

## “Chike’s School Days”: An *Autre*biography Verbalizing Chinua Achebe’s Early Schooling

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### Abstract

Todorov’s syntactic, verbal and semantic aspects of the literary text, onomastics and Maury’s psychocriticism, underlie this paper whose goal is to show that Chinua Achebe’s “Chike’s School Days” is an *autre*biography verbalizing Achebe’s early schooling. As two major thematic Ariadne’s threads, the religious, familial and onomastic connections between Chike and Achebe, as well as Achebe’s untimely love for Shakespeare’s language, have been used to compose an *autre*biographical short story, a shortened fiction about the self, which is narrated not in the first-person (“I”), but rather in the third-person (“He”). It is with such a detachment device that Achebe writes about Chike, a character who is nobody else but his double.

**Keywords:** Achebe, *autre*biography, early schooling, English, passion, primary school, verbalizing

### 1. Introduction

“The fictions of the self” or again “the versions of the self [or the other]” (Coetzee, 1992: 17), give rise to the publication of the autobiography, the biography and the *autre*biography. If the autobiography and the biography are two genres in which the writer respectively writes about himself/herself, and about another person’s life, in the *autre*biography the story being told is about the life of another person who turns out to be the author himself/herself. Chinua Achebe’s “Chike’s School Days”, in which Achebe writes about himself in an indirect way by resorting to the third-person (“He”), falls into the category of the *autre*biography, where the Nigerian short story writer verbalizes his own life experience as a schoolboy at primary school, just like in his “*Things Fall Apart* [...] based upon [his] life experience” (O’Brien, 1999: 1). With such a hypothesis, the researcher is brought to wonder about the ins and outs, the full compositional details and implications of the writing of an *autre*biography verbalizing the author’s early schooling. Being curious about the nature and the scriptural specificities of the selected shortened text, one can ask such a crucial question: What type of short fiction is “Chike’s School Days”, and how is it composed? Why does Achebe resort to such a piece of writing?

The goal of the study is to show how “Chike’s School Days” is an *autre*biography verbalizing Achebe’s early schooling. To this end, such words as “*autre*biography”, “verbalizing” and “early schooling”, will be defined. Deriving from an alteration of the term “autobiography”, the word “*autre*biography” is J. M. Coetzee’s coinage meant to refer to fiction in which a given writer uses the third-person (“He/She”) to write about himself/herself, thereby separating “the mature self from the young self” (Lenta, 2003: 162), and violating the sacrosanct principle of Philippe Lejeune’s “autobiographical pact” (Lejeune, 1989: 29) by not telling the story in the first-person (“I”). The lexis “verbalizing” is the present participle of the verb “verbalize”, which means “putting into words ideas, emotions, and fancies.” (*APA Dictionary of Psychology*, 2020) From such a psychological meaning, it can be inferred that “verbalizing or representing literarily” (Borg, 2005: 3), Achebe’s early schooling, suggests expressing the latter in carefully selected letters, words, phrases and sentences. As for the expression “early schooling”, it alludes to the author’s primary school education since “Achebe spent his early childhood in Ogidi, Nigeria, a large village near the famous marketplace of Onitsha” (O’Brien, 1999: 1). Put differently, it makes reference to Achebe’s life experience as a schoolboy “In the Primary School” (Achebe, 1972: 39), in “the village school” (Achebe, 1972: 38).

The research will be conducted by resorting to T. Todorov's theory about the "syntactic, verbal and semantic aspects"<sup>1</sup> of the literary text (Todorov, 1971: 118), as well as literary onomastics<sup>2</sup> and Charles's Mauron's psychocriticism<sup>3</sup>, which is like V. V. Vinogradov's postulate of "Linguistic Personality"<sup>4</sup>. Thus, the text's syntactic, stylistic, semantic, and onomastic and psychocritical construct will be zeroed in on. The study falls into two parts. The first section shows that the protagonist (Chike) is Achebe's double, his fictionalized "young self" (Lenta, 2003: 160), whereas the second division investigates how the Nigerian writer's premature fascination for Shakespeare's language expresses itself.

## 2. "John, Chike, Obiajulu", Albert Chinualumogu Achebe's Double

What Achebe does in "Chike's School Days" is nothing else than tell the reader about his own childhood life experience. That is why Achebe's protagonist "John, Chike, Obiajulu" (Achebe, 1972: 35), can be viewed as Albert Chinualumogu Achebe's double. From this point of view, scores of African scholars have deemed the story, as well as the whole of Achebe's *oeuvre*, to be an autobiography. Indeed, considered as a unique and logical body, Achebe's fictions "can be seen to constitute an 'autobiographical' dramatization of [...] Ibo experience." (Olney, 1973: 158) As a result, "Chike's School Days" can be viewed as "Achebe's own private story or his personal autobiography" (Olney, 1973: 158). Talking about *Things Fall Apart* and *No Longer at Ease*, Achebe himself confessed in an interview that they are a story of his native land ("l'histoire de mon pays natal Ogidi, dans l'Est nigérien [sic]") (Achebe, quoted in Olney, 1973: 158, and also in *Afrique No. 27*, 1963). Using "self-characterization", through the case of the protagonist in "Chike's School Days", Achebe, who fictionalizes himself by calling himself "Chike" in "Chike's School Days", proves that the spiritual, familial, and denominative status of fictional characters cannot be put down to chance. Named "John, Chike, Obiajulu" (Achebe, 1972: 35), the protagonist could be considered as Albert Chinualumogu Achebe's "young self" (Lenta, 2003: 160). Chike and Achebe are so much alike that the unnamed woman who offered the so-called "heathen food" to Chike could be rated to be part of "The non-Christian neighbours of [Achebe's] childhood" (Achebe, 1975: 68). The resemblance between Chike and Achebe can be studied at two levels. First, Chike and Achebe belong to a Christianized and large family of six children; second, onomastically speaking, Chike and Achebe share the same naming style since they are "named in a similar fusion of traditional words relating to their new religion" (Wikipedia, 2000, Ezenwa-Ohaeto, 1997:7); a type of appellation in which "Albert" (Albert Chinualumogu) and "John" (John Chike Obiajlu), stand for their Christian names, and "Chike Obiajulu" and "Chinualumogu", their Igbo designations.

### 2.1 A Christianized and Large Family of Six Children

Like Chike's parents who became Christians, Achebe's father Isaiah Okafo Achebe and mother Janet Anaenechi Iloegbunam (*Encyclopedia Britannica*), "were converted to the Protestant Church Mission Society (CMS) in Nigeria." (Ezenwa-Ohaeto, 1997:7) Like Chike and his parents who rejected Odinani, the Igbo traditional religion, Achebe and his progenitors "stopped practicing the religion of [their] ancestors." (Wikipedia, 2000). Not only do Chike and Achebe

<sup>1</sup> According to Todorov, any literary text encompasses three aspects which can be analysed: the "syntactic aspect" (the composition: action, characters, time, space), the "verbal aspect" (the style and the enunciation), and the "semantic aspect" (the themes). (Todorov, 1970: 24) It must be specified that the researcher's perception of the notion of "syntactic aspect" includes the compositional elements like the "syntax or sentence", the "phrase" or "expression" and the "word", which refer to the text's phrasal, "lexical and syntactic manifestations" (Ngal, 1994: 58-59).

<sup>2</sup> Literary onomastics is the study of proper nouns in an artistic text. It consists in making an inventory of such names and deals with their semantic structures. (Høbert, 2014: 52-53)

<sup>3</sup> Theorized in the 1650s and borrowed from S. Freud, Charles Mauron's psychocriticism was founded on the hypothesis that in each writer's work a "personal myth" proper to the author can be found. The "personal myth", which is a persistent fantasy, which lasts beneath the conscience, was interpreted by Mauron as "the expression of the unconscious personality and its evolvment"; in Mauron's own French terms: "l'expression de la personnalité inconsciente et de son évolution". (Mauron, quoted in Bordas, 2002: 506). Put differently, the word "psychocriticism" is a critical method meant to explain the "unconscious meaning", or again the "latent" content opposed to the "manifest" signification. (Mauron, 1963)

<sup>4</sup> The expression "Linguistic Personality" is a notion created by V. V. Vinogradov in order to deal with the issue of the "author's image" (Vinogradov, 1971: 34) It is a concept meant to show how the study of the fictional discourse reveals the writer's personality and intention. It is further described as follows: "In literary discourse LP is regarded as a linguistic correlate of the person's spiritual features, his communicative abilities, knowledge, aesthetic and cultural values" (Normurodova, 2019: 2) In the literary text, LP appears in two manifestations: in the author's vision and in the character's mental picture. One implication of LP can be summarized thus: "The type of representation of personality based on the discourse analysis of language bearer from the point of view of use of system means of this very language for reflection of vision of a certain reality and for achievement of specific communicative goals, i.e. communicative personality." (Wierzbicka, 1991)

belong to Christian families, but also these are composed of six children including each of them as the sixth, or again the last born. Chike's father "had had five daughters before him", and "Chike [himself] was an only son" (Achebe, 1972: 35); Likewise, Achebe had had five siblings: two elder brothers and three older sisters, respectively named as follows: 1-Frank Okwuofu, 2-John Chukwuemeka Ifeanyichukwu, 3-Zinobia Uzoma, 4-Augustine Ndubisi, and 5-Grace Nwanneka (Ezenwa-Ohaeto, 1997: 7). Though the names of Chike's five elder sisters have not been mentioned, it could be asserted that Achebe has fictionalized this factual element of his life by transforming his two senior brothers into sisters so that it is written that Chike's father has got five daughters. This is a fictional device which blurs the autobiographical dimension of the story being told; but it is also a narrative ploy allowing Achebe to create an "autrebiographical" short story.

Coined by J. M. Coetzee, the word "autrebiography" (Coetzee, 1992: 394), is used to refer to the innovative narratives the South African writer creates in *Boyhood* and *Youth*, where he writes about himself as an infant and as a young man by resorting to a third-person ("He") narrator. By doing so, Coetzee violates the autobiographical pact postulating the use of the first-person ("I") narrator. Writing about "Chike" in "Chike's School Days", Achebe writes about himself, but he does so without using "I", but rather "He". Used as a prefix in the coinage "autrebiography", the French word "autre" meaning "another" in English, simply expresses the idea that the Nigerian short story writer pens about another boy different from the boy he used to be. In fact, the short fiction appears as a writing about Achebe's double from whom he takes a narrative distance by using "He" instead of "I". What Achebe is achieving by his *autrebiographical* short story is to invite "the reader [...] to an ambiguous reading" (Lejeune, 1989: 32), an interpretation in which the narratee has to get ready to view the story to belong partly to autobiography, and to some extent to fiction. (Lenta, 2003: 160)

Like James Joyce who refers to himself as Stephen Daedalus in *A Portrait of the Artist as a Young Man*, Achebe renames his "younger self" (Lenta, 2003: 157) Chike in "Chike's School Days". Achebe cannot write about Chike's life experience as a schoolboy without penning about himself, without fictionalizing himself. By doing so, he proves that "All autobiography is storytelling [and that] all writing is autobiography." (Coetzee, 1992: 391) What is being meant is that any piece of literary writing produced encompasses aspects of writers' real-life experiences, their "Personal Myths"<sup>5</sup>. Therefore, "Chike's School Days" is a short *autrebiography*, that is to say, a short autobiography written in the third-person ("He"), which has allowed Achebe and Joyce to make "a separation of the mature self from the young self" (Lenta, 2003: 162), and which is a device by which Achebe turns his back on the main character, distances himself from him.

One last common point between Chike and Achebe is seen at the level of the part Zinobia Uzoma, or again one unnamed sister in Chike's case, the first daughter in Achebe's biological family, played in Achebe's life as an infant. In point of fact, Mrs Ikpeze, born Zinobia Uzoma, is the third youngster and the first female child of Isaiah and Janet Achebe. Zinobia Uzoma was a kind of second mother for Achebe because she actively contributed to his upbringing by taking care of her "youngest brother". When the heterodiegetic narrator (using "He" to tell the story in which he does not take part), who happens to be at the same time homodiegetic (Chike or again little Achebe himself as a character taking part in the story being told), and autodiegetic (Chike or again fictionalized Achebe as a hero in his own story), says that "he remembered the song his elder sisters sang" (Achebe, 1972: 38), and that "his young mind dwelt on the many stories about teachers and their canes" (Achebe, 1972: 38), he refers to the "stories" and "the song" Achebe's "elder sisters" (Augustine Ndubisi and Grace Nwanneka), and particularly Zinobia Uzoma, told and sang to him.

Actually, Zinobia Uzoma, who "carried [Achebe], watched over him, saw him crawl, stand and walk" (Egejuru, 1995), told little Achebe many stories "When Chinua was old enough to listen to fairy tales." (Booker, 2003: 115) When asked to retell the stories to Zinobia Uzoma, Achebe would tell the tales to his elder sister verbatim, which allows the latter to ascertain from this that Achebe was not only passionate for storytelling, but also that he has got a memory like an elephant. This event in Achebe's life is described as follows: "She [Zinobia Uzoma] encouraged him to retell the stories to her, "and would repeat them exactly as I told them to him," she said. It was then that she noted Chinua's great interest in storytelling as well as his prodigious memory." (Egejuru, 1995, Booker, 2003: 115) Not only do Achebe and Chike his lookalike belong to a Christianized and large family of six children, but also the Nigerian author and his character Chike share the same onomastic.

## 2.2 An Onomastic Common to Chike and Achebe

Chike and Achebe share the same onomastic, i.e. the survey of history and origin of people's names. Like a Chike

<sup>5</sup> Charles Mauron's psychocritical phrase "Personal Myth", more specifically the writer's "Personal Myth", refers to the scribbler's textual image being built in an unconscious way, and which makes it possible to grasp his/her unconscious personality revealing the nature of his/her person (Mauron, 1963: 141). For Mauron, any text is the expression of the unconscious, which refers to the author's real-life experiences mentioned in their biography, since the latter is not a ghostly individual. (Mauron, 1964: 142).

(nick)named “Obiajulu”, an Igbo name meaning “the mind at last is at rest”, an epithet used for “an only son” because “Chike was an only son”, Achebe owns an Igbo “unabbreviated name, Chinualumogu” (“May God fight on my behalf”), which was a prayer for divine protection and stability.” (Ezenwa-Ohaeto, 1997: 7) Indeed, the “mind at last is at rest” means that God has finally blessed Chike’s parents with a boy because they “had had five daughters before him” (Achebe, 1972: 35). God has “fought on their behalf” and has blessed the family with an heir. Therefore, Chike’s “Obiajulu” and Achebe’s “Chinualumogu” perform the same function which is to prove that God the Father, Jesus Christ’s Father and all Christians’ Father, fights for his creatures whose expectations are fulfilled. A unique son is not only given to Amos and his wife Sarah by God, but also the latter grants his “divine protection and stability” to the “only son”. As a result, Chike appears as Achebe’s double because of the deification of their names (For Chike, “Obiajulu” = “the mind at last is at rest”; and for Achebe, “Chinualumogu” = “May God fight on my behalf”).

Chike’s and Achebe’s Igbophilized Christian names (“Obiajulu” and “Chinualumogu”) testify to the fact that Chike’s and Achebe’s parents were at an important point in their life, that is to say, they were at a religion crossroads since they must decide which way to go next in their spirituality. Actually, Chike’s and Achebe’s “parents stood at a crossroads of traditional culture and Christian influence.” (Wikipedia, 2000). Being part of two opposed worlds, “the traditional Igbo world” and “the colonial Christian world”, Chike, Achebe and their parents have to make an important choice related to their belief. The decision makes them have one foot in the Igbo tradition by conserving Igbophilized and deified names, and another foot in the modernity by adapting the worshipped Igbo appellations to Christianity. One such posture shows that Achebe (like his lookalike Chike) belongs to two opposed and conflicting worlds, as shown in the following: “Achebe was a child of both the traditional Igbo world and the colonial Christian world, because his father, Isaiah Achebe, worked as a catechist for the church Missionary Society” (O’Brien, 1999: 1), or again in this sentence: “Chike was brought up ‘in the ways of the white man’, which meant the opposite of traditional.” (Achebe, 1972: 35) Besides, the “tiny bell with which [Chike’s father] summoned his family to prayers and hymn-singing” (Achebe, 1972: 35), as well as Chike’s attendance at “the ‘religious class’ where they sang, and sometimes danced, the catechism” (Achebe, 1972: 38), shows beyond doubt that Amos (Chike’s father) and Isaiah Achebe (Achebe’s male parent) are also alike since they epitomize catechism and Christianity. The onomastic connection between Chike and Achebe, and the spiritual link between Amos and Isaiah Achebe corroborate the hypothesis according to which “Chike’s School Days” appears as “Achebe’s story, his family’s story, and the Ibo story” (Olney, 1973: 159); in other words, this short story is “l’histoire de mon pays natal”, as Achebe puts it.

Released in 1966, Achebe’s first children’s book entitled *Chike and the River*, which could either be an autobiography or again an *autre*biography about his life experience as a child, gives sufficient proofs showing that the name “Chike” has not been given to the main character at random. Such a choice cannot be put down to chance since it also connects the protagonist with the Igbo’s conception of divinity, just like the morphemes “Obiajulu” and “Chinualumogu” do. Actually, meaning a baby boy and also a baby girl name, the word “Chike” is used mainly in Igbo language to designate the “power of God”. It comes from the lexis “Chi”, which means “God”. Such terms as “Chijioko”, “Chinelo”, “Chinese”, “Chioke” and “Chyke” are Igbo variations of the word “Chike” (*BabyNamesPedia*, 2009-2020). It is worth mentioning that Chike’s and Achebe’s names, as well as Achebe’s own children’s designations (“Chinelo”, his first daughter born on 11 July 1962, and “Chidi”, his second boy and third child born on 24 May 1967, after his senior brother Ikechukwu, born on 3 December 1964), encompass the letters “Chi” (“Chike”, “Chinualumogu” or again “Chinua”, “Chinelo”, and “Chidi”), which means that these denominations rhyme with God, i.e. “Chi” in Igbo language.

The protagonist’s Igbo name “Chike” (“power of God”), as well as his other Igbo name “Obiajulu” (“the mind at last is at rest”), and Achebe’s “Chinualumogu” (“May God fight on my behalf”), are all Igbo appellations which denote and connote the divinity of their tags, and signify that right from their births the fictional character or again the paper being (“Chike”), and the bone, blood and flesh being (Achebe) are both bestowed with divine callings which show their parents’ gratitude and faith in God the Father whose divine mercy and love have blessed Amos and Isaiah Achebe with the grace of procreation and protection for themselves and for their offspring. Called “Chinualumogu”, Achebe’s wish or again his “prayer for divine protection and stability” (Ezenwa-Ohaeto, 1997: 7), has been all the more granted by his “Chi”, his **God**, that he and his four children have been blessed beyond their expectations. Achebe has become not only famous as the most acclaimed African writer writing in English, with his innovative novel and short fiction writings, but also has benefitted from a longevity since he died at 83 on 21 March 2013.

Achebe’s four children, **Chinelo** (now 58 years old), **Ikechukwu** (now 56 years old), **Chidi** (now 53 years old), and **Nwando** (now 50 years old), have all honoured their parents by succeeding in their studies and their lives. **Chinelo Achebe** is a lecturer in Women’s Gender, and Sexuality Studies, at College of Liberal Arts Affiliate Faculty, **Ikechukwu Achebe**, an Africanist Historian, **Chidi Chike Achebe**, a Medical Doctor in Boston, Massachusetts, and **Nwando Achebe**, a Professor of History at Michigan State University. And to cap it all, their mother **Christie Chinwe Achebe**, Achebe’s wife, is a Professor of Psychology. Achebe is a great intellectual, thinker and university Professor who has

perfectly accomplished his mission on the earth by giving the World Republic of Scholars five brilliant highbrows, including his spouse.

Achebe has not prioritized his career as a writer and his struggle for the promotion of Igbo culture. When he said that “There are few things more important than my family” (Achebe, 2011), he did not mean his professional activities to be the “few things [that are] more important than [his] family”. What he wants to say is that the communal affairs connected with the well-being of the African/Igbo community is “more important than” the affairs of his family. Any Africanist well aware of the Igbo philosophy fostered by Achebe’s *oeuvre*, knows that the community always prevails over the individualism, since “The communal good is all-important and any personal denial of group commitment appears to weaken the whole and is deplored” (Cook, 1977: 4)

It is because Achebe refuses to embody the individualism of the Okonkwo (from *Things Fall Apart*), and the (Obi) Okonkwo (from *No Longer at Ease*), that he puts forward the pre-eminence of the communalism over the family. Notwithstanding, Achebe has not relegated his family to the background. The interests of Achebe’s people have not been totally at variance with his family’s concern. Though he is aware that “Contribution to the life and welfare of the community is the greatest good; and [...] [that] individualism is seen as negative” (Cook, 1977: 4), Achebe has not only pushed his small family to the top, but also has worked his way up to the position of the last word in African literature. The Nigerian short story writer’s “belle-letters text” (Normurodova, 2019: 3), which resorts to Igbo onomastic in order to make literary meaning generated by a fusion of Igbo and Christian proper nouns and divinities, entails the idea that Achebe reconciles the Igbo culture and its traditional religion, Odinani, with Christianity. Achebe’s double, whose designation is Igbo-phylized and Christianized, shows so great interest in Shakespeare’s tongue that “Chike’s School Days” can be deemed as a perfect exemplification of Achebe’s premature passion for the English language.

### 3. Achebe’s Premature Passion for the English Language

Achebe is “The Ogidi Boy” who “passed through the primary school at Ogidi and Nekede near Owerri” (Ezenwa-Ohaeto, 1997: 21), or again Saint Philips’ Central School, which he joined in 1936 (Sallah and Ngozi, 2003: 31, Lynn, 2017: 12). The unnamed village in “Chike’s School Days”, may be the Igbo village of Ogidi, Achebe’s own village situated in South-eastern Nigeria, the village where Achebe was born and raised. At the schoolhouse of fictionalized “Ogidi”, the unidentified “Ogidi” from the studied short story, not only is Chike’s “individual character” shown, but also, through the protagonist, Achebe’s early love for the sound of English words is revealed.

#### 3.1 An “Individual Character” Shown in the Village Primary School

Little Achebe/Chike attends the “Village Primary School”, where he is sent in order to “tackle the mysteries of the white man’s learning” (Achebe, 1972: 38), and where learning proper begins, as shown in this sentence: “Chike was promoted to the [Primary School] where a work of a more serious nature was undertaken.” (Achebe, 1972: 39) “Chike’s School Days”, or again “Achebe’s School Days” *autrebiographicalizes* and verbalizes the Nigerian short fiction writer’s “Linguistic Personality (LP)”, which is similar to Mauron’s “Author’s Personal Myth”, i.e. his/her “unconscious personality”. V. V. Vinogradov’s coined notion of “Linguistic Personality” can be summoned in order to demonstrate that “the textual materials” (Zwart, 2018: 30), from “Chike’s School Days” point out to the “author’s image” (Vinogradov, 1971: 34), that is Achebe’s portrayal, Achebe’s twin.

Made up of the “1-verbal-semantic, 2-(linguo)pragmatic, and 3-(linguo)cognitive levels” (Normurodova, 2012), the developed version of LP by Yu. N. Karaulov, who applied it to the Russian tongue, is a useful tool for explaining ways in which Achebe’s duplicate appears in “the inner psychological state of the personage[s], their feelings and emotions” (Normurodova, 2019: 3). The verbalized, semantized and syntacticalized expression “Individual character” (Achebe, 1972: 39), expresses the idea that Achebe’s private persona is at stake when dealing with Chike’s cognitive psychology and development. The full syntax “his individual character began to show” (Achebe, 1972: 39), shows that the village “Primary School”, that of fictionalized “Ogidi”, is a rural laboratory where Achebe’s scholarly psyche is shaped.

The verbalized LP of Achebe is revealed in that the linguistic and cultural cognition, the psychological process by which knowledge and understanding is developed in the mind, which he acquires through education arises at school. That is why it can be assumed that school greatly contributes to Achebe’s language and culture knowledge acquisition, and even stands for the starting point of his erudition and his intellectual development. Achebe’s personal temperament marked by a profound feeling of dislike for computations and by his enthusiasm for “stories” and “songs”, is conspicuous in his life as a schoolboy. Therefore, it can be asserted that the village Primary School located in Igbo land lays the foundations for Achebe’s fascination for storytelling, to the detriment of Mathematics. Actually, phrases, linguopragmatic and linguocognitive parameters like “at the tender age of [six or seven]” (Achebe, 1972: 38), “Being so young” (Achebe, 1972: 38), “He developed a strong hatred for arithmetic” (Achebe, 1972: 39), and “But he loved stories and songs” (Achebe, 1972: 39), which depict several features of the literary discourse, corroborate the idea that Achebe shows a propensity for disliking Mathematics and liking tales and melodies.

They are also proofs that Achebe's literary disposition, his passion for storytelling and Igbo songs, as well as his deep dread for calculations, date back to his life experience as a schoolboy at primary school. Achebe himself confesses that his passion for stories and storytelling can be traced back to his years of study in the village Primary School. He writes that stories and the Igbo language have always been of great interest to him because he has "always been fond of stories and intrigued by language - [...] Igbo, spoken with such eloquence by the old men of the village." (Achebe, 1975: 67) The author's confessed fondness for tales and the Igbo vernacular matches with Chike's fascination for fables and the Igbo tongue so that it can be said that Achebe writes about himself, he "*autrebiographicalizes*" himself by telling "his [own] story" (Nkosi, 1972: 5), in the third-person, "from the perspective of an indigenous African". (Ojinmah, 1991: 2).

One biographical element from Achebe's life can be mentioned in order to show that Achebe left the sciences for the letters. In point of fact, "In 1948, Achebe [who] was awarded a scholarship to study medicine at the University College of Ibadan [...] refocused his program on literature, religion, and story." (O'Brien, 1999: 3) A pupil who was excellent in class could only be awarded a scholarship to study a scientific subject (medicine) reserved for brilliant scholars. At that time only the brightest schoolchildren were selected to read such knowledge-based disciplines, and it was even believed that the future belonged to science students educated in order to help their country to embark on the road to sustainable development.

Becoming a doctor and practicing medicine could only lead Achebe to act for the sanitary, economic and social emergence of post-independent Nigeria. But Achebe "changed his studies to English literature at University College", which means that he decides to answer the call for his natural disposition, i.e. his profound love for the letters, for literature. The "Doctor" and "Professor" that he became was not to care for and cure sick people, but rather to treat and heal Africans suffering from cultural and spiritual diseases caused by colonialism and its aftermath; hence, the publication of such fictions as *Things Fall Apart*, "Dead Men's Path" and "Chike's School Days", which are scriptural medicines meant for "Decolonizing the Mind" (Ngugi, 1992), of his people, and above all, for telling them "where the rain started to beat [them]" (Achebe, 1975: 44), where their problems, their customary and religious sicknesses began. Knowing the start of such cultural and religious maladies, would allow them to know "where to begin to dry ourselves" (Ojinmah, 1991: 8), that is to say, to find the appropriate cure, the right solution.

Notwithstanding, it is not in the village Primary School that he starts writing his stories. Indeed, "fascinated with [...] traditional African cultures [including Igbo tales and language], [he] began writing stories as a university student." (Wikipedia, 2000). Later on, he became the most distinguished scholar in his field, most notably in African literature. Achebe's scholastic achievements originate in the linguistic adaption of English to African and Igbo experiences. The brilliant success of Achebe's Africanized and Igboophilized English is due to the sound primary school education which he received in the village schoolhouse. To put this sub-section in a nutshell, it can be said that Achebe's early schooling forms the bedrock of his great academic knowledge and the language innovations which he performs in his artistic writings. But Achebe's storylike and Igbolike interests have their roots in what could be termed "Achebe's School Days", which reveal Achebe's early love for the sound of English words.

### 3.2 Achebe's Early Love for the Sound of English Words

Chike who "went to the village school" (Achebe, 1972: 38), where he started the "religious class" at six, and the "Infant School" at seven, began the "Primary School" at eight, which corresponds to the age at which Achebe commenced the learning of English. Achebe himself said the following: "I began to learn [English] at about the age of eight." (Achebe, 1975: 67) Therefore, it is at eight, particularly "at a period when Anglophone school children were fed a diet of English literature" (Ojinmah, 1991: 2), that Achebe's early love for the sound of English words arose because his schoolteacher displayed a mastery of Shakespeare's language. What is being said is that Achebe's instructor's command of English greatly inspires him to love the English language. This accounts for the precociousness of the Nigerian short story writer's passion for the English alphabet. Making a reference to Achebe's age (six or seven or eight), is a significant "[linguo]pragmatic factor[s]" (Normurodova, 2019: 3), which characterizes the author's "Linguistic Personality", his "Personal Myth", his subconscious, his unintentional make-up (character), since it reveals not only that Achebe's cognizance, his knowledge or understanding of the English language, is precocious, but also that language acquisition is not compulsorily a matter of old age.

With little Achebe's case, it could be said that "Aux âmes bien nées, la valeur n'attend point le nombre des années" ("In souls nobly born, value does not depend upon age") (Corneille, 1986: 207). What is being meant is that a young person can perfectly acquire the linguistic knowledge. Talent for learning a language like English is not connected with old age and maturity. A trait of his Linguistic Personality, Achebe's gift is associated with the image of the protagonist and the author of "Chike's School Days". It is no wonder that "In fictional texts, LP is presented in the image of the author and that of the personage." (Normurodova, 2019: 4) The study of the abovementioned linguopragmatic factor of Achebe's Linguistic Personality has allowed to unveil the psychological, psychopedagogical and educational status of an Achebe

engaged in language learning at the rustic primary school.

The author's schoolmaster's brilliant knowledge of Shakespeare's language is a source of his addiction to English letters and sounds. Because of Achebe's schoolteacher's "unanswerable erudition" (Achebe, 1972: 40), his high level of oral proficiency in English, he is viewed as a "teacher [...] fond of long words" (Achebe, 1972: 39), and as "a very learned man". (Achebe, 1972: 39) It can be asserted that Achebe acknowledges the role of provider of linguistic enlightenment which his educator played in his becoming a great literature scholar, and that he even pays him homage. If truth be told, the instructor to whom respect is shown, is a bookworm, a person who likes reading very much. He is a forerunner of Achebe's passion for reading and fiction. Under such a masterly influence, Achebe has developed from an ordinary Nigerian scribbler into a thriving penman, especially the "founding father of the modern African novel in English" (Jaggi, 2000), the "Eagle on Iroko" (Tembo, 2013: 23), and the "Asiwaju (leader) of African literature" (Tembo, 2013: 18) In other words, Achebe must have become the jewel of African literature with *Things Fall Apart* because of his schoolteacher's masterful seminality, since the latter is an inspiring teacher, one who excites and encourages small Achebe to feel enthusiasm for English. The precursor's "pastime [which] was copying out jaw-breaking words from his *Chambers' Etymological Dictionary*" (Achebe, 1972: 39-40), could only bring him to be a mentor who paved the way for Achebe's international fame awarded him by his first novel, whose topic is repeated in *Girls at War and Other Stories*, notably in a short story like "Chike's School Days".

Words like "pastime", "copying out jaw-breaking words" and "*Chambers' Etymological Dictionary*", reveal the extent to which the instructor himself shows a passionate interest in his hobby, which is reading and jotting down jawbreakers, i.e. words that are very difficult to pronounce, from the "*Chambers' Etymological Dictionary*". Making a reference to the noun phrase "*Chambers' Etymological Dictionary*" is pregnant with meaning since it is suggestive of the idea that it stands for the reading devotee's bible, i.e. a book containing reliable information which explains the etymology, the origin of the English words. Put differently, the "*Chambers' Etymological Dictionary*" is a reference source accounting for Achebe's pedagogue's "unanswerable erudition", his indisputable great academic knowledge. Achebe's teacher's "unanswerable erudition" influenced him so much that it led him to be mad about Shakespeare's language. The latter's uttered words ("Procrastination is a lazy man's apology") (Achebe, 1972: 40), to a pupil who turns up late at school, are engraved on the protagonist's memory, which is also marked by the schoolmaster's lexical background termed "explosive vocabulary" (Achebe, 1972: 40), which is to say extensive and impressive lexis.

The use of the adjectival phrase "explosive vocabulary" suggests the idea that a new world is being created in Chike's/Achebe's mind. It is a "fairyland" (Achebe, 1972: 39 and 40), a "Wonderland", a fantasy world inhabited by the English words. The presence of such exciting, beautiful and interesting linguistic units, allows to posit that a *Chike in Wonderland*, or again an *Achebe in Wonderland* is at work in "Chike's School Days" or again in "Achebe's School Days", just like in the example of *Alice in Wonderland* (Carroll, 1903). Printed books like the "*Chambers' Etymological Dictionary*", and the *New Method Reader*, can be deemed to be part of Chike's/Achebe's created "fairyland/wonderland". Actually, such adjectival, noun and verb expressions as "explosive vocabulary", "fairyland quality [of] words" (Achebe, 1972:40), and "filled [...] with [...] exultation" (Achebe, 1972:40), attest to the fact that a magical bookish world is created in the protagonist's mind. Even the "meaningless song" ("Once there was a wizard. He lived in Africa. He went to China to get a lamp." (Achebe, 1972: 40)), which Chike/Achebe invents from the first and mere sentences from his *New Method Reader*, and which pleases him so much, a coined song into which words like "Periwinkles" (Achebe, 1972: 40) and "Damascus" (Achebe, 1972: 40), are inserted, suggests not only Achebe's fascination for "stories and songs", but also expresses little Chike's/Achebe's hope to become a great African writer writing in English.

The words contained in the made up song ("**wizard**", "**Africa**", "**China**" and "**lamp**"), are significant since they could be read as four terms summarizing Achebe's crowning achievement. The lexis "**wizard**" (a man with magic powers in stories), refers to Achebe as a magician of words, and also as a novelist and as a short story writer who is especially excellent at novel and short story writing. As a continent, the one Achebe is from, the word "**Africa**" (a large land mass of the earth inhabited by black people), suggests that Achebe is a brilliant African storyteller, "a wizard", whose travel to "**China**" (a country in East Asia, the most populous nation in the world), foretells the idea that Achebe, who "lived in Africa" (Achebe, 1972: 40), will become Africa's most well-known writer. And this prediction does come to pass because Achebe got international acclaim with *Things Fall Apart*. The vocable "**lamp**" (a device using electricity, oil or gas to make light), makes a reference to Achebe as an embodiment of poetic illumination, since "Achebe was, literary speaking, acclaimed Africa's unparalleled luminary in a citadel of learning: unquestionably the most widely read African writer on the globe." (Tembo, 2013: 23)

The last sentence in the short story's closure contains a paradigmatic metaphor (Jenny, 2003), a metaphor *in absentia*, which sums up the signification of Chike's/Achebe's created song by suggesting a phantasmagorical "window" (Achebe, 1972: 40), a means of access through which little Chike/Achebe "saw in the distance a strange, magical new world" (Achebe, 1972: 40). If the magicalized "**window**" suggests Achebe's revelation to the world as the "Asiwaju (Leader) of

African literature”, the terms “strange, magical new world” allude to the magicity (a reinvented African writing, an Africanized and Igbophilized English) of Achebe’s fiction, which ranks his *oeuvre* among the “World Republic of Letters” (Casanova, 2004). Moreover, in the very last four words (“And he was **happy**”) (Achebe, 1972: 40) of the studied short story, the adjective “**happy**” cannot be put down to chance. It is significant for two reasons. First, it could be connected to the worldwide celebrations and international colloquia held for Achebe all over the world. Second, it could be associated with the writer’s anticipated satisfaction with his literary achievement. Apart from his schoolmaster’s academic influence, Achebe’s natural inclination for his ethnic group language also accounts for his untimely liking for the musicality of Shakespeare’s language.

As a schoolboy who “loved the sound of [Igbo] words” (Achebe, 1972: 38), or again as a pupil who “loved [the] rhythm [of Igbo language]” (Achebe, 1972: 38), because he has ears which make him sensitive to the vernacular (Igbo), Achebe prematurely develops an obsession for the music of English terms, even for the words whose sense are unknown to him. Such a contention is fully vindicated by this extract: “And he liked particularly the sound of English words, even when they conveyed no meaning at all.” (Achebe, 1972: 39) With Achebe, listening to the sounds of English words is a source of aural bliss so that the simple fact of hearkening to the Anglicized utterance arouses feelings of great happiness and excitement in him. That is why “Some of them simply filled him with elation.” (Achebe, 1972: 39) Such words as “Periwinkle” (Achebe, 1972: 39) and “Constellation” (Achebe, 1972: 39) are good examples of terms whose sounds are attractive to little Achebe, though he is unfamiliar with their meanings. Being a lover of Igbo “sound and rhythm”, Achebe could only be an English-lover since he has a good ear for the melody of languages.

Any reader familiar with critics of Achebe’s fictions is aware of the fact that Achebe has willingly made up his mind about the choice of the colonizer’s language, a tongue which he defends as a medium for making African literature. Indeed, a controversy about which language to choose for making African fiction broke out between two schools of thought. Headed by Ngũgĩ Wa Thiong’o, the first one fostered a recourse to African vernacular, or again indigenous tongues, because it was believed that English and other Indo-European languages belong to “the neocolonial structures that repress progressive ideas”. (Ezenwa-Ohaeto, 1997: 246) Thus, Shakespeare’s language was considered as a “neocolonial” language, which prevents Africa from developing linguistically, psychologically, culturally, spiritually, and socio-economically. Championed by Achebe, the second group of writers suggests the use of English for making “a non-colonial narrative” (Achebe, quoted in Wikipedia, 2000). For Achebe, despite its negative impacts on Africans, colonialism provided Africa with a linguistic medium for communicating with one another since each African nation has several indigenous languages making communication among countries impossible.

In an essay titled “The African Writer and the English Language”, Achebe shows the ways in which colonialism gave Africans from various language backgrounds “a language with which to talk to one another” (Achebe, quoted in Wikipedia, 2000), a language which makes it possible for the author to communicate efficiently with his narratees throughout Nigeria, because it is “the one central language enjoying nationwide currency” (Achebe, 1975: 77-78). Viewing English as “the one central language enjoying nationwide currency”, means that it is accepted by scores of people. Written in English, Achebe’s fictions have been read in countries under colonial rule (Ogbaa, 1999: 192), where Achebe proves that he has literary merits since he escapes the traps, the “shortcomings”, the “serious setbacks” of “the master’s tools” (Lorde, quoted in Ogbaa, 1999: 193). His command of Shakespeare’s language, allows him “to push back [the limits of English] to accommodate his ideas” (Lorde, quoted in Ogbaa, 1999: 193). In other words, he has done “the work of extending the frontiers of English so as to accommodate African thought-patterns” (Lorde, quoted in Ogbaa, 1999: 193) Like James Baldwin, he has used the English tongue not only to give a specific rendering of his own experience, but also he has mastered it and developed it. (Mezu, 2006: 23)

For Gabriel Okara, Achebe’s appropriation and expansion of English can be compared with the evolvement of Jazz music in Uncle Sam’s country (USA) (Okara, quoted in Wikipedia, 2000). “By altering syntax, usage, and idiom [Achebe] transforms the [English] language into a distinctly African style.” (Azohu, 1996: 413) As a result, Achebe’s Africanized *oeuvre* lays an impressive foundation for the language -- expansion process. The author’s adaption of English to the Igbo cultural and religious values amounts to Igbophilizing it in such a way as to bring a critic to say the following: “In some spots this takes the form of repetition of an Igbo idea in Standard English parlance; elsewhere it appears as narrative asides integrated into descriptive sentences.” (Azohu, 1996: 415-419) An *autrebiography* verbalizing Achebe’s attendance at Primary School can only be carried out by a recourse to an Igbophilized language, as pointed out in the following: “Around the tragic stories of Okonkwo and Ezeulu, Achebe sets about textualizing Igbo cultural identity.” (Yousaf, 2003: 37) Likewise, such a story like “Chike’s School Days”, which may also be called “Achebe’s School Days”, *autrebiographicalizes* and verbalizes Achebe’s scholarly experience as a schoolboy.

#### 4. Conclusion

The propounded hypothesis (“Chike’s School Days” is an *autrebiography* verbalizing Chinua Achebe’s early schooling),



has been confirmed through the scrutiny of the syntactic, verbal, semantic, onomastic, and psychocritical dimensions of Achebe's short story. Its syntax, verb, semantics, as well as its pragmatic and cognitive specificities have revealed Achebe's "Linguistic Personality", his "Personal Myth". Thus, "all the little things" (Swart, 2018: 211), all the petty details about the studied "semiotic product" (Hébert, 2014: 53), have shed "good light [on Achebe's] secrets" (Zwart, 2018: 211), hidden to the reader by the use of the third-person ("He"), which blurs the autobiographical genre and generates an *autre*biography. In the *autre*biographical short story penned by Achebe, the protagonist "John, Chike, Obiajulu" has been portrayed as Albert Chinualumogu Achebe's lookalike, and Achebe's early fascination for Shakespeare's language, while attending Primary School, has been proved.

Put differently, "Chike's School Days" narrated not in the first-person ("I"), but rather in the third-person ("He"), has been depicted and analyzed as "Achebe's School Days". As scriptural and thematic indices showing that Chike is Achebe's clone, the size of the family and the naming of the main character after the Igbo traditional words connected with Christianity, as well as Achebe's rejection of arithmetic, and his predisposition for the English letters, which have been brought to the limelight in the Primary School of fictionalized "Ogidi", where Achebe's unseasonable keenness for the musicality of English has developed, have been used as the main Ariadne's threads drawn together in the composition of "Chike's School Days" as an *autre*biography verbalizing Achebe's life experience as a schoolboy.

The author's personal history in focus in "Chike's School Days" transforms the subject matter into the "personnel de l'écrivain" (Diaz, 2002: 74), namely the writer's private business. Voltaire's utterance running like "la biographie d'un écrivain s'édentaire est dans ses écrits" (Molière, quoted in Diaz, 2002: 74), is not only true, but also reveals that "Chike's School Days" is an "[*autre*]bio-fiction[s]" (Arnaud, quoted in Diaz, 2002: 75), showing the strength of the [*autre*]biography (Diaz, 2002: 75). Such a force is multifunctional because of its psychological, literary, educational, pragmatic, cognitive, affective, dynamic, doxic and historical forms. With Achebe's *autre*biographical short story, it can be observed that the past plays a great part in the literary composition since it appears as a historicist content contributing to the verbalization of the author's former experience as a pupil at primary school. This proves that life story nourishes fiction.

Better understanding on language acquisition is provided since Achebe embodies the image of the model language learner with his early love for English. Thus, he epitomizes such cognitive and behaviourist values as intrinsic motivation, determination, eagerness, passion, humility, industriousness, and deep interest in the learning game. These principles are not part of today's language learners' learning habits and practices. If nowadays learners of English are demotivated, undetermined, unpassionate, boastful and extremely lazy, those of Achebe's time could be said to be genuine, ideal, ambitious and serious. It is no wonder that students that are cast in Achebe's mould are good language learners with good listening, reading, speaking and writing performances, whereas those of today are bad language learners with poor aural, perusal, oral and compositional productions. Last but not least, as an *autre*biography verbalizing Achebe's school background, "Chike's School Days" is supposed to be a cornucopia of historical and personal data about a young Achebe portrayed as a lover of English, a language which he has espoused and mastered to the point of being its greatest advocate in Africa.

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