CHAPTER V
CONCLUSION

5.1 Introduction

The foremost objective of this research is to study the world famous novels of Chinua Achebe from the viewpoint of Sociolinguistics. It is assumed that linguistics can determine the sociological background of a speaker through several speech habits and linguistic patterns. The study is meant to find out the social background of Achebe’s characters and the correlation to the method of language use. The use of dialects by the characters makes the novels of Achebe realistic, which ultimately leads to form the genuineness of the incidents and the characters. The description becomes lively with the flavor of the dialects of the characters belonging to different socio-economic classes.

The chapter is mainly dedicated to the Major Findings of the present research. It takes the review of the preceding chapters. It also states the pedagogical implications of the study. Towards the end of the chapter, an effort is made to suggest further scope for research in the related area. The results of the study of the five novels of Chinua Achebe are highlighted.

5.2 Major Findings

Following are the major findings of the research:

1) Impact of Sociological Background

It is found that the social context or sociological background creates a great impact on the language of the characters of Achebe. The background of Achebe’s novels is the territory of Nigeria. The characters belong to the
Igbo, a tribal, community. They are predominantly rustic, dwelling in certain regions of Nigeria. This background characterized by poverty, superstitions and dominated by social and religious beliefs, customs and traditions has a great effect on the linguistic behavior of Achebe’s characters. The socially weaker people are oppressed by the socially upper class people. It causes impact on the language used by the people. The prominent influences on the characters’ linguistic habits are highlighted in the novels.

The following expression shows the impact of social context on the language of the characters:

“If a man kills the sacred python in the secrecy of his hut, the matter lies between him and his God.”  
*T.F.A.*(p.145)

This expression occurs in the novel *Things Fall Apart*. The royal python was the most revered animal in Mbanta and all the surrounding clans. It is addressed as ‘Our Father’. The sacred python is an example that shows the blind faith of the Igbo people. The python is basically poisonous, still it is worshiped as a sacred entity. The social custom shows that it is habitual to the people to worship the python. Another example will make this point more clear:

“Kola nut is eaten here,” replied Mr. Okonkwo,
“but not sacrificed to idols.”  
*N.L.E. (p.59)*

This expression occurs in the novel *No longer at Ease*. The conversation is between the old people of the clan and Obi during the reception of Obi Okonkow. Obi’s father does not approve of the kola nut to be eaten in his
house. According to him, his social customs do not allow it. The use of the words like “kola nut” and “sacrificed to idols” show that the people regularly use this practice and so these words. He, therefore, uses the word like sacrificed to idols.

2) Impact of Education

It is observed that Education plays a significant role in causing influence on the language of the characters in the novels. It is also discovered that the major characters are mostly either educated or have a good environment and the minor characters belong to the downtrodden or suppressed class. The educated characters speak a standard variety of English while the uneducated class speaks substandard English or Pidgin English. It is further observed that the rustic and the regional characters of Achebe use Pidgin English. They also adopt the technique of Code-Switching and Code-Mixing.

Following examples taken from the novels can justify the impact of education on the language of the characters.

Take down the body,” the Commissioner ordered his chief messenger,” “and bring it and all these people to the Court”.

“Yes, sah”, the messenger said, saluting”.


The above conversation between the commissioner and the messenger occurs in the novel Things Fall Apart. The messenger, a minor character, is a villager and uneducated man. He is asked by the Commissioner to take the body down. The messenger only knows to follow orders of his boss. He applies his minimum linguistic skills for replying his master as “Yes, sah” instead of “Yes Sir.” The body language and non-verbal skill
of communication, he uses is appropriate. His saluting to his master displays the same. The commissioner is an educated man. He, therefore, uses a standard form of English. He uses the imperative, *Take down the body...* aptly. Another example from the novel *A Man of the People* makes it more clear:

“*Big man, big palaver,*” said the one-eyed man.

........

“*Me one,*” he said, “*I no kuku mind the katakata wey de for inside. Make you put Minister money for my hand and all the wahala on top. I no mind at all.*”

“No be so, my frien’. When you done experience.”

*A.M.P. (p.15)*

The characters such as Odili Samalu, the journalist and Mr. Nwege from the novel *A Man Of the People* are educated. They are capable of using standard form of English. The linguistic expressions they use are influenced by education they have received. The expressions like “*unprecedented crowd*”, “*Principal and Proprietor of Anata Grammar School* and “*my tongue to be in my cheek*” prove their abilities to communicate effectively. However, the common villager mispronounces the word “*friend*” as “*frien*”. They also use a proverb, “*Big man, big palaver.*” The incorrect use of sentences by misplacing words which shows the syntactic deviation such as “*I no mind at all.*” It indicates the impact of illiteracy on the use of language of the characters.
3) Impact of Age

During the analysis of the language used by Achebe’s characters, it is observed that “age” is an important factor to influence the linguistic expressions of the characters. It is represented in the conversations of the characters in the novels under consideration. The variety of language used by old people is different from the variety of the young people. Their use of language differs at three levels: phonology, morphology, and syntax.

The following conversations from Achebe’s novels prove how the age factor plays a significant role in influencing the characters’ language in the novels:

“You need some sleep yourself;” said Nowye’s mother.


The conversation between Nowye’s mother and Ekwefi from the novel, Things Fall Apart shows the impact of age group of Nowye’s mother. She is an adult who cares for her son and daughter to her best abilities and uses the expressions like You need some sleep yourself and You look very tired. Another example from the novel No Longer at Ease illustrates this point:

“A job is the first thing. Person who has not secured a place on the floor should not begin to look for a mat.”

Good night my son, and God bless you.” “Good night Father.” N.L.E. (p. 68)

Obi’s father in the novel No Longer At Ease, advises Obi in such a manner which is suitable to any responsible father. He tries to convince him about the necessity of a timely job. The age factor of Obi’s father
creates an impact on his language. The expressions like *my son* and *God bless you* symbolize the parental affinity and the possessiveness of the father to the child.

Examples of language used according to age difference are seen in the conversations of Okonkwo’s father and Okonkwo in *Things Fall Apart*, Obi’s father and Obi in *No Longer at Ease*.

The similar impact of age on the language of characters is found in the novel *Arrow of God*. Obika’s father, Ezeulu and mother Matefi care for their son. They, being old, give blessings using the linguistic expressions such as:

“*may your face meeting mine bring good fortune, Follow my finger, my son, and Keep quiet there.*” *A.O.G.* (p.8)

It is noticed that the older people give blessings to the younger ones. It is a universal phenomenon.

4) **Impact of Ethnicity**

It is further noticed that the influence of Ethnicity is revealed most commonly through difference in pronunciation or vocabulary used by the characters. As demonstrated through the character of the taxi driver in *Anthills of Savannah*, Unachukwu to Nweke in *Arrow of God* (p.83); linguistic expressions like “Yes sir”, and “pardon” are mispronounced as “*Yessah*”, and “*pardin*”. While Mr. Wright asks them, “*Shut up, you black monkeys, and get down to work!*” This is a typical example. There are many other situations where we come across similar linguistic expressions. Achebe modifies his English usage in a manner that amounts to a linguistic coup that preserves the Igbo language.
The following conversation occurs in the novel *Things Fall Apart* which helps in understanding the influence of ethnicity on language of the characters.

“We have now built a church,” said Mr. Kiaga, “and we want you all to come in every seventh day to worship the true God.” *T.F.A.* (*p. 137*)

The missionaries settled in Umuofia built churches and began spreading Christianity among the Igbo community. They also attempted to convert the Igbo people to Christianity. Mr. Kiaga in his interactions with other characters appears determined to convert the natives to Christians. The regular use of the linguistic expressions like “a church”, “every seventh day” and “worship the true god” shows the impact of ethnicity on their linguistic behavior. (*A.O.G. p. 137*)

In the novel, *Arrow of God* (p.137), the sharp reactions such as “Do you have priests and elders there?”, the white man has his own way of doing things and Obika’s sharp threatening “You will know that you are not in the house of the white man but in Umuaro in the house of the Chief Priest of Ulu” reveal the respect for the native religion and hatred for the alien. The repeated way of linguistic expressions like “priest” and “white man” reveal the impact of ethnicity on the language of the characters.

5) **Impact of Gender**

It is seen that gender of the characters also causes influence on the language used by them. The impact on the linguistic utterances of the characters is studied in the present research. Male characters are
generally sharp in their tone and a little more commanding. The female characters, on the contrary, are tender and affectionate and also have low tone. Their linguistic expressions highlight their quality of being patient. It is, therefore, observed that gender influences the dialect of the characters. Male characters speak somewhat different from their counterparts female characters. Following are the glaring examples which throw light on this observation.

Nwoye’s mother, in the novel, *Things Fall Apart*, being a female character, has a soft tone. Okonkwo, on the other hand, is rough and tough in his speech. The reaction and body language of Okonkwo show his being a manly character. The following description proves this fact:

“Okonkwo bit his lips as anger welled up within him.”

Nwoye’s mother lies trying to minimize the pressure in that situation. *T.F.A. (p.27)*

Clara in the novel, *No Longer at Ease*, offers some tablets of Avomine to Obi as he is unwell. Her being more tender and caring for him is because she is a woman. Her linguistic expressions: “Take two before you go to bed”, “I’ve got enough for all the passengers” and “Good night, you’ll feel better in the morning.” *(N.L.E. p.28)* show the gentleness in a woman’s language, behavior and her approach.

6) Impact of Culture

It is discovered that culture is expressed in the material aspect by Achebe. He is well known for being a source of Igbo culture. As a native speaker, he is the best resource for a linguistics study. Achebe comes across a problem in presenting the African tradition and culture in a language that can never describe it effectively. An understanding of Igbo culture is only possible when the alien can relate to the Igbo language and vocabulary.
In *Things Fall Apart*, words and concepts such as *chi*, *egwugwu*, *ogbanje*, and *obi* are basically untranslatable, but by using them in the context of his story, Achebe supports the non-Igbo reader to identify with and relate to this complex Igbo culture. The songs sung and the beating of drums on different occasions as a part of their culture is the influence on the language of the characters. The festival of Yam is supposed to be significant. The religion recognizes the existence of a Supreme Power as the controlling force of their life. Apart from this Supreme God, there are other gods, who made and unmade with an effortless ease, as illustrated in the festival of New Yam as seen in the following description:

*The festival thus brought gods and men together in one crowd. It was the only assembly in Umuaro in which a man might look in to his right and find his neighbor and look to his left and see a god standing there.*  
*A.O.G. (p.202)*

In order to offer a reliable feel for Igbo culture, it would be impossible without the proverbs which play a significant role in the novels of Achebe.

7) **Phonological Deviations**

It is noticed that the characters of Achebe are influenced by several factors which have caused deviation in their pronunciation of words and other phonological aspects. The stress or intonation in some situations is observed to have been influenced. Following are some observations:

a) The characters tend to substitute long vowel sounds with the short sounds, the latter of which is only applicable in their mother tongues.

Hence,  

i) \( /i:/ \) is realized as \( /i/ \)  

ii) \( /a:/ \) is realized as \( /a/ \)
b) Reinterpretation occurs when a sound in English is realized as its close counterpart in English.

Hence, i) /ʌ/ is interpreted or realized as /ɔ/

ii) /ə/ is interpreted /a/

iii) “sah” instead of “sir”

c) Actual sound substitution is occasioned by the substitution or replacement of sounds absent in Nigerian languages.

Hence, i) /ð/is substituted with /d/

ii) dem instead of them

Change in pronunciation of English speech is the feature of rustic dialect in the novels. Achebe applies this technique to all his novels.

d) Words are pronounced as they are written. This is not so in English and the situation results in awkward pronunciation:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Word</th>
<th>BE</th>
<th>NE</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Listen</td>
<td>/lɪʃən/</td>
<td>/lɪʃɪn/</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

e) The pronunciation of consonants is said to differ throughout Nigeria. In general, however, the fricative sounds /θ/ and /ð/, as in “thin” and “this,” are replaced by /t/ and /d/, as in “tin” and “dis.”

f) It is further noticed that in the pronunciation of Igbo names and words, the characters are influenced by some factors mentioned above. The differences in the actual voice pitch and the rise or fall of a word or phrase can produce different meanings. In Chapter 16, (T.F.A.) for example, Achebe describes how the missionary's translator, though an
Igbo, cannot pronounce the Mbanto Igbo dialect: "Instead of saying 'myself' he always says 'my buttocks.' (The form k means strength while k means buttocks.)

8) Morphological Deviations

It is observed that the skilful inclusion of Borrowed Words, Compoundings, Acronyms , Intialisms , Misspelt Words, Pidgin Words and Creole words is done by Chinua Achebe in his novels. There are some deviations found in the use of certain words and phrases. An attempt is made to highlight some of the highly marked examples from the novels as given below.

8.1 Borrowing

Borrowings words and expressions from foreign languages and local languages is skilfully used by Achebe in his novels. For instance, in the novel Things Fall Apart we come across the following description: “She thought of that night long ago, when she had seen Ogbu-agali-odu, one of those evil essences loosed upon the world by the potent medicines' which the tribe had made in the distant past against its enemies but now had forgotten how to control.” (T. F. A. 104) The bold word is borrowed from the local language.

8.2 Compounding

i) Dwarf wall Small storage for yams (T.F.A.)

ii) Parlour- wife A girlfriend (A.M.P.)

8.3 Acronyms

i) POP (People’s Organization Party)

It is a word used informally to popular music. (A.M.P.)
8.4 Initialism

i)  
\textit{H. E.}  
His Excellency (A.O.S.)

ii)  
\textit{H.H.}  
His Honour (A. O. G.)

iii)  
\textit{OAU}  
Organization of African Unity

iv)  
\textit{MM}  
Mad Medico(A.O.S.)

8.5 Misspelt Words

i)  
\textit{Gorment}  
instead of  
Government

ii)  
\textit{Dat}  
instead of  
That (A.M.P.)

8.6 Pidgin English

Use of Pidgin words and expressions is understood as a privileged position in a colonial society. The natives feel that they are superiors when dealing with the villagers.

i)  
\textit{Kotman}  
court man (T.F.A.)

ii)  
\textit{Palavers}  
conferences (T. F. A.)

iii)  
\textit{Ife}  
something (A.O.S.)

Odili and Nanga are able to speak standard English still they choose to converse in Pidgin English when they are discussing intimate topics such as women as given below:

"E fool pass garri," said Chief Nanga. "Which person tell you am na bobby them de take to do the thing? Nonsense." "But that woman nawaa," I said. "Who put that kind sense for im head?"
"Woman?" rhapsodized Chief Nanga. "Any person wey tell you say woman no get sense just de talk pure jargon. When woman no want do something e go lef am, but make you no fool yourself say e lef the thing because e no get sense for do am." **A.M.P. (p.67)**

### 8.7 Creoles

It is found that Achebe, instead of taking the structure of Igbo, accepts the English syntax and grammar system as the basis for his Creolization process. Achebe does not entirely dismiss his Igbo roots. The novels are widespread with Igbo culture, from the imagery and figurative language discussed above, down to the use of Igbo words and sentences.

The use of **obi** for *hut*, **achi** for *tree*, or **ike** for the word *power* allows the pages to come alive with African life and culture. Achebe captures the life of his people putting into practice the Igbo and pidgin words, strengthening the languages.

Here are some glaring examples from the novels.

i) “*Why I go kill my master?*” **A.M.P.(p.34)**

ii) “*Ah This na the Famous Cadillac?*” **A.M.P. (p. 59)**

iii) “*What Mass go drink?*” **A.O.G.( p. 34)**

### 9) Syntactic Deviations

It is observed that Achebe’s English is determined by his characters. Syntax, being a disciplinary school subject, is not taught at home. It is revealed through the language of Achebe’s characters who are not educated. They use alternative to ungrammatical syntax, or syntactic difference, in contrast with standard grammatical syntax of the educated.

It is also found that in terms of tense, the English used by the characters
shows a three-way distinction such as:

(i) A form for present tense “with a specifically imperfective meaning”. It represents a continuous or progressive or a habitual action depending on the context and the specific verb used.

(ii) is a simple past tense, while

(iii) is a form indicating future tense.

Following are the examples from the novels:

i) “Plenty plenty. I been see am long time, my dear.” (A.O.S)

ii) “Your battery is down. Why your battery no down for afternoon when you come pick me.” (A.O.S)

The sentence constructions in the novels appear odd. The structural patterns are used by misplacing the parts of speech. It is discovered that the Subject Verb Concord is not taken into account while framing sentences. This kind of use appears suitable to the illiterate characters. Following sentences throw light on this observation:

i) “Why I go kill my master?” (A.M.P.)

ii) “For sake of what?” (A.O.S)

Apart from these deviations, different parts of speech such as nouns, pronouns, prepositions and the definite article are influenced. The proper use of question tag is ignored.

10) Use of Unusual Spellings:

It is interesting to note the use of unusual spellings used in the novels such as:

i) Foolis  Foolish

ii) Natin  Nothing

iii) Jus  Just
11) Use of Kinship Terms

It is found that kinship relations are often expressed in ways that are foreign to Western culture. References to kinship relations are often expressed in terms of phrases that are explicit explanations of the kind of family ties between relatives. In the novel *Arrow of God*, the expression “Son of our Daughter” is used by a maternal grand-uncle to refer to the son of his niece. The word 'son' in turn refers to his maternal grand-uncle as “Father of my Mother” since the grand-uncle could very well represent his maternal grand-father who is no longer alive.

12) Use of Code Switching and Code Mixing

It is seen that Chinua Achebe uses the CS and CM techniques to express certain specific functions in social dealings. The most common form of CS and CM used by him is between colloquial speech and English. In the situation where Achebe finds him unable to adequately express African socio-cultural reality in a European language, he uses the alternative of use of local words and expressions as in the case of following examples:

i) “He is Okonkwokpom-kwem, exact; perfect”. *T.F.A.* (p.49).

ii) “Dem talk say make rain come quick quick.” *A.O.G.* (p. 31).

iii) “Na him make I no de want carry you book people,”

*N. L.E.* (p. 50).

13) Use of Terms of Greetings

It is noticed that Greetings used in the novels is very a significant aspect of sociolinguistic study. Different characters have different socio-cultural and socio-economic background. They use expressions of greetings in various ways. However, the characters seem to have taken maximum care to abide by their native language. Expressions of *greetings, honor and*
abuse are repeatedly used by the characters in different contexts as shown in the following examples:

i) “Nno” (welcome) T.F.A. (p. 112)

ii) “Hi Micah, hi Margret,” said the woman. A.M.P. (p.44)

14) Use of Honorific Terms

It is observed that honorific terms are frequently used by the characters of Achebe. Here are some examples given from the novels.

i) *Nnaayi*---“Our Father” a greeting offered to male leaders T.F.A. (p.13)

ii) “Yes, sir, master,” said the driver. A.M.P. (p.32)

iii) “Yes, Madam.” A.O.S. (p.111)

15) Use of Abusive Expressions

It is discovered that using expressions of abuses are a common practice followed by the characters in the novels of Achebe. The following examples indicates this :


ii) *Akelogoli* Good for nothing T.F.A. (p. 50)

iii) “Damn the headquarters.” A.O.G. (p.103)

iv) “Shit!” replies Mad Medico. “You don’t have to follow your

v) “fucking leader in this house.” A.O.S. (p.50)

16) Use of Diminutive Expressions

It is found that Achebe’s characters use Diminutive expressions when they express extreme sensitivity and affection to other characters such as
5.3 Pedagogical Implications

The use of both Standard English and dialect in Achebe’s novels serves two purposes:

1) Standard English is used when a character is literate to some extent and or desires to improve, such as Chief Nanga, Obi Okonkwo, Clara.

2) Dialect is predominant as Achebe endeavors to show the characters as they are of his acquaintance or he is aware of them. It has been cited in the earlier part of the thesis.

The observations of various critics reveal that the use of non-standard language by Achebe suits his characters’ use of dialect in the novels studied. Since, non-standard language is not usually used widely, it is often used by the minor characters, such as taxi driver, Mr. Jalio, Elsie, Abdul, etc. Since the standard language is associated with educated class, non-standard language has almost been relegated to uneducated or unsophisticated class. It, therefore, can be stated that non-standard language has been a marker of class and social status.

This research work helps in understanding the characters of Achebe, their socio-cultural background, their ethos through sociolinguistic study. Consequently, it provides the readers a substantial help to understand the language used by the characters. Hence, the readers are acquainted with the sufferings of the downtrodden even in the postcolonial Africa. The sociolinguistic approach used to analyze the novels can remove the cultural
barriers and make our students understand these novels and Igbo culture.

5.4 Scope for Further Research

There is a great scope for further research in the related area of Sociolinguistics. It is proposed that further research may be carried out on other works of Chinua Achebe in variety of sub fields of linguistics and pragmatics.

Besides sociolinguistic approach, following theories and principles may be applied to Achebe’s novels and other literary works:

i. Speech Act Theory
ii. Communicative Approach
iii. Stylistic Analysis
iv. Discourse Analysis
v. Politeness Principles and Co Operative Principles

Studying the works of Achebe with the help of these theories and principles one may throw more light on the literary masterpieces of Achebe and derive aesthetic pleasure.

It is also suggested that, an independent study of sociolinguistic factors such as education, age, social class, gender and ethnicity may be conducted either at micro-level or macro-level.

Further study is also possible on comparative aspects such as Achebe’s use of dialects with some Indian novelists’ use of dialects.