Idiomaticity in ESL Contexts: Appropriacy Versus Conformity

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ABSTRACT

Studies on the domestication of idioms in English as second language contexts have investigated the strategies of domestication and the cultural imperatives of the innovative or else deviant usages as well as the implications for pedagogy, standardization and international intelligibility of the usages. Differing from earlier studies, this paper investigates idiomatic adaptation in Chimamanda Adichie's novels with the objective of establishing their causes, discourse-pragmatic functions and stylistic import. The data consist of sixty-one (61) instances of idiomatic adaptation identified through a close reading of Adichie's three novels: *Purple Hibiscus* (2003), *Half of a Yellow Sun* (2006) and *Americanah* (2013). The data were analyzed using a synthesis of insights from a discourse-pragmatic and functionalist approach with a focus on contexts of culture and situation. The findings reveal that idiomatic adaptations in ESL contexts are borne out of pragmatic constraints, the need for contextual and cultural appropriacy, communicative effectiveness and a bias for social function over grammaticality. The adaptations include both translated indigenous idioms and domesticated Standard British idioms. The translated indigenous idioms function especially as palliation, omen, and emphasis pragmatic markers, and the domesticated Standard British English idioms especially as emphasis pragmatic markers. Contextual appropriacy was realized by means of translated indigenous idioms and cultural appropriacy via indigenized Standard British English idioms through the evocation of commonplace culture-bound images, symbols and shared knowledge. Communicative effectiveness was achieved by the pairing of

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linguistic form and appropriate context. The idiomatic adaptations as such have a functional significance especially as Adichie's novels present a higher incidence of translated indigenous idioms than domesticated Standard British English idioms.

Keywords: Idiomatic adaptation; contextual appropriacy; social function; English as second language; Adichie's novels

INTRODUCTION

English as second language contexts, also 'postcolonial spaces' (Anchimbe, 2007, preface), 'the Outer circle'(Kachru,1985, p.12) are contexts which were borne out of the 19th century British occupation of South Asia, Southeast Asia, the Caribbean and West and East Africa, and British trade, missionary and economic interests between the 16th and 19th centuries which introduced the English language among disparate ethnicities, languages and cultures and the subsequent need of the indigenous peoples to connect with each other in ways most valid for them. The variety of English used in these contexts, as exemplified by the Nigerian variety, is a non-native, indigenized, adapted or nativized variety which carries the weight of the indigenous experiences reflecting their cultures, sociolinguistic realities, nuances, sensibilities and pragmatics of language use, a 'New English' (Achebe, 1965). Interestingly, these contexts, which are basically innovative situations, reveal similar patterns of responses to the English language so that English has evolved to become an important second language with fundamental internal social functions such as the language of the media, education, and administration, and a link language between the indigenous peoples and cultures (Taiwo, 2009; Jowitt 2019; Ugwuanyi & Oyebola, 2024). This underscores the functional potential of language as explicated by Halliday (1975) who maintains that language is a tool serving to express meanings created within a social system.

Studies on English as Second Language (ESL) varieties have identified different aspects and strategies of nativization or adaptation of English (see Bamgbose, 1995; Kperogi, 2015; Jowitt, 2019). Bamgbose (1995) identifies the linguistic aspect which includes domestication strategies at the phonological, syntactic and semantic levels; the pragmatic aspect where 'the rules of language use typical of English in native speaker situations have been modified' (p.30) in order to reflect indigenous contexts, socio-cultural knowledge and practices, norms, traditions, customs and worldview; and the creative aspect which includes coinages and idiomatic adaptations. The adaptations thus underscore the culture and context specificity of language.

Idioms and idiomatic expressions are universal yet culture-dependent integral parts of a speech community's linguistic behavior (Adeyanju, 2009; Ayunom & Dita, 2021; Qi Wang, 2022). Traditional definitions of idioms see them as multi-word and structurally fixed units whose meanings are not derivable from the meanings of their constituent parts but arbitrary and semantically opaque (Geeraert, 2016; Okoro, 2013). Wales (2011, p. 212) elaborates:

> idioms mostly denote phrases or strings of words which are idiosyncratic in that they are language-specific, not easily translated into another language and that their meaning is not easily determined from the meanings of its constitutive parts. In English, such phrases are characteristically fixed in collocation.

In other words, the syntactic composition and structural paradigm of idioms are (supposedly) invariant in all contexts (Epoge, 2016). More recently, however, some scholars have questioned the purported fixedness of idioms (cf Geeraert, 2016) such that a distinction is now made between 'narrow' and 'broad' descriptions of idioms. Narrow descriptions favour the traditional view and idioms are seen as fixed and semantically opaque, while broad descriptions capture the contemporary trend where idioms are seen as prefabricated multi-word units with some degree of collocation and structure flexibility and include other classification types like collocations, proverbs, similes, and formulaic language. They may or may not be semantically opaque. Idiomatic usage in ESL contexts tilts towards contemporary views of the idiom as they disregard the traditional posture of idiom fixity and opaqueness while emphasizing its language-specificity (see Umar, 2019; Ayunon & Dita, 2021). Gabrielatos (1994) observes an inconsistency in the use of the terms 'idioms' and 'collocation' in linguistic studies. While some see idioms as a sub-class of collocation, others see it as different. Crystal (1997) identifies collocations to be concerned with 'the extent to which lexemes come together randomly or predictably' (p.87). The study uses the term 'idiomatic adaptation' to mean all variant forms, structures, semantics and collocations, of British English idioms and idiomatic expressions in ESL contexts.

Previous studies on the domestication of idioms in ESL contexts have identified and classified the innovative usages (Kouega, 2000; Adeyanju, 2009), described their structure and use (Umar, 2019; Ayunon & Dita, 2021), investigated the strategies of domestication, and the cultural imperatives of the innovative or else deviant usages as well as the implications for pedagogy, standardization and international intelligibility of the usages (Kamtchueng, 2014; Epoge, 2016; Opara et al, 2019; Qi Wang, 2022). The theoretical approaches adopted include the deviationist (Osoba, 2014), variationist (Adeyanju, 2009) functionalist (Opara, Anigbogu, & Olekibe, 2019), scientific and 'special methods' (Wng Qi, 2022), word sense disambiguation model (Umar, 2019) and sociolinguistic (Sey, 1973; Kamtchueng, 2014). Other studies which fully address the cause(s) and discourse-pragmatic functions of the innovative usages are quite rare (e.g. Chiluwa, 2006, Ayumon & Dita, 2021). Such studies are however necessary in order to reveal the interplay of context and meaning in idiomatic adaptation in ESL contexts. The products of such studies would serve both to guide and restrict the understanding of the innovative usages. It would additionally reveal aspects of the intangible cultural heritage of ESL contexts and open new vistas in the knowledge base of the World Englishes on idiom usage in ESL contexts. Chiluwa sees idioms as 'a discourse type that represents the historical and cultural heritage of a people' and perform the discourse-pragmatic functions of making cultural and psychological appeals (abstract). His focus, however, is solely on the discourse-pragmatic functions of local idioms in media discourse. Ayunon & Dita investigated the use of idioms in Asian languages. They observe a titling towards native-like speech as well as variations of English idioms which 'reflect the uniqueness of the particular English variety as they try to embrace and own the language (p. 697). Platt and Ho (1984), Sey (1973), and Kamtchueng (2014) observe that idiomatic adaptation is very prolific in ESL contexts. They cite examples from Sri Lankan English, Singaporean English, Nigerian English, Malaysian English, Cameroonian English, and Ghanaian English. The present study thus seeks to address the dearth of studies on the cause(s) and discourse-pragmatic functions of idiomatic adaptations in ESL contexts. It investigates idiomatic adaptation in Chimamanda Adichie's novels with a view to identifying the causes, describing the discourse-pragmatic functions and exploring the stylistic import in ESL contexts. The study thus presents novel reflections on the sociolinguistics and evolutionary dynamics of World Englishes.

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THEORETICAL PERSPECTIVES

In this paper, we explore idiomatic adaptation using a synthesis of insights from a discourse-pragmatic and functionalist approach with a focus on contexts of culture and situation. Functionalism (Halliday, 1975) emphasizes the stylistic functional effects of linguistic features in context and conceptualizes language as a tool which serves to express meanings conditioned by their cultural and social contexts of exchange (see Nordquist, 2018). Similarly, Pragmatics considers words as more than information units; they are situation and context-driven 'acts' which are informed by the broader social context in which they occur and as such are functional (Aremu, 2015). Discourse-pragmatics therefore underscores meaning in human communication as determined by the conditions of the society.

Hallidayan concept of context of situation and context of culture maintain that language takes place in social contexts and appropriateness is a function of context of use such that language function takes precedence over language structure. In this way, linguistic choice, distinctiveness or variation is constrained by the need for appropriacy and communicative effectiveness. Context of culture includes a community's norms and values, shared meaning and assumptions: the totality of its way of life. It additionally incorporates shared attitudes and expectations, language, worldview and beliefs. In the words of Hammond, et al (1992), it comprises 'culturally evolved expectations of ways of behaving and getting things done' (p. 2).It is therefore all the extra-linguistic circumstances which surround an utterance and influence its linguistic form and which are relevant for an understanding of the utterance (cf Bloor & Bloor, 2004). Context of situation is part of context of culture and comprises three elements: Field (what is being spoken about, nature of social action taking place), tenor (the relationship existing among the interlocutors) and mode (the circumstances and nature of communication). Co-text, also linguistic or verbal context, on the other hand, includes the set of words used in the same phrase or sentence. These words contribute to our understanding of the meaning of a word (Yule, 2010). Context in texts, discourse, therefore comprises, in addition to the actual words used, the situation in which a specific discourse is held and the physical realities of the setting, the socio-cultural default, the socio-cultural realities in the form of shared norms, attitudes, knowledge, meanings, assumptions, expectations, worldviews, and ways of encoding and decoding of the people and communities where the novel is set. These inform the use and forms and interpretations of the words and consequently, the text. Both pragmatics and SFG emphasize language function and the centrality of context in language where context transcends setting and encompasses 'the dynamic, talk-connected condition that evokes co-experiential and current activity frames for the determination of senses of utterances' (Odebunmi, 2006, p.5). A coalition of these approaches is especially relevant to the present study in view of their complementarities which will make for a robust discussion.

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

The study is anchored within a postcolonial pragmatic framework which interrogates 'intermixed languages and communicative practices' exploring different forms, functions, including pragmatic functions of choices of language, and effects of 'hybridic' discourse in postcolonial speech contexts (Anchimbe & Janney, 2011). Texts which form the corpus for this study consist of three novels written by Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie, namely: *Purple Hibiscus* (2003), *Half of a Yellow Sun* (2006) and *Americanah* (2013).The data consist of sixty-one (61) instances of idiomatic

adaptation identified through close reading and close second reading of the three novels. The selection of the texts was guided by the principles of currency, representativeness, relevance, and diversity. The novels which constitute the corpus belong to 3rd generation Nigerian English novels and reflect contemporary usage. Also, Nigerian English, the language of the texts, has been identified as representative of English as second language varieties (Cordell, 2020; Kperogi, 2015; Pinon & Hayden, 2010; Wolf, 2001). Their writer, Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie, is renowned in the literature for her adroit domestication of the English language and exceptional interweaving of the exoglossic and endoglossic codes in her narratives (Onukaogu & Onyerionwu, 2010). Additionally, the language of the novels, especially, and the diversity of settings, themes, contexts and discourse domains are particularly relevant to the research objectives of the present study. The texts therefore not only represent authentic and contemporary ESL discourse in the field of African literature but are also particularly relevant to the scope and focus of the present study.

SYNOPSIS OF THE NOVELS

Purple Hibiscus features Kambili Achike, a girl from an upper class family, its protagonist and narrator. It is set in post- colonial Nigeria amidst political instability and economic difficulties on the outside macro level and misguided religious zealotry on the micro family level leading to physical, emotional and psychological abuse which culminate in Eugene, Kambili's father's death. Adichie presents Kambili's thoughts, experiences and verbal interactions in domesticated English replete with both domesticated Standard British English idioms and, especially, translated indigenous idioms. The domesticated forms are deployed to explore the themes of silence, conflict, religion, domestic violence, freedom among others.

Half of a Yellow Sun is the story of Olanna, the beautiful daughter of a wealthy but unscrupulous Igbo businessman and Odenigbo, a 'revolutionary' university lecturer. The story is supposedly narrated by Ugwu, their houseboy and chronicles the happenings in their lives and in the Nigerian society prior to, during and immediately after the Nigerian civil war, July 1967 - January 1970. Ugwu uses uniquely Nigerian English expressions in telling the story. Additionally, Adichie via Ugwu's language use exploits the imaginative freshness of idiomatic adaptations to explore aspects of the challenging realities in the Nigerian society and reflections of events in Nigeria's history and culture through the themes of war and violence, identity, live and betrayal, hope, change, corruption among others.

Americanah's protagonists are Ifemelu, a young Nigerian woman who leaves the country for America in search of better education opportunities and Obinze, her secondary school cum university sweetheart who gets left behind by Ifemelu. The setting of the story traverses three continents, Africa (Nigeria), North America and Europe. The story ends with Obinze's reunion with Ifemelu. Through an adroit extension of the frontiers of Standard British English and indigenous idioms, Adichie uses the third person narrative to explore the challenging realities of Nigerians in Diaspora, the gnawing need for identity, the suffocating realities of race and racism, the disappointing realities of the Nigerian state and the comforting reality of enduring love.

Although written in English, the novels reveal a creative use of language so that the language of the novels is basically domesticated and typifies the linguistic features of the ESL variety. The language of the novels thus foregrounds Adichie's ESL identity, communicates particular ideologies, portrays character's experiences and shapes their personalities and relationships as well as captures the sociolinguistic and cultural realities of the Nigerian state.

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DATA ANALYSIS

The data were analyzed using a synthesis of insights from a discourse-pragmatic and functionalist approach with a focus on contexts of culture and situation under three discourse-pragmatic labels, palliation, omen, and emphasis markers. The causes of the idiomatic adaptations and the stylistic import of the innovative usages were also discussed. The instances of idiomatic adaptation found in the novels include both Standard British English (SBrE) idioms which have been 'domesticated', adapted to the socio-cultural and pragmatic realities of the Nigeria ESL context, as well as indigenous idioms which have been translated into English and have become modified, inevitably, by virtue of being expressed in a foreign code. 28 instances of idiomatic adaptation, 12 for indigenized Standard English idioms and 16 for translated indigenous idioms, were selected for analysis.

Table 1 contains the frequency distribution of the identified idiomatic adaptations. For the purpose of convenience and easy reference, the texts are referred to as *PH* (*Purple Hibiscus*), *HYS* (*Half of a Yellow Sun*), and *AM* (*Americanah*).

TABLE 1. FREQUENCY DISTRIBUTION OF IDIOMATIC ADAPTATION IN *PH*, *AM* AND *HYS*

	PH	***AM***	***HYS***	**Total**
Domesticated SBrE Idioms	5	5	8	18
Translated Indigenous Idioms	16	17	10	43

Idioms and idiomatic expressions have a supposedly fixed form and collocation possibilities. The idioms identified in Adichie's novels however violate this 'fixedness' and 'frozenness'. Table 1 reveals a total of 18 indigenized Standard English idioms and 43 translated indigenous idioms in Adichie's novels.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Idioms create meaning through casting images which appeal to the imagination. That is, through meaning undertones and associations. The images evoked, however, have to be relevant to the listeners for them to re-create them in their imagination; they must be retrievable within their socio-cultural context. This is especially because idioms deploy commonplace sights, concepts, occurrences and shared knowledge to communicate contextual, social, cultural, and pragmatic meanings. This therefore implies that the meanings of idioms are maximally retrievable within only the source socio-cultural context. Adichie's stylistic adaptation of both Standard English and indigenous idioms as seen in the instances of idiomatic adaptation in *PH*, *HYS*, and *AM* is as such an attempt to make the idioms relevant and authentic representations of the source socio-cultural context: an attempt to capture and express the socio-cultural context and peculiar pragmatics of language use of her Nigerian characters and setting. The causes, discourse-pragmatic functions and stylistic import of the innovative usages are discussed in the sub sections below. Table 2 contains the instances of idiomatic adaptations in the novels which were used in the analysis and their Standard or near equivalents.

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TABLE 2. EXAMPLES OF IDIOMATIC ADAPTATION IN *PH, AM AND HYS*

S/N	Indigenized Idiom	Standard Form/Equivalent
1.	*Pinch the finger of the hand that feeds you* (*PH,* p. 104).	Bite the hand that feeds you.
2.	*Better be late than THE late* (*HYS*, p. 26).	Better late than never
3.	*A beggar did not shout* (*HYS*, p. 240).	Beggars cannot be choosers.
4.	*Time flies when you are happy* (*PH*, p. 154).	Time flies.
5.	*Master had spit this child out* (*HYS*, p. 124).	A spitting image
6.	*Good looks come in different ways* (*HYS*, p. 41).	Beauty lies in the eyes of the beholder
7.	*Not speak with water in my mouth* (*HYS*, p. 225).	Speak without mincing words.
8	*…to put the words back in her mouth…* (*AM,* p.51)	Take back one's words
9.	*…from whom much is given, much is expected* (*PH,* p. *47*)	To whom much is given…
10.	*…may another person do for you… (HYS, p.89*)	One good turn deserves another
11.	*Life begins when marriage ends (PH, p.83)*	Life begins at forty…
12.	*Have you no (words in your) mouth* (*PH*, pp. 21, 177).	Cat caught your tongue?
13.	*Looking at me hard enough* (*HYS*, p. 42).	To come with a marriage proposal.
14.	*Opened his eyes before many of our people did* (*PH*, p. 75).	To be ahead of one's peers
15.	*…shine your eye* (*AM*, p. 26).	Do not be gullible
16.	*Place my feet firmly in Onyeka's house…* (*HYS*, p. 119).	Carve a niche for myself.
17.	*…sow(ing) a seed* (*AM, p,418)*	Make a donation (usually to a religious body)
18.	*went … and got lost* (*AM*, p. 116).	Refuse to come back
19.	*…kept our eyes on the road (HYS* , p.192)	To be hopeful, expectant
20.	*…touching their hands to their mouths…(HYS* , p.195)	Dinning/eating
21.	Has Onyeka *touched you?(HYS* , p.121)	…been intimate with you?
22.	*…to have an empty house (PH,* p. 239)	To be barren
23.	*…let the sun not set on his prosperity(PH,* p. 173)	May fortune (always)smile on him
24.	*…he did not rise well…(PH, p. 156*)	To be very ill
25.	*…fall to the toad (PH, p.226).*	Fall from grace
26.	*…children of Satan…*(*AM, p,23)*	Men of the underworld (armed robbers)
27.	*His guilty conscience was working overtime (HYS* ,p. 335)	To have a guilty conscience
28.	*…have the brains of guinea fowls (PH p. 82*)	…be highly suspicious

Examples 1-12 in table 2 above are instances of domesticated Standard British English idioms (DSI). These are Standard idioms which have been 'domesticated', adapted to the socio-cultural and pragmatic realities of Nigeria ESL context through lexical omission, insertion, substitution, reordering or re-structuring. Although the adapted idioms have Standard equivalents, the standard forms do not capture the Nigerian socio-cultural and pragmatic contexts as do their indigenized forms. They also do not depict the immediate context of the novels nor create the same images as seen in:

Pinch the finger of the hand that feeds you (1). The adapted idiom is evocative of the Igbo socio-cultural context where people eat and feed others with *the finger*[s] *of the hand.* Aunty Ifeoma in *PH* tells Mama that their *umunna,* kinsmen, who had the moral and cultural obligations to check Papa's excesses, only tell Eugene (Papa) what he wants to hear because they are 'sensible' enough to not so much as *pinch the finger of the hand that feeds* [*them*]. The adapted idiom thus evokes an image of people being literally fed, with fingers, and who dared not pinch the finger giving the food. This image is shared knowledge and retrievable within the socio-cultural context of both Mama and Aunty Ifeoma. Incidentally, a Christmas feast was being prepared for the *umunna*. The expression thus captures the immediate and socio-cultural context and emphasizes the total and over-dependence of the *umunna* on Papa; a dependence that 'mortgages' their wills

and consciences and satirizes the *umunna* institution. The Standard equivalent lacks this cultural and contextual relevance.

Better be late than THE late (2) is a graphic remainder to speeding motorists that speeding could cost them their lives. It is a counsel 'to be late', not to speed and probably reach one's destination late, so as not to be among 'THE late', those who are dead. Adichie's choice to adapt the Standard English form, 'better late than never', may possibly be because the English equivalent lacks the pragmatic vibrancy, perspicuity and emotional appeal of the adapted form. The stylistic evocation of imagery, capitalization of the article 'the' in 'THE late' which makes the word stand out from the other words in the sentence, and the contrast implied in the homonymic use of the word 'late' have the effects of extra emphasis.

Examples 13-28 include indigenous idioms couched in English. They have no direct Standard equivalents, only paraphrases of the intended meanings or at best near equivalents. These innovations not only fill a semantic gap created by expressing indigenous thoughts and experiences in an alien language, but also foreground the social-cultural context and pragmatics of language use of the Nigeria ESL context. Some of the innovative usages (e.g. 13) are euphemistic, being indirect ways of saying rather offensive, unpleasant or harsh truths. Euphemism is a usual feature of indigenous Nigerian speech (Faleke, 2014). Consider:

Arize in *HYS* (13) subtly expresses her doubts about the intentions of her heartthrob, Nnakwanze, to Olanna, '…he has not said anything. I don't know if he is *looking at me hard enough*' (p.42). One needs an understanding of the Nigerian/Igbo social-cultural context and pragmatics of language use to understand the expression. A prospective suitor may 'look' at a girl but not 'look hard enough', beyond the surface beauty and beyond the girl to her family. Looking at a girl *hard enough* implies accepting the girl as a 'wife material', seeing the wife potential in the girl. Arize therefore uses the expression to voice her readiness for marriage to Nnakwanze as well as her fears that he may not feel the same way, feelings which the socio-cultural default denied her leave to express explicitly. Olanna understands her because of shared socio-cultural knowledge. The Standard equivalent of the translated indigenous idiom (TII) lacks this cultural appropriacy.

As the examples reveal, the adaptations have a functional significance: they serve to give expressive force to both the immediate context of the novels and the Nigeria ESL socio-cultural and pragmatic contexts. The literal ring to the adaptations corroborates Okoro's (2013, p.86) observation that 'while native English speech tends to be highly idiomatic, there is a distinct literal ring in second language usage'. This literalism derives from the pragmatic explicitness of the ESL discourse situation.

DISCOURSE-PRAGMATIC FUNCTIONS OF IDIOMATIC ADAPTATION IN NIGERIA ESL CONTEXT

The discourse-pragmatic functions identified in the data are discussed under three headings: palliation markers, emphasis markers and omen markers.

PALLIATION MARKERS

Idiomatic adaptations which function as palliation markers in the texts were used to reduce the effect of face-threatening acts such as rebuke and accusation (nos. 6, 8, 17) or else play down face loss occasioned by such face-threatening acts, mitigate the effect of rather offensive, unpleasant

or harsh truths such as fear, disquiet, disgust, and disapproval (nos. 16, 18) and to avoid the risk of sounding immodest (nos.13, 21). Faleke (2014) observes that palliation markers are usual features of indigenous Nigeria ESL speech.

Good looks come in different ways… (6), although assertive in form functions as a reprimand or rebuke. Through the domesticated Standard idiom (DSI), Olanna reprimands Arize who has always described Odenigbo as 'ugly' for her parochial and set views on beauty. As a palliation marker, the expression, while capturing the nuances and aesthetics of indigenous Igbo speech, 'saves' Arize's face and mitigates the effect of the rebuke where the Standard equivalent, 'beauty lies in the eyes of the beholder' would have questioned Arize's cognitive abilities being solely concerned with physical attributes. The adapted form thus more appropriately and functionally communicates Olanna's intended meaning: Arize should be broad-minded; *Good looks come in different ways.* Odenigbo's good looks had come in a way different from what Arize was used to: his personality. Similarly, sister Ibinabo's wish for Ifemelu in *AM* (8)…*to put the words back in her mouth* is a face-saving expression for both parties. Ifemelu had said something that was better left unsaid and a reprimand and possibly discipline was in order especially given the context of situation. A direct request for an apology may have hurt Ifemelu's pride and met with outright refusal which would have in turn hurt sister Ibinabo's pride. Sister Ibinabo however mitigates the face-threatening apology so that instead of an outright demand for an apology, she offers Ifemelu a chance *to put the words back in her mouth*, 'swallow' them and erase their existence.

Adichie again dexterously captures the socio-cultural worldview of the Igbo of Nigeria when in (16), Ugwu's sister, Anulika, tells him, 'I want to have a baby boy first, because it will *place my feet firmly in Onyeka's house*' (*HYS*, 119). The expression masks Anulika's fear that her place in her husband's home was under threat especially given the premium the Igbo places on male children being mostly patrilineal so that male children are guarantees of the continuity of a family's name and heritage. An Igbo woman without a male child therefore 'walks on tiptoe' in her husband's house; her feet are not firmly placed in the house. Such a woman has no voice, no stake, and no rights. This knowledge was available to both siblings so that although Anulika could not brazenly voice her fear yet by using the imagery of 'firmly placed feet' which cannot be easily displaced, she conveys her need for a sense of security, confidence and esteem and without her losing face too. Her use of the possible Standard equivalent 'make a place for herself' which lacks these cultural undertones would not only have been culturally inappropriate but also an open admission of her fears. This could cost her the marriage.

Zemaye in *AM* (p. 418) deploys the euphemistic expression *sow(ing) a seed* (17) to downplay her negative perception of the common Nigerian religious practice of sacrificial offering often indulged in by Esther. Esther would often give her whole salary to her church believing that just as a farmer expects a bountiful harvest after a generous sowing, she too would have a harvest in due course. Ironically, she would come back to ask Zemaye to give her #300 for transport. For Zemeya therefore, either Esther's seeds were always sterile so never germinated or else were planted on 'infertile fraudster soil'. The adapted idiom thus functions to convey Zemaye's skepticism while saving Esther from a direct assault on her faith. Also, Ifemelu's summary of Bartholomew as one who '*went to America and got lost*' (18), functions to play down Bartholomew's abandonment and neglect of both his family and country and possibly inspire some hope that someday he would be found. Adichie here uses the imagery of one who is adrift and unable to find his way, confused and lacking in confidence, to mitigate the effect of the harsh truth

of Bartholomew's desertion. The translated local idiom aptly captures the Nigerian attitude towards characters like Bartholomew: they are lost and need to be found.

The expressions '… *looking at me hard enough'* (13) and '… *touched you?'* (21) underscore the silence that shrouds marriage, sex and sex-related matters. Since it is culturally untoward for a woman to propose to a man or to explicitly mention sex or sex organs, deploying the cultural semantics and pragmatics of language use of their people, Arize uses the expression (13) to express her desire for a union with Nnakwanze while Ugwu in (21) deploys the expression to mean 'have intercourse'. The discourse participants in each case understand the expressions because of shared cultural background and knowledge.

EMPHASIS PRAGMATIC MARKERS

Emphasis markers include idiomatic adaptations which either restate a worldview or underscore a point. They function to emphasize attitude and philosophy or ideology. In emphasizing attitude, emphasis markers emphasize insistence, distrust, expectation, and approval as shown in numbers 1, 7, 9. 14. In emphasizing philosophy they function to express cultural beliefs as seen in numbers 3 and 5.

Emphasis markers emphasize insistence as in (1) … *pinch the finger of the hand that feeds you* where it functions to underscore Aunty Ifeoma's attitude to Papa's *umunna* in *PH.* She uses the marker to indicate her insistence that Papa's *umunna* had become so dependent on him that they dared not tell him the truth about himself. The markers additionally emphasize distrust as in (7) …*did not speak with water in my mouth*. Here, the contrasting imagery of unclear speech from a mouth full of water evoked by a creditor insisting on the repayment of her money aptly captures the mood and context of situation as well as the attitude of the creditor to the debtor: distrust. The creditor, who the greater power rests with, tells the debtor '…you will give me my money today…today, not tomorrow!' and to forestall any claims of misunderstanding, she adds, 'You heard me say so because I *did not speak with water in my mouth!' (HYS,* 225*)*.To speak without water in one's mouth underscores 'lack of interference or obstruction' leading to audible utterances. The Standard equivalent, 'speak without mincing words', lacks this pragmatic undertone.

Emphasis markers additionally express expectation as in (9) *from whom much is given, much is also expected* (*PH,* 47). The substitution of 'from' for the 'to' of the Standard equivalent emphasizes the expectation. Papa's interest is on the magnitude of what he expects from Kambili and Jaja. They also emphasize approval as in (14) …*he opened his eyes before many of our people did* (*PH*, 75) often said by Papa of his late father-in-law. In the Nigerian cum Igbo socio-cultural context, 'to open one's eyes' can mean anything from 'to be enlightened, civilized, wise, educated, informed and sophisticated to 'to be shrewd'. In Papa's estimation, therefore, not only had his father-in-law got the Whiteman's education and language, but he had also got his wisdom, civilization and sophistication and well before many people in their community! He had *opened his eyes* [to see the Whiteman's God, civilization and education] and *not shut his eyes.* Papa therefore adjudged him worthy and deserving of his attention, honour and respect unlike Papa's own father who had chosen to 'shut his eyes' [and so could not see what his counterpart could] and whom Papa therefore adjudged 'Godless'. The emphasis marker couched in the imagery of 'open eyes' (and the implied contrast with 'shut/closed eyes) succinctly and stylistically draws a contrast between Papa's relationships with both of Kambili's grandfathers and consequently highlight Papa's approval of his father-in-law.

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Emphasis markers also function to emphasize belief as seen in (3) …a *beggar did not shout* and (5) *Master had spit this child out.* They express African indigenous beliefs and ensure contextual appropriacy. When Odenigbo in *HYS* raises his voice to Olanna in his defence absolving himself of all blame in the 'Odenigbo-Amala-sexual escapade' instead of being remorseful and taking responsibility for his action, Ugwu soliloquizes: 'Master should have lowered his voice; he should know very well that *a beggar did not shout* (*HYS*, 240). In the Igbo socio-cultural milieu, beggars are low-class and expected to 'beg' in mild tones. A 'shouting beggar' was labeled 'insolent' and did not receive any handouts or favours. Odenigbo was 'a beggar' in dire need of Olanna's forgiveness: he had been unfaithful to her. He was therefore in no position 'to shout'. He should instead lower his voice in shame and apology. The expression thus emphasizes this belief among the Igbo and ensures cultural and contextual appropriacy. Furthermore, Baby in *HYS* was a 'carbon copy' of Odenigbo. The adaptation and the imagery evoked are reminiscent of the African/Nigerian trado-religious cosmology where a person can 'vomit' his replica. The adaptation thus emphasizes this belief as well as concretizes the otherwise abstract and 'alien' idea of the Standard English equivalent, 'a spitting image'.

OMEN PRAGMATIC MARKERS

Omen pragmatic markers function in ESL contexts to foreshadow future events. Although usually assertive, wishful or cautionary on the literal level, they are pragmatically portentous as may be seen in nos.11, 2, 23, 24, and 26. They omen future freedom from oppression as in (11) …*life begins when marriage ends* (*PH*, 83); impending death as in (2) …*better be late than the LATE* (*HYS,* 26); (23) *let the sun not set on his prosperity* (*PH*, 173); (24)… '*did not rise well…*(*PH*,156); and (24) *...fall to the toad* (*PH,* 226); and future unhappiness (4). When Aunty Ifeoma tells Mama in (11) that *sometimes life begins after marriage,* she omens Eugene, Mama's husband's impending death which would mean an end to an oppressive and abusive marriage and the beginning of life for Mama. Similarly, the handwritten sign by the road on Olanna's route to Enugu Airport in *HYS, Better be late than THE late* (2) portends the tragic events in the novel which would result in many of Olanna's dear ones becoming the *THE late.* (23) omens the series of misfortunes that would befall Eugene in *PH* culminating in his death. The sun had only 'waned' on his prosperity but set on his life: he had suffered some losses in his businesses due to the activities of the government of the day but had lost his life at the hands of his wife. Like *aku* (termite) which would fly high only to lose its wings and fall to the toad (26), Eugene had risen to the peak of his career but would fall into nothingness.

Related to the foregoing is the portending of Papa Nnukwu's death through the omen marker *did not rise well* (24). The adapted idiom foreshadows the day when he would not rise at all. In the Igbo socio-cultural context, when the elderly do not 'rise well' (wake up strong and healthy) on a regular basis, it is interpreted to mean that their death is imminent. On the other hand, *Time flies when you are happy,* (4) portends future unhappiness. When Jaja voices his regret about not being in Nsukka to see the Ixora flowers he had planted with Aunty Ifeoma bloom, Aunty Ifeoma replies 'Don't they say that *time flies when you are happy?*' The adapted idiom in addition to expressing the passage of time and capturing the reality of Jaja's life: Time had 'flown' only because he had been happy in Nsukka, additionally foreshadows Jaja's 'unhappy' time in prison when time would seem to drag.

By foreshowing future events, omen markers highlight otherwise inconsequential events or present realities conferring on them value and significance by being indicators of future events (Nwachukwu-Agbada, 1997).

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The discourse pragmatic markers seen in the data reveal that idioms are forms of interpersonal communication in ESL contexts meant to save face, express ideologies and attitudes towards the discourse situation and participants, and portend future events. They therefore serve the instrumental (language as a means of attainment of emotional and material needs) and personal (language as a vehicle for the expression of individuality) functions of language within defined social defaults (Bamiro, 2014).

CAUSES OF IDIOMATIC ADAPTATION IN ESL CONTEXTS

The causes of idiomatic adaptation in ESL contexts are discussed under two headings: Contextual Appropriacy and Cultural Appropriacy.

CONTEXTUAL APPROPRIACY

Underlying discourse and situational contexts constitute the basis of most idiomatic adaptations in ESL contexts as may be seen in nos.15, 20, 26 and 28.

Shine your eye (15) (from Nigerian Pidgin) is a call to be shrewd and on the alert. It is also a call to make the best use of a rare opportunity. The expression is an analogical derivation from the shine of a torch-light or electric bulb and especially the sun. In African trado-religious worldview, nothing escapes the 'shine' of the sun; nothing is hidden from its light. Nneoma, in *AM,* upon hearing the business offer made by chief to Obinze tells Obinze, 'This is your opportunity! The Zed, *shine your eye!* They call it a big-big name, evaluation consulting… (*AM*, 26) The expression thus highlights the tough economic realities of the Nigeria ESL context and the struggle of the average Nigerian to carve a niche for himself.

Again, given the context of the war and the scarcity of food, the translated indigenous idiom *touching their hands to their mouths* (20) in reference to eating underscores a preference for contextual appropriacy. The quality and quantity of the food were so grossly inadequate and below what normally constitutes a meal in the Odenigbo household that eating had become a mere *touching [of] their hands to their mouths.* The expression, although an invitation to the usual meal-time-visitor to dine with the family, has the pragmatic force of a warning to not expect much from the meal or better still to refuse the invitation and not further reduce the family's ration.

Adichie's euphemistic description of the people that stole Nneoma's money as *children of Satan* (26) in *AM* (p.23) and not as 'thieves' or 'robbers' is contextually and culturally appropriate. The adaptation derives from the Biblical description of Satan as one who 'comes to kill, steal and destroy' (John 10:10). So it follows that those who stole her money were Satan's children. Additionally, in the ESL Nigeria context dreaded persons, animals and circumstances are usually referred to euphemistically so that *children of Satan* underscores both the context and cultural pragmatics of the discourse situation. Similarly, Aunty Ifeoma's assertion that her late husband's *umunna* (*PH*, 82) in (28) *have the brains of guinea fowls* aptly captures both the context of discourse and the discourse situation. Guinea fowls are usual sights in African communities. They are ground feeding easily stressed birds and farmers' favourites because of their predator-detecting abilities and high survival instincts. They would usually make loud noises to warn of imminent danger. This knowledge was available to both Mama and Aunty Ifeoma. The *umunna*'s hyperactive 'survival and predator-detecting instincts' had made them highly suspicious so that they noisily accused Aunty Ifeoma of orchestrating their son's death so that other men would steer

clear of her. They therefore had *the brains of guinea fowls.* For aunty Ifeoma, if they had had normal human brains, they would have known that a woman did not orchestrate the death of the man she loved.

The foregoing reveals the cause of translated indigenous idioms in ESL contexts as an overriding insistence on contextual appropriacy and communicative effectiveness of linguistic forms.

CULTURAL APPROPRIACY

Underlying cultural imperatives also inform idiomatic adaptations in ESL contexts. The adaptations thus serve a social function. ESL contexts adapt, especially, Standard British English idioms to ensure cultural appropriacy for relevance of imagery as may be seen in nos. 1, 3, 10, and 22.

…*pinch the finger of the hand that feeds you* (1) an adaptation of 'bite the hand that feeds you' evokes an image of people being literally fed, with fingers, and who dared not even pinch the finger giving the food. The image is culturally retrievable especially as only fingers not entire hands get bitten or pinched in ESL contexts. Additionally…*a beggar did not shout* (3) underscores the Igbo socio-cultural milieu where beggars are low-class and expected to 'beg' in mild tones. Its Standard equivalent 'beggars cannot be choosers' is culturally inappropriate in ESL contexts. *May another person do for you* (10) captures the Igbo social-cultural context where 'good deeds beget good deeds and bad deeds beget bad deeds' such that every deed gets a just recompense. The prayer is an expression of both Ugwu's father's gratitude and indebtedness to Odenigbo for footing Ugwu's mother's hospital expenses; although he might not be able to repay Odenigbo, someone else definitely would. The Standard equivalent 'one good turn deserves another' lacks this cultural semantics. The expression additionally highlights the tenor of the discourse participants. Ugwu's father was an uneducated villager conversant with traditional ways of encoding whereas Odenigbo was a university lecturer. Also …*have an empty house* (22) aptly captures the ESL African socio-cultural and religious context were a house without children is regarded as 'empty'. Standard English lacks a suitable equivalent for the emptiness, aloneness, lack and desolateness embodied in the translated indigenous form.

The discussion reveals that Idiomatic adaptation in ESL contexts capture peculiarly ESL speech mannerisms, culture, traditions, language forms and meaning systems such that the meanings of the linguistic forms are retrievable only within the ESL context of situation and culture. This corroborates Ononye's (2018, p. 81) observation that Nigerian ESL forms, which the idiomatic adaptations exemplify, are 'constrained by the linguistic pattern and socio-cultural worldview' of the ESL context. The linguistic forms are therefore informed by the need to primarily ensure 'internal relevance' (expressing and meeting the communication needs of ELS contexts) and contextual and cultural appropriacy.

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THE STYLISTIC IMPORT OF IDIOMATIC ADAPTATION IN ESL CONTEXTS

The stylistic import of idiomatic adaptation evidenced in the discourse pragmatic markers underline a tilt towards appropriacy. Adichie's stylistic adaptation of both Standard idioms and indigenous idioms permeates her novels with vibrant imagery, cultural relevance and contextual appropriacy. The stylistic effect of the higher incidence of translated indigenous idioms is an assertion of the socio-cultural identity of Nigerian ESL variety. The adaptations function to convey indigenized and context-bound meanings as may be seen in nos. (19)… *kept our eyes on the road* (*HYS,* 192) and (27) *His guilty conscience was working overtime (HYS, 335)*. They also function to convey Adichie's themes as in (12) *Have you no (words in your) mouth?*

The stylistic effect of Nwafor Isaiah's deployment of a translated indigenous idiom to request Olanna to tell the family what she knew of Arize and her family's deaths in the North: 'others have come back and *we have kept our eyes on the road for our son…and our wife…*is an acute awareness of their pain, helplessness, despondency and heartrending need for respite. Even though their eyes ached from being focused on the road each day, they could not help themselves. Each new day brought new hopes but also dashed them. Similarly, the choice of the indigenized form of the Standard 'a guilty conscience needs no accuser' (27) is stylistically motivated. One works overtime either by compulsion or by choice. Either way, one gets to go the extra mile either to redeem one's self or else be redeemed. Alice's lover had deceived her into thinking he was unmarried, got her pregnant and abandoned her just before the onset of the War when his wife who had been abroad came back. In an attempt to save face and possibly assuage his conscience, the Colonel had sent her some money and a van to convey her and her properties out of Enugu when the city fell. His actions were as such results of a *guilty conscience* [which] *was working overtime* in a bid to redeem itself. In the given context therefore, the Standard version will not only be inappropriate but also communicatively ineffective.

Again, in the Igbo cum Nigerian socio-cultural context, great premium is placed on the mouth and the faculty of speech especially because the Igbo are very vocal. The mouth is regarded as much more than an organ of speech. More importantly, it is a weapon of both defence and attack. One therefore speaks not only because one 'has a mouth' but especially because 'there are words in one's mouth': ideas, wisdom, knowledge, and superior argument. If there is 'no mouth' or there are 'no words in one's mouth' then one remains silent, defeated, subjugated, and a push-over. In other words, one is really free only when one has the faculty or ability to express oneself.

Fear, subjection and habitual silence could rob one of this ability, of words to express or defend one when there is a need for it. In (12), Jaja and his sister, Kambili in *PH* are so used to silence and being silent that their ability to have and voice opinions or even verbally defend themselves appears dormant. When Papa asks Jaja's opinion about the cashew juice just brought in from the factory he says, '*there are no words in my mouth*…I have nothing to say', (*PH*, pp. 21-22). In other words, either he did not have an opinion or else was too scared to voice it. Also, when Kambili continued to take Amaka's verbal pokes silently, Aunty Ifeoma, exasperated, asks 'O ginidi Kambili*, have you no mouth?* (*PH*, p. 177). Aunty Ifeoma thus questions Kambili's seeming inability to use her mouth either to defend herself or else to 'attack' Amaka. Hence, the order, 'talk back to her'. In this way, the adaptation, in addition to ensuring both contextual and cultural appropriacy also stylistically realizes the themes of silence and subjugation: Jaja and Kambili's upbringing and home environment had robbed them of both 'mouth' and 'words'. Neither did they have their own opinions on issues, nor were they able to put up a verbal defence for themselves, at least prior to their visit to Nsukka.

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CONCLUSION

The study has examined idiomatic adaptation in ESL contexts as exemplified in Adichie's novels *Purple Hibiscus (2003), Half of a Yellow Sun (2006) and Americanah (2013)* to ascertain their discourse-pragmatic functions, causes and stylistic import. The study shows that idiomatic adaptations in ESL contexts function as emphasis discourse-pragmatic markers; palliation discourse-pragmatic markers and omen discourse-pragmatic markers. As emphasis discourse-pragmatic markers idiomatic adaptations emphasize attitude and philosophy or ideology. In emphasizing attitude, they emphasize insistence, distrust, expectation, and approval and in emphasizing philosophy they highlight beliefs. As palliation markers, idiomatic adaptations function to reduce the effect of face-threatening acts such as rebuke and accusation or else play down face loss occasioned by such face-threatening acts on discourse participants, mitigate the effect of rather offensive, unpleasant or harsh truths such as fear, disquiet, disgust, and disapproval, and to avoid the risk of sounding immodest. As omen markers, the adaptations foreshadow future events being pragmatically portentous.

The paper submits that idiomatic adaptation in ESL contexts is informed by underlying discourse and situational contexts as well as by cultural imperatives. This view is consistent with Wang Qi (2022, p. 769) position that idioms in ESL contexts 'present the way of cultural expressiveness and reveal unique features of national mentality'. It additionally re-echoes Umar (2019) observations on the specific nature of idioms in ESL contexts and Ayunon & Dita (2021) views on the causes of variant idiomatic usages in Asian ESL contexts. The stylistic effects of the adaptations are vibrant imagery, cultural relevance, contextual appropriacy, communicative effectiveness and an overall assertion of the socio-cultural identity of the ESL variety. Idiomatic adaptations in ESL contexts therefore tilt towards appropriacy, not conformity and are 'a means of retaining the indigenous cultures and language [forms] while reaping the benefits of large scale integration via a language of wider communication' (Modiano, 2004 as cited in Ugwuanyi, 2024, p.41). The adaptations specifically foreground the social-cultural context and pragmatics of language use of the Nigeria ESL context and by extension, the larger ESL context.

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