

Discursive Strategies in Achebe's *There was a Country: A Personal History of Biafra*

Olubunmi Funmi Oyebanji (PhD)

Bamidele Olumilua University of Education, Science and Technology
olubunmiadegbola@gmail.com

DOI: [10.56201/ijelcs.v9.no1.2024.pg30.45](https://doi.org/10.56201/ijelcs.v9.no1.2024.pg30.45)

Abstract

Achebe's There was a Country became controversial due to the author's recount of the civil war story. The text has been criticised for its bias by different people. However, these kinds of explorations, mainly literary reviews, have merely focused on its bias in terms of ethnicity and the civil war story, with little attention paid to the linguistic strategies used by the author in emphasising certain ideologies. This study, therefore, seeks to unearth the different discursive strategies used in the ideological representations of social actors and actions in the text. Wodak's approach to discursive strategies is found helpful for this study for its ideological and contextual approach to the use of language. Data are randomly selected from the different parts of the text and subject to content analysis and critical discourse analysis. The study reveals the 'us and 'them' dichotomy and provides concrete linguistic evidence as to the author's bias in representing social actors and actions.

Keywords: *Discursive strategies, Achebe's There was a Country, Ideologies, Ethnic bigotry, Nigerian Civil War*

1. Introduction

Albert Chinualumogu Achebe (16th November 1930-21st March 2013) was a renowned Nigerian writer (novelist, poet, professor, and critic) who played a vital role in the development of African literature. He grew up in an Igbo town called Ogidi in South-Eastern Nigeria. When the region of Biafra broke away from Nigeria in 1967, Achebe became a supporter of Biafra and acted as an ambassador for the Republic of Biafra. He solicited help from other countries on behalf of Biafra. When the Nigerian government retook the region of Biafra, he took part in politics but was soon frustrated because of corruption.

He authored a personal memoir written shortly before his death titled *There was a Country*. The text presents the early life of Achebe before the Nigerian-Biafran war, his experience during the civil war, how it ended, and the vices that have made Nigeria a failed state. After this text was published, it was followed by many controversies, especially about the issues that transpired during the war and the author's representation of social actors. Some people believed that Achebe was biased in his story, having been previously identified as a Biafran. However, other historical texts have since been published to retell the Biafran war story from different perspectives. Therefore,

the analysis of this text is necessary because of the controversies that followed it, and since it relates to the history of Nigeria and the happenings in the country.

Since the text has been criticised for the author's bias in relation to his story of the Biafran war and ethnicity, this study examines the discursive strategies that are indicators of bias or otherwise. The analysis of discursive strategies provides insights into how social actors are named or referred to in the text, what verbs and adjectives are used in the description of actors, the strategies used in supporting claims and opinions, and how both positive and negative actions are used are backgrounded and foregrounded. All these would reveal the authors' ideologies on the issues in the text.

The language use of individuals, either spoken or written, depicts their ideologies about issues of discourse. Over time, some scholars have critically examined the ideological analysis of language use in the humanities and the social sciences (Van Dijk, 1998:140). Hence, the implicit ideologies of speakers or writers are revealed through the understanding of their language use. According to Van Dijk (2001:12), ideology is a special form of social cognition shared by members of a particular social group. Ideologies include the shared beliefs that are peculiar to a particular social group, which indicates their identity, position in society, interest and aims, how they relate with other groups, and their reproduction and national environment. Ideologies are collective belief systems. According to Fairclough (2001:64), ideologies are common-sense assumptions that people bring into the production and interpretation of texts. Texts are "the semiotic dimension of events" (*ibid.*), where we can find the traces of different discourses and ideologies (Weiss and Wodak, 2003).

It has also become commonplace in scholarship that the way a writer writes reveals his/her ideologies/ way of thinking, which could have been influenced by past experiences, ethnicity, social group, etc. Literature is, therefore, an embodiment of history and ideology. It reflects people's values and lifestyles based on historical facts. Different scholars have analysed many literary texts to explain the ideologies that informed the literary texts by looking into the writer's use of language.

Scholars, such as Benard and Kinggeorge (2014), Chinedu (2014), Ekhaton (2014), have examined the text, *There was a Country*, basically for the literary and historical perspectives. Comments of people on the controversial text have also been considered (Ngwu et al., 2013). From a linguistic standpoint, Lawal (2019) explores language, power and gender in Achebe's *There was a Country* and Adichie's *Half of a Yellow Sun*, adopting van Dijk's (1998) Socio-cognitive Model of Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA) and Halliday's (1985) Socio-semiotic Model of Systemic Functional Grammar (SFG) for analysis. He explains that both Achebe and Adichie deploy their English linguistic prowess with their traditional Igbo language to express power and gender discourses. However, adequate attention has not been paid to the discursive strategies deployed by the author in the text and their ideological implications. This study, therefore, explores the discursive strategies in the text *There was Country* and their ideological implications. The objectives are to identify, interpret and explain the referential, predication, argumentation, mitigation and intensification strategies in the text.

1.1 The Synopsis of the Text

Achebe's *There was a Country* is a personal memoir divided into four parts, including an introduction and a post-script. Tucked in between these pages are poems, previously published in some form, depicting the horrors Biafrans experienced during their three years of Nigeria/Biafra civil war. In the first part of the text, Achebe begins with a coming-of-age routine, recounting his early life of scholastics, his passion for literature, his struggle between the religion of the Whites and his Igbo African traditional religion, and his burning desire to elevate African stories to a narrative tradition. Achebe gives an account of himself as a man whose enthusiasm for nationalism was reformed into an instinct for survival through a civil war that targeted and eliminated people from his ethnic group. He focuses on the roles of writers in Africa, the coup and the counter-coup, the killing of the Igbo in the northern part of the country and other incidents that led to the war.

The second part focuses on the arguments for and against the war from the perspectives of both Nigerians and the Igbos. The events and actors of the war are described. The civil war casualties on the Biafran side are reported to be about one million civilians. These deaths were mainly non-battle related - caused by starvation, sickness and disease due to the economic blockade of the Eastern region by the Federal Military Government. As Achebe explains it, the war affected him personally. He had to stay on the run, first escaping from the Nigerian army targeting civilian populations and second as a roving ambassador of the de facto Biafran State. The war went further to take away his friend, Christopher Okigbo. To Achebe, that was one loss too many. While his mother died during that period, it seems that Achebe is yet to recover from the loss of his dear friend. He accuses the major actors of General Yakubu Gowon's government as having personal interests in persecuting his ethnic group and thus saw the war as an opportunity to achieve their selfish interests. It reports the support each of the sides received from international bodies. The writer also accounts for his trips around the world to plead for humanitarian support from Sweden, Norway, Canada, United States and his meeting with the resident of Senegal on behalf of Biafra. His own family's ordeal as he moved from place to place during the war is also presented. The creation of the Republic of Biafra and all its entailments also form part of this section.

The third part focuses on the determination of the Biafrans to keep fighting, the strategies used by both sides, and the economic blockade strategy used by the federal side, which consequently led to the death of many Biafrans. This part also reveals the fall of Biafra and raises the question of genocide. Part four is an analysis of Nigeria's present situation, characterized by corruption, ethnic bigotry, debauchery, and political ineptitude. He also goes further to recommend solutions that will help develop the country. However, since the above novel is based on the Nigerian experience before, during and after the war, it makes sense to devote some space to discussing the development of the Nigerian state and the intrigues that snowballed into the war. Marrying history and memoir, poetry and prose, *There was a Country* represents vivid observation.

2. Previous Studies on Achebe's *There was a Country*

The text, *There was a Country*, has stirred many comments, especially regarding the author's ethnocentric sentiments and the war story. Some have also reviewed the book with the conclusion that Achebe is biased in recounting the war story. They see it as ethnic activism championed by an 'unforgiving' old man. On the other hand, some have agreed with Achebe's side of the story, while others have remained on the fence. Scholars have also examined the text, particularly from the sociological and historical perspectives. For instance, Ngwu et al. (2013)

discusses public opinions on the book using qualitative and quantitative data generated through the interview, questionnaire and focus group discussion. They investigate how the text has influenced Nigerians to construct or reconstruct their memories of the war and discovered that the book had influenced Nigerians to build and rebuild negative memories of the war.

Also, Benard and Kinggeorge (2014) examine how the history and memory of the war and the lessons as portrayed in Adichie's *Half of a Yellow Sun* and Achebe's *There Was a Country* could facilitate collective exorcism and engender national unity. They observe that Achebe "has succeeded in preventing our collective memory and history from sinking into atrophy and amnesia, thereby facilitating the process of exorcism". They conclude that the texts boost national memory and enhance the nation's history. Chinedu (2014) attempts to trace the trends of Achebe's initiation into the tribal life of his people, his creative thoughts and his conception of the 'art of the masquerade' in his works, especially, in *There Was a Country*. The study suggests that if Achebe sees works of art as masquerades (masks), there was a country seen as the IJELE. The paper identifies the qualities of Ijele in the narrative, hence the description of the work as Achebe's Ijele.

Interrogating the Nigerian-Biafran War and the elites' notion of nation and nationalism in Achebe's *There Was a Country*, Ekhatior (2014) contends that "Nigeria's story and Achebe's personal story were told to inspire in future Nigerians the spirit of nationalism, value for where Nigerians are coming from". He notes that "the veritable themes in the memoir are politics of nationhood, ethnic nationalism and national integration". These, according to Ekhatior, are "the sum of the causes of Nigeria—Biafra War". Olu Obafemi (2012) focuses on Achebe's representation of Nnamdi Azikwe and Obafemi Awolowo. He sees these representations as pro-Igbo and Anti-Yoruba in the sense that Achebe eulogizes Azikwe forgetting the likes of Herbert Macaulay and ethicises Awolowo's politics. He concludes that the book is dangerous for Nigerians to read as it will only cause discontent and ethnic bigotry. According to Soyinka in Fashua (2013, para.5), "It is however a book I wish he had never written, that is, not in the way it was"

To Chimamanda Adichie (2012), *There Was a Country* is striking for not being very personal in its account of the war. Instead, it is a Nigerian nationalist lament for the failure of the giant that never was; she believes that Achebe is mourning Nigeria's failures, the greatest and most devastating of which was Biafra. Adichie believes that people remember stories differently and therefore remains neutral in her review. Tarila Ebiede (2012) believes that *There was a Country* should be a source of inspiration and advocacy guide for those calling for a new Nigeria, a Nigeria where members of the different nations have an equal place no matter their size and where they would not repeat the unfortunate incidence that happened from July 1967 to January 1970. He sees the book as filling a yawning need in Nigeria's historical analysis, one need the Nigerian state and her historians have carefully avoided that.

Furthermore, Lawal (2019) explores language, power and gender in Achebe's *There was a Country* and Adichie's *Half of a Yellow Sun*, adopting van Dijk's (1998) Socio-cognitive Model of Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA) and Halliday's (1985) Socio-semiotic Model of Systemic Functional Grammar (SFG) for analysis. He explains that both Achebe and Adichie deploy their English linguistic prowess with their traditional Igbo language to express power and gender discourses. He finds that Achebe uses rhetorical and proverbial expressions, which betray his patriarchal gender and power ideological inclination in his memoir. In contrast, Adichie, in her use of sublime language, exhibited her feminine gender belief in a rather subtle manner. He also found

that the two authors' use of the English language with a heavy Igbo language influence is an index to the fact that language, apart from being a powerful means of expression of a writer's ideological idiosyncrasy, is a source of power on its own; an instrument which both Achebe and Adichie deployed to show their different gender inclinations and power discourses in the texts.

However, this study examines the discursive strategies which are indicators of bias or otherwise in the text *There was a Country*. The analysis of discursive strategies provides insights into how social actors are named or referred to in the text, what verbs and adjectives are used in the description of actors, the strategies used in supporting claims and opinions, and how both positive and negative actions are used are backgrounded and foregrounded.

2.1 Theoretical Framework

This work has its basis in Critical Discourse Analysis (henceforth CDA) and Halliday's Systemic Functional Linguistics (SFL). CDA is 'fundamentally interested in analyzing opaque and transparent structural relationships of dominance, discrimination, power and control when these are manifested in language' (Wodak, 2006). The study mainly deploys Wodak's Discourse Historical Approach in the analysis of the text.

2.1.1 Wodak's model of CDA (Discourse Historical Approach, DHA)

Discourse Historical Approach elaborates and views 'discourse' as structured forms of knowledge and the memory of social practices (Reisigl and Wodak, 2001). The term "historical" occupies a unique place in this approach. It denotes an attempt on the part of this approach "to integrate systematically all available background information in the analysis and interpretation of the many layers of a written or spoken text" (Wodak, 1995:209). Focusing on the historical contexts of discourse in the process of explanation and interpretation is a feature that distinguishes this approach from other approaches of CDA. The study for which the Discourse-Historical Approach (DHA) was actually developed, for instance, first attempted to trace in detail the constitution of an anti-Semitic stereotyped image, as it emerged in public discourse in the 1986 Austrian presidential campaign of Kurt Waldheim (Gruber, 1991; Mitten, 1992; Wodak et al., 1990). In order to be able to study the discourse about the 'Waldheim Affair', 'context' was unravelled into various dimensions. Initially, DHA was concerned with prejudiced utterances in anti-Semitic discourse.

The DHA has been further elaborated in a number of studies, for example, in a study on racist discrimination against immigrants from Romania and in a study on the discourse about nation and national identity in Austria (Kovács and Wodak, 2003; Wodak et al., 1999) and in the European Union (Muntigl et al., 2000; Wodak and van Dijk, 2000). The 1999 study is concerned with the analysis of the relationships between the discursive construction of national sameness and the discursive construction of difference leading to the political and social exclusion of specific out-groups, and the reconstruction of the past through sanitised narratives. The findings suggest that discourses about nations and national identities rely on at least four types of discursive macro-strategies. These are:

- constructive strategies (aiming at the construction of national identities)
- preservative or justificatory strategies (aiming at the conservation and reproduction of national identities or narratives of identity)
- transformative strategies (aiming at the change of national identities)

- destructive strategies (aiming at the dismantling of national identities). Depending on the context, that is to say, on the social field in which the ‘discursive events’ related to the topic under investigation takes place – one or other of the aspects connected with these strategies is brought into prominence.

The Discourse-Historical Approach (DHA) is linguistically oriented like all the other approaches. It explicitly tries to establish a theory of discourse by establishing the connection between *fields of action* (Girnth, 1996), *genres*, *discourses* and *texts*. Although DHA is aligned to Critical Theory, general social theory plays a minor role compared with the discourse model and the emphasis on historical analysis: context is understood as mainly historical. The DHA concentrates its efforts in the field of politics, where it tries to develop conceptual frameworks for political discourse. The Wodak’s discourse-historical approach considers the linguistic realization of the representation of social actors, i.e. what words are chosen to refer to a social actor, and at the same time, considers argumentative level of discourse together other means of maintaining a certain perspective or point of view.

Discursive Strategies

The discursive strategies emphasize sameness and/or difference (the two most important characteristics of identity formation) as well as uniqueness, autonomy/independence, inclusion, unity and continuity on the one hand, and heteronomy, exclusion, fragmentation, and discontinuity on the other hand. Wodak views “the discursive construction of ‘us’ and ‘them’ as the basic fundamentals of discourses of identity and difference. And such discourses are salient for discourses of discrimination.” (Wodak 2001:73). Strategy, as understood by Wodak (2001:69), means “a more or less accurate and more or less intentional plan of practices (including discursive practices) adopted to achieve a particular social, political, psychological or linguistic aims.” However, these discursive strategies are shown below.

- **Referential strategy or strategy of nomination**, where the linguistic devices of interest are membership categorization (Sacks, 1992), metaphors and metonymies and synecdoches.
- **Strategies of predication** which appear in stereotypical, evaluative attributions of positive or negative traits and implicit or explicit predicates.
- **Strategies of argumentation** which are reflected in certain *topoi* used to justify political inclusion or exclusion.
- **Strategies of perspectivization, framing or discourse representation** use means of reporting, description, narration or quotation of events and utterances.
- **Strategies of intensification and mitigation** try to intensify or mitigate the illocutionary force of utterances (Ng and Bradac, 1993). The historical context is always analysed and integrated into the interpretation, although there is no stringent procedure for this task.

In summary, in the discourse historical method approach, it is believed that language "manifests social processes and interaction" and "constitutes" those processes as well (Wodak & Ludwig, 1999: 12). According to Wodak & Ludwig (1999:12), viewing language this way entails three things at least. First, discourse "always involves power and ideologies. No interaction exists where power relations do not prevail and where values and norms do not have a relevant role". Second, "discourse ... is always historical, that is, it is connected synchronically and diachronically with other communicative events which are happening at the same time or which have happened before". The third feature of Wodak's approach is that of interpretation. According to Wodak &

Ludwig (1999:13), readers and listeners, depending on their background knowledge and information and their position, might have different interpretations of the same communicative event. Due to the integrative nature of this approach, the researcher finds it more suitable for the analysis of Achebe's *There was a Country* being a text based on history, politics and ethnicity.

3. Methodology

The data for the analysis are extracted from the text *There was a Country* written by Chinua Achebe. The text is a memoir containing 333 pages, divided into four parts. Each of these parts are further broken down into different topics and sub-topics including poems. The text also has an introduction and a postscript. For this study, excerpts were taken from each of the parts in the text as they are relevant in expressing opinions. Data excerpts were purposively taken based on areas steeped in culture, ethnicity, war, colonialism, freedom and politics, being issues of national interest in the text. This is a content-based analysis.

The study is a critical analysis of language use to reveal implicit ideologies informed by the historical context and the background of the social actor relating the events in the text. The text was subjected to rigorous reading several times to identify the issues discussed in it. Wodak's discourse historical approach to critical discourse analysis and Halliday's systemic functional linguistics were adopted in this study.

3.1 Contextualization of the Text

The text *There was a Country* is situated within the historical, social, political and cultural context of Nigeria. The story revolves around the history of Nigeria, the Nigerian civil war and the ineptitude that has characterized the political situation of Nigeria. Achebe traces the history of Nigeria from independence to its present state. In this book, Achebe incorporates not only national issues but also cultural ones. Important to the understanding of this text is the socio-cultural context in which the text is situated. The text does not exist in isolation; hence, it evolves around the socio-cultural context of Nigeria. Nigeria is a multi-ethnic nation with people of different cultures and languages. Achebe is an Igbo man from the eastern part of the country and he reflects the Igbo culture in relation to some other cultures in the text. One of the problems caused by this multi-ethnicity is ethnic suspicion and rivalry, which according to Achebe, is one of the reasons why the country has not developed. Achebe, however, reflects this in the text.

The understanding of the history of Nigeria is also essential for the understanding of the text. The memoir tells the history of Nigeria from the author's perspective. The knowledge of the history of Nigeria helps in relating with the issues discussed in the text. Also important is the political context. Social actors and their roles in the Nigerian political scene since inception are mentioned. The text references an actual historical event, real people and places, making it a non-fiction. It is important to note that this text belongs to both literary and historical genres. It takes the fusion of prose and poetry forms at the same time.

4. Data Analysis and Discussion

The author of the memoir has deployed different discursive strategies, *There was a country* to achieve certain ideological meanings. Here, these strategies and their ideological implications are considered.

4.1 Referential strategy

The referential or nomination strategy helps in the construction of in-groups and out-groups (Wodak, 2001). The device used to construct in-groups and out-groups is membership categorization using pronouns, nominals, metaphors and metonymy. This strategy examines how people are named or referred to linguistically. The referential strategy is a constructive strategy that serves to build and establish a particular identity. Significantly, of utmost importance to this strategy is the use of “we” and “us” as against “they” and “them” as a form of in-group and out-group categorization. In *There was a country*, Achebe uses pronouns in the construction of in-groups and out-groups to show solidarity and polarization. He uses the ‘us’ and ‘them’ categorisation. I discovered that at different points in the text, he constructs different identities for himself. He identifies himself as a Biafran, a Nigerian, an Intellectual, among other identities. The writer has also deployed nominals and metaphors to emphasise the ideologies. Examples of such categorisation can be seen in the examples below.

As a Biafran

Excerpts

1. **The country** had not embraced **us, the Igbo people and other easterners**, as full-fledged members of the Nigerian family. (pg.87)
2. As **we** fled **home to eastern Nigeria** to escape all manner of atrocities that were inflicted upon **us** and **our** families in the different parts of Nigeria, **we** saw **ourselves** as **victims** (pg.95).
3. For most of **us** in Biafra **our** new nation was a dream that had become reality... (pg. 143)
4. **We** were able to demonstrate that it was possible for African people, entirely on their own, to refine oil (pg. 157)

In excerpt 1, the author’s position is apparent. He constitutes an ethnic “we group” through the use of the pronoun “us”; he associates himself with the “Igbo people”. This shows ethnic identity and solidarity with the Igbo people. This also serves as a basis for appealing directly or indirectly to ethnic solidarity and union. This is probably one of the reasons he has been perceived to be biased. The use of the first person plural pronouns “we”, – including all its dialect forms and the corresponding possessive pronouns, “us”, “our”, “ourselves”, – is of utmost importance in the discourses about nations and national identities. Also noticeable is the backgrounding of the ‘other’ that constitutes ‘them’. He simply refers to Nigerians as ‘The country’ in excerpt 1, which is metonymy. Again, the actor of the atrocities in excerpt two is missing. Apart from pronouns, Achebe constructs self (Igbos) positively and as a victim of the meanness and atrocities of the other side, using different lexical items. Ideologically, Achebe does not see himself and other Igbos as being part of Nigeria. This is vivid in excerpt 2 where he describes the eastern part of Nigeria as ‘home’. The ‘home’ metaphor connotes a place of safety and peace, a place where one can be free. This image contrasts with the notion of ‘victims’ outside the home (Nigeria). Excerpt 4 also reveals the positive attribute designated to ‘we’. This is in a bid to emphasise the positivity and achievements of Biafrans as a positive influence on other African nations.

As a Nigerian

After the plan for secession failed, in the fourth part of the text, Achebe constructs self as a Nigerian and advocates for a better Nigeria. An example of such construction can be found below:

5. **Nigerians** will have to find a way to do away with the present system of godfatherism...**we** will have to make sure that the electoral body overseeing elections is run by widely respected and competent officials chosen by a nonpartisan group free of governmental influence or interference. Finally, **we** have to find a way to open up the political process to every Nigerian citizen. (pg.245)

In the above excerpt, the writer also identifies himself with the Nigerians through “we”. A striking feature of Achebe’s solidarity with the Nigerians is that it performs a persuasive function. He tries to motivate the Nigerians to find a solution to the political problems in the country, using obligatory modality ‘have to’ repeatedly. Components of constructive strategies are persuasive linguistic devices that help invite identification and solidarity with the “we” group, which simultaneously implies distancing from and marginalization of others.

The way an author describes actors in a text can be said to be ideological. It reflects the sentiment of the author towards the individual being described. A glimpse at the excerpt below indicates the use of nominal groups with ideological meanings in describing the major actors of the civil war. For example, the author describes General Emeka Ojukwu, the initiator of the secession as *The aristocrat* (pg. 118) and general Gowon as *The gentleman general* (pg 120). An aristocrat is a member of the highest social class in a country; a person believed to be superior to all others. Using this nominal group, the author tactically indicates the superiority of the social actor when compared with Gowon. While he tactically uses the nominal group *The gentleman general* to indicate General Gowon’s humble or lowly background. This suggests that he was a nobody before he emerged as the head of state shortly before the Biafran war. The contrast of “Gentleman” and “General” reveals the author’s sentiments about the social actor.

4.2 Predication

This involves labelling social actors more or less positively or negatively, deprecatorily or appreciatively. This is shown through stereotypical, evaluative attributions of negative or positive traits, implicit and explicit predicates. Description of social actors representing the three major ethnic groups in Nigeria as described in the text is examined. This is done to show the subjectivity or objectivity of the author. For this purpose, Chief Obafemi Awolowo is chosen for the West, Nnamdi Azikwe for the East and Sir Ahmadu Bello for the North.

Nnamdi Azikwe

6. Azikwe, fondly referred to by his admirer as ‘ZIK’ **was the preeminent political figure of my youth**
7. and a man who **was endowed with the political pan Africanist vision.**
8. He **had help, no doubt from several eminent sons and daughters of the soil.** (pg. 41)
9. Azikwe **built upon lessons he had learned from earlier forays in political activism**
10. and successfully **persuaded several active members of the Nigerian youth movement to form an...** (pg 45).

Looking at the predicates in the above excerpts, the labelling of Nnamdi Azikwe by the writer is done both positively and appreciatively. Considering the background of this social actor, he is from the eastern part of the country, the same as the writer. This may be responsible for the positive representation of the social actor by the writer, ideologically portraying him as an ethnocentric individual. He posits affirmatively: “The father of African independence was Nnamdi Azikiwe. There is no question about that at all. He was the preeminent political figure of my youth and a man who was endowed with the political Pan-Africanist vision”. Many people, especially non-Igbos, can object to the writer’s position here.

The reasons Achebe adduced for this claim here are; a) Azikwe's mentoring of great leaders, including Nkrumah who led Ghana to its independence, three years before Nigeria's and that Azikiwe opened the way for West Africans to seek knowledge in America, b) his pioneering journalism, especially his opening up the media space for political activism, populist and accessible journalism, departing from Aristocratic media establishmentarianism in West Africa; c) the founding of the National Council of Nigeria and the Cameroons (NCNC) in 1944 and which later became the National Council of Nigerian Citizens (NCNC). The question will now be: Where did Achebe put the likes of Herbert Macaulay and other political activists from other parts of the country? The writer has tactically neglected the negative actions of the social actor. It was recorded that there was a high level of corruption during the regime of the social actor as the President of the country but Achebe has tactically avoided crediting this atrocity to the name of the social actor.

Chief Obafemi Awolowo

- Chief Awolowo and close associate **reunited his ancient Yoruba people with powerful glue-resuscitated ethnic pride and created...** (pg 45).
- ... Chief Obafemi Awolowo **was driven by an overriding ambition for power, for himself in particular and for the advancement of his Yoruba people in general** (pg 233).
- A statement credited to Chief Obafemi Awolowo and echoed by his cohorts **is the most callous and unfortunate** (pg 233).
- ... his ambition **drove him into a frenzy to go every length to achieve his dreams**. In the Biafran case it meant **hatching up a diabolical policy to reduce the numbers of his enemies significantly through starvation- eliminating over two million people, mainly members of future generations**. (pg 233)

From the above excerpt, Chief Obafemi Awolowo is portrayed as being selfish, seeking his interest alone and over-ambitious as to have influenced the blockade strategy that led to the death of many Biafrans. He is also portrayed as being callous and greedy, with negative predicates. During the Nigerian Civil War, Chief Obafemi Awolowo suggested a blockade that restricted food movement to the Biafrans from Nigeria. He believed that one should not feed one’s enemies, helping them to get more energy to keep fighting. It was said that this led to the death of many Biafran and eventually led to their surrender. This made Achebe bitter, hence the negative attribution. In the last excerpt, he tactically uses the figure to elicit pity from readers. He further intensifies the event by referring to the dead as ‘mainly members of future generation’. This depiction represents the social actor as wicked and callous., one who is ready to ruin a nation’s future entirely.

Sir Ahmadu Bello

11. He was a contentious and ardently ambitious figure who claimed direct lineage from one of the founders of the Islamic Sokoto Caliphate- Shehu Usman dan Fodio.
12. It was widely known that he had “aspired to the throne of the sultan of Sokoto”.
13. Sir Ahmadu Bello was able to control northern Nigeria politically by feeding on the fears of the ruling emirs and a small elite group of Western-educated northerners. (45)

From the above excerpts, it can be inferred that Achebe is skeptical about the lineage of the social actor. The use evidently sees this of the verb “claimed”. This represents Sir Ahmadu Bello as not being truthful. He is also portrayed as being over ambitious as to have “aspired to the throne of the sultan of Sokoto”. This part of the predicate is emphasized or foregrounded to portray the implicit meaning. The social actor is also portrayed as an opportunist who feeds on the fears of the ruling Emirs and the small elite group. In essence, the social actor is represented negatively by the author through the use of the predication strategy. Achebe associates the ‘other’ group members with an array of negative predications on the predicational level. The conclusions of such negative associations are explicitly and overtly provided.

4.3 Argumentation strategy

In the text, argumentation is used for the justification of positive and negative attribution. Argumentation can be in the form of certain topoi used to justify inclusion or exclusion. Proverbs, cause and effects, past facts, witnesses, documents, testimony and comparison, are used by rhetors to produce arguments. Also, numbers, dates and statistic facts are presented against mere opinions and expressions. These have been used extensively in the text. *There was a Country*.

14. I remember hearing **Azikiwe comment** years later on those events. He was asked in a small gathering: “why did Sir James Robertson not go home, like the other people who were leaving?” **Azikiwe made light of the question**: “well, when he told me that he was going to stay on, I said to him, Go on, stay as long as you like.” The laughter that followed did not obscure the greater meaning of his statement (pg. 50)

In a bid to back up his argument about the notion that Nigerians went from colonialism to neo-colonialism, the writer quotes what authority had said concerning the issue at hand. Azikwe is portrayed as a relevant force to give information about why Sir James Robertson did not go home, like the other people who were leaving, being an important figure in the country. From this comment, meaning can be inferred. This quote supports the negative attribution used in labelling the whites who were reluctant in handing over their colonies totally.

Another instance of the justification of positive attribution used in describing the Igbos can be seen in the excerpt below. The author uses the statement of another writer to emphasise the notion that the Igbo people had always been ahead of other ethnic groups in the country. Paul Anber is quoted as saying:

15. With unparalleled rapidity, the Igbos advanced fastest in the shortest period of time of all Nigeria’s ethnic groups. Like the Jews, to whom they have

frequently been likened, they progressed despite being a minority in the country, filling the ranks of the nation's educated, prosperous upper classes...it was not long before the educational and economic progress of the Igbos led to their becoming the major source of administrators, managers, technicians, and civil servants for the country, occupying senior positions out of proportion to their numbers. Particularly with respect to the federal public service and the government statutory corporations, this led to the accusations of an Igbo monopoly of essential services to the exclusion of other ethnic groups (pg. 74-75).

Writers quote testimonies to back up arguments. One of such testimonies is that of Paul Anber shown in the excerpt above. Paul Anber wrote an article titled *Modernisation and Political Disintegration: Nigeria and the Ibos* in 1967. Achebe finds Paul Anber's words to align with his views; therefore, he quotes him. Writers appear to be more credible when they attribute their opinions and knowledge to reliable sources not to allow readers to doubt whether they are well-grounded. One of such credible sources includes quoting witnesses, sources or experts in news reports. However, the above quote is made by Achebe to justify the positive attribution used in labelling his Igbo group and what led to their hatred by other ethnic groups, which is a negative attribution for other ethnic groups. This shows that out of the mouth of two or more witnesses, the truth is justified.

Furthermore, statistics and numbers have been used as argumentation strategies. An example is shown below.

16. **Thirty thousand** civilian men, women, and children were slaughtered, **hundreds of thousands** were wounded, maimed and violated, their homes and property looted and burned... (pg. 82).

The numbers and dates are used to indirectly show the altitude of negative actions of the Nigerian soldiers. The numbers are argumentative strategies used to justify the negative attributions used in labelling Nigerians. In the example, Achebe constructs Biafrans (self) as civilians who are victims of the soldiers' atrocities (them). This is to show the extent of the brutality melted out by the Nigerians on the Biafrans. Generally, it foregrounds the enormity of the civil war.

4.4 Intensification and mitigation

This strategy examines how the author modifies the epistemic status of a proposition. A writer can mitigate or intensify discriminatory events or utterances. This is done in such a way that when information that is unfavourable to "us" (the author's identified group) is given, it is mitigated. In contrast, negative information about "them" is emphasized. A glance at some examples from the text provides insights into how Achebe has used this strategy in *There was a Country*.

17. Nigerian radio reports **claimed** that the Biafrans shot a number of innocent civilians as they fled the advancing federal forces. As disturbing

as these allegations are, **I have found no credible corroboration of them.** (pg.133)

The information reported by the Nigerian radio is that Biafrans killed some innocent civilians. This information is unfavourable to the Biafrans. However, being a Biafran a Biafran, Achebe mitigates this statement first by identifying it as a mere claim. This is emphasised by the verb ‘claimed’. Secondly, Achebe tries to tone down the effect of this statement by saying he has not found any credible corroboration of the allegation. He sees this as an allegation because it has to do with his group (us), while other discriminating statements that have to do with the other groups (them) are emphasized or intensified. An example of an intensified statement can be seen below.

18. Following the Biafran invasion of the mid-west, Gowon reorganized his war strategy. He placed some of his best military personnel in three key roles as part of his agenda to **“crush the Biafrans** (pg.132)

A glimpse at the above excerpt shows that Achebe emphasizes the discriminatory statement “crush the Biafrans”. This is done in a bid to accentuate the evil intention and wickedness of Gowon towards the Biafrans. He emphasizes Gowon’s intent to destroy the Biafran totally. Adverbs and adverbial phrases can also be used as tools for intensification. A view at the excerpt below reveals this.

19. The weeks following the coup saw easterners attacked both **randomly and in an organized fashion**. There seemed to be a lust for revenge, which meant an excuse for Nigerians to take out their resentment on the Igbo who led the nation in virtually every sector... (pg.66)

In the above excerpt, the adverb “randomly” and the adverbial phrase “in an organized fashion” are used by Achebe to emphasize the cruelty of other Nigerians in killing the Igbos. The action is intensified because it was done against his people.

Another means of mitigation is the avoidance of naming. In the excerpt below, the author tries to mitigate the action of the Biafran soldiers by calling them Major Uchendu’s troops. The “Muhammed’s entire convoy” referred to in the excerpt are the Nigerian soldiers.

20. Major Uchendu’s strategy proved to be highly successful. His troop destroyed Muhammed’s entire convoy within one and a half hours. All told the Nigerians suffered about five hundred casualties (pg.173)

While intensifying the success of the Biafrans (Major Uchendu’s troop) using the lexical item ‘highly’, the actors of destroying Mohammed’s convoy are backgrounded because the action is a negative one. It is in the third sentence that we know the group identified as ‘Mohammed’s convoy’. Again, the writer continues to shield the actors of the atrocity using passivisation. Syntactic structures can put more or less emphasis, focus or prominence on specific words, phrases or clauses, and thus indirectly contribute to corresponding semantic stress on particular meanings,

as a function of the political interests and allegiances of the speaker or writer (Fowler et al. 1979; Kress & Hodge 1993).

5. Conclusion

Having considered the discursive strategies used in the text *There was a Country*, we discovered that the author foregrounds the in-group and out-group categorization of social actors and actions, using the referential, predication, argumentation, mitigation and intensification strategies. Social actors and actions have been labelled both positively and negatively and the author shows the justifications of these labels. This study, therefore, concludes that Achebe uses the different discursive strategies to emphasize/achieve his ethnic sentiments.

References

- Achebe, C. (2012). *There was a Country: A Personal History of Biafra*. London: Penguin.
- Adichie, Chimamanda. (2012). "We Remember Differently" Retrieved November, 28, 2014 from www.Vanguagrndngr.com/category/topstories.
- Benard, D. and Kinggeorge, O. P. (2014). History, Memory and the Politics of National Unity in Adichie's *half of a Yellow Sun* and Achebe's *There was a Country*. *International Journal on Studies in English Language and Literature (IJSELL)*, 2, 5: 81-89
- Chinedu, F. (2014). *There Was a Country: Achebe's Ijele*. *Okike: An African Journal of New Writing*, 51, 01: 198-213
- Ebiede, T. M. (2012). Biafra: A lesson not learned: Reflections on 'There Was A Country: A Personal History of Biafra' by Chinua Achebe, Allen Lane, 333 pp. <https://www.pambazuka.org/arts/biafra-lesson-not-learned>
- Ekhaton, O. G. (2014). "There Was A Country": The Reminiscence of Nigeria-Biafra Civil War And Elites' Perception of Nation and Nationalism in Nigeria. *Historical Research Letters*, 12: 13-25
- Fairclough, N. (2001). *Language and Power*. Second edition. England: Pearson Education Limited.
- Fowler, R., Hodge, R., Kress G. and Trew, T. (1979). *Language and control*. London: Routledge and Kegan.
- Girnth, H. (1996). Texte im politischen Diskurs. Ein Vorschlag zur diskursorientierten Beschreibung von Textsorten. *Muttersprache*, 106/1/96: 66-80.
- Gruber H. (1991). *Antisemitismus im Medi-endiskurs. Die Affdre "Waldheim" in der Tagespresse*. Wiesbaden, Germ.: Dtsch. Univ. Verlag.
- Halliday, M. A. K. (1985). *An Introduction to Functional Grammar* (1st ed.). London: Edward Arnold.

- Kress, G., & Hodge, B. (1993). *Language as ideology*. Second Edition. London: Routledge & Kegan Paul
- Kovács, A. & Wodak, R. Eds. (2003). NATO, neutrality, and national identity. Vienna: Böhlau.
- Lawal, M. O. (2019). Language, Gender and Power in Chinua Achebe's—There Was a Country and Chimamanda Adiche's—Half of a Yellow Sun. *Global Research in Higher Education*, 2, 2: 82-97
- Mitten, R. (1992). *The Politics of Antisemitic Prejudice: The Waldheim Phenomenon in Austria*. Boulder, CO: Westview. 261.
- Muntigl, P., Weiss, G. & Wodak, R. (2000). European union discourses on un/employment: an interdisciplinary approach to employment policymaking and organizational change. *Dialogues on work and innovation*, 12: 235.
- Ng, S and Bradac, J. (1993). *Power in language*. Newbury Park: Sage
- Ngwu, C. C., Ekwe, O. & Chukwuma, O. (2013). Achebe's There Was A Country in the court of public opinion: 43 years after the Nigerian civil war. *Developing Country Studies*. 3.13. www.iiste.org
- Obafemi, O. (2012). Nigeria: Chinua Achebe's 'There Was a Country'. Daily Trust. Retrieved on 12/11/ 2012
- Reisigl, M. and Wodak, R. (2001). *Discourse and discrimination*. London: Routledge.
- Sacks, H. (1992). *Lectures on Conversation*. London: Blackwell, Oxford
- Van Dijk, T.A. (1998). Critical discourse analysis. Retrieved on <http://www.hum.uva.nl/teun/cda.htm>. (1/25/2000)
- Weiss, G., & Wodak, R. (2003). Introduction: Theory, interdisciplinarity and critical discourse analysis. *Critical Discourse Analysis: Theory and interdisciplinarity*. Eds. G. Weiss & R. Wodak. New York: Palgrave Macmillan.
- Wodak, Ruth. (2006). Mediation Between Discourse and Society: Assessing Cognitive Approaches in CDA. *Discourse Studies - Discourse Stud.* 8. 179-190. 10.1177/1461445606059566.
- Wodak, R. (2001). What CDA Is about—A Summary of Its History, Important Concepts and Its Developments. In W. R., & M. Meyer (Eds.), *Methods of Critical Discourse Analysis* (pp. 1-13). London: Sage Publications.
- Wodak, R. (1995). Critical Linguistics and Critical Discourse Analysis. *Handbook of Pragmatics: Manual* Edited by Jef Verschueren, Jan-Ola Östman and Jan Blommaert. pp. 204–210.

Wodak, R., De Cillia, R., Reisigl, M., & Liebhart, K. (1999). *The discursive construction of national identity*. Edinburgh, United Kingdom: Edinburgh University Press.

Wodak, R. & Ludwig, C. Ed. (1999). *Challenges in a changing world: issues in critical discourse analysis*. Vienna: Passagenverlag.

Wodak, R., Nowak, P., Pelikan, J., Gruber, H., de Cillia, R., & Mitten, R. (1990). “Wir sind alle unschuldige Täter”. Diskurshistorische Studien zum Nachkriegsantisemitismus (“We are all innocent perpetrators” Discourse-historical studies in post war antisemitism). Frankfurt/Main: Suhrkamp.

Wodak, R. & Van Dijk, T. A. Eds. (2000). *Racism at the top*. Klagenfurt: Drava Verlag.