Linguistic Components in the African Novel: a Re-Examination of Gracy Osifo's *The Dizzy Angel*

Anakoro Canice Ihentuge

Abstract
This investigation centres on linguistic components and stylistic preferences in *Grace Osiifo's Dizzy Angel*. It probes how language is exploited to demonstrate cultural identity in the African novel. Its general aim is to explore the role of language in depicting cultural norms, identity and gender. Anchored in a methodology that scrutinises the bond between the linguistic contents of African and European forms, it adopts a framework combining Stylistic technique with Postcolonial Literary Theory and elements of Sociolinguistics. Stylistics is required for text-level analysis covering the author's choices and their effect on the reader. Postcolonial Literary Theory, especially the "*writing back"* analytical frame, covers context-level analysis. The third analytical frame is Sociolinguistics. The rationale for this procedural hybridity centres on study objectives including, to: i) identify samples of African orature components in the narrative dialogue; ii) discuss the interplay of Standard English with native language patterns in form, diction, syntax and code-switching versus the narrative style; and iii) assess rhetorical and stylistic devices, illustrating character relationships and cultural norms. The findings show that *The Dizzy Angel* uses simple, straightforward language to reflect the intricacies of Igbo cultural identity and the pressures of its fusion with foreign elements. The investigation concludes that the narrative linguistic mode supports the novel's success by depicting the confusing landscape of feminist principles in a post-colonial African setting, using Igbo traditional society as its prototype.

Keywords: The African novel, *The Dizzy Angel*, hybridity, linguistic components, cultural identity.

Introduction:

From its inception, the African novel has been a powerful tool for connecting ideas with practical experiences in society. This has manifested in the genre's use of man's culture, especially as it traditionally reflects the wider socio-linguistic milieu. Each African author has communicated compelling experiences of the continent. The colonial language (English, French, or any other) is used to communicate shared cultural norms, native thought patterns, and the socio-economic and political realities of the people. This intermingling of native African and foreign European cultural components, particularly language, is evident. It resulted in a stylistic hybridisation often apparent in modern African literary tradition. Thus, most novelists view language as an important device for steering cultural apprehensions involving traditional African ideals and the incursions of modern ideas.

Notably, the selected novel, Grace Osifo's *The Dizzy Angel* (1985), is a major contribution to the tradition of linguistic and cultural blending. It presents a unique combination of English and Nigerian linguistic shades to tell the story of Ogbanje Agu. This young girl navigates her teenage anxieties, mystical identity and the constraints of Southern Nigerian socio-cultural customs. The narrative presents an appealing, comprehensible language that captures the inner emotional background of the characters in addition to the wider Igbo folkloric situations. This backdrop of cultural anxieties reveals the dilemma of traditional belief amid the Christian belief structure. Current studies have concentrated on feminist arguments and the ideological ambivalence that follow from these tensions, while overlooking the need to closely scrutinise how specific linguistic features in the novel shape the text's intricate preoccupations.

The study aims to explore how language conveys cultural norms, identity, and gender in the novel. However, the specific objectives of the study are to: i) identify some samples of African oral traditional features in the dialogue and narrative of *The Dizzy Angel*; ii) discuss how the interplay of Standard English with native language patterns in form, diction, syntax and code-switching influences the narrative style; iii) assess how rhetorical and stylistic devices illustrate character relationships and cultural norms, highlighting or subverting feminist ideologies in the novel; and iv) evaluate these components as the essential means for unlocking the fuller meaning of the narrative's thematic pre-occupations. The study's textual scope is limited to Grace Osifo's *The Dizzy Angel*, a novel selected for its robust coverage of African oral mechanisms (myths, proverbs, folksongs) in addition to numerous rhetorical devices/components. The narrative style shows evidence of the interplay of native and foreign linguistic clashes.

Review of Relevant Literature

African novelists have continued to exploit English to reflect various situations. Thus, the language has served, among other things, as a cultural mantra. With its buoyancy in presenting native linguistic and cultural forms, the novel *The Dizzy Angel* (1985) mingles these structures with English linguistic forms. This stylistic creation offers rare opportunities for critical analysis through phonology, lexicon, or graphology; the novel dwells on the *ogbanje* experience in addition to female empowerment. Literary historians believe that African writers have long adapted English to present their unique cultural perspectives. This process often resulted in the rise of the "New Englishes" initiative (Schmied p. 157). Achebe's novels and the broader view of Africanising English have helped to wrestle against the Eurocentric version of the African experience. It is indispensable for this investigation as his (Achebe's) procedures, such as direct translation of proverbs, become precedent for later writers (Jowitt 106). Modern African novels also include works by other writers, such as Akachi Adimora-Ezeigbo, who employ methods from oral traditional folk narratives that passed stories among multiple participants, creating a "translational" style (Nwaiwu cited in Awa 2015 pp. 105).

From its inception, the African novel has been shaped by tensions between native African traditions and foreign European sentiments. The main struggles are largely between Christianity and the African traditional outlook. Some scholars argue that analysis of the genre is incomplete when this trend is not fully considered. *The Dizzy Angel* is a narrative with much evidence of these religious and supernatural struggles. Specific linguistic structures have aided the exploration of the dialogue between Christianity and traditional faith. This takes the form of rhetorical devices or lexical fields, as shown in the novel's construction of a "new" African personality.

Other markers of character and identity were highlighted through the use of local "isms" such as Tivisms and Nigerian Pidgin. Adichie's treatise on the language front adds to critical interest in linguistic features, manifesting in studies of lexical repetition, italics, capitalisation, dashes, and other fundamental features aligned with descriptive voice and emotive depth in her novels (Orakwue pp. 45-48, 62). The analysis also examines the novel's roots in Igbo society, including dynamics such as proverbs, folklore, and myths. Notably, the *ogbanje* concept signifies "a reincarnating child", showing the role of orature in the novel. Christopher Okonkwo has extended the vista of the Ogbanje myth in a "compelling case [of] absence in extant scholarship" (p. 5). He links the history of "Ogbañje/the Born-to-Die's appearance in African American texts to a convergence of factors" (p. 4), including: the impact of Chinua Achebe's *Things Fall Apart*; the 1960s emergence of the contemporary neo-slave narrative; the 1960s and 1970s black consciousness/Black Power movement and the cultural agenda, gendered politics, and centripetal philosophy of the Black Arts movement's nationalist aesthetic; African American identity questions of the post-civil rights and the

multicultural eras; and the thematic shifts, as well as the African diaspora orientation of African American fiction of the post-nationalist aesthetic period.

Several studies on the novel emphasise its ideological questions. However, some scholars have pointed out a divide between its feminist aspirations and its outcome, thus creating a potential opportunity for linguistic inquiry into how this "ambivalence" is implicit in the linguistic factor. Some scholars insist that *The Dizzy Angel* does not present a clear-cut campaign for women's emancipation. One reading notes that throughout the narrative, "strong female characters are either dead or silenced by tradition" (Agboola pp. 1–10). It is argued that this thematic question is traceable to linguistic preferences and character models.

Consequent upon the foregoing review, there are some discernible research gaps in connection with the linguistic elements in the novel. This does not diminish the significant work done on thematic concerns such as cultural hybridism, feminist principles, or the fundamental Ogbanje premise that defines the centrality of supernatural power in the text. Thus, the main current of analytical interest in the novel is either feminist or sociological, underscoring the need for greater stylistic focus. There is also a need for universal inquiries that should bridge the gaps amid thematic "ambivalence" and aligned linguistic expression. Such studies should expose the syntax, diction and other contributory features of the narrative idiom and its meaning. This investigation aims to address this gap through an in-depth stylistic analysis of the novel's linguistic elements.

Empirical Review

Numerous critical investigations have examined *Osifo's The Dizzy Angel* (1985). These include Olubunmi Tayo Agboola **(**pp. 1–10**)**, Madubuchi D. Nwachukwu, and Nkechinyere Chukwu **(**pp. 169-179). Some of these scholars anchored their studies on cultural or sociological paradigms. Some studies are based on feminist propaganda, while others dwell on the dialogue and tensions between Christianity and traditional faith. This empirical review focuses on available literature on the novel's stylistic preferences, linguistic elements, and thematic preoccupations. It examines studies that focus on how linguistic elements like proverbs are used to discuss cultural identity and feminist principles. Some critics, Chikwenye Okonjo Ogunyemi (pp. 21-25**)**, Florence Stratton (pp. 88-92**)**, and Helen Chukwuma (pp. 1-15), classify Gracy Osifo among those Nigerian women writers who exploit narrative strategies like proverbs, myths, songs, dialogues and repetitions in their works to generate a typical feminist voice. These strategies are attributed to the Ifo (Igbo oral tales). Hence, the novel *The Dizzy Angel* is known for its loaded amalgamation of youthful anguish associated with Igbo oral traditional narratives.

Again, many critics (Agboola pp. 2–3, Madu 2015, p. 4) have worked on *The Dizzy Angel*, pointing to linguistic preferences that suggest an ideological tension between Christianity and traditional faith. The tension is played out in the clash of interests between the heroine's Western education and the traditional demands of a juju priest betrothal. In the long run, an "ideological ambivalence" manifests as the patriarchal cultural idiom inhibits the linguistic depiction of female empowerment. The creation of Ogbanje Agu as a character in the novel becomes a channel through which Christianity and traditional practices are critically assessed.

Nigerian literary linguistic scholarship has always stressed functionality rather than the decorative nature of language. Language must serve the goal of creating meaning. These scholars including Chinua Achebe in *Things Fall Apart* (1958) and his essay 'The African Writer and the English Language' (1965 pp. 27-30), Gabriel Okara in *The Voice* (1964 pp. 25-26), Ayo Bamgbose in *Language and Style in Soyinka's Plays* (1983 p. 105) along with several others like Funso Aiyejina

(1990 pp. 257-270), solidified the idea that English must be bent to carry the weight of African experience. Some often read English as a means of modernising native issues and situations. Consequently, the "Africanisation" of English became a necessary and central premise among this class of scholars in the analyses of Nigerian literature. This domestication of English used oral traditional narrative strategies like idioms, code-switching, and proverbs to bridge the gap between English and the indigenous socio-cultural contexts it encountered in Africa.

By and large, current scholarship validates that Osifo's *The Dizzy Angel is* an important text in Nigerian literary production, where "hybridized" English is used to investigate feminist concerns. Nevertheless, there is an acknowledged need for more targeted inquiries into the precise stylistic, morphological, syntactic, and other innovations in Osifo's *The Dizzy Angel* that show her linguistic agility and its place as a bridge between oral traditional elements and modern sentiments in the Nigerian novel.

Theoretical Framework

The framework adopted for this study blends stylistic technique with Postcolonial Literary Theory and elements of Sociolinguistics. Stylistics is required to contain text-level analysis. It examines the author's choices and how they affect the reader. In analysing *The Dizzy Angel*, this analytical mode will be applied to scrutinise how linguistic elements are maneuvered to mirror the socio-economic, emotional and philosophical circumstances under which the characters operate. The role of linguistic factors and their analysis is to uncover the underlying mood created by their interface for the characters. The second analytical frame is Postcolonial Literary Theory, especially "*writing back*". It is vital as a context-level analysis. This frame is advocated by the theorists Ashcroft, Bill, Gareth Griffiths, and Helen Tiffin (2002/2007, pp. 164–168). The theory argues that African writers "appropriate", or *take over*, the English language and "abrogate", or *abolish*, Standard English usage, signifying the authentication of various "Englishes", or *varieties* of English, to suit their particular African experiences or *contexts*. With the integration of components of Nigerian Pidgin, proverbs, vernacular phrases, and other modes of idiomatic expression attributed to Nigerian culture into *The Dizzy Angel*, an English prose, a conscious domestication or Africanisation takes place within the space provided by the novel. The author thus generates a unique linguistic identity through her indigenisation and Nigerianisation efforts.

Finally, the third analytical frame is Sociolinguistics. It is also vital to intermingle elements of Sociolinguistics into the broad spectrum of this study framework. Known as the SFL, this frame is attributed to its pioneer theorist, Michael Halliday (1961 pp. 241–292; 1985). The SFL sees language as a social semiotic system. It is a store for generating meaning. Again, it centres on three metafunctions: i.) Ideational Function: This shows how language characterises experience (for instance, how the setting is depicted); ii.) Interpersonal Function: This shows how language defines relationships (for instance, in a dialogue between characters marked by generation gaps or genders in a narrative); and iii.) Textual Function: This shows how the text is structured. Other components that may be part of the frame are captured from the thematic perspective. These include African feminism or the ideological element of the analysis. A linguistic analysis of the novel *The Dizzy Angel* would be incomplete without integrating the gender question. This would add to the know-how of precise language *antics* (how dialogue and narrative voice) sustain or weaken patriarchal formations.

In a nutshell, the framework of the study would consider these linguistic components in *The Dizzy Angel*: a) the exploitation of indigenous expressions, capitalisation or exceptional punctuation as cultural design or emphasis; b) the effects of native linguistic forms on English expression/ sentence format (as in straight-forward translation of idioms into English); c) the employment of songs,

proverbs, metaphors and folktales to mirror the socio-cultural environment of the characters; and d) distinguishing between the speech prototypes of female and male characters as markers of power dynamics in dialogue models. The rationale for this hybridity in the study procedure centres on the study objectives. Moreover, the effects of native linguistic forms on English stress the special place these local forms have in the text.

Methodology

This study adopts a qualitative, descriptive research design based on literary stylistics. It focuses on how linguistic constituents such as word choice, sentence structure, and native-language interference shape the novel's thematic issues of gender interface and cultural repression. The study relies on close reading and analysis of the textual, linguistic, and stylistic features in *The Dizzy Angel*, the primary data source. Materials were purposively sampled, as precise chapters, expressions, passages, and conversations were identified and selected based on their relevance. These materials were verified for suitability in illustrating the incidence of African oral tradition elements (songs, proverbs, metaphors, and so forth); as samples of African English (their nativisation or domestication status); or as representations of women's voice or other forms of gendered language. The study draws its secondary data from assorted peer-reviewed journals and texts of literary criticism, including several books on linguistic theories and African literature. The method seeks to ascertain the connection between the narrative's ideological themes and the novelist's linguistic choices.

Analysis of Linguistic Components in Osifo's *The Dizzy Angel*

The narrative *The Dizzy Angel* employs a mixture of formal English, Nigerian Pidgin, and local idioms to represent the political, socio-cultural and gendered circumstances in Nigeria. Analysing its linguistic components entails considering the stylistic, syntactic, and lexical choices made by the novelist. At the heart of this analysis, therefore, is scrutiny of cultural nuances (translation/transliteration), idiomatic expressions, and narrative voice, as well as the connection between language and feminist principles, since these components shape the narrative's stylistic impact.

In the narrative, One finds specific words like "customs", "tradition", "oppression", and "emancipation". These words appear most frequently in the opening chapters of the novel, where the family deliberates the heroine's future. Notably, they generate a mood of apprehension. They reflect the profound tension involving Westernised contemporary principles and traditional cultural conventions. Hence, they underscore the novel's ideological framework by creating a "dizzying" ambiguity in the lives of female characters, especially the protagonist. They emphasise the anxiety between new Eurocentric ideas and established African cultural codes.

The narrative also intermingles Standard English and Nigerian Pidgin. This reflects the characters' social classification as well as the locale. The eminent, formal speech of educated characters is presented in Standard English, while others use Pidgin in marketplaces or for other informal conversations. This also reflects a divide within the society. It stresses the inequality involving the educated elite and the common people. It also serves as a vivid mirror of the Nigerian situation.

It is vital to look further at materials that signify these syntactic structures and narrative techniques in the novel. This entails a close assessment of sentence construction, with punctuation marking tone and pacing. Syntax in the narrative, as earlier indicated, often mirrors the characters' cultural and educational backgrounds. Frequently, this ranges from those who attained formal education and can use English to the sparsely schooled who use colloquial pidgin.

Syntactic constructions include simple sentence patterns with local color. This is generally applied to stress traditional beliefs. In the narrative, this sentence format is used in relation to the character of Ogbanje Agu. Consider this example: "Ogbanje Agu is destined to torture her parents by her constant coming and going" (p. 10). Another shade of sentence patterns is the narrative or descriptive model. In *The Dizzy Angel*, a careful reader frequently comes across long sentences recounting the supernatural episodes. These descriptions also mingle with brief, abrupt sentences, especially when relating the disappointment of Ogbanje's parents (cf. p. 75). There are also the *pidginated* and *colloquial* sentence formats, often found in oracular divination episodes (pp. 30–50). The following expression reveals the oracular representative's assurance: "She no go die again". These sentences and dialogues also underline the apprehension between modern sentiments and tradition, particularly the conflict between Christianity and traditional beliefs.

In terms of narrative technique, in *The Dizzy Angel*, the author mingles traditional third-person storytelling with varied shades of cultural dialogue. The novel's key narrative model remains third-person omniscient narration. Through this *Eye-of-God* technique, the narrator knows the feelings, thoughts and actions of everyone in the Bebiri village. This technique also allows the narrator to account for the supernatural elements behind the protagonist's circumstances.

The oracular representative frequently predicts events and people's conditions. These are conveyed by expressions that mingle within the traditional third-person storytelling mode as shades of the wider cultural dialogue. Among other things, the oracular predictions also confirm that the oral tradition method, and especially the folklore mode, shows that the novel remains a story structured around the cultural narrative of an *Ogbanje*.

Another import of the narrative technique is the creation of characters through conversation. As a result, the method is dramatic. For instance, through direct speeches, the narrator exposes the cultural dilemma of the father's longing for formal Western education amid the villagers' bent toward fulfilling their traditional, superstitious beliefs (pp. 200-210). Suspense is at the heart of the entire story. The anxiety, confusion, and ominous twists built around Ogbanje's life and future spiral into her plan for survival, culminating in her eventual escape on her wedding day (pp. 150-160). In the long run, the narrative structure remains ambiguous in its propagation **of** female characters' progress and freedom through education (modernisation) amid the perceived oppressive role of traditional cultural norms of the patriarchal society. From the outset, the female character is presented as promising and able to subvert traditional cultural norms. However, she dies, or bends and conforms, to patriarchal norms (p. 250).

The centrality of Igbo folklore in Osifo's *The Dizzy Angel* (1985) is not in question—the novel centers on the *ogbanje* (revenant child) phenomenon. The novel is thus loaded with Nigerian traditional social norms and religious beliefs, cultural idioms, and transliterated words and expressions. The following is a brief list of samples from the novel.

"Olokun Priest" – This means a priest of the water spirit/goddess.

"An Ogbanje Agu" – Meaning a recurring, wandering child.

"The child has come again" – This is a direct translation of the perception of a new child being the same deceased child.

"To take a bride/runaway bride" – This captures the context of the arranged marriage conflict with the juju priest.

Other samples reflect traditional cultural contexts. Moreover, they attest to Osifo's style of integrating English into the Igbo milieu, thereby generating an exclusively Nigerian literary aura. The "Bebiri" village setting conveys the idea that traditional rites and other community standards are

meticulously followed. Another instance is the dilemma posed by Western education. Father Ogbanje's obstinacy represents this. It is seen in his sending her to a grammar school regardless of her "betrothal" to the juju priest. It also shows the collision of traditionalism with modernity. Several incidents of Ogbanje's fainting fits are shown as a physical demonstration of her spiritual tension that places her at variance with local tradition.

More samples of cultural transliteration involve transformation from Igbo to English. They are direct translations of cultural concepts. This is where the character or thinker's frame of thought remains Nigerian. He merely uses English words. "Let us go and see the Oracle" is a case in point. Frequently used in the early chapters of *The Dizzy Angel*, it means consulting traditional deities for intervention or guidance. Another sample is: "If you continue to do this, you will have no place to hide your face". This is a general cultural warning to avoid doing something that ends in disgrace. "They are bringing me to this world to suffer" is another way of recalling the persistent birth and death cycle of an *ogbanje*. "When you die, you will tell them that you are not one of them"; this sarcastically instructs the *ogbanje* to rebuff her spiritual associates. "She is an evil child" captures the perception of an *ogbanje* who unleashes torture on parents. This view is common on pages 1-5 of the novel.

Gracy Osifo's 1985 Young Adult novel *The Dizzy Angel* blends Igbo folklore with themes of tradition and education, using accessible language to explore the life of an *ogbanje* child, as noted in analyses of the work. The narrative is characterised by cultural hybridity, featuring a mix of traditional and Western terminology, alongside a dramatic, often ironic, tone, according to critical reviews. Key elements highlighting this style include the focus on supernaturalism in the opening, the portrayal of conflict through ironic character presentation, and the tension between traditional and modern settings.

Conclusion:

Gracy Osifo's novel *The Dizzy Angel* (1985) explores the unique blend of English and Nigerian linguistic shades to tell the story of Ogbanje Agu. This young girl navigates her teenage anxieties, mystical identity and the constraints of Southern Nigerian socio-cultural customs. The narrative presents an appealing, comprehensible language that captures the inner emotional background of the characters in addition to the wider Igbo folkloric situation. This backdrop of cultural anxieties reveals the dilemma of traditional belief amid the Christian belief structure. Different critical efforts seem to focus on feminist arguments and the ideological ambivalence that follows, while overlooking the need to closely examine how specific linguistic features in the novel shape these complex preoccupations. Having analysed these features in detail, the investigation reveals that the novel uses simple, straightforward language to reflect the intricacies of Igbo cultural identity, as well as the pressures of its fusion with various foreign elements. The simple, direct language depicts physical decline, as in Ogbanje's feeling of extreme weakness (p. 256), which intensifies the narrative's anxiety. This ease of access through its simple language, however, does not obscure the complex philosophical questions and discourses on matrimonial choices, polygamy, feminine enlightenment, and partial empowerment. It integrates formal discussion into an informal narration; for instance, the conversation that underscores the dilemma of religious verbosity and choice (pp. 190-91). The conversation reveals that the inflexible Christian doctrine operates as a "patriarchal and separatist" influence and frequently associates non-Christian marriage with "darkness". Thus, the investigation concludes that the linguistic mode in *The Dizzy Angel* facilitates its success as a novel. Moreover, the linguistic technique provides the novel an avenue to depict the confusing landscape of feminist principles in a post-colonial African setting, using the Igbo traditional society as its prototype. In this vein, the narrative uses Southern Nigerian (Igbo) related expressions and idioms to

project its cultural colour and depth. This is achieved through code-switching, transliteration and many other linguistic strategies like proverbs and rhetorical questions.

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