and people considered his new wife's inability to conceive as being divinely motivated.

Ends: To reiterate that as gods do not condone injustice, they vent their anger on Dogo right by not granting him his desire for male children which made him drive his first wife out. The act serves to justify Dogo's situation as that informed by poetic justice.

Key: Serious tone, disapproving mood.

15. **Act sequence:** *A man who taunts the gods will have nowhere to run when the gods turn on him* (p. 48).

Analysis - As gods are all-powerful and omnipresent in African belief, there is nowhere anyone that taunts them can turn to for rescue or escape from their inevitable punishment.

Participants: Addresser: Taltu, a passenger, a young woman in her late thirties (quoting people).

Addressee: Nana Ai, seventeen years old.

Setting: Place and time: In the lorry; at night.

Scene: Telling the story of Dogo, the clownish entertainer in the lorry, (whose new wife could not conceive after five years) that sent his first wife away for giving birth to many girls and a boy. His attitude was considered culturally reprehensible and people considered his new wife's inability to conceive as being divinely motivated.

Ends: To emphasize that no man can escape the punishment of the gods that he deserves after incurring their wrath.

Key: Serious tone.

16. **Act sequence:** *Evil usually takes abode in the quiet and seemingly patient ones* (p. 48).

Analysis - Life is made up ironies. It happens that those who appear gentle and meek at the surface are evil while some people who look difficult are good.

Participants: Addresser: Taltu, a passenger, a young woman in her late thirties (quoting people).

Addressee: Nana Ai, seventeen years old.

Setting: Place and time: In the lorry; at night.

Scene: Telling some people's suspicion, and the socio-cultural (mis)belief that any instance of barrenness/misfortune is the handiwork of some witches. The first wife that is maltreated is considered to be responsible for the new wife's childlessness.

Ends: To make the first wife appear guilty; to justify possible outrage or attack against her; to impose the verdict of guilt on her for an offence there is no evidence she committed.

Key: Serious tone.

17. **Act sequence:** *A man who makes (sic) too many mistakes in the past cannot hope to live a comfortable present* (p.51).

Analysis - Like ghosts that haunt the living, past misdeeds tend to suffuse people with guilty conscience that makes them lose their charm and liveliness. For most people, the past affects the present and many still continue to live in misery as a result of their past failures and foibles.

Participants: Addresser: Taltu, twins' mother, quoting Dogo.

Addressee: Nana Ai.

Setting: Place and time: In the lorry; at night.

Scene: Justifying the pitiable condition in which Dogo is as well deserved; creating a psychological boost for oneself through which one takes the circumstances surrounding one as normal.

End: To make Nana realise that nothing could change Dogo; he has resigned to his fate and would like to pay, by so doing, for his past excesses, with his unfortunate lifestyle.

Key: Philosophical tone.

18. Act sequence: *Memories are like bedbugs* (p. 51).

Analysis - Memories, especially of unpleasant events, bug and disturb human psyche like bedbugs that trouble one's sleep and suck one's blood. Memories are capable of affecting the present for better or for worse.

Participants: Addresser: Taltu, twins' mother, Nana's co-passenger.

Addressee: Nana Ai, seventeen years of age.

Setting: Place and time: In the lorry; at night.

Scene: A reinforcement of the tenor of what she has said about Dogo's attitude to life, informed by his past misdeed; accentuating the previous datum.

Ends: To make Nana realise that Dogo's case is beyond redemption; that as long as he remembers the past mistakes he made, he would continue to be bitter with himself for those mistakes.

Key: Philosophical tone.

19. Act sequence: *The man with the head hasn't got a cap, the man with the cap hasn't got a head* (p. 60).

Analysis - This is an equivalent of datum 9 in characterizing the irony and reality of life. A person cannot just have all that s/he wants.

Participants: Addresser: Nana Ai, protagonist, seventeen years old.

Addressee: Laila, her friend and age-mate.

Setting: Place and time: Inside the lorry; in the morning.

Scene: Expressing her feelings about the irony of life in relation to Abubakar, a minister's son, who is travelling in the lorry with them just to experience adventure, whereas he could have easily travelled in his father's "special official vehicle". If Nana were to have such an opportunity, she would not subject herself to the agony of the unpredictable commercial lorries.

Ends: To emphasise that she is not impressed by Abubakar's attitude; to lament her own poor and low status in a way, compared to Abubakar.

Key: Philosophical tone.

20. Act sequence: *The sun has got to shine tomorrow* (p.83).

Analysis - This is a universal truth, a philosophical postulate. No matter how dark and hopeless today may be, tomorrow will bring sunshine. If one really appreciates the incontrovertibility of the appearance of the sun after a dark night, one will know that all difficulties will be followed by ease.

Participants: Addresser: Nana Ai, protagonist, seventeen years old.

Addressee: Intended for Bello, co-passenger, of about twenty years old.

Setting: Place and time: In the train; in the afternoon.

Scene: Lamenting the deplorable condition of the nation's roads, leading to avoidable accidents (of which Bello is a recent victim) and deaths as well as expressing the positive mental attitude that tomorrow will be better for the distressed boy.

End: To comfort him and make him not to feel despondent about the social problems - mainly corruption and bad leadership - confronting the nation.

Key: Philosophical tone.

7. A Discussion of the Analyses: Sociolinguistic Implications

The preceding analysis of Group A data has shown that the *physical settings* or places where the proverbs are used are five: home (with the highest frequency of 4 proverbs or 40%), woods (1 proverb or 10%), neighbourhood (with 3 proverbs or 30%) market road (1 proverb or 10%) and the village at large (1 proverb or 10% as well). The *temporal setting* has 4 proverbs (40%) used in the morning, 1 (10%) in the afternoon, 4 also (40%) in the evening, none (0%) applicable to the night specifically and 1(10%) applicable to anytime. The implication of this is a synecdoche, home as a part stands for the society at a whole, the realism of which the story projects. The Hausa people, like others, regard home as the nucleus of society; when each home is good, the society would be good. Home therefore serves mainly as the focus of proverbial exchanges. As there is more interaction at home in the morning (before leaving for the day's work) and in the evening (at the end of day's work), most proverbs (80% of data) feature at both periods.

For *participants*, the analysis reveals that eight addressers and six addressees are featured with varying frequencies of occurrence. The addressers are Baba (2 proverbs or 20%), Awa (1 proverb or 10%), Kaka (1 proverb or 10%) Li (1 proverb or 10%) Audu (2 proverbs or 20%), Manu (1 proverb or 10%), village men (1 proverb or 10% attributed to them) and the author, using the omnipresent point-of-view, (1 proverb or 10%). Sociolinguistically, elders are considered as the custodians of proverbs, accounting for the higher frequencies attributed to the older participants and just 1 (mere 10%) used by Li, despite being the protagonist, since she is just a teenager. In the addressees category, Li has 2 proverbs (or 20%), Mama 2 also (20%), Baba 1 (10%) Manu and his friends 2 (or 20% as well), the reader 1(or 10%) and the villagers 2 (or 20 %) making 10, the total number of proverbs analyzed). This pattern reveals that proverbs serve all social categories of people in the society, the young and the old, the male and the female, etc. While the proverbs addressed to Li would serve to orientate her as a young woman with 'a lot of growing up to do', those address to Baba and Mama as well as others would serve mainly thematic and rhetorical purposes.

The *Ends* are as diverse and varied as the proverbs – emphasizing, rebuking, assuring, teaching, moralizing, etc. just as the *Act sequences* are ten, with all the data analyzed functioning to reinforce themes, instruct and teach, persuade and depict character and as well as serve rhetorical functions. The *Keys* are mainly in three categories, 2 instances of harsh tone, 3 instances for each of the reflective tone and 5 occurrences of serious tone, which underpin the utterance of the proverbs.

The remaining ING elements (i.e. *Instrumentalities*, *Norms of interaction and interpretation* and *Genre*) are general in scope. The data are sourced through the instrumentality of a written medium (a novel), these proverbs are normally and appropriately used in interaction and are successfully interpreted by the different participants they are meant for as result of the "pragmasociolinguistic" competence that appears to be in force, among the various participants or interactants. The data all belong to the genre of proverbs.

The second group also manifests a similar, though not the same, pattern. The *setting* has place (physical) and time (temporal) components. The *physical settings* or places are four, at home (1 proverb or 10%), at the fountain (2 proverbs or 20%), in the lorry (6 proverbs or 60%) and in the train (1 proverb or 10%). That the physical setting of inside the lorry is preponderant rather than home here, reinforces the thematic allegory of life as a journey filled with uncertainties and problems that the author projects. It is significant that the lorry is peopled with all categories of people: infants, children,

teenagers, men and women as well as a very old man. Different classes (the rich and the poor) age groups, etc. are represented as an artistic portrayal of a typical community. The *temporal setting* component has 3 proverbs (or 30%) occurring in the morning, 1 (or 10%) in the afternoon, none (or 0%) in the evening and 6 (or 60%) at night. The sociolinguistic implication of this is that there is no time proverbs can't be used. The occurrence of many proverbs in the night is only because the journey and interaction take place in the night. Another implication deriving from the foregoing, which serves thematic reinforcement, is that night is associated with gloom and fear, so more proverbs are used at that time to project or portray the gloom pervading the national horizon and that after the darkness of bad infrastructural facilities, there will be sunlight; there will be a bright tomorrow. The psychological and socio-cultural aspects of setting that *scene* represents also highlight this implication.

The *participants* in group B are in five categories for the addressers and four for the addressees. The addressers are Baba Sani (1 proverb or 10%), an unnamed village girl (1 proverb or 10% as well) the author, in her omnipresent point-of-view (1 proverb or 10% also), Taltu (5 proverbs or 50%) and Nana Ai (2 proverbs or 20%). That Taltu is a mother-figure, an age-mate of Nana Ai's mother, is sociolinguistically significant to her highest frequency of proverbs: a mother is typically a teacher, a counsellor, a wise person, a role model in the culture. Being the protagonist and the quintessential *virtuous woman*, Nana Ai's characterization is further projected by her use of proverbs. In the addressees category, Nana Ai has 7 proverbs (or 70%) addressed to her, while the reader, Laila and Bello have 1 proverb each (or 30% in total) addressed to them. The implication of this is that Nana Ai's exposure to the words of wisdom that proverbs are shapes her virtuous personality. The socio-culturally deviant Laila and Hajjo do not benefit from such proverbs like Nana Ai and such, they do not use proverbs at all.

The *Ends* of the proverbs are also as diverse and varied as their occurrences, counselling, reassuring, motivating, emphasizing, rebuking, etc. The *act sequences* are ten in the analyzed data and their *keys* are serious (5 occurrences or 50%), sarcastic (1 occurrence or 10%) and philosophical (3 occurrences or 30%). And as mentioned in the previous discussion of Group A data, the remaining ING elements are general to the data: sourced through the written *instrumentality*, appropriately used and effectively interpreted as expected by the *norms*, and belonging to the single *genre* of proverbs, functioning like the data in Group A.

8. Conclusion

Language is by far the most important mode of cultural transmission, the process by which one generation passes culture to the succeeding ones. "Language is not only a necessary condition for culture, it is itself part of culture" and the prerequisite for the transmission of other cultural traits (Greenberg, 1971:156). And just as our bodies contain the genes of our forefathers, it is said, so are our everyday lives are grounded in the symbolic system of our predecessors. The unique power of language, either in oral or written mode/instrument, accords us access to centuries of accumulated wisdom, especially when such language is distilled in proverbs and aphorisms. This informs the artistry of Zainab Alkali, a foremost Nigerian female writer, and how she has opened vistas to the emotional, socio-cultural, philosophical, physical aspects of the conflicts and conditions of her society through the skillful use of language/proverbs. Her works, *The Stillborn* and *The Virtuous Woman*, are laden with cultural artifacts, religious beliefs,

social patterns, psychological dispositions and general aspects of life of the Hausa people which all call for re-assessment.

This paper has attempted a paremiological appraisal of Zainab Alkali's two novels, using the ethnography of speaking sociolinguistic framework. It is found that like in several African cultures, the author uses proverbs to garnish discourse, foreground issues, emphasize points, showcase culture, project religious beliefs and portray her people's world-view and philosophy. The nexus between the form the works take and the social functions they are meant to serve is thus remarkable and such harmony (between the linguistic forms and the society they depict) is considered a powerful strategy effectively used by the writer that would continue to make the works relevant to all categories of researchers in African cultural studies for several years to come.

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