

## Linguistic Nuances and Creative Techniques in Chika Unigwe's Select Novels

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### **Abstract**

*This paper examines the practical application of linguistic and creative tools in Chika Unigwe's *On Black Sisters' Street* and *Night Dancer*. This study relies significantly on the notion of stylistics, with its creative and linguistic nuances, to enhance a more holistic understanding and appreciation of the select texts. Based on linguistic evidence, the novels reveal the physical and psychic effects of the postcolonial realities on the post-colonial subjects. The descriptive system of the textual analysis shows that the artistic values of the novels are illuminated primarily through the language and creative techniques employed by the author in the select novels. Unigwe's creative manipulation of languages in the select texts shows that most Nigerian writers in particular have eventually arrived at a linguistic compromise between the target and the indigenous languages as well as pidgin. This does not just reflect the dexterousness of the author as a story teller with exciting linguistic, stylistic, and structural awareness but indeed, the nature of Nigeria as a dense linguistic ecology. The author's skillful manipulation of the English language in such a way that it still encapsulates the indigenous knowledge and culture, as well as the striking creative techniques employed makes her message vigorous and captivating to the readers since they invoke clear mental pictures, code variation, linguistic appositioning/substitution, transliteration, narrative framing and other stylistic peculiarities, all for linguistic foregrounding, artistic beauty and signification. It is the opinion of this paper that more African writers, especially young and developing writers should creatively use the languages both foreign and indigenous at their disposal not just to suit the African milieu or experience but to promote the indigenous languages, and also widen and deepen the aesthetic taste of their artistic productions.*

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### **Introduction**

What probably differentiates literature from other creative arts is the fact that its basic creative tool is made up of words; words of any given language which are brought together, in the most remarkable and creative way. The success or failure of any creative writing enterprise is therefore weighed by the creative writer's ability in manipulating the linguistic repertoire available to him or her during the creation of a literary text. According to Chukwukere (1969, p. 26), "Language, undoubtedly, is the gateway to success in the literary

text.” This is so because literature is a communication event and can only be effectively realized through proper and adequate handling of the language of expression.

Africa's peculiar history of colonialism, the question of language provenience in a multilingual situation and the foreign languages imposed on or bequeathed to indigenous Africans as one of its legacies make the issue of the language of creative writing in the continent a problematic one. This has led to what is known as the question of language in African literature and has also generated heated arguments and serious controversies, pitching African writers in polarised sides. On the one side of the divide are those who, like Wali (2007, p. 282), believe that African literature will arrive at a ‘dead end’ should “the whole uncritical acceptance of English and French [among other languages of the colonialists] as the inevitable medium of educated African writing” continue. The Kenyan-born Marxist writer, Ngugi wa Thiong’O practically rejects the English language as his medium of literary expression and adopts his native Gikuyu. In adopting an African indigenous language as his medium of creative writing, Ngugi seems to be inferring that an authentic African literary text is the one written in an African language.

On the other hand however are those literary scholars who like Chinua Achebe insist unequivocally that “the national literature of Nigeria and of many other countries of Africa is, or will be, written in English” (Achebe, 1975, p. 57) or other popular world languages, without which “the work of the vast majority will be closed to the rest of the world for ever, including no doubt, the work of some excellent writers” (p. 59). Achebe further submits that:

The African writer should aim to use English in a way that brings out his message best without altering the language to the extent that its value as a medium of international exchange is lost. He should aim at fashioning out an English which is at once universal and able to carry his peculiar experiences (p. 61).

Unarguably, African creative writers have sufficiently subjected the English language to “many different kinds of use” (Achebe, 1975, p. 61), especially to reflect their peculiar socio-political, historical and cultural experiences. Nigerian writers in particular have tried to arrive at a linguistic compromise between their use of the English Language and the indigenous languages as well as Pidgin. This, indeed, reflects the multilingual nature of the Nigerian linguistic landscape. The select texts of Chika Unigwe, a Nigerian Igbo writer, to a great extent portray this linguistic compromise.

It is pertinent to point out that Chika Unigwe’s *On Black Sisters’ Street* and *Night Dancer* represent one of the well-received works that explore the phenomena of urbanization and forceful belonging in the migrants’ new world, especially as postcolonial factors. Unigwe’s *On Black Sisters’ Street* examines the now global phenomena of human trafficking and international sex trade as subject matters worthy of literary engagement. *Night Dancer* poignantly presents a powerful story about relationships, duties and responsibilities as well as the vicissitudes that usually arise in the course of negotiating this complex web. It creates a conversation around the definitive stamp of patriarchy in the life of a woman and the consequences inherent in an attempt to challenge the status quo. Unigwe weaves a tale of the betrayal of one woman’s intimate trust by her husband and the aftermaths of her reactions.

In her consciousness therefore to depict literature as a demonstration of language in practical usage, Unigwe exemplifies the enduring socio-economic (and political) realities in her novels through adequate and creative manipulation of the languages at her disposal, as well as deploying diverse creative techniques as will be seen in the subsequent sections.

## Research Objectives

The study of style, that is stylistics, is of great interest to the linguists, especially that of literary stylistics because as literature involves the creative use of one's imagination, it employs the use of language in portraying this unique creativity. A writer's intention goes a long way to influence his or her choice of linguistic features. Linguistic features of a language are innumerable, thus a writer has various features at his or her disposal to choose from. It is therefore, this effective manipulation of language that this paper intends to highlight and analyze in order to examine the stylistic value of Chika Unigwe's *On Black Sisters' Street* and *Night Dancer*, and also to identify some of the different linguistic resources used by the author and how she has effectively manipulated them to achieve both artistic and aesthetic significance in the select texts.

### Theoretical Framework

The study employs Stylistics as its theoretical approach. The word 'Stylistics' is derived from the word 'Style'. Style is the basic thing which gives uniqueness to every writer. The term 'Stylistics' since the 1950s, has been applied to a method of analyzing and interpreting works of literature which propose to replace the subjectively and impressionism of standard criticism with an objective or scientific analysis and evaluation of the styles of writers. Stylistics has become more popular over the years as a broad approach to the study of language variations especially in literary texts. Stylistics in modern times has gained prominence through the works of linguists, like Roman Jakobson, who applied the ideas of Saussure to the language of literature.

As stated by Udeze, Udeze and Orji (2017, p. 113), "Stylistics is a scientific study of style; it is also the study of variations in language use." Stylistics therefore, could be said to be a combination of style and linguistics. Leech and Short (1981, p. 74) illustrate the task of stylistic analysis as "an attempt to find the artistic principles underlying a writer's choice of language." Stylistics according to Syal and Jindal (2010), is that branch of linguistics which takes the language of literary texts as its object of study. Syal and Jindal further explain that:

Out of the many types of variations that occur in language, it is the variation in literary style that is most complex, and thus offers unlimited scope for linguistic analysis (P. 61).

Anagbogu, Mbah and Eme, (2010) defined stylistics as the linguistic study of literary appreciation. Carter and Simpson (1989) are of the view that stylistics is a bridge (link) discipline between linguistics and literature. To further buttress this fact, Crystal (2008, p. 460). Opines that stylistics is a branch of linguistics which studies the features of

Situational distinctive uses or varieties of language, and tries to establish principles capable of accounting for the particular choices made by individual and social groups in their use of language."

Stylistics is very important in literature because each literary text represents an individual's use and exercise of language which reflects his or her unique personality, thoughts and style, to artistically respond to social realities. Little wonder the French scholar, Buffon (as cited in Shamsuddin, 2014) said that "Style is the Man". The key aspects of stylistics as submitted by Thornborrow and Wareing (1998) is pointed out thus:

- The use of linguistics (the study of language) to approach literary texts;
- The discussion of texts according to objective criteria rather than according purely

to subjective and impressionistic values;

- Emphasis on the aesthetic properties of language (for example, the way rhyme can give pleasure) (p. 2).

#### Some of the features used in an achieving style include:

- **Graphology:** The analysis of hand writing to interpret character and personality. Aspects of italics, bold sentence and capitalization.
- **Code Switching:** A system of switching from one linguistic code to another. Most times it is deliberately used by the bi-lingual or multi-lingual speaker.
- **Code Mixing:** A systematic way of mixing two or more linguistic codes in an utterance or in writing.
- **Transliteration:** This is the literal translation of the syntactic structure of a language into another language.
- **Linguistic Positioning:** Giving an indigenous word its English translation immediately. It is the juxtaposition of local expressions and their English equivalents in a story.
- **Oral Narrative Style:** This refers to how an author tells a story.

#### Other features of style include:

Diction, figurative usage and various sentence structures such as:

- **Parenthetical Expressions:** These are words, clauses or even another sentence inserted at the middle or end of a sentence, such as after thoughts.
- **Compound Sentence:** A compound sentence is one which consists of three or more simple sentences joined together by a co-ordinating conjunction or semi – colon.
- **Complex Sentence:** A complex sentence consists of two parts. The main clause and one or more subordinate clauses.
- **Compound complex sentence:** This consists of two or more main clauses and one or more subordinate clauses.

### Textual Analysis

#### Linguistic Nuances in Unigwe's *On Black Sisters' Street and Night Dancer*

Language use in the select texts for this study reveals a manipulation of the English language in such a way that it still captures the indigenous knowledge and culture. Chika Unigwe is an Igbo from the Southeastern part of Nigeria, and like many Nigerians of her generation, was exposed to the English language at an early stage in her life. In fact, she studied English at the University of Nigeria, Nsukka, and from all indications, acquired excellent proficiency in the English language. Nevertheless, the innovative use of language in her fictional texts is worth the scholarly discursive engagement this study accords it.

#### A. Literary language in Unigwe's *On Black Sisters' Street and Night Dancer*

The Africanness of these narratives is at once visible in their linguistic complexion. Although *On Black Sisters' Street* is not entirely set in Africa but is partly set in Europe, the language use of the characters reveals their ethnic and linguistic orientation. For a multilingual country such as Nigeria, and for people such as Efe, Ama, Sisi and Joyce, who come from different linguistic communities, English and Pidgin become a lingua franca. At some points, however, there is an attempt to reach a linguistic compromise amidst the English language, Pidgin and an indigenous language. And at other intervals, they simply flow freely using

either English or Pidgin. For instance, when Efe gets the news of the demise of Iya Ijebu, she expresses shock: “She died? Iya Ijebu? *Osalobua!* What killed her?” (p. 9) She explains to her housemates – Ama, Joyce and Sisi:

She is not even my real grandmother ooo I been dey call her Granny but she be just dis woman wey live near our house wey I like well well. On Sundays, she made me moi-moi. When I was in primary school, if my mother wasn't home, she'd make lunch for my younger ones and me. Ah, the woman dey good to us. Which kin' granny pass dat one? (P. 8)

At another instance in the narrative, Sisi's (Chisom) father says concerning himself, “I had the head for it. I had bookhead, *isi akwukwo*” (p.19). In these instances, the characters make effort to forge a linguistic compromise using the languages at their disposal. In the first example, Efe who is from Edo State employs the Edo word for God – *Osalobua*, to express her surprise and shock over the death of Iya Ijebu, while in the second instance, she seamlessly uses English and Pidgin. And as for Sisi's father, the reader encounters a kind of English that could go for a direct transliteration of the Igbo expression: ‘bookhead’ – *isi akwukwo*. What is noteworthy is that Unigwe through this means achieves contextual realism. It is a means through which she establishes the ‘Nigerianness’ of these characters.

In the same manner, Unigwe in *Night Dancer*, a novel that really portrays her as an Igbo writer, displays an obvious inclination towards an Igbo-patterned English language. Unigwe deliberately juxtaposes Igbo words/expressions beside their English counterparts in order to establish the ‘Igboness’ of her narrative and the characters, even though they speak English quite fluently. What is interesting about this incorporation of Igbo words in a narrative rendered wholly in English is that Unigwe does not leave her non-Igbo readers out, but succeeds in taking them along through employing linguistic appositioning and narrative/conversational framing as a means of meaning linkage.

### **B. Linguistic Appositioning in *On Black Sisters' Street* and *Night Dancer***

Linguistic appositioning refers to a grammatical construction in which two linguistic elements are placed side by side, with one element identifying the other, especially within the context of their use. Onukaogu and Onyerionwu (2010, p. 291) aver that linguistic appositioning “can happen at the word, phrasal or clausal/sentential level and can manifest more in dialogues than in authorial narratives”. In Chika Unigwe's *On Black Sisters' Street* and *Night Dancer*, some Igbo grammatical elements appear side-by-side with their English counterparts. The following are some of the examples:

1. "She wiped it off with the back of her hand and screamed that she had got pepper, *ose ose*, in her eyes.” (*On Black*, p. 124)
2. "The girl risked enemy bullets, *mgbo*, to dig out yams and cassava for the children.” (*On Black*, p. 125)
3. "That day you will suffer more than Job. *I ga atakalia Job n'afufu.*” (*On Black*, p. 125)
4. "You are the chief of your shitty buttocks. *Eze ike nsi.*” (*On Black*, p. 137)
5. “*Nyenu m ego*. Give me money please.” (*On Black*, p. 138)
6. “*Ga*, go and tell the man that got you pregnant to look after you. *Anu ofia*. Wild animal.” (*On Black*, p. 139)
7. "It had been difficult for her to accept but *nwa bu nwa*. A child is a child.” (*On Black*, P. 142)
8. "Get out of my sight, *ka m fu uzo*, let me see road.” (*On Black*, p. 147)
9. “*Ezi Okwu ka m na-agwa gi*. I'm telling you the truth.” (*On Black*, p. 156)
10. “Count your teeth with your tongue, *welu ile gi guo eze gi onu* and tell me what you



- come up with.” (*On Black*, p. 164)
11. "Any man. *Nwoke obuna*, would have done the same.” (*Night Dancer*, p. 12)
  12. "Are you listening to me? *I na-egekwa m nti ?*” (*Night*, p. 12)
  13. "She did not want to remember children yelling, ‘*ada ashawo*’ whose daughter, to her as she walked to school.” (*Night*, p. 20)
  14. "They are thieves, *ndi oshi*. Every single one of them.” (*Night*, p. 90)
  15. "But she was very intelligent. *O ma akwukwo rinne*.” (*Night*, p. 102)
  16. "He is a snake. *Agwo*.” (*Night*, p. 142)
  17. “*Osoka*. Delicious.” (*Night*, p. 167)
  18. "She asked again, *a bum Chukwu ? Am I God?*” (*Night*, p. 145)
  19. "Like Anwuli said all the time, *Mmili di oku ga emesia juo oyi*. Hot water will always eventually cool down.” (*Night*, p. 204)
  20. "He came home repeating ‘*Ogbenye ajoka*. Poverty is bad.” (*Night*, p. 207)

These examples of linguistic appositioning reveal that the meaning, in this case, of the Igbo expressions whether word, phrase or clause can be located in the English equivalent to the right or left of the Igbo expression. In examples 1, 2, 3, 4, 10, 11, 12, 14, 15, and 16, the meaning of the Igbo expressions can be found in the English translations that come right before them while in example 5, 6, 7, 8, 9, 13, 17, 18, 19, 20, the Igbo expressions come first and their meanings are in the English translations right after them. Again, while examples 1, 7, 13, 19 and 20 appear in authorial commentary, the rest manifest in the conversation between characters. In all, Unigwe succeeds in educating her non-Igbo readers on the meaning of some Igbo expressions.

### C. Narrative Framing in *On Black Sisters’ Street* and *Night Dancer*

Narrative framing is another method Unigwe employs in educating her non-Igbo readers on the meaning of some of the Igbo expressions used by her Igbo characters particularly in *Night Dancer*. Unigwe frames the meaning of the Igbo expressions into the narrative itself. The English translations are therefore not strictly close, either to the left or right of their Igbo counterparts. This is observable in *On Black Sisters’ Street* where Unigwe aside using Igbo expressions, also uses Pidgin and even Dinka, the indigenous language of Joyce who is a Sudanese. These are some examples from the texts:

21. “If I had that kind of *owo*, sir, I for no dey here. I for done buil’ house for my papa and my mama!” she protested angrily. For that amount of money she could not only buy a house for her parents, she could buy an entire city, she almost added. (*On Black*, p. 34)
22. “In the morning breakfast and a bath. And an argument. Apiu did not want Nyok in his white *jalabiya*. ‘In this weather, your gown will be brown before we have reached the end of our street.” (*On Black*, p. 188)
23. "Some people said she did touch and follow on him, the sort of *juju* that good medicine men made, with pubic hair and toenails clipped at dawn, to help women catch men and hold on to them.” (*On Black*, p. 253)
24. “‘There will be plenty *ngwo ngwo oo*,’ Erinne had promised, hoping to entice Mma with her favourite dish. As much goat head as you can finish”. (*Night*, p. 56)
25. "‘May be he used her womb for *ogwu*,’ Anwuli said ... Rapu disagreed. Uncle Mike was not the sort of man who would do deals with the devil for wealth. You could tell just by looking at him. ‘Excessive wealth in exchange for his wife’s womb? No!’” (*Night*, p.156)
26. “And when she called Rapu every night into the bedroom to rub *okwuma* into her soles, she rejoiced in the girl’s palms, like sandpaper, smoothing the shea-butter lotion into her legs.” (*Night*, p.178)

Examples (21) and (22) contain Yoruba and Dinka expressions respectively. There obviously should be a reliance on the conversational context so as to get a clue to the meaning of the expressions which are embedded in the narrative frame. In (21), the conversation is between Chisom and Dele on the amount of money she will pay Dele for sending her to Belgium, which is “Taty t’ousand euro” (p. 34). This is a huge sum of money which prompted Chisom’s response. The meaning of *owo* – the Yoruba word for money is framed within the narrative. In (22), the meaning of *jalabiya* is expressed in the conversation. The reader easily discovers that it is a kind of gown which Dinka men usually wear. In example (22), the narrative context is how a Ghanaian prostitute is able to get a rich client who settles her debts. The author does not provide a clear translation of “touch and follow” but is able to frame its meaning within the narrative as a kind of medicine women use to attract and control men.

In examples (24) and (25), the direct English equivalents of *ngwo ngwo* and *ogwu* are not provided rather their respective meanings are framed in the conversational/narrative structure in which both of them occur. However, this is not the case in example (26), the English equivalent of *ogwuma* (shea-butter lotion) is provided. It is therefore clear that Unigwe’s use of narrative/conversational framing is a deliberate artistic exercise which is aimed at a linguistic and cultural education of her readers.

### Creative Techniques in Unigwe's Select Novels

Chika Unigwe obviously relies on the resource of language in her creative enterprise simply because literature involves the creative use of language. The select texts manifest ample examples of a subscription to the tenets of the creative enterprise especially in her novelistic genre. The narratives manifest ample examples of creative ingenuity in the aspect of Unigwe's depth of imagery and descriptive ability, memorable characterization, narrative point of view and structural make-up.

#### A. Depth of Imagery in Select Novels

Unigwe’s *On Black Sisters’ Street* and *Night Dancer* are also replete with scenes aptly portrayed to create mental pictures in the mind of the reader. For instance, this description of Mama Eko’s living room aptly invokes an image:

“This is my mansion,” she chuckled as she turned the key in the lock of a grimy leaf-green door which led directly to a living room that was crammed with furniture .... There was a huge beige sofa running down one side of the room’s mud-brown wall; behind it a dining table. A blue velvet love seat and two rattan dining-room chairs faced the sofa. And in the middle, a wide, low table with a glass top and massive marble legs. On the table was a brown vase, the same shade as the walls, filled with yellow, purple and red artificial flowers. The flowers were clean, as if they had recently been dusted with a damp cloth. To the left of the table, on the side of the love seat, was a three-tiered oak-panelled TV stand with a twenty-one-inch screen Samsung colour TV and, below it, a stereo set and, under that, a video player. Squeezed in between the TV stand and the glass-topped table was a narrow vitrine containing a large selection of CDs (*On Black*, pp. 152-153)

In *Night Dancer*, Unigwe captures the simplicity of Mma’s room on her visit to her father’s house in Kaduna, thus: “The room was all pink affair, probably painted for the twins when they were born and never redecorated. The paint was flaking in places. Like old skin failing to rejuvenate” (p. 222). Also Unigwe’s portrayal of Ezi’s room (pp. 34-36), and Ezi’s report of her experience as a single mother in the Uwani neighbourhood, is capable of

invoking crystal clear images in the mind of the reader. Unigwe is able to achieve this through her ability in manipulating the tool of language.

### B. Memorable Character Delineation

Unigwe also creates memorable characters in her narratives. The four women migrants and protagonists – Efe, Ama, Sisi and Joyce – of *On Black Sisters' Street* are convincingly round characters. Having come from different backgrounds though united by a common goal – the will to survive in the red district of Belgium – the women remain strangers to one another, with each of them hiding her unpleasant past experiences. However, the sudden death of Sisi changes the other three totally. They begin to share their stories and as well acknowledge one another as the only relative they have. With the psychic change which takes place in them, they consequently relate more closely. They therefore see themselves as a people drawn together by a conspiracy of fate and united by one common enemy – the sinister Dele.

As the story progresses, exuberance, zeal and optimism which mark their arrival in Belgium give way to that of despondency, pessimism and sadness. The same psychological change takes place in Sisi before her death. There is, indeed, a sense of truth in attributing her demise to the attitudinal change which takes place in her. Sisi has arrived Belgium full of hope and happiness, but as the reality of life begins to unfold, the enthusiasm with which she initially works gives way to unhappiness, discomfort and regret. At this point, she blames herself for believing in Dele's promise of wealth and glamour and for her original conception of Europe as a paradise. It is instructive to note that the Sisi at the beginning of the narrative considerably differs from the Sisi of the later part, because of the psychological transformation she undergoes. It is therefore, this change in her personality that is responsible for her revolt against Dele and the syndicate.

The authentic roundness of character is also evident in Mma, one of the protagonists of Unigwe's *Night Dancer*. Even as a grown up, Mma's childhood experiences, a result of being the daughter of Ezi, a woman people consider as brash, and for being brought up by her mother with no knowledge of her father, develop in her an attitude of righteous indignation at her mother. However, she later discovers who her mother really is and the circumstance that leads her to walk out of her marriage and even her decision to bring her up alone. This discovery transforms her; "she was changing in ways she could never have imagined" (p. 222). It changes her attitude of hatred and anger towards her mother to that of love and appreciation. Rapu also exhibits a roundness of character as she changes from a naïve maid to the madam of the same home she has been a house-help. The change in her is evident as she gradually takes control of her new home and begins to exhibit the attitudes of a wife and no longer those of a maid.

Instructively, Unigwe's narratives are peopled by characters who are well delineated. Some of them undergo both physical and psychic changes as the foregoing demonstrates while others have a certain consistency to their static personality. Dele, the sinister racketeer in *On Black Sisters' Street*; Madam, Dele's business partner responsible for managing the girls in Belgium; Paedophilic Titus, the unfaithful and irresponsible man who impregnates young girls and abandons them, and who also impregnates Efe (*On Black*); soft-handed and innocuously disposed Segun, Dele and Madam's cohort who maintains a very inimical taciturn zombie-like mien (*On Black*); Ezi's parents who are rigid and dutiful custodians of culture and tradition (*Night Dancer*); Ezi, one of the protagonists who is characterised by a headstrong assertive personality (*Night Dancer*); Mike Ugwu, Mma's father and Ezi's husband, who is imbued with resolute inclination (*Night Dancer*); etc. These individuals remain consistent with their characterisation throughout the narratives in which they appear.



What is commendable about the manner in which Unigwe delineates her characters, whether as static or as dynamic, is that they truly reflect real life figures. Their essential humanity, character strengths and weaknesses, ambitions and regrets, optimism and pessimism, successes and failures, are passionately portrayed. It is important to mention that this author also explores the psychology of her characters, the workings of their minds and the internal motivations of their actions. For instance, Ezi in *Night Dancer* has an aversion and a strong distrust for the poor beggars and does not give them alms. This attitude of hers is psychologically motivated by Rapu's williness, which results in the dispossession of her home. Ama in *On Black* develops intense hatred for pastors. This is as a psychological reaction to Brother Cyril, who is an assistant pastor but keeps raping her secretly, a contradiction of the piety he displays outside.

In all, the thought pattern of these characters are in tandem with their personalities, physical attributes, psychic make-up and level of innocence, naivety or experience. Moreso, these characters are portrayed as individuals embroiled in personal, even inner conflicts and struggle as they grapple with the challenges of life. These characters so aptly delineated, possess the verisimilitude required to make them very credible and capable of being identified among real life figures.

### C. Narrative Perspective/ Point of View in Select Novels

Point of view refers to the perspective from which the narrative is rendered. Abrams (2005, p. 231) defines it as "the way a story gets told – the mode (or modes) established by an author by means of which the reader is presented with the characters, dialogue, actions, setting and events which constitute the narrative in a work of fiction." Fictive narrative is usually a storytelling exercise which requires a writer to tell a story through a particular pattern suitable in delivering. With utmost effectiveness, their imaginative conception of the events and the people that drive the story. A survey of prose fictional writing reveals that fiction writers have told their stories through different modes.

Chika Unigwe in the select texts adopts the third person or omniscient point of view in telling her stories. This narrative technique helps her to effectively express and capture every detail of the narratives. Abrams (2005, p. 232) describes the third person omniscient perspective as the mode of narration in which:

The narrator knows everything that needs to be known about the agents, actions and events and has privileged access to the characters' thoughts, feelings, and motives; also ... the narrator is free to move at will in time, place, to shift from character to character, and to report (or conceal) their speech, doings and states of consciousness.

This narrator is all-knowing and usually outside the actions and events of the story. One significant marker of this point of view is that this third person narrator often refers to the characters by their proper names or by the third person pronouns 'he', 'she', 'they', 'them', 'their'. It is the omniscient narrator, who sometimes accesses the subconscious state of the characters or some of the characters that Chika Unigwe deploys in telling the story of *On Black Sisters' Street* and *Night Dancer*. The narrator of these stories reveals everything that needs to be known and even delves into the characters' mind to reveal their thoughts, feelings and intentions. For instance, the narrator in *On Black Sisters' Street* randomly accesses the thoughts of the protagonists at will to reveal the working of their subconscious mind, the following few examples will suffice:

27. "Peter, she thought but did not speak out loud for fear of hurting him, *right now, you're not the man for me.*" (Chisom in *On Black*, p. 46)

28. “*And de dinner sef, na wahala. White people might be good at a lot of things but their culinary skills left a lot to be desired: No pepper. No salt. No oil. How can they call this food? It’s like eating sandpaper, she thought ....* (Efe, *On Black*, p. 88).
29. My father, she thought, “*But he’s not my father. He is just the useless man my mother married. I’m well rid of him. I’m well rid of them both ....* She could not be sorry to be leaving her mother. *What has she ever done for me? She let the man rule her, let him ruin my life. She did nothing. Nothing to help me. What sort of a mother is that?”* (Ama, *On Black*, p. 136)
30. “*And Dele? Oh well, Dele has more than enough girls working for him, he doesn’t need me.*” Sisi pushed the thoughts of Dele away as soon as they came (Sisi) *On Black*, p. 285).

In (27) the narrator expresses Chisom’s thought as her boyfriend is pleading with her to change her mind and not travel abroad. While (28) reveals Efe’s dislike for the dinner of mashed potatoes and salad she and other passengers are served on board during her flight to Belgium, (29) shows Ama’s perception following the aftermath of the quarrel she has with her family. (30) Lastly portrays Sisi’s thought after her decision to quit the job despite not having finished repaying her debt to Dele. These are just four of the many instances in which the all-knowing narrator accesses the characters’ mind in order to reveal their thoughts.

There are yet other moments in which Unigwe uses the stream of consciousness mode of narration to freely express the flashes of thought and feelings of some of her characters. This narrative technique features prominently in *On Black Sisters’ Street* and is exemplified thus: “*I had been living with him for almost a year and still had not met his family. It did not seem right. So I gave him a break and then I started nagging him about it again*” (p. 221). In *Night Dancer*, stream of consciousness also features as Mma dines with the members of her newly-discovered family:

‘My son, the doctor,’ her father said, and the pride in his voice hit Mma with the sharpness of a blade. S is for son. It needs no explanation. The pride in the voice. How would he introduce Mma? My daughter? My daughter by my first wife? You remember her? Ezi? The one who upped and left with the baby and never looked back and now she’s dead and her daughter has come to ask me to forgive her. And I’ve forgiven her. I’ve welcomed my daughter. My daughter, Mma. Would the pride be in his voice? Would it be sweet and warm like it was when he talked about his other children? (P. 221)

The use of the third-person omniscient point of view and the stream of consciousness mode of narration by Chika Unigwe to essentially capture, without restraint, every aspect of the events and realities which she portrays in the select texts is obvious. She is able to probe the psychological make-up of her characters as well as explore the intimate part of their personality, their thoughts, feelings, aspirations, motivations, weaknesses and strengths.

#### **D. Stylistic Peculiarities in Select Novels**

Apart from the linguistic peculiarities discussed in the previous section of this chapter under linguistic nuances, there are certain formal stylistic peculiarities that characterise the select texts. There is the structure of the texts, developed according to the individual volition of each author; there is also the pattern of chapterisation and divisions and the use of date as a major marker in establishing the temporal setting of the narratives.

This tendency to experiment with the formal structure of the prose fictional genre finds expression in Chika Unigwe’s select texts. In Unigwe’s *On Black Sisters’ Street*, the narrative opens on Sisi’s act of rebellion against Dele’s exploitation, her decision not to pay up her debt

to Dele, to break away contact with Madam and turn a new leaf. The narrator relies on a narrative pattern that moves between the past and present in order to tell the story. Although Unigwe in *On Black Sisters' Street* follows a pattern of seamless vacillation between the now and the then, she however, brings her individual artistic and creative ingenuity to bear on it, giving it its peculiar formal structure.

The first chapter entitled '12 May 2006' serves as a prologue which ushers the reader into the main parts of the story, while the last one entitled 'Sisi' serves as the epilogue. The twenty-five other chapters in-between take the reader to and fro the past and the present life of the protagonists. The 'Zwartzusterstraat' chapters portray the present – Belgium, while the other chapters explore the characters' past. It is note-worthy that Unigwe's all-knowing narrator assigns a chapter to any of the four women – Efe, Ama, Sisi and Joyce, whose stories are in focus so that other chapters bear the names of the protagonists. This means that Sisi's life-story, before and in Belgium is portrayed in the chapter entitled 'Sisi', while Ama's takes the centre stage in the 'Ama' chapter, etc. It is through this pattern that the reader gets to know more about the protagonists. What is most remarkable about Unigwe's style is that each character takes charge of her story.

Indeed, Unigwe's epigram: 'Armed with a vagina and the will to survive, she knew destitution would never lay claim on her', from Brian Chikwava's "Seventh Street Alchemy", is quite instructive. It foreshadows the commercialization of the woman body which is the subject matter of the novel.

In *Night Dancer*, Unigwe creates what can be ideally described as a truly African novel. This can be seen in her use of African oral tradition. *Night Dancer* has three sections of varying number of chapters. What is innovative in this novel is that Unigwe begins each of these parts with an Igbo proverb which encapsulates the entire thematic and formal outlook. For instance, the proverb that begins the 'Part Two' section of the story reads: "*Azu na-enoro ibe ya adiro ebu ibu*" and it transliterates as 'A fish that does not swallow another fish does not grow fat.' Indeed, the narrative that follows in which Rapu, Ezi's maid wily dispossesses her of her home, turning from a housemaid to house-owner, validates the message of the proverb. Alluding to the belief that a fish needs to swallow another of its kind in order to grow fat, captures the story of Rapu who gets married through snatching her fellow woman's husband, thereby swallowing her victim's marital position. It is indeed, Rapu's presence in the family of Mike Ugwu that swallows that of Ezi; Rapu achieves her prophesied fortunes by appropriating the fortunes of Ezi.

Unigwe also attempts creating a new method of code switching English and Igbo expressions without using any form of marker. Her language of expression is the English language and in the course of her narrative, she uses Igbo words, or rather gives Igbo expressions to her Igbo characters as a means of foregrounding their Igbo identity. She, however, out of stylistic innovation refuses to set the Igbo words apart through the use of italics so as to alert the reader. In *Night Dancer*, the non-Igbo reader can hardly identify Igbo or any other non-English expression by simply looking at the words as is the case with *On Black Sisters' Street* in which non-English expressions are marked with italics.

## Conclusion

The study has so far shown that Chika Unigwe in the select texts, exhibits a high dexterity in her manipulation of the languages; foreign and indigenous which are at her disposal in effectively telling a truly African story. The texts also portray the language behaviour of Africans as they struggle to forge a linguistic compromise between foreign and indigenous languages. That Unigwe's Igbo characters in *On Black Sisters' Street* and *Night Dancer* are given Igbo expressions from time to time even as they use English is very

significant. The author achieves contextual and linguistic realism through this means.

Undoubtedly, Unigwe, through her conscious manipulation of language in the attempt to portray her artistic and imaginative assertions in the select texts reveals that the African, particularly Nigerian literary writer can speak to an African as well as a global audience in a single creative piece. Indeed, the texts show that a world language such as English must as Achebe (1975, p. 61) opines “be prepared to pay the price of submission to many different kinds of use.” The novels also show that the African writer can actually fashion out “an English which is at once universal and able to carry his peculiar experience” (P. 61).

Moreover, it is crystal clear that Unigwe establishes her artistic relevance and creative ingenuity through the diverse creative techniques and linguistic nuances she deploys as means of effectively realizing her imaginative and artistic vision. Her subjection of the English language to different kinds of use, the aptness of her characterization, her ability to invoke clear mental pictures in the reader’s mind through clear imagery, her experimentation with a structure that oscillates between the past and the present etc, all together mark her out as a very gifted writer. The success of the select texts derives from the deep and brilliant mind of the author whose competence in using the total resources of language and literature is admirable. This unarguably, shows the synergy between language and literature as explicated in the tenet of stylistics. Literature can therefore be said to involve a skillful manipulation of language for creative purposes.

### Recommendations

This paper recommends that African writers should creatively use the languages both foreign and indigenous at their disposal not just to suit the African milieu or experience but to promote the indigenous languages, and also widen and deepen the aesthetic taste of their artistic productions.

Also, since English has remained a lingua franca in most African nations, the submission of Achebe (1975) is further recommended thus:

The African writer should aim to use English in a way that brings out his message best without altering the language to the extent that its value as a medium of international exchange is lost. He should aim at fashioning out an English which is at once universal and able to carry his peculiar experiences (p. 61).

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