



Idiomatic adaptation as social consciousness in the African novel: Perspectives on Chimamanda Adichie's novels

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Abstract

Studies on the domestication of idioms in African literature have investigated the strategies of domestication and the cultural imperatives of the innovative and deviant usages as well as the implications of the usages for pedagogy, standardization, and international intelligibility. Differing from earlier studies, this paper investigates idiomatic adaptation in Chimamanda Adichie's novels with the objective of establishing their causes, discourse-pragmatic functions, and implications for sustainable development. Sixty-one (61) instances of idiomatic adaptation were identified across Adichie's three novels: *Purple Hibiscus* (2003), *Half of a Yellow Sun* (2006), and *Americana* (2013). The data were analysed using a synthesis of insights from a discourse-pragmatic and functionalist approach with a focus on contexts of culture and situation. The results reveal that idiomatic adaptation in the African novel is borne out of pragmatic constraints, the need for contextual and cultural appropriacy, communicative effectiveness, and a bias for social function over grammaticality. The adaptations additionally reveal the African 'collective conscience', thus projecting an overwhelming African social consciousness which can be harnessed for sustainable development. The study contributes to scholarship on African literature and social

consciousness by expanding the understanding of the role of literature in mobilizing collective memory to inspire social change.

Keywords: Idiomatic adaptation; Contextual appropriacy; Social function; Social consciousness; Collective conscience; Adichie's novels

Introduction

The African novel, as exemplified by the Nigerian English novel, is characterized by remarkable distinctiveness, bold experimentations in language, recreations of distinctly African discourse in English and thematic innovations (Bamgbose et al., 1995). Adebija (2004, p. 39) opines that these bold experimentations are 'identity-affirming processes' which stamp the African identity on the English language, making it a 'son of the soil'. Adebija's position is reflective of Achebe's (1965) insistence that the African writer must aim to fashion out English which is at once universal and able to carry his peculiar experience. The bold experimentations in language include domestication or nativization at all levels of linguistic analysis, which have given rise to a 'new English', English as a Second Language (ESL) variety (Achebe, 1965; Anchimbe, 2008). Emenyonu (1995, p. 331) elaborates that the experimentations etch the African presence in the global space, 'using the very tools the colonizers had used to rob

[Africa] of it'. The African novel is therefore an instantiation of the writers' social consciousness, a reflection of not only their awareness of their collective experience as 'post-colonial spaces' (Anchimbe, 2007, preface), but more importantly their consciousness of African values, norms, socio-cultural and linguistic realities, nuances, sensibilities and pragmatics of language use, their 'social default' (Adeniyi, 2014, p. 229).

Studies on ESL varieties have identified different aspects and strategies of nativization or adaptation of English (see Sey, 1973; Bamgbose, 1995; Adebija, 2004). These studies identified the linguistic aspect which includes domestication strategies at the phonological, syntactic and semantic levels; the pragmatic aspect is where 'the rules of language use typical of English in native speaker situations have been modified' in order to reflect indigenous contexts, socio-cultural knowledge and practices, norms, traditions, customs and worldview; another area which has also been modified is the creative aspect

which includes coinages and idiomatic adaptations. The adaptations thus underscore the culture and context specificity of this variety of English (ESL).

Idioms and idiomatic expressions are universal yet culture-dependent as they are integral parts of the linguistic behaviour of a speech community (Adeyanju, 2009). Whereas idioms are usually set phrases and often have no literal meanings, idiomatic expressions include idioms and constructions that are natural or characteristic to the native speakers of a language and may be wholly or partly literal. Traditional definitions of idioms portray them as multi-word and structurally fixed units whose meanings are not derivable from the meanings of their constituent parts but are arbitrary and semantically opaque (Geeraert, 2016; Okoro, 2013). Wales (2011, p. 212) elaborates:

idioms mostly denote phrases or strings of words which are idiosyncratic in that they are language-specific, not easily translated into another language and that their meaning is not easily determined from the meanings of its constitutive parts. In English, such phrases are characteristically fixed in collocation.

In other words, the syntactic composition and structural paradigm of idioms are (supposedly) invariant in all contexts (Epoge, 2016). More recently, however, some scholars have questioned the purported fixedness of idioms (Geeraert, 2016), leading to a distinction between 'narrow' and 'broad' descriptions of idioms. Narrow descriptions favour the traditional view, where idioms are seen as fixed and semantically opaque, while broad descriptions capture the contemporary trend of viewing idioms as prefabricated multi-word units with some degree of collocation and structure flexibility, also including other classification types like collocations, proverbs, similes, and formulaic language. They may or may not be semantically opaque. Idiomatic usage in African contexts of ESL tilts towards contemporary views of the idiom, given that they disregard the traditional posture of idiom fixity and opaqueness while emphasizing its language-specificity. Gabrielatos (1994) observes an inconsistency in the use of the terms 'idioms' and 'collocation' in linguistic studies. While some see idioms as a subclass of collocation, others see them as different. Crystal (1997, p. 87) identifies collocations to be concerned with 'the extent to which lexemes come together randomly or predictably'. The

study uses the term 'idiomatic adaptation' to mean all variant forms, structures, semantics and collocations of British English idioms and idiomatic expressions in African contexts of ESL.

Previous studies on the domestication of idioms in African contexts of ESL have identified and classified the innovative usages (Kouega, 2000; Adegbiya, 2004; Adeyanju, 2009), investigated the strategies of domestication and the cultural imperatives of the innovative or deviant usages as well as the implications of the usages for pedagogy, standardization and international intelligibility (Kamtchueng, 2014; Epoge, 2016; Opara et al., 2019). The theoretical approaches adopted include the deviationist (Osoba, 2014), variationist (Adeyanju, 2009), functionalist (Opara et al., 2019), and sociolinguistic (Sey, 1973; Kamtchueng, 2014). Other studies which fully address the cause(s) and discourse-pragmatic functions of the innovative usages of language are quite rare (e.g. Chiluiwa, 2006). Such studies are, however, necessary to reveal the underlying social consciousness that informs the interplay of context and meaning in idiomatic adaptation in African contexts of ESL. The products of such studies would serve both to guide and restrict the understanding of the

innovative usages. Chiluiwa sees idioms as 'a discourse type that represents the historical and cultural heritage of a people' and performs the discourse-pragmatic functions of making cultural and psychological appeals (abstract). His focus, however, is solely on the discourse-pragmatic functions of local idioms in media discourse. Sey (1973) and Kamtchueng (2014) observe that idiomatic adaptation is very prolific in the African context of ESL. They cite examples from Nigerian English, Cameroonian English, and Ghanaian English. The present study thus seeks to address the dearth of studies on the cause(s) and discourse-pragmatic functions of idiomatic adaptations in the African context of ESL. It investigates Adichie's instantiation of her Nigerian cum African social consciousness through idiomatic adaptation and its implications for social integration and sustainable development.

Theoretical perspectives

This study explores idiomatic adaptation, drawing insight from a synthesis of discourse-pragmatic and functionalist approaches with a focus on contexts of culture and situation. Additional insight is gained from Durkheim's (1893) structural functionalism that emphasizes the role of social consciousness, also

collective conscience, in social integration and sustainable development. Functionalism (Halliday, 1975) emphasizes the functional effects of linguistic features in context and conceptualizes language as a tool that serves to express meanings conditioned by their cultural and social contexts of exchange (see Nordquist, 2018). Similarly, Pragmatics considers words as more than information units; they are situation and context-driven 'acts' which are informed by the broader social context in which they occur and, as such, are functional (Aremu, 2015). Discourse-pragmatics, therefore, underscores meaning in human communication as determined by the conditions of society.

Halliday's concept of context of situation and context of culture maintains that language takes place in social contexts and appropriateness is a function of context of use, such that language function takes precedence over language structure. In this way, linguistic choice, distinctiveness, or variation is constrained by the need for appropriacy and communicative effectiveness. Context of culture includes a community's norms and values, shared meaning and assumptions: the totality of its way of life. It additionally incorporates shared attitudes and expectations, language,

worldview, and beliefs. In the words of Hammond et al (1992, p. 2), it comprises 'culturally evolved expectations of ways of behaving and getting things done'. Context of culture is therefore all the extra-linguistic circumstances that surround an utterance and influence its linguistic form, and which are relevant for an understanding of the utterance (Bloor & Bloor, 2004). Context of situation is part of the context of culture and comprises three elements: field (what is being spoken about, nature of social action taking place), tenor (the relationship existing among the interlocutors), and mode (the circumstances and nature of communication). Co-text, also linguistic or verbal context, on the other hand, includes the set of words used in the same phrase or sentence. These words contribute to our understanding of the meaning of a word (Yule, 2010). Context in texts and discourse, therefore comprises, in addition to the actual words used, the situation in which a specific discourse is held and the physical realities of the setting, the socio-cultural default, the socio-cultural realities in the form of shared norms, attitudes, knowledge, meanings, assumptions, expectations, worldviews, and ways of encoding and decoding of the people and communities where the novel is set. These constitute

Durkheim's (1893) 'social consciousness' and inform the use and forms and interpretations of the words and, consequently, the text. Both pragmatics and Systematic Functional Grammar emphasize language function and the centrality of context in language, where context transcends setting and encompasses 'the dynamic, talk-connected condition that evokes co-experiential and current activity frames for the determination of senses of utterances' (Odebunmi, 2006, p. 5). A coalition of these approaches is especially relevant to the present study in view of their complementarity, which will make for a robust discussion.

Research methodology

The study is anchored on a postcolonial pragmatic framework which interrogates 'intermixed languages and communicative practices', exploring different forms, functions, including pragmatic functions of choices of language, and effects of 'hybridic' discourse in postcolonial speech contexts (Anchimbe & Janney, 2011). Texts which form the corpus for this study consist of three novels written by Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie, namely: *Purple Hibiscus* (2003), *Half of a Yellow Sun* (2006) and *Americanah* (2013). The data consist of sixty-one (61) instances of idiomatic

adaptation identified through close reading and close second reading of the three novels. The novels belong to the 3rd generation Nigerian English novels and reflect contemporary usage (Awoyemi-Arayela, 2013). As such, the three novels represent authentic discourse in the field of African literature in English. The data were analyzed using insight from a synthesis of discourse-pragmatic and functionalist approaches, with a focus on contexts of culture and situation under three discourse-pragmatic labels: palliation, omen, and emphasis markers. The causes of the idiomatic adaptations and the implications for sustainable development of the innovative usages were also discussed.

The instances of idiomatic adaptation found in the novels include both Standard British English (SBrE) idioms, which have been 'domesticated', adapted to the socio-cultural and pragmatic realities of the Nigerian context of ESL, as well as indigenous idioms, which have been translated into English and have become modified, inevitably, by virtue of being expressed in a foreign code. 28 instances of idiomatic adaptation, 12 for indigenized Standard English idioms and 16 for translated indigenous idioms, were selected for analysis.

Table 1 contains the frequency distribution of the identified idiomatic adaptations. For the purpose of convenience and easy reference, the texts

are referred to as *PH* (*Purple Hibiscus*), *HYS* (*Half of a Yellow Sun*), and *AM* (*Americanah*).

Table 1: Frequency Distribution of Idiomatic Adaptation in *PH*, *AM* and *HYS*

	<i>PH</i>	<i>AM</i>	<i>HYS</i>	Total
Domesticated SBrE Idioms	5	5	8	18
Translated Indigenous Idioms	16	17	10	43

Idioms and idiomatic expressions have a supposedly fixed form and collocation possibilities. The idioms identified in Adichie's novels however violate this 'fixedness' and 'frozenness'. Table 1 reveals a total of 18 indigenized Standard English idioms and 43 translated indigenous idioms in Adichie's novels.

Results and discussion

Idioms create meaning through evoking images which appeal to the imagination. That is, through underlying meanings and associative connotations. The images evoked, however, have to be relevant to the listeners for them to re-create them in their imagination; they must be retrievable within the listener's socio-cultural context. This is especially because idioms deploy commonplace sights, concepts, occurrences and shared knowledge to communicate contextual, social, cultural, and pragmatic meanings.

This, therefore, implies that the meanings of idioms are most readily retrievable only within their original socio-cultural context. Adichie's stylistic adaptation of both Standard English and indigenous idioms as seen in the instances of idiomatic adaptation in *PH*, *HYS*, and *AM* is an attempt to make the idioms relevant and authentic representations of the African (Nigerian) 'collective conscience' (Libre Texts, 2020): an attempt to capture and express the socio-cultural context and pragmatic distinctiveness of her Nigerian characters and setting. The causes, discourse-pragmatic functions and implications for sustainable development of the innovative usages are discussed in the sub-sections below. Table 2 contains the instances of idiomatic adaptation in the novels which were used in the analysis, along with their standard or near-standard equivalents.

Table 2: Examples of Idiomatic Adaptation in *Ph*, *Am* and *Hys*

S/N	Indigenized Idiom	Standard Form/Equivalent
1.	<i>Pinch the finger of the hand that feeds you (PH, p. 104).</i>	Bite the hand that feeds you.
2.	<i>Better be late than THE late (HYS, p. 26).</i>	Better late than never
3.	<i>A beggar did not shout (HYS, p. 240).</i>	Beggars cannot be choosers.
4.	<i>Time flies when you are happy (PH, p. 154).</i>	Time flies.
5.	<i>Master had spit this child out (HYS, p. 124).</i>	A spitting image
6.	<i>Good looks come in different ways (HYS, p. 41).</i>	Beauty lies in the eyes of the beholder
7.	<i>Not speak with water in my mouth (HYS, p. 225).</i>	Speak without mincing words.
8.	<i>...to put the words back in her mouth... (AM, p.51)</i>	Take back one's words
9.	<i>...from whom much is given, much is expected (PH, p. 47)</i>	To whom much is given...
10.	<i>...may another person do for you... (HYS, p.89)</i>	One good turn deserves another
11.	<i>Life begins when marriage ends (PH, p.83)</i>	Life begins at forty...
12.	<i>Have you no (words in your) mouth (PH, pp. 21, 177).</i>	Cat caught your tongue?
13.	<i>Looking at me hard enough (HYS, p. 42).</i>	To come with a marriage proposal.
14.	<i>Opened his eyes before many of our people did (PH, p. 75).</i>	To be ahead of one's peers
15.	<i>...shine your eye (AM, p. 26).</i>	Do not be gullible
16.	<i>Place my feet firmly in Onyeka's house... (HYS, p. 119).</i>	Carve a niche for myself.
17.	<i>...sow(ing) a seed (AM, p.418)</i>	Make a donation (usually to a religious body)
18.	<i>went ... and got lost (AM, p. 116).</i>	Refuse to come back
19.	<i>...kept our eyes on the road (HYS , p.192)</i>	To be hopeful, expectant
20.	<i>...touching their hands to their mouths...(HYS , p.195)</i>	Dinning/eating

21.	Has Onyeka <i>touched you?</i> (HYS , p.121)	...been intimate with you?
22.	<i>...to have an empty house</i> (PH, p. 239)	To be barren
23.	<i>...let the sun not set on his prosperity</i> (PH, p. 173)	May fortune (always)smile on him
24.	<i>...he did not rise well...</i> (PH, p. 156)	To be very ill
25.	<i>...fall to the toad</i> (PH, p.226).	Fall from grace
26.	<i>...children of Satan...</i> (AM, p,23)	Men of the underworld (armed robbers)
27.	<i>His guilty conscience was working overtime</i> (HYS, p. 335)	To have a guilty conscience
28.	<i>...have the brains of guinea fowls</i> (PH p. 82)	...be highly suspicious

Examples 1–12 in Table 2 above are instances of domesticated Standard British English idioms (DSI). These are Standard idioms which have been adapted to the socio-cultural and pragmatic realities of the Nigerian context of ESL through lexical omission, insertion, substitution, reordering or restructuring. Although the adapted idioms have standard equivalents, the standard forms fail to capture the Nigerian socio-cultural and pragmatic contexts as effectively as their indigenized versions. They also do not depict the immediate contexts of the novels, nor evoke the same culturally embedded images, as seen in:

Pinch the finger of the hand that feeds you (1). The adapted idiom is evocative of the Igbo socio-cultural context, where people eat and feed others with the

finger[s] of the hand. Auntie Ifeoma in *PH* tells Mama that their *umunna*, kinsmen, who had the moral and cultural obligations to check Papa's excesses, only tell Eugene (Papa) what he wants to hear because they are 'sensible' enough not to even *pinch the finger of the hand that feeds [them]*. The adapted idiom thus evokes an image of people being literally fed, with fingers, and who dared not pinch the finger giving the food. This image is rooted in shared knowledge and is readily retrievable within the socio-cultural context shared by Mama and Auntie Ifeoma. Incidentally, a Christmas feast is being prepared for the *umunna* during this scene, heightening the literal and symbolic significance of the idiom. The expression thus captures the immediate socio-cultural context and emphasizes the *umunna's* total dependence on Papa; a dependence that

'mortgages' their wills and consciences and satirizes the *umunna* institution. The standard equivalent lacks this cultural and contextual relevance.

Better be late than THE late (2) is a graphic reminder to speeding motorists that speeding could cost them their lives. It is a counsel 'to be late', not to speed and probably reach one's destination late, so as not to be among 'THE late', those who are dead. Adichie's choice to adapt the Standard English form, 'better late than never', underscores the pragmatic vibrancy, perspicuity and emotional appeal found in African speech and so highlights her African social consciousness. The stylistic evocation of imagery, capitalization of the article 'the' in 'THE late', which makes the word stand out from the other words in the sentence, and the contrast implied in the homonymic use of the word 'late' have the effects of extra emphasis.

Examples 13–28 consist of indigenous idioms expressed in English. They have no direct standard equivalents, only paraphrases of the intended meanings or, at best, near equivalents. These innovations not only fill a semantic gap created by expressing indigenous thoughts and experiences in a non-native language but also foreground the

collective consciousness of the Nigerian context of ESL. Some of the innovative usages (e.g. 13) are euphemistic, serving as indirect ways of conveying offensive, unpleasant, or socially sensitive truths. Euphemism is a usual feature of indigenous Nigerian speech (Faleke, 2014). Consider Arize in *HYS* (13) who subtly conveys her doubts about the intentions of her heartthrob, Nnakwanze, to Olanna, '...he has not said anything. I don't know if he is *looking at me hard enough*' (p.42). Understanding this expression requires familiarity with the Nigerian/Igbo socio-cultural context and the pragmatics of local language use. A prospective suitor may 'look' at a girl but not 'look hard enough', beyond the surface beauty to evaluate her family background. Looking at a girl *hard enough* implies accepting the girl as a 'wife material', seeing the wife potential in the girl. Arize, therefore, uses the expression to voice her readiness for marriage to Nnakwanze as well as her fears that he may not feel the same way, feelings which the socio-cultural default denied her to express explicitly. Olanna understands her because of shared socio-cultural knowledge. The standard equivalent of the translated indigenous idiom (TII) lacks this cultural appropriacy.

As the examples reveal, the adaptations have a functional significance: they serve to give expressive force to the immediate context of the novels, especially within the ESL in Nigeria ESL socio-cultural and pragmatic contexts, and social consciousness. The literal tone of the adaptations corroborates Okoro's (2012, p. 86) observation that 'while native English speech tends to be highly idiomatic, there is a distinct literal ring in second language usage'. This literalism arises from the pragmatic explicitness of ESL in the African discourse situation.

Discourse-pragmatic functions of idiomatic adaptation in the Nigerian context of ESL

The discourse-pragmatic functions identified in the data are discussed under three headings: palliation markers, emphasis markers, and omen markers.

Palliation markers

Idiomatic adaptations which function as palliation markers in the texts were used to reduce the effect of face-threatening acts such as rebuke and accusation (nos. 6, 8, 17) or mitigate the effect of offensive, unpleasant or harsh truths such as fear, disquiet, disgust, and disapproval (nos. 16, 18) and to avoid the possibility of sounding immodest (nos.13, 21) which would be an affront on African social consciousness.

Good looks come in different ways...' (6), although assertive in form, functions as a reprimand or rebuke. Through DSI, Olanna reprimands Arize, who has always described Odenigbo as 'ugly' for her (Arize's) parochial and set views on beauty. As a palliation marker, the expression, while capturing the nuances and aesthetics of indigenous Igbo speech, 'saves' Arize's face and mitigates the effect of the rebuke, where the standard equivalent, 'beauty lies in the eyes of the beholder' would have questioned Arize's cognitive abilities, being solely concerned with physical attributes. The adapted form, therefore, more appropriately and functionally conveys Olanna's intended meaning: Arize should be broad-minded; *Good looks come in different ways*. Odenigbo's good looks had come in a way different from what Arize was used to: his personality. Similarly, sister Ibinabo's wish for Ifemelu in *AM* (8)... *to put the words back in her mouth* is a face-saving expression for both parties. Ifemelu had said something that was better left unsaid, and a reprimand and possibly discipline were in order, especially given the context of the situation. A direct request for an apology may have hurt Ifemelu's pride and met with outright refusal, which would have, in turn, hurt sister Ibinabo's pride. Sister Ibinabo,

however, mitigates the face-threatening apology so that instead of an outright demand for an apology, she offers Ifemelu a chance *to put the words back in her mouth*, 'swallow' them, and erase their existence. Again, Adichie dexterously captures the socio-cultural worldview of the Igbo of Nigeria when in (16), Ugwu's sister, Anulika, tells him, 'I want to have a baby boy first, because it will *place my feet firmly in Onyeka's house*' (HYS, 119). The expression masks Anulika's fear that her place in her husband's home was under threat, especially given the premium the Igbo place on male children. Being mostly patrilineal, male children guarantee the continuity of a family's name and heritage. An Igbo woman without a male child, therefore, 'walks on tiptoe' in her husband's house; her feet are not firmly placed in the house. Such a woman has no voice, no stake, and no rights. This cultural knowledge is shared between Anulika and Ugwu, so although she cannot explicitly voice her fear, the image of "firmly placed feet" conveys her need for stability, dignity, and belonging—without losing face. Her use of the possible standard equivalent 'make a place for herself', which lacks these cultural undertones, would not only have been culturally inappropriate but also an

open admission of her fears, which could cost her the marriage.

Zemaye in *AM* (p. 418) deploys the euphemistic expression *sow(ing) a seed* (17) to downplay her negative perception of the common Nigerian religious practice of sacrificial offering often indulged in by Esther. Esther would often give her whole salary to her church, believing that just as a farmer expects a bountiful harvest after a generous sowing, she too would have a harvest in due course. Ironically, she would return to ask Zemaye to give her #300 for transport. For Zemaya, therefore, either Esther's seeds were always sterile so never germinated or else were planted on 'infertile fraudster soil'. The adapted idiom thus functions to convey Zemaye's skepticism while saving Esther from a direct assault on her faith. Similarly, Ifemelu's description of Bartholomew as one who '*went to America and got lost*' (no 18), functions to play down his abandonment and neglect of both his family and country, and possibly inspire some hope that someday he would be found. Here, Adichie uses the imagery of one who is adrift and unable to find his way, confused and lacking in confidence, to mitigate the effect of the harsh truth of Bartholomew's desertion. The translated local idiom aptly captures the Nigerian

attitude toward such characters: they are considered 'lost' and in need of recovery. The translated local idiom aptly captures the Nigerian attitude towards characters like Bartholomew: they are considered 'lost' and in need of recovery. The expressions '... *looking at me hard enough*' (13) and '... *touched you?*' (21) underscore the silence that shrouds marriage, sex, and sex-related matters in Africa. Since it is culturally untoward for a woman to propose to a man or to explicitly mention sex or sex organs, deploying the cultural semantics and pragmatics of language use of their people, Arize uses the expression (13) to express her desire for a union with Nnakwanze, while Ugwu in (21) deploys the expression to mean 'have intercourse'. The discourse participants in each case understand the expressions because of shared social consciousness.

Pragmatic markers of emphasis

Markers of emphasis include idiomatic adaptations which either restate a worldview or underscore a point. They function to emphasize attitude and philosophy or ideology. In emphasizing attitude, markers of emphasis emphasize insistence, distrust, expectation, and approval as shown in numbers 1, 7, 9, and 14. In emphasizing philosophy, they function to express cultural beliefs as seen in numbers 3 and 5.

Markers of emphasis emphasize insistence as in (1) ... *pinch the finger of the hand that feeds you* where it functions to underscore Auntie Ifeoma's attitude to Papa's umunna in *PH*. She uses the marker to indicate her insistence that Papa's umunna had become so dependent on him that they dared not tell him the truth about himself. The markers additionally emphasize distrust as in (7) ...*did not speak with water in my mouth*. Here, the contrasting imagery of unclear speech from a mouth full of water, evoked by a creditor insisting on the repayment of her money, aptly captures the mood and context of the situation as well as the attitude of the creditor to the debtor: distrust. The creditor, who has the greater power, tells the debtor, '...you will give me my money today...today, not tomorrow!' and to forestall any claims of misunderstanding, she adds, 'You heard me say so because I *did not speak with water in my mouth!*' (*HYS*, 225). To speak without water in one's mouth underscores 'lack of interference or obstruction' leading to audible utterances. The standard equivalent, 'speak without mincing words', lacks this pragmatic undertone.

Markers of emphasis additionally express expectation, as in (9) *from whom much is given, much is also expected* (*PH*, 47). The

substitution of 'from' for the 'to' of the standard equivalent emphasizes the magnitude of expectation. Papa's interest is in the magnitude of what he expects from Kambili and Jaja. Markers of emphasis also express approval, as in (14) ...*he opened his eyes before many of our people did (PH, 75)*, often said by Papa of his late father-in-law. In the Nigerian cum Igbo socio-cultural context, 'to open one's eyes' can mean anything from 'to be enlightened, civilized, wise, educated, informed, and sophisticated to 'to be shrewd'. In Papa's estimation, therefore, not only had his father-in-law got the Whiteman's education and language, but he had also got his wisdom, civilization, and sophistication, and well before many people in their community! He had *opened his eyes* [to see the Whiteman's God, civilization, and education] and *not shut his eyes*. Papa, therefore, adjudged his father-in-law worthy and deserving of his attention, honour and respect, unlike Papa's own father, who had chosen to 'shut his eyes' [and so could not see what his counterpart could] and whom Papa therefore adjudged 'Godless'. The emphasis marker couched in the imagery of 'open eyes' (and the implied contrast with 'shut/closed eyes) succinctly and stylistically draws a contrast between Papa's relationships with both of

Kambili's grandfathers and consequently highlights Papa's approval of his father-in-law.

Emphasis markers also function to emphasize belief, as seen in (3) ...*a beggar did not shout* and (5) *Master had spit this child out*. They express African indigenous beliefs and ensure contextual appropriacy. When Odenigbo in *HYS* raises his voice to Olanna in his defence, absolving himself of all blame in the 'Odenigbo-Amala-sexual escapade' instead of being remorseful and taking responsibility for his action, Ugwu soliloquizes: 'Master should have lowered his voice; he should know very well that *a beggar does not shout (HYS, 240)*. In the Igbo socio-cultural milieu, beggars are seen as low-class individuals expected to 'beg' in mild and humble tones. A 'shouting beggar' was labelled 'insolent' and did not receive any handouts or favours. In this context, Odenigbo is the 'beggar', desperately in need of Olanna's forgiveness: he had been unfaithful to her. He was therefore in no position 'to shout'. He should instead lower his voice in shame and apology. The expression, therefore, emphasizes this cultural belief among the Igbo and ensures cultural and contextual appropriacy. Furthermore, Baby in *HYS* was a 'carbon copy' of Odenigbo. The adaptation and the

imagery evoked are reminiscent of the African trado-religious cosmology, where a person can 'vomit' his replica. The adaptation thus emphasizes this belief as well as concretizes the otherwise abstract and 'alien' idea of the Standard English equivalent, 'a spitting image'.

Pragmatic markers of Omen

Pragmatic markers of omen function in African contexts of ESL to foreshadow future events. Although usually assertive, wishful or cautionary on the literal level, they are pragmatically portentous as may be seen in nos. 11, 2, 23, 24, and 26. These markers foretell freedom from oppression, as in (11) *...life begins when marriage ends* (PH, 83); impending death as in (2) *...better be late than the LATE* (HYS, 26); (23) *let the sun not set on his prosperity* (PH, 173); (24) *... 'did not rise well...'* (PH, 156); (24) *...fall to the toad* (PH, 226); and future unhappiness (p. 4) *Time flies when you are happy* (PH, p. 154). When Auntie Ifeoma tells Mama in (11) that *sometimes life begins after marriage*, she omens Eugene's, Mama's husband's impending death, which would mean an end to an oppressive and abusive marriage and the beginning of life for Mama. Similarly, the handwritten sign by the road on Olanna's route to Enugu Airport in HYS, *Better be late than THE late* (2), portends the tragic events in the

novel, which would result in many of Olanna's dear ones becoming *THE late*. (23) omens the series of misfortunes that would befall Eugene in PH, culminating in his death. The sun had only 'waned' on his prosperity but set on his life: he had suffered some losses in his businesses due to the activities of the government of the day, but had lost his life at the hands of his wife. Like *aku* (termite), which would fly high only to lose its wings and fall to the toad (26), Eugene had risen to the peak of his career but would fall into nothingness. Related to this is the portending of Papa Nnukwu's death through the omen marker, *did not rise well* (24), foreshadowing the impending death of Papa Nnukwu. In the Igbo socio-cultural context, when the elderly do not 'rise well' (wake up strong and healthy) on a regular basis, it is interpreted to mean that their death is imminent. On the other hand, *Time flies when you are happy*, (4) portends future unhappiness. When Jaja voices his regret about not being in Nsukka to see the Ixora flowers he had planted with Auntie Ifeoma bloom, Auntie Ifeoma replies, 'Don't they say that *time flies when you are happy?*' The adapted idiom, in addition to expressing the passage of time and capturing the reality of Jaja's life, Time had 'flown' only because he had been happy in Nsukka,

additionally foreshadows his 'unhappy' time in prison, when time would seem to drag. By foreshowing future events, omen markers highlight otherwise inconsequential events or present realities, conferring on them value and significance by being indicators of future events (Nwachukwu-Agbada, 1997).

The discourse pragmatic markers seen in the data reveal that idioms are forms of interpersonal communication in the African context of ESL meant to save face, express ideologies and attitudes towards the discourse situation and participants, and portend future events. They, therefore, serve the instrumental (language as a means of attainment of emotional and material needs) and personal (language as a vehicle for the expression of individuality) functions of language within defined social defaults (Bamiro, 2014).

Causes of idiomatic adaptation in the African context of ESL

The causes of idiomatic adaptation are discussed under two headings: Contextual appropriacy and cultural appropriacy.

Contextual appropriacy

Underlying social, discourse and situational contexts constitute the basis of most idiomatic adaptations in the

African context of ESLs may be seen in numbers 15, 20, 26, 27 and 28.

Shine your eye (15) (from Nigerian Pidgin) is a call to be shrewd and on the alert. It is also a call to make the best use of a rare opportunity. The expression is an analogical derivation from the shine of a torchlight or electric bulb, and especially the sun. In the African trado-religious worldview, nothing escapes the 'shine' of the sun; nothing is hidden from its light. Nneoma, in *AM*, upon hearing the business offer made by the chief to Obinze, tells Obinze, 'This is your opportunity! The Zed, *shine your eye!* They call it a big-big name, evaluation consulting... (*AM*, 26) The expression thus highlights the tough economic realities in the Nigerian context of ESL and the struggle of the average Nigerian to carve a niche for himself. Again, given the context of the war and the scarcity of food, the translated indigenous idiom *touching their hands to their mouths* (20) in reference to eating underscores a preference for contextual appropriacy. The quality and quantity of the food were so grossly inadequate and below what normally constitutes a meal in the Odenigbo household that eating had become a mere *touching [of] their hands to their mouths*. The expression, although an invitation to the usual meal-time-

visitor to dine with the family, has the pragmatic force of a warning not to expect much from the meal or, better still, to refuse the invitation and not further reduce the family's ration.

Adichie's euphemistic description of the people who stole Nneoma's money as *children of Satan* (26) in *AM* (p.23) and not as 'thieves' or 'robbers' is contextually and culturally appropriate. The adaptation derives from the Biblical description of Satan as one who 'comes to kill, steal and destroy' (John 10:10). So it follows that those who stole her money were Satan's children. Similarly, the choice of the indigenized form of the Standard 'a guilty conscience needs no accuser' (27) is contextually appropriate. One works overtime either by compulsion or by choice. Either way, one gets to go the extra mile either to redeem one's self or else be redeemed. Alice's lover had deceived her into thinking he was unmarried, got her pregnant, and abandoned her just before the onset of the War when his wife, who had been abroad, came back. In an attempt to save face and possibly assuage his conscience, the Colonel had sent her some money and a van to convey her and her property out of Enugu when the city fell. His actions were as such a result of a *guilty conscience* [which] *was working overtime*

in a bid to redeem itself. Additionally, in the Nigerian context of ESL dreaded persons, animals and circumstances are usually referred to euphemistically so that *children of Satan* underscore both the context and cultural pragmatics of the discourse situation. Similarly, Auntie Ifeoma's assertion that her late husband's *umunna* (*PH*, 82) in (28) *have the brains of guinea fowls* aptly captures both the context of discourse and the discourse situation. Guinea fowls are usual sights in African communities. They are ground-feeding, easily stressed birds and farmers' favourites' because of their predator-detecting abilities and high survival instincts. They usually make loud noises to warn of imminent danger. This knowledge was available to both Mama and Auntie Ifeoma. The *umunna's* hyperactive 'survival and predator-detecting instincts' had made them highly suspicious, so that they noisily accused Auntie Ifeoma of orchestrating their son's death so that other men would steer clear of her. They, therefore, had *the brains of guinea fowls*. For Auntie Ifeoma, if they had had normal human brains, they would have known that a woman did not orchestrate the death of the man she loved. This analysis highlights the key motivation behind translated indigenous idioms: a firm insistence on contextual

appropriacy and the communicative effectiveness of linguistic forms in capturing socio-cultural realities.

Cultural appropriacy

Underlying cultural imperatives also inform idiomatic adaptation in the African context of ESL. The adaptations thus serve a social function. The contexts adapt, especially, Standard British English idioms to ensure cultural appropriacy for relevance of imagery as may be seen in nos. 1, 3, 10, and 22.

...*pinch the finger of the hand that feeds you* (1) an adaptation of 'bite the hand that feeds you' evokes an image of people being literally fed with fingers, and who dare not even pinch the finger giving the food. The image is culturally retrievable, especially as only fingers, not entire hands, get bitten or pinched in African contexts. Additionally, *a beggar did not shout* (3) underscores the Igbo socio-cultural milieu where beggars are low-class and expected to 'beg' in mild tones. Its standard equivalent, 'beggars cannot be choosers,' is culturally inappropriate. *May another person do for you* (10) captures the Igbo social-cultural context where 'good deeds beget good deeds, and bad deeds beget bad deeds' such that every deed gets a just recompense. The prayer is an expression

of both Ugwu's father's gratitude and indebtedness to Odenigbo for footing Ugwu's mother's hospital expenses; although he might not be able to repay Odenigbo, someone else definitely would. The standard equivalent, 'one good turn deserves another' lacks this cultural semantics. The expression additionally highlights the tenor of the discourse participants. Ugwu's father was an uneducated villager conversant with traditional ways of encoding, whereas Odenigbo was a university lecturer. Also ...*have an empty house* (22) aptly captures the African socio-cultural and religious context where a house without children is regarded as 'empty'. Standard English lacks a suitable equivalent for the emptiness, aloneness, lack, and desolateness embodied in the translated indigenous form.

The discussion reveals that idiomatic adaptation in the African context of ESL captures peculiarly African speech mannerisms, culture, traditions, language forms, and meaning systems, such that the meanings of the linguistic forms are retrievable only within the source context of situation and culture. The linguistic forms are, therefore, informed by the need to primarily ensure 'internal relevance' (expressing and meeting the

communication needs of Africans) and contextual and cultural appropriacy.

Implications of idiomatic adaptation for sustainable development

Idiomatic adaptation as seen in the data reveals a deep awareness of African social consciousness and 'collectively shared social identity' (Schlitz et al., 2010) that could be harnessed for sustainable development. According to the Brundtland Commission Report (1987, as cited in Mensah, 2019), sustainable development should aim to address present needs without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their own. Its ultimate goal should be 'to achieve a more equitable, just and sustainable world...where no one is left behind' (UNICEF). By highlighting African commonality, collective consciousness, shared socio-linguistic and cultural realities and Nigerians' collective ownership of Nigerian English thereby emphasizing 'us' over the 'other' which in Durkheim's view binds a society together and creates social integration through unity, inclusion and participation (Libre Texts, 2020), Adichie downplays ethnic division in the African use of ESL and reasserts the collectively shared African social identity which is fundamental to

sustainable social, linguistic, economic and environmental development.

Nwafor Isaiah's deployment of a TII to request Olanna to tell the family what she knew of Arize and her family's deaths in the North: 'others have come back, and *we have kept our eyes on the road for our son...and our wife...*underscores the yearning for a safe and peaceful society. It is a re-echoing of the African need for sustainable peace, equity, and co-existence.

Again, in African social consciousness, a great premium is placed on the mouth and the faculty of speech. The mouth is regarded as much more than an organ of speech. More importantly, it is a weapon of both defence and attack. One therefore speaks not only because one 'has a mouth' but especially because 'there are words in one's mouth': ideas, wisdom, knowledge, and superior argument. If there is 'no mouth' or there are 'no words in one's mouth' then one remains silent, defeated, subjugated, and a pushover. In other words, one is really free only when one has the faculty or ability to express oneself. Fear, subjection, and habitual silence could rob one of this ability, of words to express or defend one when there is a need for it. In (12), Jaja and his sister, Kambili, in *PH* are so used to

silence and being silent that their ability to have and voice opinions or even verbally defend themselves appears dormant. When Papa asks Jaja's opinion about the cashew juice just brought in from the factory, he says, '*There are no words in my mouth...I have nothing to say*', (PH, pp. 21-22). In other words, either he did not have an opinion or else was too scared to voice it. Also, when Kambili continued to take Amaka's verbal pokes silently, Auntie Ifeoma, exasperated, asks, 'O ginidi Kambili, *have you no mouth?*' (PH, p. 177). Auntie Ifeoma thus questions Kambili's seeming inability to use her mouth either to defend herself or else to 'attack' Amaka. The adaptation, in addition to foregrounding the African collective conscience, is a subtle call for Africa to make use of its faculty of speech and the infinite adaptability of language for an equitable, just, and sustainable world where no one is left behind.

Conclusion

The paper examines idiomatic adaptation as social consciousness in the African novel using instances from Adichie's novels, namely *Purple Hibiscus*, *Half of a Yellow Sun*, and *Americana*. Its main objective is to establish the causes of idiomatic adaptation (contextual and cultural), discourse-pragmatic functions,

and their implications for sustainable development. The study shows that idiomatic adaptations in contexts function as discourse-pragmatic markers of emphasis, discourse-pragmatic markers of palliation and discourse-pragmatic markers of omen. As discourse-pragmatic markers of emphasis, idiomatic adaptations emphasize attitude and philosophy or ideology. In emphasizing attitude, they emphasize insistence, distrust, expectation, and approval, and in emphasizing philosophy, they highlight beliefs. As palliation markers, idiomatic adaptations function to reduce the effects of face-threatening acts such as rebuke and accusation or else play down face loss occasioned by such face-threatening acts on discourse participants, mitigate the effects of rather offensive, unpleasant, or harsh truths such as fear, disquiet, disgust, and disapproval, and to avoid the risk of sounding immodest. As omen markers, the adaptations foreshadow future events being pragmatically portentous. The paper submits that idiomatic adaptation in the African novel is informed by underlying discourse and situational contexts as well as by African social consciousness. The adaptations highlight African commonality, collective consciousness, shared socio-linguistic

and cultural realities, and collective ownership of Nigerian English (a form of ESL). The adaptations thus promote social cohesion, which is central to social integration, a prerequisite for sustainable development. The study, therefore, reiterates Sivaji's (2020) position that

literature is a tool to reflect social consciousness. The onus, therefore, lies on all stakeholders to harness this awareness created through the 'new English' for sustainable social, environmental, and economic development of Africa.

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