



## A MICRO-PRAGMATIC STUDY OF CHINUA ACHEBE'S *THERE WAS A COUNTRY: A PERSONAL HISTORY OF BIAFRA*

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### ABSTRACT

This paper presents a micro-pragmatic analysis of Chinua Achebe's *There Was a Country: A Personal History of Biafra*. It examined the intricate use of language to express, presuppose, imply and decode appropriately, based on the common ground and the shared belief among the interlocutors. Achebe's memoir, which accounts for the Nigerian Civil War, is rich in pragmatic elements that shape its narrative, ideological stance, and persuasive influence. Through a close reading of thirty-one selected excerpts, the study explored how Achebe strategically employed linguistic resources to construct his personal and collective identity, critique political structures, and evoke emotional responses from his audience. The study applies theories from Grice (1975), Searle (1969), and Bach & Harnish (1979) to examine Achebe's intentions, implicatures, presuppositions, his applications of Mutual Contextual Beliefs, World Knowledge and common ground. The analysis revealed how his use of pragmatic strategies enhanced the memoir's rhetorical effectiveness, highlighting its role as both historical evidence and a socio-political commentary. The findings demonstrate how Achebe's presuppositions subtly assume the reader's familiarity with political events, while implicatures convey deeper messages of injustice, leadership failures, and ethnic conflict. This study contributes to discussions on the intersection of language, history, and ideology, highlighting how memoirs serve as both historical documentation and political persuasion.

**Keywords:** Micro-pragmatics, Common Ground, Presuppositions, Implicatures and Nigerian Civil war

### Introduction

Chinua Achebe's *There Was a Country* is a memoir that blends historical narrative with personal recollections, making it an ideal text for a micro-pragmatic analysis. Through various linguistic strategies, Achebe constructs an ideological and rhetorical stance on the Nigerian Civil War, emphasising his perspective on the sociopolitical events surrounding Biafra's secession.

Since the publication of *There Was a Country*, Achebe's memoir has generated significant controversy due to its portrayal of key Nigerian political figures and its perceived bias towards the Igbo perspective in the Biafran War. For some critics, Achebe's narrative is biased and does not fully account for the intricacies of the war.

One of the main issues is the political and ethnic allegations. Achebe criticizes figures such as Chief Obafemi Awolowo and General Yakubu Gowon for their roles in policies that allegedly targeted the Igbo population, particularly through economic blockades. Achebe narrated the Igbo Marginalization in which he presupposes that the Igbo people were systematically mistreated, a claim that has been disputed by other ethnic groups in Nigeria.

For instance, Achebe accused Awolowo, the former Premier of Western Nigeria, of implementing policies that led to the starvation of Biafrans during the Nigerian Civil War. However, Awolowo and his supporters have countered this, arguing that the economic blockade was a wartime strategy, not an ethnic attack. Evaluating the colonial rule in Nigeria, Achebe suggests that British colonial rule, despite its flaws, was more structured than the post-independence Nigerian

Chinua Achebe's *There Was a Country* is a subjective account of Biafran war and its aftermath. The memoir highlights ethnic divisions and the Biafran cause. However, the manner in which language is employed through presuppositions, implicatures, and common ground are concerns about how historical events are presented.

The challenge, therefore, is the implicit ideological bias within Achebe's account, which influences how readers understand Nigerian history and ongoing ethnic relations. This study, however, examines the pragmatic strategies employed in the memoir to construct meaning, form public perception, and sustain particular sociopolitical ideologies about leadership, governance, and national unity in Nigeria.

### **Aim and Objectives**

The study aims to do a micro-pragmatic analysis of Achebe's *There Was a Country: A Personal History of Biafra* to highlight how language constructs meaning and influences perception. Specifically, the objectives are:

1. To examine how Achebe employs presuppositions and implicatures to convey implicit messages and
2. to examine the role of common ground and mutual contextual beliefs in shaping reader interpretation

### **Literature Review**

Micro-pragmatics is a subfield of pragmatics that focuses on how individuals use language in specific interactions, particularly in relation to presuppositions, implicatures, common ground, and locutionary acts. It investigates how meaning is conveyed beyond the literal interpretation of words, considering elements such as intention, context, and background knowledge.

According to Cap (2011), the study of micro pragmatics focuses on the level of language use. It is concerned with the discussion of pragmatic task aroused by the understanding of language symbols, reference and implication during conversation. These include context, conversational implicatures, reference, pragmatic principles, speech act and conversational Analysis (Mey 2001). Micro pragmatics can also be seen as the study of illocutionary force at an utterance level (a force traditionally assumed to reside in (a) speech act(s) responsible for enacting a specific function of the utterance (Cap 2011, p.199).

### **Key Concepts in Micro-Pragmatics**

Micro-pragmatics focuses on the of meaning in discourse, mostly how context influences utterance interpretation at the sentence or clause level. Key concepts include intention, implicature, where speakers imply meanings beyond the literal interpretation (cf. Grice's Cooperative Principle and maxims); presupposition, which is the background assumptions necessary for an utterance to be meaningful; deixis, relating to words whose meaning depends on context (e.g., pronouns, time expressions); and speech acts, which classify utterances based on their function (e.g., commands, demands, requests, etc.). Micro-pragmatics is an analytical tool needed to examine how speakers disseminate and hearers interpret meaning within specific, immediate discourse contexts. This section reviews relevant literature on the following pragmatic concepts.

### **Speech Acts: Locutionary and Illocutionary Acts**

A speech act is a minimal functional unit in human communication. According to Austin (1962), speech acts can be seen from three angles: The locutionary act, the illocutionary act and the perlocutionary act. While the locutionary acts refer to the actual utterances made by a speaker; an illocutionary act is the social function of what is said.

A Perlocutionary act (or perlocutionary effect) has to do with the effect of illocutionary act on the recipient by means of passing a piece of information via writing, uttering or making signs. A perlocutionary effect is in some sense external to performance.

### **Intention**

Haugh (2008, p.45) states that, "it is commonly assumed in linguistic pragmatics that the communication of implicatures involves the addressee making inferences about the intention(s) of the speakers". The concept of intention in pragmatics can be broadly defined as "an element 'inside' a person which motivates him/her to act in certain ways" (Nuyts 2000, p.1).

The notion of intention commonly presumed in pragmatics processing arguably encompasses an a priori mental construct where "some individual has in mind some situation, not yet actualized, along with a disposition to prefer that the situation be actualized" (Mann 2003, p.165).

### **Implicatures**

Implicature is a technical term in the pragmatics coined by H. P. Grice. It refers to what is suggested in an utterance, even though neither expressed nor strictly implied (that is entailed) by the utterance. Implicatures, as defined by Grice (1975), involve meaning that is inferred rather than explicitly stated. Grice recognizes two types of implicature: Conventional implicature and Conversational implicature.

While the conventional implicatures are worked out through the normal or conventional meanings, i.e. they are derived based on the conventional meaning of the lexical items, conversational implicatures on the other hand are derived from Grice's maxim cooperative principle. These are the maxim of quality, quantity, manner and relation. Huang (2011, p.412) explains that "a conventional implicature is a non-truth-conditional meaning which is not derivable from general considerations of cooperation and rationality, but arises solely from the conventional features attached to particular lexical items and/or linguistic constructions involved".

### **Presuppositions**

Presupposition can be seen as a mechanism whereby a speaker addresses a body of knowledge and experience, involving both linguistic and non-linguistic contexts, which he or she assumes to be common to him/her and the hearer (Cap 2011, p. 59). It is an implicit assumption about the world or background belief (common ground) relating to an utterance whose truth is taken for granted in discourse.

In any given discourse, some information is taken as known (shared) by the participants and since this information is treated as known, it is part of what is communicated in the speech even though it is implicitly so but not explicitly stated (communicated). They are the assumptions the speaker or writer makes concerning the hearer or reader in relation to the subject matter on ground.

### 2.1.5 Common Ground, Mutual Contextual Beliefs and World Knowledge

Common ground refers to the extent of “shared features” that exist between or among interlocutors in conversation which has the capacity to be enriched or expanded in the course of the conversation or speech event. It is the available shared information, suppositions and assertions commonly available to interlocutors in a situational context (Stalnaker, 1978). These shared features are assumptions taken by the participants in a given discourse. Clark (2009, p.116) defines common ground as “the sum of the information that people assume they share”.

World Knowledge is the contextual idea shared by the interlocutors as a lubricant for effective and smooth communication. It is the universal belief that people have about a particular concept. For instance, there is the general belief that the world is round, the general belief that it is an offence to commit murder, the general belief that a man cannot be pregnant, the general belief that war is an unhealthy rivalry, etc. The importance of world knowledge in any communicative act is that, since the decoders already have a background information about something, the encoder will not have to make any explanation of what is already known.

The concept of Mutual Contextual Beliefs (MCBs) was brought about by Bach and Harnish in 1978. According to them, in any speech event, a speaker or writer has an intention, and the hearer or reader is expected to make meanings out of the encoded information.

When language is used, it is unconsciously assumed that the speaker/writer is communicating to the hearers/readers who have grown up in the same sort of world. This assumption at times leads to confusion in communication especially between or among people from different social background or thinking. Mutual Contextual Beliefs (MCBs) is about the shared knowledge that interlocutors use as a tool to understand utterances.

### Materials and Methods

The study employs a qualitative, descriptive approach to analyse Chinua Achebe’s *There Was a Country* using a micro-pragmatic approach. The methodology encompasses a comprehensive examination of thirty-one selected excerpts from the memoir, focusing on linguistic strategies such as presuppositions, implicatures, common ground, and illocutionary acts.

Data collection was carried out by extracting key utterances from the text that illustrate Achebe’s pragmatic techniques. These utterances were then categorized based on their speech act classification, inferred meaning, and contextual relevance. The study applies theories from Grice (1975), Searle (1969), and Bach & Harnish (1979) to analyse how Achebe encodes implicit meanings to influence reader interpretation.

### Analysis Framework

The study explores how Achebe employs Mutual Contextual Beliefs (MCBs) and World Knowledge to construct ideological perspectives. Contextual interpretation plays a vital role in understanding how Achebe’s narrative functions as both a historical record and political commentary.

## Data Presentation of Data and Analysis

**Table 1: The presuppositions in the memoir via the existing common ground.**

Locutionary acts (Choice of Expression)	Illocutionary acts	Common Ground (Background Information/Knowledge)			Overall message of the Encoder.
		Presupposition	MCBs	General Knowledge	
1. The neighbor reported this incident to the menfolk, who then exaggerated the “insult to our traditions”. But mother insisted that she had every right to pick the fruit, particularly from a tree in her own compound. I did not think up to that moment that my mother was a fighter. There was a pressure to punish my mother, though it did not go anywhere in the end.	Expressives/ Expositives/ Narratives.	The writer takes it for granted that the readers know the incidence he is referring to, i.e. “The Kola nut incident”, where the writer’s mother was plucking Kola nut in her own compound. It is also presupposed that the decoders know what the “insult to traditions” entails. Kola nut is a sacred fruit with a very distinct and distinguished role to play in Igbo life and culture, and therefore, traditionally, no one was allowed to pluck from the kola nut tree. They were supposed to ripen, fall and then be collected from the ground and by men, not by women.	Chinua Achebe’s magical years (childhood experience) and the Igbo tradition.	A tradition is a belief or behavior passed down within a group or society with symbolic meaning or special significance with origins in the past.	Every generation must recognize and embrace the task it is peculiarly designed by history and by providence to perform.

2. But things were simpler and safer in those days, and there was never a story of child abductions or any unsavory incidents that I can recall.	Expressives/ Assertives/ Informatives.	It is presupposed that the decoders know that unlike those days when everywhere was peaceful and safe, nowadays, insecurity, corruptions insurgencies are the order of the day. A typical example is the case of the over two hundred secondary school girls abducted in Chibok, Bornu state.	Educational context.	Nigeria today is characterized by insecurity and Boko Haram insurgency.	Child abduction and Savory incidents are now prevalent in Nigeria.
3. In those days, men like Okongwu, who had the means, sent family members abroad to advance their education with the hope that they would return and improve the standard of living of their family and community.	Expressives/ Informatives.	It is presupposed that the decoders know who Okongwu is. Okongwu was a pillar of the Igbo community. During Okongwu's time, he was extensively admired for his achievements in education. He was a generous man who sponsored a number of children in various schools in Nigeria and abroad.	A primary exposure (Educational context).	Education is the best legacy.	Education is important in life because it gives people the skills and tools they need to navigate the world.
4. Between these four schools – King's, Queen's, Umuahia and Ibadan – we had some of the very best secondary schools in the British Empire. As a group, these schools were better endowed financially, had excellent amenities and	Expressives/ informatives/ Expositives/ Assertives.	It is taken for granted that the readers know the four schools in question. These schools are Government College, Umuahia, Government College Ibadan, King's College, Lagos and Queen's College, Lagos.	The formative years at Umuahia and Ibadan (Educational context).	Generally, the standard of education in Nigeria has dropped.	Education is the fulcrum of the nation's development. It is the foundation upon which all other sectors are built. If the foundation is faulty, what can the righteous do? The foundation of Nigerian's

were staffed with first-rate teachers, custodians, instructors and librarians. Of course, today, under Nigerian control, these schools have fallen into disrepair, and are nothing like they were in their heyday.					education is weak and if nothing is done to rebuild it, the hope of the unborn children cannot be guaranteed.
5. While African languages and writing should be developed, nurtured and preserved, I would wonder later, would I have been able to communicate with so many boys from different parts of the country and ethnic groups speaking different languages had we not been taught one language?	Expressives/ Ascriptives.	It is taken for granted that the decoders know that the language being referred to is the English language.	The Umuahia experience.	English language is the lingua franca in Nigeria.	English language is a neutral language that accommodates and represents every lexical item in every language. It is a universal language when it comes to globalization. It also plays a key role in ethnic equitability and tolerance when it comes to communication that involves two or more groups.
6. After graduation, I did not have to worry about where I would go next. The system was so well organised that as we left university, most of us were instantly absorbed into civil service, academia, business or industry. I went home to my village at the end of the holiday and	Expressives/ Informatives/ Narratives.	It is taken for granted that the decoders know the situation of the country today (Unemployment is rampant among the youths).	The Ibadan experience.	There is economic recession in Nigeria.	Unemployment and underemployment are prevalent issues in Nigeria.

visited a secondary school within my district, .....					
7. The good luck was that at that point in my career, I was working very closely with a British BBC Talks producer, Angela Beattie. Beattie was seconded to the Nigerian Broadcasting Corporation for which she served as head of our two-person department. She was the head of Talks..... It was to Beattie that I now went to and told my story about British typing agency. Ms. Angela Beattie was shocked – she was a no-nonsense person. “Give me their names and addresses” she insisted.	Expressives/ Informatives/ Descriptives/ narratives.	The presupposition here is that Angela Beattie was a British, former BBC Head of Talks, producer and a woman who has the power to influence the processing of Achebe’s manuscript.	Discovering the manuscript; <i>Things Fall Apart</i> .	<i>Things Fall Apart</i> is a post-colonial novel written by the Nigerian author, Chinua Achebe in 1958. It is seen as the archetypal modern African novel in English, one of the first to receive global critical acclaim.	Publishing <i>Things Fall Apart</i> was not an easy task for the author (Chinua Achebe) of the novel.



8. I took along my typed manuscript, hoping to bump into a number of writers and publishers who could provide me with some advice about how best to get the book published.	Expressives/ narratives.	It is taken for granted that the decoders know that the typed manuscript and the book being referred to is the novel <i>Things Fall Apart</i> .	Discovering the manuscript <i>Things Fall Apart</i> .	<i>Things Fall Apart</i> is a post-colonial novel written by Chinua Achebe.	Chinua Achebe made some efforts before his manuscripts; <i>Things Fall Apart</i> was published.
9. It has often been said that my generation was a very lucky one.	Expressives.	It is presupposed that the decoders know that the encoder is referring to the twentieth century since the former was born on the 16 <sup>th</sup> of November, 1930.	A lucky generation.	The pace of change in Nigeria from the 1940s was incredible in the aspect of development, villages transforming to towns, modern comforts such as electricity, running water etc.	Achebe's generation witnessed the crucial economic history of Nigeria i.e. colonialism, slave trade, indirect rule, independence and the Nigerian civil war.
10. I am not justifying colonialism. But is important to face the fact that the British colonies, more or less, were expertly run. There was a distinct order during this time.... I recall the day I travelled from Lagos to Ibadan and stayed with Christopher Okigbo that evening. I took off again the next morning, driving alone, going all the way from Lagos to Asaba.....	Expressives/ Assertives/ Ascriptives/ Informatives.	It is presupposed that the readers know that the situation of the country today is nothing to write home about compared with when the British government was in control. It is also taken for granted that the decoders know that rape, abductions, corruption, misappropriation of funds, armed robbery attacks, etc. are prevalent in Nigeria today, which were not experienced during the colonial rule.	The cradle of Nigerian Nationalism.	The colonial masters, majorly the Europeans invaded Nigeria in the 19 <sup>th</sup> century, displaced the culture and traditions of Nigeria and replaced it with modernization and all sorts of positive and negative changes in the areas of religion, traditions, work of arts, dressings, marriages, etc.	Democracy which is a means for the people to choose their leaders and hold their leaders accountable for their policies in office is a failure in Nigeria.

11. By the time I became a young adult, Obafemi Awolowo had emerged as one of Nigerians dominant political figures.	Expressive/ Assertives/ Informatives.	Achebe presuppose that the readers know that chief Obafemi Awolowo was a Nigerian nationalist, a political participant in the struggle for Nigerian independence.	The cradle of Nigerian Nationalism.	Chief Obafemi Awolowo is the founder of the Obafemi Awolowo University established in 1962 in Ile-Ife. The founder is also known as the undisputed hero of the Yorubas, and a tribe of Nigeria whose wartime policy of starvation and currency change helped kill the Biafran dream.	The post-colonial era of Nigeria history was dominated by three actors, Nnamdi Azikiwe, Obafemi Awolowo and Ahmadu Bello.
12. Sir Ahmadu Bello was able to control Northern Nigeria politically by feeding on the fears of the ruling Emirs and a small elite group of Western-educated Northerners.	Expressives/ Informatives/ Behabitives (Accusatory).	It is presupposed that the readers know how important Ahmadu Bello was to the Northerners. He was a Nigerian politician who was the first and only premier of the Northern Nigeria region.	The cradle of Nigeria Nationalism.	Ahmadu Bello, the Sarduna of Sokoto was the architect of the development of the northern Nigeria. He, together with Azikiwe and Awolowo fought for the independence of Nigeria. He (Ahmadu Bello) was one of the three selected to represent the North at the drafting committee for the new Macpherson	Sir Ahmadu Bello emerged as the most powerful politician in the Northern region.

				constitution in 1951.	
13. The British were aware of the inter-ethnic tensions and posturing for power among the three main groups.	Expressives/ Assertives.	It is taken for granted that the readers know that Yoruba, Hausa and Igbo are the three major ethnic groups in Nigeria.	The cradle of Nigeria Nationalism.	Nigeria a country viewed as a multi-national state, as it is inhabited by over five hundred ethnic groups, of which the three largest are the Hausa, Igbo and Yoruba. These ethnic groups speak over five hundred different languages and are identified with wide varieties of cultures.	Ethnicity is one of the features of the post-colonial rule in Nigeria.
14. While this quiet transition was happening, a number of internal jobs, especially the senior management positions began to open up for Nigerians, particularly for those with university education.	Expressives/ Informatives.	It is taken for granted that the readers know what "this quiet transition" means.	The post-independence Nigeria.	Post-colonialism is an intellectual direction that exists since around the middle of the 20 <sup>th</sup> century. It developed from and mainly refers to the time after colonialism.	There were major internal changes in Nigeria after the independence. These changes include changes in the system of governance, trade, orientation, ideology, etc.

15. I knew that the book was going to be problematic for me because of its criticism of Nigerian politics – very severe criticism. The novel, after all, climaxes in a military coup.	Expressives/ Assertives/ Informatives.	It is presupposed that the decoders know that the book in question is <i>A Man of the People</i> .	The January 15, 1966 Coup.	<i>A Man of the People</i> (1966) is the fourth novel by Chinua Achebe. The book ends with a military coup, similar to the real-life Coups of Johnson Aguiyi Ironsi, Chukwuma Kaduna Nzeogwu and Yakubu Gowon.	Corruption is a persistent phenomenon in Nigeria. It is the greatest form of human right violation, official misuse of funds and resources. In short, Nigerian politics is corrupt.
16. For about a week, lying hidden in Mr. Cawson's house in Lagos, I still simply thought that things had temporarily gotten out of hand and that everything would soon be all right.... I arranged to smuggle Christie and the children out of Lagos on a Cargo ship from the port.	Expressives/ Informatives/ Narratives.	It is taken for granted that the readers know why Achebe and his family members turned to fugitives in their own country.	The dark days.	The Nigerian civil war which lasted for over a period of thirty months (6 <sup>th</sup> of July, 1967 to 15 <sup>th</sup> of January, 1970), was a war fought to counter the secession of Biafra from Nigeria. Biafra represented nationalist aspirations of the then Eastern Nigeria now South-East and South-South regions, whose leadership felt they could no longer coexist with the Northern dominated	The Nigerian civil war was a brutal one which took many lives and damaged many properties.

				federal government.	
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**Table 2: The Illocutionary acts, Implicatures, Intention behind the acts, and their Pragmatic functions in the memoir.**

Utterance Acts (Choice of Expression)	Illocutionary Acts	Implicatures	Mode of Communication	Intended Message
17. There was a strong sense that Nigeria was no longer habitable for the Igbo and many other peoples from Eastern Nigeria.... That Epiphany made us civilized that Nigeria “did not belong we” as Liberians would put it.	Expressives/ Expositives/ Informatives.	- The Igbos and other Easterners were not seen as full-fledged members of the Nigerian family.  - The Igbos and the non-Igbos were co-habiting peacefully before the clamour for political emancipation of the Igbos	An indirect illocutionary act of justifying the Igbos’ struggle for political emancipation.	To let the readers know the predicaments of the Igbos and the people from the Eastern Nigeria. A situation which consequently informed Ojukwu’s decision: A clamour for a separate political participation in the Nigerian politics.
18. Nigerian’s position on Biafra as I understand it, was hinged on the premise that if Biafra was allowed to secede, then a number of other ethnic nationalities within Nigeria would follow suit. The Nigerian government, therefore, had to block Biafra’s secession to prevent dissolution of Nigeria.	Informatives/ Expositives/ Expressives.	The Igbos’ agitation for Biafra is justified and inevitable, but the Federal Government’s disapproval is because of its selfish reasons and benefits.	An indirect illocutionary act of justifying Igbos ‘struggle for a political emancipation, as well as condemning the federal government for being inconsiderate.	The Nigerian government is inherently wicked, inhumane and self-centred. The government did not care about the welfare of the masses.
19. Most African countries adhered to the doctrines of the 390ivilization of African unity, which supported Nigeria for the same reasons espoused by	Expressives/ Expositives/ Disputatives/ Informatives/ Representatives.	There were controversial views and opinion about the Igbos’ agitation for	A direct illocutionary act of condemning the federal government.	To let his readers know how heartless, self-centred and desperate the Nigerian government was.

the great powers “Allowing Biafra to secede would result in the 391ivilizations391391 of the entire continent”. There were a few prominent nations in Africa that openly declared support for the Biafran cause for humanitarian, ethical and moral reasons.		Biafra independence.		
20. The leader of the influential civil right group, Roy Wilkins, implored the Nigerians especially to be more humane in their treatment of the Biafrans. He made a moral argument to end the food blockage by reminding Gowon that the need to save the lives of the thousands starving daily, “outweighed any military or political considerations”.	Expressives/ Informatives.	The Nigerian government was inhuman.	An indirect illocutionary act of criticising Gowon’s administration.	The intention of the encoder is to threaten both the positive and the negative faces of Gowon’s administrative government.
21. ....Wole, fed up with the federal government’s unsuccessful treatment of the Biafra issue, had travelled to secessionist Biafra in an attempt to appeal for a cease fire to the hostilities. He planned to set up an antiwar delegation made up of intellectuals, artists and writers from both sides of the conflict and from around the world to achieve his aim. When he returned to Nigeria, the authorities arrested him and accused him of assisting Biafra in the purchase of weapons of war.	Informatives/ Expressives.	The Nigerian system is faulty. It is characterized with injustice, unfairness, corruption and violation of human right.	An indirect illocutionary act of criticising and condemning the Nigerian system of government.	To intensify the approval of Wole Soyinka. His attempt to intervene in conflict going on in the country earned him a jail term. That is the kind of government Nigeria had.
22. Dike had already established an international reputation for academic excellence as an historian. He taught at Harvard University after the war as	Assertives/ Expressives/ Behabitives (Accusatory)/ Informative.	The Nigerian public health care system is inefficient.	An indirect illocutionary act of assessing the public health care sector in Nigeria, and condemning	The intention of the encoder is to enjoin the federal government to improve on the Nigerian health care service. It is when the federal

the first Mellon professor of African history. In 1978, at the dawn of Nigeria's second republic, this towering international academic returned to Nigeria to help set up the Anambra state university of Technology. It is a disservice to this wonderful man, to his achievements and contributions to Nigeria's development that he died in 1983 from a blood infection that would not have been difficult to cure had he stayed in the United States.			the government for its poor implementation of the national health policy.	government ensures that health is regarded as the right of all citizens of the country, irrespective of status, tribe, etc., that the health care sector will be given an urgent attention for its improvement.
23. John de St. Jorre, the well-regarded reporter for the observer reported, "The Biafrans 'stormed' through the Mid-West not in the usual massive impedimenta of modern warfare but in a bizarre collection of private cars, 'mammy' wagons, cattle and vegetable trucks. The command vehicle was a Peugeot 404 estate car. The whole operation was not carried out by an 'army' or even a 'brigade' .... but by at most 1,000 men, the majority poorly trained and armed, and wearing civilian clothes because they had not been issued with uniforms"	Descriptives/ Representatives/ Expressives/ Narratives.	The Biafran armies were not well prepared for the Nigerian civil war.	A direct illocutionary act, picturing the Biafran invasion of the Mid-West.	To provide the readers a subdued picture of the Biafran army's readiness.
24. For most of us, Biafra our new nation was a dream that had become a reality – a republic in the strict definition of the word: "a state in which the supreme power rests in the body of citizens entitled to vote and is exercised by representatives chosen directly or indirectly	Expressives/ Expositives.	The republic of Biafra was built on a strong intellectual foundation, making the interest of the masses its utmost priority.	An indirect illocutionary act of condemning the federal government for the ill treatment given to the Igbos.	To make the readers realise that the urgent need of the Republic of Biafra was inevitable because of the ill treatment of the Easterners by the Nigerian government.

by them. We could forge a new nation that respected freedoms that all mankind cherished and were willing to fight hard to hold on to. Within Biafra, the Biafran people would be free of persecution of all kind.				
25. She remembers vividly: The bombardment from the Nigerian Air Force on this day was particularly heavy, as if the pilots had been upset at not discovering the market sooner. Most of the bombs fell before dawn. In the morning, we discovered the most harrowing of sights. One image still haunts me till today; that of a pregnant woman split in two by the Nigerian blitz. That was a horrendous experience for most of us and we were very frightened after that.	Expressive/ Representatives/ Narratives/ Descriptives.	The Nigerian Airforce's bombing exercise was barbaric, ruthless and disheartening.	An indirect representative act of denting the image of the Nigerian government.	To let the readers know the level of hatred the Nigerian government had for its fellow Nigerians; the Igbos.
26. ...General Yakubu Gowon, ever so cocksure following his victory, proclaimed to the entire planet that Nigeria had more money than it knew what to do with it. A new era of great decadence and decline was born. It continues to this day.	Informatives/ Expressives/ Behabitives (Accusatory)/ Assertives.	General Yakubu Gowon was a deceitful president, just like many presidents and politicians of nowadays are deceptive and misleading in many ways.	An indirect illocutionary act of threatening the positive and the negative face of the Nigerian government.	To condemn and criticize Nigerian politicians and the play of politics in Nigeria generally.
27. Elie Wiesel reminded us, "There may be times when we are powerless to prevent injustice, but there must never be a time when we fail to protest". I had very little at my very disposal to protest with, so the strongest statement I could make was turn down the honour of commander of the Federal Republic which I was awarded.	Representatives/ Expressives/ Behabitives (Giving Advice).	No matter how difficult it might be, when government leaps beyond the precipice, one should never join ranks with crime.	An indirect illocutionary act of assessing and criticising the Nigerian polity.	To reveal the level of corruption and indiscipline in the Nigerian polity.



28. In 2011, Nigeria was ranked number fourteen in the Failed State Index, just below “heavens of stability” – Afghanistan, Somalia and Iraq! (A failed state) is one that is unable to perform its duties on several levels when violence cascades into an all-out international war, when standards of living massively deteriorate, when the infrastructure of ordinary life decays and when the greed of rulers overwhelms their responsibilities to better their people and their surroundings.	Assertives/ Informatives/ Expressives/ Behabitives (Accusatory).	Nigerian government has failed woefully in many aspects.	An indirect illocutionary act of condemning and criticising the Nigerian government and its political leaders.	The intention of the encoder is to describe the state/ condition of Nigeria today. He (Achebe) uses indirectness to state the failures of the Nigerian rulers and the aftermath (Consequences) of failure which include insecurities, corruption, ineffectiveness, poor health services, economics recession, etc. Achebe's primary intention here is to threaten the positive and the negative face of the Nigerian political leaders before, during and after the Nigeian civil war and all the people that were against the Igbo course of a separate political participation.
29. Over eight hundred deaths, mainly in Northern Nigeria have been attributed to the Islamist Boko Haram since its formation in 2002. The group's ultimate goal, we are told is to, “overthrow the Nigerian government and create Islamic state. In many respects, Nigeri's federal government has always tolerated terrorism.	Declaratives/ Assertives/ Informatives/ Expressives/ Behabitives (Accusatory).	The federal government is partial, tribalistic and unjust. It (federal government) failed to enforce laws protecting its citizens from wanton violence, particularly attacks against non- indigenes living in desperate parts of the country.	An indirect illocutionary act of inciting the readers (especially the Christians) to be sensitive to the Islamic activites in Nigeria and criticising the government for being anti-christianity and sentimental.	To condemn the federal government's act of injustice and unfairness to the Igbos and the Christians.
30. Corruption in Nigeria has grown because it is highly encouraged. In <i>The Trouble with Nigeria</i> , I suggest, “Nigerians are corrupt because the system they live under today make corruption easy and	Assertives/ Representatives/ Suggestives/ Expressives/ Behabitives (Accusatory).	Nigeria is still a corrupt nation because of lack of discipline and weakness of the democratic institution.	A direct illocutionary act of expressing thoughts and feelings about the outgrowing pace of corruption in Nigeria.	The intention of the encoder is to condemn the act of corruption in Nigeria and make likely suggestions on how to curb it.

profitable: They will cease to be corrupt when corruption is made difficult and unattractive”.				
31. I foresee the Nigerian solution will come in stages. First, we have to nurture and strengthen our democratic institutions- and strive for the freest and fairest elections possible. That will place the true candidates of the people in the office.	Predictives, Behabitives (Advisories)/ Assertives/ Expressives.	- Nigerian democratic policy system is built on a faulty foundation, and that is why corruption is so rampant.  - Presently, there are no true candidates of people in the office.	An indirect illocutionary act of condemning and criticizing the Nigerian political leaders.	To condemn the way democracy is practiced in Nigeria and criticise the Nigerian political leaders.

### Discussion of Findings

This section presents the interpretation of the study’s findings in relation to the research objectives. The results obtained from the data analysis are examined to identify patterns, trends, and significant insights. These findings are further discussed in light of existing literature and theoretical frameworks.

The background information, which is the common ground in any communicative event aids the inferencing process of the decoder(s). The encoder will always have an intention which is the proposed goal to be achieved, resident in the encoder’s mind. Understanding the total context (linguistic, social, sociological, physical etc.) of the speech act and having background knowledge of vital information are very essential in any interactive exchange.

It is the background information (Mutual Contextual Beliefs and World Knowledge) that often guide the decoders towards understanding the encoded message, what it implicates (Implicatures) and what was taken for granted (Presuppositions) by the encoder in the course of using language (communication).

Achebe uses both conventional and conversational implicatures to convey deeper messages about Nigerian politics, war atrocities, and leadership failures. The working of an implicature is believed to be crucially dependent on the awareness of the encoder and the decoder of the presuppositions of the context of interaction.

Most of the encoder’s (Achebe) locutionary acts are implicitly stated with so many assumptions that the readers will be able to decode the intended message appropriately. This is because Achebe took it for granted that his targeted readers have the ability to process the encoded messages accordingly based on the mutuality of context. All the sampled utterances, however, show that both what Achebe stated and what he implicated are part of the encoded meanings. Excerpt 17 for instance,

“There was a strong sense that Nigeria was no longer habitable for the Igbos and many other people from the Eastern Nigeria..... That Epi-phany made us realise that Nigeria “did not belong we” as Liberians would put it”.

This utterance has two distinctive implications that are not explicitly stated in the locutionary act. These implications are: Nigeria was habitable for the Igbos and many other people from the Eastern Nigeria before

the hostility started (Conventional/Generalised implicature) and the Igbos were outcast in Nigeria, as they were not seen as full-fledged members of the Nigerian family (Conversational/Particularised implicature - context based).

The implication for the locutionary act above (excerpt 17) is conversational (particularised) because in the working out of the meanings, there was the need to look beyond the lexical makeup of the utterance since more is communicated than is lexically expressed. It is assumed by the encoder (Achebe) that the participants (the encoder himself, Achebe and the readers) are mutually aware of the unhealthy rivalries between the Igbos and the non-Igbos before, during and after the Biafra war. This mutuality is what makes implicatures rationally possible. Conversational (particularised) implicatures are therefore achieved by the exploitation or observation of the cooperative principles and a set of maxims (Grice 1975, p.198).

The first implication of the sampled utterance above (excerpt 17) which is "Nigeria was habitable for the Igbos and many other people from the Eastern Nigeria before the hostility started" is a conventional (generalised) implicature because no special background knowledge of the context of the utterance is needed to draw the necessary inference. The utterance can be understood by reason of the conventional meanings of the lexical items that make up the utterance. This echoes the word of Yule (1996) that no special knowledge in the context is required to calculate the additional conveyed meaning.

Common ground refers to the shared knowledge, beliefs, and assumptions that exist among the interlocutors in communication. In *There Was a Country*, Chinua Achebe relies heavily on Mutual Contextual Beliefs (MCBs) and World Knowledge to frame his arguments, particularly in discussing the Nigerian Civil War and Igbo marginalization. These pragmatic tools enable Achebe to engage readers by assuming their familiarity with historical and socio-political contexts.

While the Mutual Contextual Beliefs is based on Bach and Harnish (1979) intention and inference approach to pragmatics, World/General Knowledge involves the interlocutors' acquired and perception of the world which affects their interpretation of conversations. Osisanwo (2003) opines that the background information such as the knowledge of the world and the MCBs are required by man through acculturation, observation, personal experience of different socio-cultural, socio-political and socio-economic events as well as linguistic interaction with people (p.84).

Achebe uses headings and subheadings as tools to understand the locutionary acts better in every section of the memoir. The headings and subheadings are perceived as the background knowledge (MCBs) which aid the smooth running of communication process in the memoir. Meanwhile, the general belief about a particular concept, history, theories, etc. of the readers makes the interpretation of the message easier for the readers. For instance, excerpt 6:

"After the graduation, I did not worry about where I would go next.  
The system was so well organised that as we left University, most  
of us were instantly absorbed into civil service, academia, business  
or industry"

The above statement has a lot of meaning based on the common ground the interlocutors shared on the situational context of Nigeria. Even though less is encoded by Achebe about the condition of Nigeria, but because of the general knowledge that Nigeria is experiencing a period of economic recession where unemployment of many graduates is so rampant, the locutionary act is thus adequate to accommodate the communicative intention of Achebe which is that "unemployment and underemployment are prevalent issues in Nigeria".

Intention in pragmatics refers to the speaker's goal behind an utterance. Achebe's communicative intentions in *There Was a Country* include criticizing Nigerian leadership, justifying Biafra's struggle and eliciting empathy for the Igbo people.

Chinua Achebe claimed that the Hausa/Fulani and the Yoruba stocks do not like his Igbo ethnic group because of the South-Eastern's cultural advantage. He observed that the Igbo culture which emphasizes on change, individualism and competitiveness gave his ethnic group an edge over the Hausa/Fulani man who were hindered by a "wary religion" and the Yoruba man who was hampered by

“traditional hierarchies”. Achebe’s intention here is to condemn and criticise the Nigerian government, especially during Gowon’s political administration for the unfair treatment towards the Igbos, and to justify the Igbos for their struggle for a political emancipation which eventually led to the Biafra war in 1967.

One of Achebe’s notable communicative intentions is to let his readers know that Nigerians should have maximised the competitive, individualism and the adventurous spirit of the Igbos which was a boon, but Nigerian leaders failed to recognise and harness this advantage for modernisation. Achebe also noted that the ousting of the prominent Igbos from top offices was a ploy to achieve a crude goal (excerpts 22, 23 and 24). Achebe thereby criticises and condemns Nigerians (Hausa/Fulani and the Yorubas) for wanting to get the achievers (Igbos) out and replace them with less qualified individuals from the desired ethnic background so as to gain access to the resources of the state.

According to Achebe (2014), one of the vital communicative intentions in his memoir is to tell the Nigeria’s story (excerpts 4, 10, 14, 28, 30 among others), Biafra’s story (excerpts 17, 18, 19, 20, 21, 23, 24, 25, and 29) and Achebe’s early life experience (excerpts 1, 2, 3, 6, 7, 11 among others) for the sake of future Nigeria (p.3).

Other communicative intentions of Achebe are to criticise the Yorubas especially the Yoruba leader, Awolowo and his civil war policy “A no-food policy” against the secessionist Biafran side (mainly Igbos and the present South-South), a diabolic policy according to Achebe which killed over two million people (excerpts 17, 18, 20 among other samples in the chapter 5).

Achebe’s intentions are also to criticise Gowon and his administration’s unfair treatment to the Igbos (excerpts 16, 17, 18, 21, 23, 25, 26, 29 among other samples in chapter 5), to let the readers know little about the history of the post-colonial era of Nigeria (excerpts 11, 12, 13, 14, etc), to expose the ills of the Nigerian government (from the time of Obasanjo till date) and suggest possible ways out of bad governance and corruption in Nigeria (excerpts 28, 29 30 and 31).

In discourse, some information is taken as known by the participants. This information is part of what is communicated in the speech event, even though they are implicit but not explicitly stated. People usually make all manners of assumptions about the background information to their utterance which they believe to be mutually known prior to the conversation to avoid verbosity (Grundy, 2000).

Such use of language echoes the words of Cap (2011) that “most communicative goals served by preposition have to do with, in some way with economy of expression” (p.52). This assertion holds true for encoder-decoders (Achebe and the readers) communication in the memoir as the encoder (Achebe) relies a lot on the shared assumptions which reduce the lexical and the grammatical load of the literary text.

From the sampled utterances, there were many instances of assumptions (semantic presuppositions) on the part of the encoder based on the logical relation that holds between sentences (Adegbija 1999). Such examples include the use Pronouns like her, he, she, they, etc; the use of acronym “BBC” in excerpt 7; aspectual verbs like stopped, continued, emerged, began, etc.

A typical example of usage is sample 14, “While this quiet transition was happening, a number of internal jobs, especially the senior management position began to open up for Nigerians, particularly those with university education”. The presupposition here is that “there was no opportunity for Nigerians with university education to get employed and fill the senior management positions before the transition”.

Other examples are the use of factives, e.g., “There was a strong sense that Nigeria was no longer habitable for the Igbos and many other peoples from Eastern Nigeria” presupposes the fact is that Nigeria was no longer habitable for the Easterners (as used in excerpt 17); temporal clauses headed by before, after, since, etc. excerpt 6 is a typical example of temporal clause usage in the sentence, “After graduation, I did not have to worry about where to go”.

The presupposition here is that Achebe is educated. Also, “Men like Okongwu” in excerpt 3 presupposes that Okongwu is an adult male; cleft sentences e.g., “African languages and writing should be

developed, nurtured and preserved" in excerpt 5 presupposes that language which is an instrument of communication is not developed in Africa; qualifiers e.g., "These schools have fallen into disrepair".

The use of "these" in excerpt 4 presupposes that there were more than one school that fell in disrepair; definite descriptions e.g., "I was working very closely with the former British BBC Talks producer, Angela Beattie" in excerpt 7 presupposes that BBC Talks had a producer; names such as Obafemi Awolowo, Sir Ahmadu Bello, Mr Cawsons in excerpts 11, 12 and 16 respectively presuppose that the aforementioned people (names) exist.

"Insult to our tradition", "quiet transition", "in those days", "my generation", "during this time", "the inter-ethnic tensions" as used in excerpt 1, 3, 9, 10 and 13 among others exemplify Achebe's assumptions and beliefs about the social and sociological contexts of his speech acts. Achebe's presuppositions here are the propositions whose truth he takes for granted as part of the conversation with the readers.

From the foregoing discussion, the study reveals that Achebe strategically employs presuppositions and implicatures to frame the Nigerian Civil War as a struggle for Igbo survival and justice, presuming the readers' familiarity with key historical events and figures. Through assertive illocutionary acts, he critiques Nigerian leadership, particularly the roles of Awolowo and Gowon, while expressive, narrative and accusatory behabitives emphasize the suffering of the Biafrans.

Achebe's reliance on common ground allows him to reinforce Igbo victimhood, positioning British colonial rule as more structured than post-independence governance. Implicatures suggest that Nigeria's leadership was corrupt and ineffective, that ethnic divisions persist, and that the war could have been avoided. The findings however highlight how language in political memoirs serves not only to document history, but also, to construct ideological positions, influencing contemporary discourse on national unity, governance, and ethnic relations.

## Conclusion

Achebe's *There Was a Country* is more than a memoir. It is a politically charged account shaped by micro-pragmatic strategies that subtly reinforce ideological perspectives. By analysing presuppositions, implicatures, common ground and illocutionary acts, the study illustrates how Achebe constructs a discourse of marginalization and resistance, shaping perceptions of historical events. The memoir frames the Nigerian Civil War through a lens of Igbo victimhood and governmental failure, employing linguistic strategies that evoke sympathy, critique leadership, and justify secessionist aspirations.

The study also underscores the power of language in constructing historical and political realities. Achebe's strategic use of common ground ensures that his narrative resonates with audiences who share similar contextual beliefs, reinforcing pre-existing biases. This analysis contributes to broader discussions on the intersection of language, politics, and history, showing how memoirs serve as ideological tools that influence collective memory.

While Achebe's work provides valuable historical insights, its pragmatic framing raises questions about objectivity, selective memory, and the role of language in shaping national discourse. Understanding these linguistic strategies allows a more critical engagement with historical narratives, ensuring that diverse perspectives are acknowledged in discussions of Nigeria's past and present.

Future researchers can build on this study by exploring how linguistic strategies in memoirs and autobiographies shape historical and political narratives beyond Achebe's *There Was a Country*. Investigative similar works by other Nigerian or African authors could offer comparative insights into how language constructs collective memory and identity.

Additionally, scholars could study counter-narratives from different ethnic or political standpoints to assess how competing linguistic strategies influence national discourse. Further research could also delve into the ethical implications of using pragmatic strategies to frame historical events.

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