

# CONTENTS/ ODIGASINIME

<b>Editorial/</b>	
The Igbo World in Transition: Problems and Challenges	1
<b>Articles/Edemede</b>	
Maurice Iwu/The State of Studies in Igbo Pharmacology and Therapy.	45
<b>Texts and Records/</b>	
Chukwuma Azuonye/The Romantic Epic of the Anambra Igbo: An Introductory Survey.	4
Obiọra Udechukwu/Further Notes on the Epics of <i>Ameke Okoyè</i> and <i>Ozọmèné Ndive</i> .	17
Isidore Okpewho/ <i>Ezèmu</i> : A Heroic Narrative from Ubulu-Uño, Bendel State	70
Chukwuma Azuonye and Obiọra Udechukwu/Enu-Nyiji-Mbà: An Episode from the <i>Ameke Okoye</i> Epic as Performed by Jevzeizu Okaarọ of Aguleri.	20
Obiọra Udechukwu/Ogwùgwà Aja Iyíazí, Nri 1984 A Photographic Record in Colour.	55
Sam Uzochukwu/ <i>Mbèm Akwamozu</i> : Two Funeral Chants from Lọlọ Chinyereude of Qsuhiteukwa.	66
<b>Poetry/Abụ</b>	
John Umeh/Qbọ'gụ (A Poem)	44
Chieka Ifemesia/Odogwu Dikè (A Poem)	43
Amanze Onyechefuna/Abụ Abụọ (Two Poems)	86
Catherine Acholọnu/Ndị Qchịchị (A Poem)	42
G.O. Onyekaonwu/Abụ Iri nà Abụọ (Twelve Poems)	61
<b>Fiction/Akụkọ Nràrọ</b>	
Chibiko Okebalama/Aka Nsi (A Short Story)	53
<b>Notes and Queries</b>	
Kay Williamson/A Note on the Word <i>Bèkèè</i>	102
Obieze Ogbo/Saving the Igbo Language	103
<b>News and Report</b>	
Films on the Igbo Presence in Barbados and Haiti (correspondence from Ms Elaine Fido Savory)	105
<b>Review Article</b>	
E. 'Nolue Emenanjo/After the Blackout: Editorial and Linguistic Problems in <i>Aka Weta</i> .	89
Chinua Achebe/Editorial and Linguistic Problems in <i>Aka Weta</i> : A Comment	94
<b>Book Reviews</b>	
Ebo Ubahakwe/Mbaise-nizing the Literary Standard Igbo (P.A. Nwachukwu (ed.), <i>Readings on the Igbo Verb</i> and P.A. Nwachukwu, <i>Towards an Igbo Literary Standard</i> ).	87
Dan Izevbaye/In Achebe's World (Robert Wren, <i>Achebe's World</i> ).	98
G.D. Killam/In Achebe's World	100

P.A. Oguagha/Studies in Igbo History and Culture (a.E. Afigbo, <i>Ropes of Sand: Studies in Igbo History and Culture</i> ).	96
<b>Notes on Contributors</b>	106

## E. 'Nolue EMENANJO

### AFTER THE BLACKOUT: EDITORIAL AND LINGUISTIC PROBLEMS IN AKA WETA\*

N'ime ntakiri akwukwo a bu *Aka Weta*, Chinua Achebe na Obiọra Udechukwu 'wekotara' abụ na egwu Igbo di iche iche, ma ndi 'aguluagu' ma ndi 'edeluede'. Akwukwo a bara uru nke ukwu, kama na lbe mebiru ya bu na e dezimaghị otutu n'ime abụ na egwu ndi ewekotara n'ime ya nke oma di ka esi chọọ ya n'Otografị Igbo enwere ugbu a.

AKA WETA is an interesting anthology of forty verse-like verbal art forms which the 'collectors', Chinua Achebe and Obiọra Udechukwu, call 'egwu'. The book is divided into two parts: Part I is for the sung/chanted pieces, 'a gulu agu' and Part II for the 'written' ones 'e delu ede'. In Part I will be found four excerpts from Ezigbo Obiligbo, one from Okonkwo Asaa (Seven-Seven), and four Abigbo ones from different parts of Mbaise. There is, also, in this part one excerpt from Kalu Igrigiri rendered in Ohafia. In Part II, there are two pieces each from C. Achebe, C. Aniakor, O. Enekwe, K. Uka and J.A. Umeh; three each from O. Agu, C. Azuonye, A. Onyechefuna, O. Udechukwu and four each from E. Chimezie and N. Nkala.

But before we continue, we think it is necessary for us to dispose of two issues which are central to the *raison d'être* of AKA WETA:

- (i) what is the in-put of Achebe and Udechukwu into text?
- (ii) what does the word 'egwu mean in this text?

With regard to (i), 'wekotala' suggests that Achebe and Udechukwu have done no more than 'collect' the forms — including their own. For sure, if Achebe and Udechukwu had edited the work, in addition, a number of glaring inconsistencies, at least, in spelling, which meet one on almost every page of the work would have been picked out. It does appear, that Achebe and Udechukwu merely put the works together without any editing and got them printed under the Okike imprint. So, Achebe and Udechukwu collated the poems, and with the help of Ogona Agu, wrote the very interesting *Mbido Okwu*, i.e. Introduction or Preface, call it what you like. But the credit, as we are told, for the transcription of some of the Ezigbo Obiligbo 'egwu' goes to R. Chijioke Okafor. The credit for transcribing the Abigbo pieces goes to D. Ibe Nwoga, while C. Azuonye has the credit for the Kaalu Igrigiri piece. By a simple logic of deduction, therefore, it is Achebe and Udechukwu who are to be credited with the

transcription of some of the Obiligbo, and the Okonkwo Asaa pieces. Now that it is clear who did what in *AKA WETA*, we can not only say how badly or how well they have fared in their self-imposed ventures but apportion blames accordingly. It is necessary to mention for now, and in passing, that the Kalu Igrigiri piece appears to be the best transcribed and the only one fully but economically tone-marked, reflecting current spelling practices<sup>3</sup> in the literary Igbo of today. The reason for this is not too far to seek. Azuonye, the transcriber, is a scholar-critic trained in stylistics, and teaches Igbo literature and stylistics at the University of Ibadan. The second question we intend to dispose of touches on the question of taxonomy. Are the forms in *AKA WETA* *egwu* or *abụ*? Are *egwu* and *abụ* synonymous or two different art forms? The definition or explanation given by Achebe and Udechukwu about *egwu* on p.6 suggests that for the collectors *egwu* and *abụ* are one and the same thing:

Egwu aburo so ife nkili, ife iji kpa amu, ife iji nwe afuli, ife e ji atụ ndu mmanu. A na-amuta n'egwu maka na ndi egwu bu ndi amuma, ndi ji anya nka enejelu echi. Fa na-enedalụ anya ani na-afu ife na-eme n'obodo, tumadụ nsogbu na ajo ife ga-adochigha obodo azu maka ndi kwulu okwu si na o diji mmili mma, o diji azu'.

A free but fair translation of this would read something like this:

Egwu is not only something to watch, something that is used for joking, something that gives joy and happiness, something for oiling human nerves. People learn something from poetry because poets are prophets, people who use the eyes of art to see deep into tomorrow. They are very perceptive people who observe the goings on in the society, more especially the problems and other negative forces that pull a society back because there is an adage that fish are as good as the river they are in.

I have tried in this translation to bring out the multiple synonymity that the word *egwu* has in Igbo. Depending on the context, the dialect and the verb with which it collocates *egwu* can mean dance, spectacle, drama, play, entertainment, song, verse, chant, and poetry. For sure, Ezigbo Obiligbo, Okonkwo Asaa and Abigbo are, first and foremost, dances or dance troupe or some sort of orchestras, which provide spectacle, laughter and joy to the onlookers. But these dances are also accompanied by songs which are also called *egwu* — which may or may not be poetry. Okonkwo Asaa's "Josefu and Bulaki" may be a good song with its accompanying orchestration. But I find the language of the piece too staccato to be poetry. Kaalu Igrigiri is a different kettle of fish from the other pieces in Part I. It is a chant where the others are plain songs. It is a solo-performance by a master-chanter performing to the dexterous accompaniment of the Ohafia War Dance drums and rattles.

All the pieces in Part II were conceived by their authors as verse or poetry, not dance. Although the language of most of them is lyrical, and their styles and antiphonal

\*Chinua Achebe and Obiọra Udechukwu (eds.), *Aka Weta: Egwu Aguluagu, Egwu edeluede*. Nsukka: Okike Magazine, 1982.

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structures (notice the choruses) are reminiscent of traditional, especially children's songs, and songs found in folktales,<sup>1</sup> it does not appear that their authors meant them to be sung or as songs. *Egwu* in Igbo has a wide semantic field. Achebe and Udechukwu appear, therefore, to have stuck to this pristine, etymological but ambiguous meaning of the word. *Egwu* means dance and spectacle as well as verse. But even at that *egwu* and *abu* are two different things as Egudu and Nwoga (1971)<sup>2</sup> Ugonna (1979)<sup>3</sup> and Madubi (1981) have shown. Madubi puts it thus: 'Abụ Igbo na Egwu Igbo yiri ma na ... Abụ na Egwu abughị otu' (Igbo Poetry and Igbo Music/dance resemble each other (but... poetry and music are not the same thing.)

A word may be necessary on the division of the content of the book into two parts: a *gulu agu* (sung ones) and *e delu ede* (written ones). A *gulu agu* suggests that the pieces exist mainly or principally in the spoken medium. The editors are ingenious in this approach. For whereas a *gulu agu* suggests the medium, it does not suggest that the forms belong to traditional literature as in the forms edited by Egudu and Nwoga (1971), Ugonna (1979) and Ogbalu (1974, 1975)<sup>5</sup>. Historically, Abigbo, Ezigbo Obligbo and Okonkwo Asaa are recent musical developments and the songs from them appear too close in time to qualify as traditional literature. Perhaps Kaaḷu Igirigiri's piece is the only one with a long history behind it and can, therefore, be regarded as traditional or oral literature!<sup>6</sup> But one thing common to all of the *a gulu agu* pieces is that they exist, as of now, in the spoken medium in contradistinction to the pieces in Part II which exist first and foremost in the written medium. Ingenious and appropriate as a *gulu agu* may be for the purposes of *AKA WETA*, it does raise a problem for a good number of apparently verse-like pieces and songs which now exist only in the spoken or sung medium. What of the many ballad-like pieces from musicians like Mike Ejeagha, Show Promoter, Area Scatter? Do these qualify as poetry? What of the thousand and one songs, both secular and sacred which now exist only orally, played by our many Igbo dance bands and gospel/evangelical groups? Are these simply a *gulu agu* or poetry? And, as a *gulu agu* are they simply *egwu* (which they are) or poetry which they could also be?

*AKA WETA* is a very bold anthology, indeed. In the subjects covered, its contents touch on practically all aspects of human life, contemporary and past. In this regard, it satisfies one part of one definition of literature in general and poetry in particular which is that it deals with 'what oft was thought'. But do the contents of *AKA WETA* live up to the other half of the definition of poetry as 'ne'er so well expressed'?

In folklore, repetition is a very recurrent method of expression. Repetition — ideational, structural, phonological<sup>7</sup> etc — can be found as a feature of verbal art in most of the pieces in *AKA WETA*. But one artist who uses it very effectively is Emeka Chimezie. And in 'Akwa M Na-ebere Princess Alexandria Auditorium', he reaches

the highest water-mark of his creative abilities — and the capabilities of the tonal Igbo language in his effective manipulation of alliteration, assonance and word-play in lines such as:

- (1) Haa ya aka, ya adaa gworogodom! kukaṣia  
Noro na Nsuka sọ kaka kaka kaka sukasia
- (2) O bere akwa bekuru Gowaanụ, Gowaanụ asi ya  
gawanu  
O bekuru Murtala, Murtala asi ya I mütala  
I mütala na i bu nwanji di kpọrọ ugwu, I  
mütala?
- (3) O beekwa akwa bekuru Obasanjo, uwa akara  
ya njo  
"Olusegun nyem ego!" Olusegun asi, ana m  
enye gi ego  
Abu m olisiego? Aha m bu Olusegun, abughị  
m olisiego  
Ugbu a, o shigara ka ishi ewu n'ihu Shehu  
Eshigaghari, ahashagharị n'ihu Shagari  
Echeteobjadimma ya bu F.N. Ndiñi  
Ndiñi si ya na o ga-adilili  
Ndiñi si ya dibe, dibe, ndidi, ndidi ka mma  
Onye o biara ya dibe dii dii dii dii dii  
Na ndidi nwe mmeri na ndidi bu nne mmeri

Whatever one may have to say about poetry in the written medium it is meant to be read out. But whether or not we do not read the excerpts above aloud, we cannot fail to hear and recognise the play on /s/ and /k/ sounds and on the syllables *suka* in (1). In (2), the play on the words Gowan and Gawanu; murtala and (I) mütala are too clear to warrant any explanation. In (3) the play on Olusegun and Olisiego and on Shigara and Shagari are dexterous manipulations by an artist who has an ear for the sounds of human language. In (4) the play on words is on *Ndiñi, adilili, ndidi* and the ideophones *dii dii, dii, dii dii!* Anybody who has had the experience of watching and listening to Chimezie perform his works cannot but appreciate the point that much that cannot be brought out by cold print comes to life when poems are read out, aloud.

*AKA WETA* would have been a better and more easily read work if it has been better edited. Really very little editing seems to have been done on this work. For how else can one account for the thousand and one inconsistencies which one finds on practically every line of every page of the work. There are inconsistencies in the areas of:

- (a) spelling the syllabic nasal:  
Should we have *nkpū* instead of *mkpu* (p.10)  
*nkpukpo* instead of *mkpukpo* (p.37)  
and *nkpōnanj* instead of *mkpōnaani* (p.73)
- (b) word division:  
*oyimuo* instead of *oyi mu o* (p.9)  
*akili-aki* instead of *akiliaki*  
*Egbenuoba* (p.37) instead of *Egbenu Oba*  
(p.38)  
*ya afu* instead of *ga-afu* (p.9)  
*umu-uwa* instead of *umu uwa* (p.9)

- umunwanyj* instead of *umu nwanynj*  
(p.16)
- akoodo* instead of *aka odo* (p.17)
- nchankota* instead of *ncha nkota* (p.17)
- udeaku* instead of *ude aku* (p.12)
- ala-na-azụ nwa* instead of *ala na-azụ nwa*  
(p.11)
- di-na-nwunye* instead of *di na nwunye*  
(p.15)
- di-egbe* instead of *diegbe* (p.24)
- kilibekwe nu* instead of *kilibekwenu* (p.9)
- afugo kwe* instead of *afugokwe* (p.13)
- akanni* instead of *aka nni*  
*akaekpe* instead of *aka ekpe* (p.35)
- akunuuba* instead of *aku na uba* (p.36)
- (c) mixing up of dialect forms:  
on two lines of following each other: we  
find: *o ya-afu* and *(anyi) ga-afu ife* and  
*ive* on the same line 11 of p.13  
*we* and *ihe* (p.15)  
*nde* and *ndi* (pp.19-20)
- (d) unnecessary elision: *ya k'aguy* instead of *ya  
ka aguy* (p.9)  
*n'eje* instead of *na-eje* (p.10)  
*n'okwanj* instead of *nookwanj na o  
bukwanj* (p.10)  
*n'ekwu* instead of *na-ekwu* (p.15)  
*n'alu* instead of *na-alu* (p.15)  
*n'elu* instead of *na-elu* (p.16)  
*g'-eme* instead of *ga-eme* (p.16)  
*chi jil'eki efo* instead of *chi jili eji efo*  
*efo* (p.75)  
*chi fol'efo ejin'eki* instead of *chi folo efo  
ejina eji*
- (e) poor transcription in the bid to use underlying  
forms:  
*okwanj/ookwanj* instead of *o bukwanj  
Oduonye/Oduonye* instead of *O budu  
onye, Okwo/Ookwo* instead of *O bukwo*
- (f) use of surface forms resulting from coalescent  
assimilation<sup>8</sup>  
*nnie* instead of *nne ya* (pp. 9; 31)  
*egwue* instead of *egwu ya*  
*uni ya* instead of *unọ ya* (p.11)  
*die* instead of *di ya* (p.12)  
*nwunye ya* instead of *nwanynye ya* (p.13)  
*n'imie* instead of *n'ime ya* (p.15)
- (g) unpardonable inconsistencies:  
*nabo* (p.11) and *naabo naabe* (p.13)  
*Josef* and *Josefu* (p.15)  
*Ojya* and *Ofia* (p.24)

It is very painful indeed that the collectors of *AKA WETA* can afford to put out a work which is so disappointing in terms of editing. Only Lee Oruruo's *Ogiageli*<sup>9</sup> and Egudu and Nwoga's *Poetic Heritage*<sup>10</sup> match it in the poverty of the editorial work therein. The impression one gets from these works is that there are yet no agreed conventions for writing Igbo. And that is why these authors/editors/publishers have

done what they have done. Creative writing is an art. But editing is a science and an art and a craft and has to be done within the existing conventions in any given language. Igbo has been written since 1852. And since 1975, some sanity has been brought into written Igbo with the *Recommendations of the Igbo Standardisation Committee*, especially the Volume I of the series. If Okike intends to be relevant and to be taken seriously as a publisher of Igbo texts whether it be in its new 'magazine' *Uwa Ndi Igbo* or in follow-ups to *AKA WETA*, it just has to learn to present Igbo the way it is written now. Otherwise all the noble intentions and seriousness of purpose of Okike in halving out into Igbo publishing will not make the desired impact. Whether or not some people are prepared to admit it, a literary Standard Igbo (fluid as it may be to the non-initiate) now exists. And all authors should try to approximate to this model.

Whether *egwu* is song, music, dance or poetry is immaterial to the point that it is soon to be made. Whereas minimum tone marking is acceptable, where necessary, in prose texts, especially, in ambiguous places when apparent look-alikes are involved, with songs, verses, poems, proverbs — as in texts on grammar, tones have to be fully even though economically marked. It is immaterial what system an author, publisher or editor chooses to adopt. Whether it is the Green and Igwe one in which most people who have studied locally in Nigeria, have been brought up in or the Welmers and Welmers'<sup>12</sup> one (to which Dr. Nwachukwu is a partial convert)<sup>12</sup> — is immaterial provided there is a convention to explain it. But in any case, why should someone deviate from the system now in general use — the one employed by Azuonye and Chimezie and to a very simple but effective extent by Udechukwu on p.70, where *Ifè* (light) and *Ifè* (thing) are correctly tone-marked? Although one notices a few incorrectly marked grammatical tones in Azuonye and Chimezie, these authors have tried to do what should be done in transcribing or writing Igbo, poetry and verse.

At this juncture of talking about tone-marking, it is necessary to add that whatever may be the practice for spelling some words in prose narratives, such words need to be fully and correctly spelt in songs and poems to allow for meaningful tone-marking. Hence we should, for example, have:

- nwaanyi* instead of *nwanyni*
- ogbunigwe* instead of *ogbunigwe* (pp.43-4)
- niine* instead of *nine*
- Nkeirā* instead of *Nkiru* (pp.18-20)

By the nature of the Igbo language used, *AKA WETA* raises a number of issues. 'Mbido Okwu' of the book is written in a variety of Igbo which is radically different from that usually found in available texts. There is no reason for this unnecessary deviation.

All the pieces in Part I are in dialects. This is quite in order for it would be preposterous to reduce them

to the straight-jacket that is Standard Igbo. Egudu and Nwoga (1971:6-7) have beautifully argued this case. Writing or transcribing in dialects, however, presupposes that the transcriber knows the phonemes and the distinctive phonological features of the dialect he is transcribing from. Anyone who is conversant with the phonology of Mbaise dialects<sup>13</sup> as of most other Central Igbo dialects readily knows that nasalization and aspiration are distinctive in these dialects. And yet these are not marked in all the Abigbo pieces. Again, Mbaise has a nasalized and bilabialized glottal fricative /hw/ but not as aspirated bilabial approximant /wh/ if ever such a phoneme exists! Thus the words transcribed as *we*, *awha*, *whu* (p.20) and *iwhere* (p.21) should have been more correctly transcribed *hwe*, *ahwa*, *hwu* and *ihwere*.

In the *e delu ede* pieces, Chimezie, who read Igbo formally and Azuonye who teaches Igbo literature, have done what is expected of people writing for the general public. The deliberate and ill-motivated attempts of the others to write in dialects<sup>24</sup> is not only an attempt to set back the fast-moving hand of the clock of Standard Igbo, but also an unnecessary exercise in futility which reaches its most exasperating *cul-de-sac* in Kalu Uka's 'Ukpara Kitikiti'. It is paradoxical that some of those poets and prose writers who have written beautiful verses, poems, novels, short stories, plays, essays, and critiques in some variety of Standard English should now be backing the horse of dialects in Igbo, which too has its own Standard variety.<sup>15</sup> People who are still disturbed by what the standard variety of any language is, are welcome to read Quirk's classic 'What is Standard English'.<sup>16</sup> Since what Quirk says about Standard English can apply; *matatis mutandis*, to the standard variety of any human language, I shall quote extensively from him '...the term "Standard English" covers not only the grammar that is common to all kinds of English but also the grammar used in the speech and writing of educated people: in other words we should exclude the grammar which is peculiar to dialectal or uneducated use. In effect this means the usage of the wider community... The usage that bears least restrictive (such as regional) mark, the usage that has widest acceptability... Standard English, is, as Lawrence's Hilda puts it 'normal English'; that kind of English which draws least attention to itself over the widest area and through the widest range of usage... This norm is a complex function of vocabulary, grammar and transmission, most clearly established in one of the means of transmission (pronunciation). This latter point draws attention to one important factor in the notion of a standard: it is particularly associated with English in a *written* form, and we find that there are sharper restrictions in every way upon the English that is written (and especially *printed*) than upon English that is spoken. In fact, the standards of Standard English are determined and preserved, to no small extent, by

the great printing houses... Standard English is basically an ideal, a model of expression that we seek when we wish to communicate beyond our immediate community with members of wider community of the nation as a whole... As an ideal it cannot be perfectly realized and we must expect that members of the different wider communities may produce different realizations. In fact, however, the remarkable thing is the very high degree of unanimity, the small amount of divergence. Any of us can read a newspaper printed in Leeds or San Francisco or Delhi without difficulty and often, even without realising that there are differences at all.'

There is a Standard Igbo variety used by people who are educated in Igbo. As we have pointed out in Emenanjo (1981), 'Standard Igbo is not everybody's cup of tea. It is the subject of study and is learnt in schools, colleges and universities, from well-edited books. It does not come naturally no matter our exposure to or our interest in Igbo. It is a variety that is 'received' just as Received Standard English...' It has a psychological reality which neither Isumama nor Union Igbo had. It has universally accepted inflectional forms which are close to but different from those of Central Igbo... In its stock of lexical items Standard Igbo is eclectic and pan-Igbo, a flexibility which Central Igbo did not have. It is studied and it is effectively used by all formally brought up in it. People from Bendel, Anambra, Imo and Rivers States use it. The unity in diversity exhibited can be seen in the works of writers from different dialectal backgrounds who, in spite of obvious dialectalisms, naturally found in their works communicate. Ubesie, Odilora and Nzeako<sup>17</sup> who come from Anambra State communicate effectively through Standard written Igbo. So too do Chukuezi, Akoma and Osuagwu<sup>18</sup> who come from Imo State. Anyone conversant with the poems in *Akpa Uche*<sup>19</sup> *Utara Nti*<sup>20</sup>, *Obiageli*<sup>21</sup> and *Mbem Igbo* will see dialectalisms here and there. But these do not inhibit effective communication.

*AKA WETA* is a book of eighty-two pages, with four pages taken up exclusively with highly impressionistic art work by the artists' artist, Obiora Udechukwu. Published by Okike Magazine, *AKA WETA* was typeset in London, but printed in Nigeria by SNAAP Press, Enugu. The covers of the book are beautifully decked by (eleven-year old) paintings from the Iyazi Shrine in Nri. Although its price is not stated I got my copy for ₦2.00 at the Okike Stand during the 1982 Conference of the Literary Society of Nigeria which held in April at the Continuing Education Centre of the University of Nigeria, Nsukka.

With little or no regard for the many diacritics and tone marks which make Igbo writing what it is, with its chaotic spellings which seem to have no rhyme or reason, and the deliberate attempt to foster some Northern Igbo dialect in opposition to the

reason, and the deliberate attempt to foster some Northern Igbo dialect in opposition to the Central-based literary Igbo of today, *AKA WETA* has really appeared after the black-out.

Students of the evolution of written Igbo<sup>22</sup> are agreed that there was a period of 'black-out' in the language. First, there was the Orthography controversy and then the Dialect controversy. The Orthography controversy was settled in 1961, and since 1972 sanity has been brought into other aspects of the Igbo writing system by the Igbo Standardisation Committee. The dialect question is now a non-issue. From the missionaries' Isumama, through Dennis' Union, through Ward's Central we are now in the era of Standard Igbo. The period of 'black-out' is now over. Perhaps the greatest point about this not very well-bound *AKA WETA* is that, appearing in the year of Our Lord 1982, it serves as a good example of how Igbo should not be transcribed or written in our time. This is because it has come long, indeed, very long AFTER THE BLACK-OUT.

#### NOTES AND REFERENCES

1. See for example, Emenanjo, E.N. (ed.) 1976 *Omalinze: A Book of Igbo Folktales*. Ibadan; Oxford University Press. See also Emenanjo, E.N. 1978 'An Igbo folk-song: A Linguistic Study' *African Languages/Langes Africaine* 4:96-109.
2. Egudu, R.N. and Nwoga, D.I. (eds.) 1971 *Poetic Heritage: An Anthology of Traditional Igbo Verse*. Enugu: Nwamife.
3. Ugonna, N. 1979 *Abu na Egwuregwu Odnala Igbo*, Lagos: Longman.
4. Madubulike, I. 1981 *Ighota Abu Igbo*. Ibadan: University Press Ltd., p.6
5. Ogbalu, F.C. 1974 *Igbo Songs and Poems*. Onitsha University Press, Ltd. -----1978 *Mbem na Egwu Igbo*. Ibadan: Macmillan.
6. Azuonye, C. has done a very comprehensive study of Ohafia Heroic Poetry. See for example, Azuonye (1981a) 'Functional and Aesthetic Principles of the Ohafia Igbo Oral Epic Song' and Azuonye 1981(b). 'The formulaic character of Oral Epic songs of the Ohafia Igbo.'
7. 'Phonological repetition in Igbo proverbs: An Aspect of traditional African Poetry'. *Journal of Humanities* 3 (To appear)
8. For discussions of coalescent assimilation in Igbo see Nwachukwu, 1976 op. cit. pp.67-69 and Emenanjo, E.N. 1978(b) *Elements of Modern Igbo Grammar*. Ibadan: Oxford University Press pp.24-25.
9. See Emenanjo, E.N. 1978 *Akwukwo Nkowa na Mkpowa maka Obiageli* (mimeo)
10. Emenanjo, E.N. 1973 'A (Linguistic) review of Poetic Heritage.' *Ikenga* 2.1:105-110.
11. Welmer, B.F. and W.E. Welmers, (1978) *Igbo: A Learners Manual*. Los Angeles. Privately published by the authors.
12. Dr. P. Akjuobi Nwachukwu's view though not yet in print has been presented at many meetings and workshops of the Society for Promoting Igbo Language & Culture.
13. For analyses of the phonology of some Mbaise Igbo varieties See (1) Swift, L.B., A. Ahaghotu and E. Ugorji (1962) *Basic*

- Igbo Course*. Foreign Service Institute, Washington D.C.
- (2) Nwachukwu, P.A. 1976 *Noun Phrase Sentential Complementation in Igbo*. Unpublished doctoral dissertation, School of Oriental and African Studies, University of London, pp.31-33.'
  14. One of the collectors of *Aka Weta*, Chinua Achebe has persistently called for Igbo creative artists to write in whatever dialect they like. His views on this can be read in 'The Bane of Union: An appraisal of the consequences of Union for Igbo Language & Literature' in *Anu Magazine* (Vol.1) pp.33-41.
  15. See (i) Emenanjo, E.N. 1980 'A evaluacao da lingua Igbo na literatura de ficcao (The rise of Literary Standard Igbo). *Africa Literature-Arte e Cultura*. 2.9:409-416. -----1981 'Towards a definition of Standard Igbo.' (mimeo)
  16. Quirk, R. 1968 'What is Standard English' in *Language in Education*. The Open University Press, pp.25-30.
  17. Ubesie, T.U. Odilora, A.V. & Nzeako, J.U.T. are all Igbo novelists.
  18. Chukuezi, A.B. Akoma, I & Osuagwu, B.I.N. have written Igbo plays.
  19. *Akpa Uche* is an anthology of creative Igbo verse edited by R.M. Ekechukwu & published by Oxford University Press, Ibadan.
  20. *Utara Nti* is an anthology of Igbo verse edited by 'Nolue Emenanjo and published by Evans (Brothers Nigeria) Publishers Ltd., Ibadan.
  21. *Obiageli* is an anthology of poems written by Oruruo Lee Oguaga and published by University Publishing Co. Onitsha.
  22. See (1) Afigbo, A.E. (1975) The place of the Igbo Language in our Schools: A Historical Explanation in Ogbalu .F.C. and E.N. Emenanjo (eds.) *Igbo Language & Culture* Ibadan: O.U.P.
  - (2) Emenanjo, 1980 op. cit. in note 13(i) above
  - (3) Nwadike, I.U. 1981 'The development of Written Igbo as a school subject.' Unpublished M.Ed. thesis SUNY Buffalo.
  - (4) Oraka, L.N. 1981 *The Impact of the Society for promoting Igbo Language and Culture on evolution of Igbo Studies in Nigeria*. Unpublished M. Ed. thesis SUNY Buffalo.

# EDITORIAL AND LINGUISTIC PROBLEMS IN AKA WETA: A COMMENT

Maazi Emenanjo na-egosi na onwelu mkpulu okwu onemogune ndi wekotalu Aka Weta na-asupero n'usolo otografi eji-ede Igbo kitta. Nke a bu eziokwu. Ma na o bu ife itunanya na o bu ososo ife gbasali nsupe okwu na umu ife ndi ozo na-adiro omimi ka Emenanjo ji chu onwe ya ula na ogonogo anyocha o nyochalu akwukwo ofuu di lche bu Aka Weta. Ma egwu ewekotalu fa di mma ka fa di njo; ma akaaka ndi delu fa o sili lke ka o lili mpei — ife ndia agbasaro Emenanjo ncha-ncha. E weruga nsupe okwu, ife ozo di ya mkpa bu ka ekpofue asusu di ndu ndi Igbo di lche-lche n'asu uwatwa gbasobe opatalu ofuu ya na ndi otu ya na-afikwa akuzili ndi na amu akwukwo n'aka fa; asusu n'enwerwo odinjiru n'ifi na o no n'afu daa uduli!

O bu mkpako na ochicho di etua debelu asusu Igbo n'onodu igba ghali o no kitta.

Mr. Emenanjo draws attention to a number of editorial flaws in *Aka Weta* such as inconsistency in spelling which the editors are already aware of and very much regret.

It is, however, a matter of even deeper regret that a reviewer confronted with forty-odd poems in a new and unique anthology should have offered no better response than a lengthy display of obscurantist grammatical jargon, such as:

Mbaise has a nasalized and labialized glottal fricative . . . but not an aspirated bilabial approximant . . . if ever such a phoneme exists! In a review running into 17 foolscap pages of typed manuscript Emenanjo finds it possible to devote no more than one page to the assessment of the poetry. And even within this self-imposed constraint he deals not with quality but with some piece of superficiality he calls *repetition* which, he pompously informs us, can be "ideational, structural, phonological" and "can be found as a feature of verbal art in most of the pieces in *Aka Weta*".

Having offered that penetrating insight in a couple of lines he spends the rest of his page-long analysis on Emeka Chimezie who, in his opinion, "reaches the highest water-mark of his creative abilities" by making word-play and alliteration with the names of Gowon, Muritala, Obasanjo and Ndili!

It would seem, however, that in addition to his alliterative powers Chimezie's claim to attention has to do with the fact that he "read Igbo formally".

Azuonye, the only other poet mentioned favourably is, we are told, "a scholar-critic trained in stylistics and makes a living teaching Igbo literature and stylistics." Obviously, Emenanjo believes that what a poet read at school or does for a living are crucial factors in judging his work. Well, the editors of *Aka Weta* took quite a different line. They looked at the poem rather than the cv of the poet! Their sole concern was to present a living harvest of the great variety of poetic writings and utterances of contemporary Igbo poets.

Twice in his review Emenanjo quite abruptly levels charges of bad faith against *Aka Weta* on the question of dialect. The first charge goes as follows:

The deliberate and ill-motivated attempts of the others /besides Chimezie and Azuonye/ to write in dialects is not only an attempt to set back the fast-moving hand of the clock of standard Igbo but also an unnecessary exercise in futility.

But earlier in the same review the same Emenanjo has also written as follows:

. . . all the pieces in Part I are in dialects. This is quite in order for it would be *preposterous to reduce them to the straight jacket that is standard Igbo* (my emphasis).

So, standard Igbo is, by Emenanjo's reckoning, a *straitjacket* which he believes it would be preposterous to impose on poets who recite (rather than write) their poetry! What then, in the name of sanity, makes Emenanjo turn around and think he can propose the straitjacket (which, by the way, is an instrument of torture) for poets who write? And not only that, but even ready to accuse them rather than their torturers of an evil motive! This is surely a scenario out of Kafka!

Surely all right-thinking people must reject such a capricious and bizarre division in the single family of contemporaneous oral and written Igbo poetry! I recall how, after listening to an oral poet from Ikwere just before his death, Christopher Okigbo proclaimed from his chalet across to mine: "Chinua, come and hear a genuine poet. We are all wasting our time!"

He was absolutely right. Those who wish to write Igbo poetry must stop wasting their time with a bunch of opinionated grammarians with no sensitivity for language and poetry and go humbly to the real and genuine masters of the spoken word for their example.

These genuine poets have never heard of Emenanjo, and will never hear of him! Which is why he tactfully decides to leave them alone and face students and other apprentices he can control.

His final indictment against *Aka Weta* is for a deliberate attempt to foster some northern Igbo dialect in opposition to the central based literary Igbo of today.

What in heaven's name is "some northern Igbo dialect"? How many poems in *Aka Weta* are rendered in this strange northern tongue? How does it constitute an opposition and a threat? Is the "central

based literary Igbo of today" whose panegyric Emenanjo has sung with so much assurance here and everywhere so timorous after all that a few puffs in some ill-defined *dialect of the north and of yesterday* should cause it so much consternation and verbal diarrhoea?

Let there be no mistake about it: the spirit of *Aka Weta* is, as its name clearly implies, for bringing together, not scattering. Its mission is to give full, unfettered play to the creative genius of Igbo speech in all its splendid variety, not to dam it up into the sluggish pond of a sterile pedantry. The "central based" dialect of Emenanjo's dream was fully represented in *Aka Weta*. But, like all extremists, Emenanjo is not satisfied by mere representation; he must eliminate all other contenders. The evil motive he saw fit to ascribe to the editors and poets of *Aka Weta* was for daring to write and to print living idioms of Igbo rather than his class-room variety. Needless to say, we have absolutely no apologies to Emenanjo or to anybody else. The fate of one of the great languages of Africa cannot be abandoned to the whims of a tiny conclave of linguistic dogmatists.

Emenanjo points out, quite correctly, that Igbo has been written since 1852. The fact that in all that time it has failed to produce any significant literature in spite of the devoted work of successive schools of grammarians (Union, Central and now, Standard) may not strike him as remarkable. But, of course, he believes fervently that the school he espouses is the school to end all schools. He is entitled to his faith. But those of us who wish to remain sceptical must surely be free to do so. For it would be tragic indeed were we all to put our faith in the latest school only to discover perhaps after another fifty wasted years, that Emenanjo was just another misguided enthusiast. And where would Igbo be then? *Ife lue n'ito, o me gini? O to?*

The fact we must now face is that language is *never* created by grammarians. It is made by the people and enriched by their poets. If grammarians must come, then they will have to come later, much later and in humility to study and classify what has been created. The great tragedy of Igbo is to have been saddled one generation after another with egoistic schoolmen who have been concerned not to study the language but to steer it into narrow tracks of their particular pet illusion. That, and not dialects, has been at the heart of our long black-out.

Can Idolebe write Igbo at all?

overdo, na

from anticists is not sufficient

You self you no go school so?

simplistic cant

The same schoolmen had to translate your 1999 Odenigbo lecture "Echi di ime" INTO legible Igbo, and someday another schoolman or woman will do the same service for ~~Thijs Fall~~ and the rest of your oeuvre composed in down Bekee.

# Uwa ndi Igbo

*Uwa Ndi Igbo* bu akwukwo nka na mmuta meputara ihe dum gbasara ndu na omenaala ndi Igbo, ma n'ala Ibo ma na ngalaba umu Igbo bi na mba ndi ozo. A na-ebiputa ya ugboro abuo n'afọ (na Jun na Disemba); ihe ana-ebiputa n'ime ya mgbe obula bu: edemede di iche iche, n'asusu Igbo ma o bu Bekee, gbasara ndu n'omenaala ndi Igbo; agumagu ohu edere n'asusu Igbo; ndeputa agumagu odinaala di iche iche esetere n'ime Obodo, ha na nsughari ha n'asusu Bekee na nkowa so ha; foto ndi na-egosi nkenu udi ndu ndi Igbo di iche iche, nke ka nke nta; umu ajuju ma o bu nkowa; edemede ntule akwukwo ukwu na nke nta; umu ajuju ma o bu nkowa gbasara ihe di iche iche gbasara ndi Igbo nke e nwebeghi nkwekorita banyere ha; akuko ihe ndi na-eme ugbo a gbasara omenaala Igbo.

A choro ka ihe dum ebiputara n'akwukwo a di ka e si kowa n'Usoro Edemede maka *Uwa Ndi Igbo*, nke e nwere i nata n'aka edito. Nchikota okwu agafeghi mkporu okwu nari abuo (200) ga-esoriri edemede na ntule akwukwo dum, ha na okwu mmalite na-eso ndeputa agumagu odinaala na foto dum. Onye aga-edere akwukwo maka ihe dum gbasara nwezikota ihe mbiputa dum bu: Edito, *Uwa Ndi Igbo*, Ulo Nka Okike, P.O. Box 53, Nsukka, Naijiria.

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## Edito Ukwu

CHIEKA IFEMESIA

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CHUKWUMA AZUONYE

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# Uwa ndi Igbo

*Uwa Ndi Igbo* is a broadly-based humanistic and scientific publication covering the entire spectrum of Igbo life and culture both in the Igbo homeland and in the diaspora. Published twice a year (in June and December), its regular features include: articles in English or Igbo on various aspects of Igbo life and culture; new creative writing in Igbo; texts of Igbo oral literature recorded in the field and edited with parallel English translations and notes; photographic records (preferably in full colour) depicting Igbo life; reviews and review articles; short notes and queries on controversial and topical issues in Igbo studies and News and reports on Igbo cultural events.

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