PRAGMATIC MORALITY AND IDEOLOGIES OF AFRICAN PROVERBS IN CHINUA ACHEBE'S THINGS FALL APART AND OLA ROTIMI'S KURUNMI

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Abstract

Proverbs, which are central to African literature as stylistic and cultural tools, are increasingly underutilised in contemporary African societies due to their transformation through satire, irony, humour, and parody. This study investigates the experiential and textual metafunctions of proverbs in Things Fall Apart and Kurunmi. It employs Systemic Functional Linguistics as the analytical framework. Forty proverbs were purposively selected (20 from each text) and analysed for transitivity patterns and Theme-Rheme structures, combining quantitative content analysis with a descriptive interpretive approach. Findings indicate that Things Fall Apart predominantly employs material and relational processes, foregrounding individual morality, social mobility, and justice, whereas Kurunmi favours relational and behavioural processes, highlighting collective resilience and communal accountability. Theme analysis further reveals differing ideological orientations, with Things Fall Apart emphasising hierarchical morality and Kurunmi centring on

agency and interdependence. The study concludes that proverbs function as effective vehicles for cultural transmission, sustaining African epistemologies and reinforcing indigenous worldviews despite contemporary transformations. It contributes to knowledge by integrating SFL with African literary analysis to demonstrate how linguistic metafunctions encode cultural ideologies across genres, and recommends renewed scholarly and pedagogical engagement with proverbs through linguistically grounded approaches that preserve their cultural and epistemic relevance.

Introduction

Despite extensive scholarship on African proverbs from folkloric (Oluwádòrò et al., 2025), anthropological (Ọlọruntọba-Oju, 2013), pragmatic (Alabi, 2000; Odebunmi, 2006; Adedimeji, 2009), and stylistic perspectives, a significant research gap persists in the limited attention paid to their metafunctional realisation within literary discourse. Existing studies have not sufficiently interrogated how the experiential and textual metafunctions of proverbs operate simultaneously to construct sociocultural ideology and identity in African dramatic and prose narratives. This oversight has resulted in a largely descriptive treatment of proverbs as cultural artefacts, rather than as structured linguistic resources through which meaning, ideology, and identity are systematically encoded. Consequently, the grammatical and discourse-level mechanisms through which proverbs construe experience and organise textual meaning in African literary texts remain under-theorised.

This gap is particularly significant given the representational and ideological burden borne by language in African literature written in English, which emerged partly in response to Eurocentric misrepresentations of Africa. Language, across its genres, holds substantial representational power, enabling the construction and negotiation of social, cultural, and moral meanings (Bühler, 2011; Tenbrink, 2020). African literary writers such as Chinua Achebe, Wole Soyinka, Ngũgĩ wa Thiong'o, and Ola Rotimi have consistently mobilised language as a tool for cultural assertion and epistemic resistance. Achebe (1983), for instance, challenges colonial portrayals of Africans as devoid of language and meaning, insisting instead on language as a potent instrument of cultural affirmation (see Jonsson, 2014).

Within this broader linguistic and literary context, African proverbs function as dense semiotic resources embedded with cultural wisdom, ideology, and social norms. They operate not merely as decorative rhetorical devices but as active carriers of communal epistemologies and identity structures. Proverbs thus function as cultural markers that sustain social reality and articulate shared meanings, serving as what may be described as a symbolic badge of collective belonging (see Afolayan, 2024). However, without a rigorous metafunctional analysis, the full extent of their ideological and grammatical significance remains insufficiently explored.

It is against this backdrop that this study situates its inquiry. It investigates the experiential and textual metafunctions of selected proverbs in Kurunmi and Things Fall Apart, with the aim of demonstrating how these proverbs encode ideology and sociolinguistic

identity among Africans generally, and Nigerians in particular. The study is anchored in Systemic Functional Linguistics, which conceptualises language as simultaneously construing experience, enacting social relations, and organising textual meaning (Halliday, 1994; Halliday & Matthiessen, 2004).

Accordingly, this study moves beyond the ornamental interpretation of proverbs to demonstrate their systematic role in meaning construction within literary texts. It focuses specifically on transitivity as the realisation of experiential meaning and Theme/Rheme structure as the realisation of textual meaning, in order to show how these metafunctional systems jointly encode ideology and identity. The objectives guiding the study are to:

i. Examine how experiential meanings are realised in the selected proverbs;

ii. Analyse how textual meanings are organised within the selected proverbs; and

iii. Investigate how these metafunctional structures contribute to the construction of sociocultural identity in the literary texts.

Against this background, this study adopts a distinctly metafunctional angle that departs from earlier approaches by shifting analytical focus from what proverbs mean culturally to how proverbs work linguistically as integrated systems of meaning-making. Specifically, it argues that the ideological and identity functions of proverbs in African literary texts cannot be fully understood unless their experiential (transitivity) and textual (Theme-Rheme) configurations are analysed as interdependent rather than isolated features. In doing so, the study moves beyond descriptive, thematic, and purely stylistic readings of proverbs, as well as approaches that privilege pragmatics or cultural interpretation without close grammatical scrutiny.

This metafunctional orientation is particularly significant because it enables a dual-level analysis in which proverbs are examined not only as carriers of African epistemology but also as structured linguistic resources that actively organise reality and perspective within discourse. The study offers an analytical pathway that integrates ideology, identity, and grammar within a unified interpretive framework. It thereby provides a more systematic account of how meaning is constructed in African proverbs.

An Exploration of African Proverbs in Nigerian Culture

Proverbs have been widely recognised as key repositories of social and cultural identity. They function as condensed expressions of a community's worldview, moral philosophy, and historical consciousness. Mieder (1996) characterises proverbs as concise traditional statements that convey apparent truths, thereby foregrounding their sententious and didactic nature. While this definition is foundational, it tends to privilege form and brevity over the dynamic communicative roles proverbs play in real discourse situations. Extending this view, Norrick (2015) shifts attention to the pragmatic flexibility of proverbs, showing that their meanings are not fixed but are continually reshaped by context. This insight usefully challenges static definitions, yet it still largely frames proverbs in terms of usage rather than their internal linguistic architecture. Similarly, Falola (2024) conceptualises Yoruba proverbs through the metaphor *Òwe l'eṣin ọ̀rọ̀* ("the proverb is the horse of speech"), emphasising their mediating role in meaning construction. While this metaphor richly captures their cultural centrality, it foregrounds function and

symbolism more than grammatical form, leaving unexamined how such mediation is linguistically achieved. Ethnographic accounts, such as Leslau and Leslau (1985), further demonstrate that among Yoruba and Igbo speakers, proverbs regulate conversational flow and encode culturally sanctioned wisdom. However, these studies primarily document social usage patterns without systematically unpacking the linguistic mechanisms that enable such regulatory and epistemic functions.

Empirical studies of African literary texts have further expanded the understanding of proverb usage. Gogoi (2017), for instance, argues that in Chinua Achebe's works, proverbs serve as strategic linguistic resources that enable the domestication of English for African expressive purposes. While this study importantly foregrounds linguistic adaptation and cultural assertion, its focus remains largely thematic, as it does not closely examine how grammatical structures within proverbs generate these ideological effects. In a more quantitative direction, Chintya Winda et al. (2019) identify twenty-seven proverbs in Things Fall Apart and categorise them into six functional domains, thereby demonstrating their cognitive and cultural embeddedness. However, their classificatory approach, while useful for mapping distribution, reduces proverbs to functional labels without interrogating the linguistic systems that produce such functions. From a pragmatic perspective, Osipeju (2022) shows that proverbs and idioms operate as goal-oriented speech acts, revealing speakers as intentional agents who deploy language strategically. However, even this insightful contribution remains centred on illocutionary force and communicative intent rather than on clause-level organisation. Complementing these findings, Jegede and Osoba (2019), in their study of *Kurunmi*, identify thirty proverbs and demonstrate their context-dependent meanings, particularly in relation to warning, advising, correcting, and asserting. Nevertheless, their analysis similarly privileges interpretive outcomes over the grammatical configurations that enable such meanings.

When these studies are collectively considered, they reveal a consistent scholarly orientation towards classification, interpretation, and pragmatic function. Proverbs are repeatedly shown to be culturally dense, cognitively rich, and contextually dynamic. However, a critical limitation runs through these approaches: they largely treat proverbs as already-formed semantic wholes whose meanings are accessed at the level of usage, rather than as linguistically engineered structures whose meanings are systematically realised through grammatical organisation. Consequently, the internal mechanics of meaning construction, particularly how experiential reality is encoded through transitivity patterns and how discourse coherence is achieved through Theme-Rheme organisation, remain underexplored. It is precisely this gap that necessitates the present study's Systemic Functional Linguistic orientation, which repositions proverbs not merely as cultural artefacts of interpretation but as structured semiotic systems through which ideology and identity are grammatically enacted in African literary discourse.

Proverbs in African Literary Discourse

In African literary discourse, particularly in the works of Chinua Achebe and Ola Rotimi, proverbs function not only as cultural artefacts but also as aesthetic and ideological devices embedded within narrative structure. Achebe's (1958) characterisation of proverbs as "the palm oil with which words are eaten" foregrounds their centrality in discourse, especially in the indigenisation of English. Through such

deployment, African writers encode indigenous epistemologies within colonial languages with the aim of resisting misrepresentation and asserting cultural identity.

Empirical studies confirm the strategic and context-sensitive deployment of proverbs in literary texts. Gogoi (2017) demonstrates that Achebe's use of proverbs is adaptive and non-mechanical, varying across sociocultural contexts to reflect shifts between tradition and modernity. Chintya Winda et al. (2019) show that proverbs in *Things Fall Apart* function across multiple interpretive dimensions, reinforcing their role as cognitive and cultural frameworks within narrative discourse. Osipeju (2022) further establishes that proverbs operate as pragmatic acts, revealing characters as rhetorically strategic and culturally grounded speakers. Similarly, Jegede and Osoba (2019) demonstrate that in *Kurunmi*, proverbs derive meaning from context and perform diverse communicative functions, highlighting their role in shaping interaction and reinforcing thematic concerns within the text. Collectively, these studies demonstrate that proverbs are dynamic discursive tools, shaped by context, genre, and communicative intent.

Additional scholarship by Odebunmi (2006), Alabi (2000, 2009), and Adedimeji (2009) highlights the stylistic and sociopolitical functions of proverbs. These studies demonstrate that such expressions are not merely decorative elements of language but serve as strategic communicative resources within African discourse. These scholars show that proverbs function as tools for encoding ideology, negotiating power relations, and reinforcing communal norms. They argue that proverbs often allow speakers to articulate sensitive or critical positions in socially acceptable ways. In this sense, proverbial discourse operates at the intersection of aesthetics and social action, where form and function are deeply intertwined.

Building on this foundation, Adeoti (2019) and Ajadi and Oloruntoba-Oju (2023) position proverbs as mediating devices between African oral traditions and global literary forms. Their work underscores how proverbs facilitate the transposition of indigenous epistemologies into written and often Westernised literary frameworks. Proverbs, thereby, preserve cultural specificity while enabling cross-cultural intelligibility. They, in this regard, become linguistic bridges that sustain continuity between orality and textuality, tradition and modernity.

However, critical perspectives by Afolayan (2024) and Falola (2024) introduce important tensions into this discourse. They draw attention to issues of interpretive accessibility, particularly for non-native audiences who may lack the cultural competence required to fully grasp the layered meanings of proverbs. Furthermore, they caution against the risk of cultural essentialism, where the repeated framing of proverbs as fixed repositories of "African wisdom" may inadvertently homogenise diverse cultural practices and overlook internal variations and contestations. These critiques invite a more reflexive engagement that recognises both the cultural richness and complexities of proverbial discourse within contemporary global and academic contexts.

Synthesising these perspectives, this section achieves a clear analytical advancement. First, it demonstrates that proverbs have been robustly validated as functional, pragmatic, and ideological resources within African literary discourse. Second, it shows that existing studies, despite their empirical richness, remain largely descriptive, interpretive, or classificatory, focusing on meaning, usage, and effect rather than on linguistic realisation. Third, it

establishes that the acknowledged complexity, variability, and context-dependence of proverbial meaning necessitate a more systematic, linguistically grounded analytical approach.

Consequently, this study advances the field by applying Systemic Functional Linguistics to examine the experiential (transitivity) and textual (Theme-Rheme) metafunctions of proverbs. In doing so, it provides empirical, clause-level evidence of how proverbs encode cultural values, organise meaning, and guide interpretation within Nigerian literary discourse. What is achieved here, therefore, is a decisive shift from descriptive cultural and pragmatic analysis to systematic linguistic explanation, thereby addressing a critical and previously underexplored dimension of proverb studies.

Linguistic Frameworks for Analysing Proverbs

Language theories across structural, pragmatic, cognitive, and functional traditions have offered diverse perspectives on proverb interpretation. Within pragmatics, proverbs have been analysed through the Speech Act Theory of John Austin (1962), where they are considered to function as indirect performatives capable of guiding action and shaping attitudes. Discourse analysts, such as Norrick (2015), emphasise proverbs' interactional and conversational functions, while ethnographic approaches foreground their cultural embedding and context-specific significance. Indigenous scholarship further demonstrates that proverbs are dynamic instruments of social regulation and cultural expression. For instance, Hausa proverbs, like Igbo and Yoruba proverbs, encode moral teachings and societal norms as windows into cultural values (Abdulwaheed & Aliyu, 2025). The proverbs function as meta-communicative devices reflecting collective wisdom and communal conscience (Uyanne & Ejiaso, 2024). Yoruba proverbs, on the other hand, are shown to adapt to contemporary social and economic transformations and are used to illustrate the evolving nature of proverbial discourse (Oluwádòrò, Oladosu, & Ajao, 2025). Indigenous studies also highlight the pragmatic deployment of proverbs in conflict resolution and negotiation among minority cultures, such as the *Alago* (Ose-Agbo & Edache, 2025). Collectively, these perspectives underscore that proverbs are culturally potent but fluid, serving both normative and adaptive functions.

While these perspectives illuminate important dimensions of proverb usage, they often lack a systematic grammatical model for analysing how proverbs simultaneously encode experiential meaning and organise textual structure. Systemic Functional Linguistics (SFL), developed by Halliday (1973, 1994) and elaborated by Halliday and Matthiessen (2004), offers such a model. By conceiving language as a social semiotic system, SFL posits that meaning is realised through three metafunctions: experiential, interpersonal, and textual. Transitivity analysis accounts for how experience is represented through processes, participants, and circumstances, while Theme/Rheme analysis explains how messages are organised within clauses. Despite the robustness of this framework, relatively few studies have applied transitivity and Theme analysis systematically to African literary proverbs. Where SFL is invoked, it is often conceptual rather than operationalised through detailed clause-level examination (Fomukong, 2017; Ayinuola, 2019).

From the foregoing review, it is evident that scholarship on African proverbs is rich in cultural, folkloric, and pragmatic insights. However, a methodological gap remains in the systematic metafunctional analysis of proverbs

within literary texts. Specifically, insufficient attention has been paid to how experiential processes and thematic structures grammatically encode ideology and sociocultural identity. The present study addresses this gap by applying transitivity and Theme analysis within the SFL framework to selected proverbs in *Kurunmi* and *Things Fall Apart*. By doing so, it moves beyond descriptive, ethnographic, and pragmatic accounts to demonstrate how proverbs function as structured meaning-making resources, constructing experiential realities and organising textual coherence in ways that reinforce African sociocultural identity, ideology, and collective worldviews.

Theoretical Framework

This study is grounded in Systemic Functional Linguistics (SFL), developed principally by Halliday (1978) and further elaborated by Matthiessen (2004). SFL conceptualises language as a social semiotic system, in which meaning is actively constructed and negotiated within specific sociocultural contexts. Unlike formalist or generative approaches that prioritise abstract syntactic competence (Chomsky, 1965), SFL foregrounds language use, social function, and contextual embeddedness. This functional orientation is particularly pertinent for literary discourse, where linguistic form is inseparable from ideological and cultural meaning (Eggins, 2004; Martin & Rose, 2007). Building on SFL, this study innovatively applies transitivity and Theme analysis to African literary proverbs, highlighting how grammatical choices enact cultural meaning and social ideology.

A foundational premise of SFL is that language simultaneously realises three metafunctions: experiential, interpersonal, and textual. The experiential metafunction construes human experience; the interpersonal metafunction enacts social relations and evaluative positioning; and the textual metafunction organises discourse into coherent messages (Halliday, 1994). Unlike traditional literary analyses that focus primarily on thematic or performative aspects, SFL positions grammatical choices as socially motivated semiotic acts, making it especially suitable for examining culturally rich and ideologically loaded forms such as proverbs (Finnegan, 1970; Yankah, 1989).

While SFL has been widely applied in educational linguistics, discourse analysis, and multimodal studies (Eggins, 2004; Martin & Rose, 2007), its application to African literary proverb studies remains limited. Most existing scholarship privileges ethnographic, anthropological, or stylistic approaches, emphasising performance, oral tradition, or cultural symbolism, while leaving grammatical patterning analytically under-theorised (Finnegan, 1970; Yankah, 1989). Unlike prior studies that treat proverbs ethnographically or stylistically, this research demonstrates how grammatical patterns actively enact ideology and construct sociocultural identity, thereby contributing both to proverb scholarship and to functional linguistic theory.The present study focuses specifically on two metafunctional systems. These aretransitivity, which realises experiential meaning, and Theme/Rheme structure, which realises textual meaning. The theoretical claim underpinning this alignment is that sociocultural identity is not only thematically represented but grammatically enacted through patterned metafunctional choices. SFL is not employed merely as a classificatory tool but as a critical lens for analysing the ideological and evaluative work of proverbs.

Transitivity, Information Structure, Agency, and Ideological Representation

Within SFL, transitivity constitutes a semantic system for modelling experience through configurations of processes, participants, and circumstances (Halliday & Matthiessen, 2004). The six principal process types, material, mental, relational, behavioural, verbal, and existential, encode distinct domains of experience. Material processes represent actions and events. Theyinvolve an Actor and, where applicable, a Goal. Mental processes construe perception, cognition, affection, or desire, and involve a Senser and a Phenomenon while relational processes establish states of being and relationships, functioning either attributively (Carrier and Attribute) or identificationally (Identifier and Identified).Behavioural processes represent physiological or psychological behaviour and verbal processes encode acts of saying and symbolic exchange. Lastly, existential processes indicate presence or occurrence (Halliday & Matthiessen, 2004; Thompson, 2004).

Transitivity analysis is not merely classificatory. Patterns of transitivity foreground or obscure actors, naturalise social hierarchies, and encode culturally specific understandings of action and moral order (Fowler, 1991; Fairclough, 1995). Transitivity enables the examination of how communal wisdom construes agency and social relations in African proverbs embedded in literary narratives. Material processes foreground action and consequence while relational processes encode normative truths or identities.Mental processes highlight culturally valued modes of perception or judgement. Through this lens, the first research question, how experiential metafunctions are realised, is addressed critically to reveal the ideological work embedded in grammatical structures (Halliday, 1994; Halliday & Matthiessen, 2004). By foregrounding the interplay between transitivity and Theme/Rheme patterns, this study offers a systematic model for examining how condensed literary forms encode cultural knowledge and social norms.

While transitivity explains what is represented, the textual metafunction explains how representation is organised. Theme/Rheme structure determines the point of departure of the clause. It shapes interpretive orientation (Halliday, 1994). Among its types, Topical Themes realise experiential meaning, and Textual Themes establish cohesion and continuity. Interpersonal Themes signal stance, evaluation, or interactional orientation (Halliday, 1994; Martin & Rose, 2007). Thematic selection is not neutral. It signals and foregrounds culturally significant participants, actions, or circumstances and guides interpretation and reinforces communal values (Finnegan, 1970; Yankah, 1989). Marked Themes, where circumstantial or process elements occupy initial position, signal rhetorical emphasis, particularly salient in condensed proverbial discourse (Martin & Rose, 2007).

The third research question concerns the broader ideological implications of metafunctional patterns. SFL posits that linguistic systems are culturally shaped and reproduce cultural meaning (Halliday, 1978). Transitivity and Theme patterns are therefore not ideologically neutral. By integrating these analyses, proverbs in *Kurunmi* and *Things Fall Apart* are conceptualised as grammatically condensed sites of cultural memory. Experiential configurations encode shared understandings of agency, morality, and causation, while textual organisation foregrounds elements that transmit communal norms. Thus, identity is enacted through recurrent grammatical choices, rather than merely described thematically (Halliday &

Matthiessen, 2004; Eggins, 2004). This approach diverges from existing literature by situating grammatical choices as active mediators of communal norms, rather than neutral descriptors of content.

This study extends the application of SFL by demonstrating how grammatical structures in African literary proverbs not only represent meaning but actively enact communal ideology and sociocultural identity. Unlike previous research that primarily analyses proverbs through ethnographic, anthropological, or stylistic lenses, this study uses transitivity and Theme/Rheme analysis to systematically reveal the ideological and evaluative work embedded in clause-level patterns. In doing so, it contributes to both proverb scholarship and functional linguistic theory by illustrating how language choices mediate cultural knowledge, agency, and social norms. Therefore, it offers a model for integrating SFL into the analysis of condensed, culturally saturated literary forms. This study thus advances SFL theory by demonstrating its analytical potential for critically interrogating the grammar of culturally dense literary texts. It shows that language choices are ideological acts rather than neutral reflections of content.

Methodological Consideration

Proverbs were selected from *Kurunmi* and *Things Fall Apart* based on thematic significance and narrative function. Thematic significance was determined by identifying proverbs that repeatedly capture central cultural, moral, or ideological concerns. Narrative function was assessed by examining how proverbs advance the plot, guide character interactions, or shape reader interpretation. A rubric was used to score each proverb on these two dimensions. This is to ensure a consistent and transparent selection. A total of forty proverbs were analysed, with twenty drawn from each text. Although *Kurunmi* contains more proverbs overall, equal distribution allows for a comparative analysis of the ideological and historical contexts rather than reflecting absolute frequency.

The use of Systemic Functional Linguistics (SFL) is both epistemologically and methodologically justified. Alternative approaches, such as pragmatic, stylistic, or ethnopoetic frameworks, offer insights into performance and symbolism but often do not provide a systematic account of how grammatical patterns realise cultural meaning. SFL integrates clause-level analysis, discourse organisation, and sociocultural interpretation (Halliday, 1978; Halliday & Matthiessen, 2004). This alignment ensures coherence between the theoretical framework, study objectives, and analytical procedures, enabling a systematic investigation of proverbs as structured linguistic and cultural resources.

The transitivity analysis focuses on processes, participants, and circumstances to uncover how experience and ideology are encoded. Theme/Rheme analysis examines how textual meaning is organised and how culturally salient elements are foregrounded. This approach differs from purely descriptive or sociolinguistic methods, such as those used by Merabti and Benzoukh (2021), and from pragma-stylistic approaches like Essuman, ResCue, and Yeboah (2021), which prioritised qualitative interpretation without systematic clause-level analysis. By combining qualitative interpretation with quantitative evidence, the study shows not only the linguistic intricacies of proverbs but also their sociocultural and historical significance.

A mixed-methods approach is adopted. Qualitative analysis interprets the cultural,

moral, and ideological meanings embedded in the proverbs, while quantitative analysis identifies patterns in process types, participant roles, and thematic structures. Frequencies and distributions of processes and participants are tabulated to highlight dominant experiential structures and provide numerical support for interpretive claims.

Analysis of Proverbs in *Things Fall Apart* and *Kurunmi*

This analysis examines how proverbs function both linguistically and culturally. It focuses on the grammatical patterns and textual organisation that encode experiential meaning, emphasise key elements, and construct sociocultural identity.

Transitivity Patterns in the Proverbs of *Things Fall Apart*

In Chinua Achebe's *Things Fall Apart*, the proverbs serve as powerful sites for the linguistic encoding of ideology through transitivity, privileging material and relational processes that foreground action, consequence, and social pragmatism. The dataset of twenty proverbs, demonstrates that the Igbo worldview is deeply communal, justice-oriented, and pragmatically moral. It emphasises resilience, humility, respect, and accountability. For instance, the proverb "Looking at a king's mouth," said an old man, "one would think he never sucked at his mother's breast" (TFA, p. 12) combines the material processes "looking" and "suckled" with the mental process "think," to enact an observer-phenomenon-goal relationship in which the actor "One" evaluates the phenomenon "A king's mouth" against the goal "He never suckled at his mother's breast." The ideological import of this construction highlights the fallibility of appearances and the equalising truth of human origins and reflecting humility and the shared humanity of all social actors.

In a similar vein, the proverb "If a child washed his hands, he will dine with kings" (TFA, p.6) foregrounds material processes, "washed" and "dine," to signify the importance of personal effort, civility, and social mobility, establishing a pragmatic link between action and reward within communal ethics. The proverb "A man who makes trouble for others is also making troubles for himself" (TFA, p.68) foregrounds material processes "makes" and "making," pairing actor and goal in a morally instructive sequence that conveys reciprocity, accountability, and the inevitability of consequences for unethical behaviour. See table one below for illustration.

Table 1: Distribution of Process Types in Achebe's *Things Fall Apart*

Process Type	Frequency (f)	Percentage (%)	Ideological functions
Material	20	50%	Action, consequence, pragmatism, accountability
Relational	12	30%	Identity, hierarchy, continuity
Mental	4	10%	Reflection, foresight, awareness
Verbal	3	7.5%	Communication, persuasion
Behavioural	1	2.5%	Observation, social learning
Total	40	100%	—

Likewise, "The clan was like a lizard; if it lost its tail, it soon grew another one" (TFA, p.71) employs a relational process "was like" alongside material processes "lost" and "grew,"

presenting the clan as a resilient social entity capable of regeneration despite adversity, emphasising communal continuity and adaptability.

Proverbs such as "When mother cow is chewing grass, its young ones watch its mouth" (*TFA*, p. 49) encode material and behavioural processes, representing observation and learning as central mechanisms through which knowledge, behaviour, and social norms are transmitted. Across the dataset, material processes are dominant. This accounting for 50% of all clauses, with relational processes comprising 30%, mental processes 10%, verbal processes 7.5%, and behavioural processes 2.5%.

This distribution reflects Achebe's prioritisation of observable actions and their consequences. This indicates a pragmatic moral philosophy that foregrounds ethical conduct as enacted through deeds rather than mere words, while relational processes maintain social identity and hierarchy. Mental processes provide reflective insight, foresight, and awareness, verbal processes encode communication and persuasion, and behavioural processes, though minimal, capture the role of observation and learning in communal life. One of the specific proverbs that illustrates these ideological functions include "The sun will shine on those who stand before it shines on those who kneel under them". This proverb enacts material processes that emphasise justice and the inevitability of reward. "When the moon is shining, the crippled becomes hungry for a work" pairs material and relational processes to portray desire and motivation.

Also, "A toad does not walk in the day time for noting" foregrounds material processes to encode prudence and vigilance. The saying about the old woman uneasy when dry bones are mentioned (*TFA*, p. 10) couples material and mental processes to signal awareness and caution; paying respect to the great paves the way for personal greatness (*TFA*, p. 14) combines material and relational processes to encode respect and strategic pragmatism; the lizard jumping from the Iroko tree (*TFA*, pp. 15-16) exemplifies hierarchical fairness and eventual justice through material processes; Eneke the bird (*TFA*, p. 16) pairs material and verbal processes to illustrate adaptation and skill; pouring grains into a bag full of holes (*TFA*, p. 16) foregrounds material processes to represent futility and planning; a chick that will grow into a cock can be spotted the very day it hatches (*TFA*, p. 46) enacts material processes to convey foresight and pragmatism; a child's fingers not being scalded by a piece of yam (*TFA*, p. 47) encodes material processes signalling protection and nurturing.

This underscores Achebe's systematic deployment of transitivity to structure moral and social ideologies and to demonstrate that proverbs operate not merely as metaphorical or symbolic artifacts but as grammatical mechanisms that encode action, consequence, and ethical reflection. The thematic and experiential centrality of actors, the patterned sequencing of cause and effect, and the integration of relational and material processes can collectively reveal a worldview where social ethics, prudence, resilience, and accountability are linguistically and cognitively staged to, therefore, render proverbs as both instructive and performative in their narrative function.

Transitivity Patterns in the Proverbs of *Kurunmi*

The transitivity analysis of proverbs in *Kurunmi* demonstrates that Rotimi's deployment of proverbial discourse is neither stylistically incidental nor structurally random. Rather, it reflects a patterned metafunctional organisation that encodes a distinctly Yoruba ideological orientation. Quantitative evidence from the 40 analysed clauses (derived from 20 proverbs) reveals the following distribution: relational processes (40%), behavioural processes (25%), material processes (20%), verbal processes (10%), and mental processes (5%). This configuration contrasts significantly with the material dominance identified in Achebe's *Things Fall Apart* (45%), thereby foregrounding ideological divergence at the level of grammatical realisation. See the table below.

Table 2: Distribution of Process Types in *Kurunmi* Proverbs

Process Type	Frequency (f)	Percentage (%)	Ideological functions
Relational	16	40%	Identity assignment, moral evaluation, limitation
Behavioural	10	25%	Evaluative conduct, strategic stance
Material	8	20%	Consequence, collective action
Verbal	4	10%	Persuasion, authority in dialogue
Mental	2	5%	Epistemic responsibility
Total	40	100%	—

From a Systemic Functional Linguistics (SFL) perspective (Halliday & Matthiessen, 2014), relational processes function to assign attributes, identify entities and construct states of being. Their predominance (40%) in *Kurunmi* suggests that moral categorisation and identity alignment are foundational to the play's proverbial logic. For example, in the clause, *"It is a foolish daughter who thinks she knows so much…"* (*Kurunmi*, p. 64), the relational attributive process ("is") assigns moral judgement prior to action. Identity is evaluated before behaviour unfolds. This finding aligns with Oluwádòrò et al. (2025), who argue that Yoruba proverbs are structurally oriented toward ethical classification and communal value reinforcement. However, while their study emphasises cultural continuity at the semantic level, the present analysis demonstrates that such evaluative orientation is grammatically instantiated through the systematic preference for relational clauses.

Similarly, *"Sharp though a knife, it cannot cut its own handle"* (*Kurunmi*, p. 64), juxtaposes relational attribution ("sharp") with negated material action ("cannot cut"), thereby encoding limitation within capability. This grammatical pattern reinforces the Yoruba philosophical emphasis on interdependence, a point also noted by Ose-Agbo and Edache (2025), who identify indigenous proverbs as discourse tools for conflict management and communal equilibrium. The present findings extend this claim by showing that equilibrium is linguistically structured through relational limitation rather than merely culturally implied.

Behavioural processes (25%) further strengthen the evaluative orientation of the text.

In SFL, behavioural clauses occupy the intermediate space between mental and material processes, often encoding embodied psychological stance. Proverbs such as *"When a rat laughs at a cat, there is a hole nearby"* (*Kurunmi*, p. 38) use behavioural action ("laughs") to signal calculated security rather than naïve defiance. The behavioural act is legitimised by relational assurance ("there is a hole"). This supports Ògúnṣíji et al. (2025), who argue that Nigerian proverbs frequently function within speech situations as strategic social positioning devices. However, while their work situates proverbs within pragmatic interaction, the present analysis demonstrates that such positioning is grammatically encoded through behavioural-relational interplay.

Material processes, although present (20%), are comparatively restrained. Where they occur, they typically encode consequence rather than heroic agency. In *"The bull-frog that rivals the size of the elephant will burst,"* (*Kurunmi*, p. 29) material clauses ("rivals," "will burst") construct disproportionate ambition followed by inevitable collapse. Unlike Achebe's frequent use of material processes to highlight achievement and social mobility, Rotimi's material clauses often function as cautionary mechanisms. This finding partially challenges Abdulwaheed and Aliyu's (2025) argument that African proverbs predominantly foreground symbolic action as a representation of worldview. In *Kurunmi*, action is secondary to identity alignment and communal calibration; it is relational morality that structures the interpretive frame.

The relative scarcity of mental processes (5%) is also ideologically significant. Mental clauses such as *"When an Elder sees a mudskipper…"*(*Kurunmi*, p. 42) position knowledge as responsibility, not speculation. Cognition is subordinated to moral accuracy. This observation resonates with Uyanne and Ejiaso's (2024) claim that Igbo proverbs function meta-communicatively to regulate epistemic conduct. However, while their findings foreground discourse-level regulation, the present study reveals how epistemic accountability is grammatically realised through the distributional marginality yet functional salience of mental processes.

Verbal processes (10%) reflect the dramatic and dialogic structure of *Kurunmi*. Proverbs are embedded within speech acts that reinforce authority and persuasion, supporting pragmatic accounts such as those of Norrick (2015), who emphasises conversational framing. Yet, unlike purely interactional analyses, the SFL-based findings demonstrate that dialogic embedding operates alongside structured experiential encoding rather than replacing it.

When interpreted comparatively, the divergence between *Kurunmi* and *Things Fall Apart* becomes ideologically revealing. See table 3 below.

Table 3: Transitivity comparison

Process Type	***Things Fall Apart***	**%**	***Kurunmi***	**%**
Material	18	45%	8	20%
Relational	12	30%	16	40%
Behavioural	3	8%	10	25%
Mental	4	10%	2	5%
Verbal	3	7%	4	10%

Achebe's 45% material dominance foregrounds individual agency within hierarchical moral systems. Rotimi's 65% combined relational and behavioural dominance foregrounds communal alignment, strategic foresight and ethical positioning. This contrast suggests that while both texts draw from African oral traditions, they grammatically privilege different dimensions of sociocultural identity, individual mobility in Achebe and communal calibration in Rotimi.

Theme-Rheme Patterns in the Proverbs of *Things Fall Apart*

A separate Theme-Rheme analysis of the proverbs in Things Fall Apart reveals how clause-initial positioning organises ideology, hierarchy, and communal ethics in the novel. Following the Systemic Functional Linguistics (SFL) framework, Theme constitutes the point of departure of the message, while Rheme provides its development. Thematic choice therefore reflects how moral responsibility, causality, and inevitability are cognitively staged.

The 20 proverb samples (with page numbers retained as indicated) were segmented into 40 analysable clauses. The thematic distribution shows three dominant configurations: Unmarked Topical Themes (65%)**,** Marked Themes (25%), andTextual/Interpersonal Themes (10%)**.**

Table 2: Distribution of Theme Types in the Proverbs of *Things Fall Apart*

Theme Type	Frequency (f)	Percentage (%)
Unmarked Topical Theme	26	65%
Marked Theme	10	25%
Textual/Interpersonal	4	10%
Total	40	100%

The majority of proverbs begin with the grammatical Subject functioning as Theme. This participant-first structure foregrounds Actors or Carriers before unfolding action or evaluation, reinforcing personal accountability and social hierarchy.

Examples include:

"The sun will shine on those who stand before it shines on those who kneel under them."

"A man who pays respect to the great paves the way for his greatness" (TFA p.14).

"The lizard that jumped from the high Iroko tree … said he would praise himself…" (TFA pp.15-16).

"A chick that will grow into a cock can be spotted the very day it hatches" (TFA p.46).

"A man who makes trouble for others is also making troubles for himself" (TFA p.68).

"The clan was like a lizard; if it lost its tail, it soon grew another one" (TFA p.71).

In each case, the Theme foregrounds a participant (sun, man, lizard, chick, clan). The Rheme then encodes consequence, evaluation, or inevitability. The 65% dominance of unmarked Themes suggests ideological directness: agency is clearly attributed before judgement unfolds. This thematic clarity aligns with Achebe's broader narrative strategy, where moral order is

anchored in identifiable social actors: elders, children, clan, kings. Responsibility is thematically visible rather than abstract.

Marked Themes occur when circumstantial or dependent clauses precede the Subject. These create rhetorical emphasis on condition, time, or inevitability before the main clause unfolds.

Examples:

"When the moon is shining, the cripple becomes hungry for a walk" (TFA p.7).

"If a child washed his hands, he will dine with kings" (TFA p.6).

"When mother cow is chewing grass, its young ones watch its mouth" (TFA p.49).

"If one finger brought oil, it soiled the others" (TFA p.87).

"As a man danced, so the drums were beaten for him" (TFA p.131).

"Looking at a king's mouth… one would think he never sucked at his mother's breast" (TFA p.12).

In the above instances, thematic fronting foregrounds circumstance or condition before revealing moral outcome. The effect is pedagogical: consequence is framed as logically dependent on prior action. The 25% rate of marked Themes indicates structured reasoning. Unlike purely declarative moral statements, these proverbs guide interpretation through conditional logic, reinforcing communal cause-and-effect ethics.

A smaller proportion (10%) foregrounds interpersonal or textual meaning. These include imperatives, evaluative structures, or meta-proverbial commentary.

Examples:

"Let the kite perch and let the eagle perch too…" (TFA p.9).

"I cannot live on the bank of a river and wash my hands with spittle" (TFA p.117).

"As the saying goes, an old woman is always uneasy when dry bones are mentioned…" (*TFA*, *p. 10*).

In these cases, the Theme carries evaluation or communal voice before identifying actors. The imperative "Let" foregrounds negotiation and balance. The textual marker "As the saying goes" highlights cultural authority. Though only 10%, these Themes carry strong ideological force, signalling communal consensus or invoking proverbial legitimacy.

Theme-Rheme Patterns in the Proverbs of *Kurunmi*

The analysis of Theme-Rheme organisation in the proverbs of *Kurunmi* further clarifies how ideological meanings are textually structured. Within the Systemic Functional Linguistics (SFL) framework (Halliday & Matthiessen, 2014), the Theme functions as the point of departure of the clause, shaping how the message is framed, while the Rheme develops or completes that message. Thematic choice, therefore, is not merely syntactic arrangement but an ideological act: it determines what is foregrounded and how responsibility, causality and evaluation are cognitively processed.

An examination of the 40 clauses derived from the 20 proverbs reveals three dominant thematic configurations: Unmarked Topical Themes (60%), Marked Themes (30%), and Textual/Interpersonal Themes (10%). The distribution is summarised in Table 4.

Table 4: Distribution of Theme Types in the Proverbs of*Kurunmi*

Theme Type	Frequency (f)	Percentage (%)
Unmarked Topical Theme	24	60%
Marked Theme	12	30%
Textual/Interpersonal	4	10%
Total	40	100%

The predominance of unmarked topical Themes indicates that most proverbs begin with the grammatical Subject functioning as Theme. This participant-centred structuring foregrounds Actors or Carriers before unfolding action or evaluation.

For example:

"The bull-frog that rivals the size of the elephant will burst." (*Kurunmi*, p. 29)

In this proverb, *The bull-frog* functions as the unmarked topical Theme. The proverb foregrounds the Actor before presenting the inevitable consequence. Responsibility is immediately anchored in the participant. Similarly:

"A man with fire on his hands welcomes no delay." (*Kurunmi*, p. 28)

The participant *A man* occupies initial position, reinforcing accountability and pragmatic urgency.

The 60% dominance of unmarked Themes suggests ideological clarity and directness. Participants are thematically visible; action and consequence follow logically. This aligns with observations in indigenous scholarship (e.g., Oluwádòrò et al., 2025) that Yoruba proverbs favour clarity in moral instruction. However, the present findings extend that claim by showing that clarity is structurally realised through participant-first thematic organisation.

Marked Themes account for 30% of the clauses, a comparatively high proportion. These occur when circumstantial, concessive or dependent clauses precede the Subject, thereby foregrounding condition or inevitability.

For example:

"When five little hyenas combine strength, they crush the father of lions." (*Kurunmi*, p. 38)

The conditional clause *When five little hyenas combine strength* functions as a marked Theme. Thematic fronting emphasises circumstance before outcome. Collective unity is presented as the precondition for success.

Similarly:

"No matter how high the swallow flies, it must at last come down to earth." (*Kurunmi*, p. 47)

The concessive structure *No matter how high…* foregrounds elevation only to intensify the inevitability expressed in the Rheme. Thematic marking creates rhetorical tension.

The relatively high occurrence of marked Themes (30%) suggests that Rotimi's proverbs are strategically framed rather than linearly declarative. Conditionality, concession and inevitability are highlighted before resolution. This supports Ògúnṣíji et al.'s (2025) argument that Nigerian proverbs operate within situational pragmatics; however, the present analysis demonstrates that such situational framing is

grammatically realised through thematic fronting.

Textual and interpersonal Themes, though fewer (10%), are ideologically potent. These structures introduce explicit evaluation or logical connection.

For example:

"It is a foolish daughter who thinks she knows so much…" (*Kurunmi*, p. 64)

The interpersonal Theme *It is* foregrounds moral evaluation before identifying the Carrier. Judgement becomes the point of departure.

Similarly:

"When an Elder sees a mudskipper, he must not afterwards say it was a crocodile."

The textual Theme *When* frames epistemic responsibility before issuing the prohibition.

The relatively limited frequency of these Themes indicates that overt moralising is structurally controlled. Evaluation is embedded within participant or condition-centred framing rather than excessively foregrounded.

A comparison of the thematic organisation of proverbs in Achebe's *Things Fall Apart* (TFA) and Rotimi's *Kurunmi* shows how clause-initial positioning encodes ideology beyond metaphor or symbolism. Quantitative analysis of 40 clauses from each text reveals three primary Theme types: unmarked topical, marked (conditional), and textual/interpersonal.

Table 5: Comparative Theme Distribution

Theme Type	***Things Fall Apart***	**%**	***Kurunmi***	**%**
Unmarked Topical Theme	26	65%	24	60%
Marked Theme	10	25%	12	30%
Textual/Interpersonal	4	10%	4	10%
Total	40	100%	40	100%

The thematic configuration of proverbs in TFA foregrounds participant visibility (65%), highlighting social actors such as *child*, *man*, *clan*, and *sun*. By placing these actors in thematic position, Achebe ensures that moral lessons are clearly anchored in identifiable agents. For instance:

"If a child washed his hands, he will dine with kings" (TFA, p.6)
"A man who makes trouble for others is also making trouble for himself" (TFA, p.68)

These constructions exemplify how actions and consequences are participant-centred, foregrounding social accountability and moral responsibility.

Conditional moral logic (25%) emerges through marked Themes that structure cause-and-effect reasoning. Examples include:

"When the moon is shining, the cripple becomes hungry for a walk" (TFA, p.7)
"If one finger brought oil, it soiled the others" (TFA, p.87)

Therefore, circumstantial fronting creates a temporal or causal dependency, indicating that behaviour generates predictable outcomes. This aligns with observations by Okpewho (1992) and Finnegan (2012), who note that African proverbs frequently encode morality through conditionally structured experience. Finally, textual/interpersonal Themes (10%) activate communal voice and authority. Imperatives or proverb-invoked collective wisdom, as in:

"Let the kite perch and let the eagle perch too. If one says no to the other, let his wing break" (TFA, p.9)

signal cultural consensus, placing collective judgement in thematic position. Ideologically, these structures validate communal norms and traditional authority.

In sum, Achebe's proverbs privilege moral clarity, participant agency, and hierarchical accountability, with a quantitative distribution (65% / 25% / 10%) that confirms systematic grammatical encoding of ideology.

In contrast, Rotimi's proverbs distribute thematic prominence differently. Unmarked topical Themes (60%) maintain participant centrality, similar to TFA, but marked Themes (30%) appear more frequently, reflecting deliberate rhetorical foregrounding within dramatic dialogue. Conditional and circumstantial fronting ("When…", "No matter how…", "Sharp though…") structures inevitability, guiding audience interpretation and reinforcing strategic foresight. Textual/interpersonal Themes (10%) retain a role in reinforcing communal consensus and authority.

Examples illustrate these trends:

"When five little hyenas combine strength they crush the father of lions" (*Kurunmi*, p. 38) illustrates conditional fronting that encodes collective agency while "A man with fire on his hands welcomes no delay" (*Kurunmi*, p.28), foregrounds thematic markedness that underscores urgency and pragmatic decisiveness. Also, "It is a foolish daughter who thinks she knows so much that she can teach her own mother how to bear children" (Kurunmi, p.64) uses topical Theme to foreground participant, while relational and mental clauses are deployed to encode moral evaluation.

The higher proportion of marked Themes in *Kurunmi* compared to TFA suggests a performative and persuasive orientation, consistent with Rotimi's dramatic medium. This supports previous studies (Okpewho, 1992; Olaniyan, 2010) which argue that African proverbs adapt structural and rhetorical strategies to context, foregrounding audience engagement and moral instruction. The comparative distribution of Theme types shows that while both texts foreground participants, Rotimi emphasises conditionality more frequently to heighten rhetorical urgency. In both corpora, textual and interpersonal Themes, though limited, activate communal authority and reinforce collective moral wisdom. The interplay between transitivity and thematic configuration reveals that ideology in African proverbs is not solely metaphorical: it is structurally staged. In TFA, relational and material processes are coupled with participant-fronted Themes to foreground individual responsibility within communal norms. In *Kurunmi*, relational and behavioural processes are paired with marked thematic structures to dramatise strategic intelligence, collective action, and pragmatic realism. The Theme-Rheme analysis across both datasets demonstrates that African proverbs systematically encode ideology through grammatical structuring. In *Things Fall Apart*, moral clarity and individual accountability dominate; in *Kurunmi*, strategic realism,

communal foresight, and rhetorical urgency are foregrounded. The analysis provides empirical evidence that illustrates that ideological emphasis is realised not only in content but also in thematic staging.

Discussion of Findings

This study reveals that proverbs in Chinua Achebe's *Things Fall Apart* (TFA) and Ola Rotimi's *Kurunmi* serve as powerful linguistic vehicles for encoding African cultural values, moral ideology, and sociocultural identity. Analysis of transitivity patterns and theme-rheme structures demonstrates both convergence and divergence in the ways these literary texts use proverbs to communicate meaning. In *Things Fall Apart*, proverbs predominantly employ material and relational processes, foregrounding tangible actions, social consequences, and identity relationships. For instance, the material processes in proverbs such as *"If a child washed his hands, he would eat with kings"* or *"If a man comes into my hut and defecates on the floor, I take a stick and break his head"* highlight individual effort, social mobility, and the ethical imperative of defending personal dignity. Relational processes, as in *"The clan was like a lizard; if it lost its tail, it soon grew another one"*, communicate resilience and adaptability. These findings align with the observations of Adeoti (2019), who argues that Achebe's deployment of proverbs reflects an ideology that balances individual responsibility with communal norms, highlighting prudence and hierarchical morality.

However, some scholars offer a counter perspective. Fomukong (2017) contends that excessive focus on material processes risks overemphasising action over the subtler dimensions of moral reasoning embedded in proverbs, such as reflection and relational negotiation. This suggests that while TFA proverbs foreground concrete actions, the moral and ethical subtleties also warrant attention, particularly in the context of Igbo epistemology, where communal consequences are paramount. In contrast, *Kurunmi* demonstrates a distinct transitivity profile, privileging relational, behavioural, and material processes. Proverbs such as *"When death wants to take a man, it first takes his wisdom"* and *"The chicken that challenges the hawk must have confidence in its wings"* foreground communal values, preparation, and moral foresight. The relational processes articulate possession, identity, and causality, while behavioural and material processes stress agency, courage, and assertive action. This resonates with Falola (2024) and Afolayan (2024), who emphasise that proverbs reinforce communal accountability and immediate justice, reflecting Yoruba cultural norms of interdependence and pragmatic morality.

Nevertheless, a counterargument may arise to suggest that Rotimi's emphasis on assertive action could risk overshadowing reflective and deliberative moral reasoning, potentially privileging decisiveness over contemplation. While this is valid, the present analysis indicates that the behavioural processes function within a structured moral framework, demonstrating that assertive action in Kurunmi is never divorced from ethical and communal accountability.

Analysis of theme-rheme structures further elucidates ideological orientations. Both texts rely heavily on topical themes, foregrounding participants and actions. In TFA, textual themes appear frequently, providing temporal and logical connections that reinforce the interconnectedness of actions and consequences. Interpersonal themes, though less frequent, convey conditionality and accountability, reflecting the cultural principle that personal conduct is inseparable from social and spiritual

responsibility (Adeoti, 2019; Ọlọruntọba-Oju, 2013). In Kurunmi, topical themes dominate entirely, emphasising human agency and communal resilience, while interpersonal and textual themes support reciprocity and social cohesion.

This comparative analysis reveals an important insight: Achebe's proverbs often stress individual morality within a communal framework, reflecting an ideology of prudence, humility, and hierarchical social order. Rotimi, by contrast, foregrounds collective responsibility, proactive decision-making, and resilience, demonstrating a culture-specific orientation toward immediate moral and social action. Together, these findings underscore the role of proverbs as instruments of cultural continuity, moral education, and sociocultural identity formation, supporting Fomukong's (2017) argument regarding the centrality of grammatical structures in realising meaning.

Consequently, this study extends the discourse in African literary and linguistic studies. While prior scholarship has highlighted the cultural and pragmatic dimensions of proverbs (Essuman et al., 2021; Merabti & Benzoukh, 2021), few studies have systematically applied Systemic Functional Linguistics to demonstrate how experiential processes and thematic structures encode ideology. The findings demonstrate that transitivity and theme analysis offer a rigorous, replicable method for uncovering the ideological and sociocultural significance of proverbs, bridging the gap between descriptive cultural interpretation and formal linguistic analysis.

Conclusion

The study employs quantitative content analysis and interpretive descriptive methodology to explore the deeper meanings embedded in the African proverbial. For this study, the analysis of proverbs from Achebe's *Things Fall Apart* and Rotimi's *Kurunmi* is examined to uncover their cultural, moral, and ideological significance. The proverbs are analysed within their cultural and textual contexts to reveal their roles in the narratives. Both texts emphasise community values, resilience, respect for hierarchy andrespect for elders and traditionas a recurring cultural value. The analysis of proverbs from Achebe's *Things Fall Apart* and Rotimi's *Kurunmi* reveals a rich tapestry of cultural, moral, and communal ideologies. While Achebe emphasises individual morality and social mobility, Rotimi foregrounds collective resilience and pragmatic justice, reflecting the nuances of their respective cultural and historical contexts. The use of quantitative content analysis to interpret the text usingSystemic Functional Linguistics (SFL) has provided a new dimension to deepen the exploration of proverbs from Achebe's *Things Fall Apart* and Rotimi's *Kurunmi*. By leveraging the SFL framework, particularly theme-rheme analysis and transitivity patterns, the study unpacks how these proverbs convey cultural ideologies, moral teachings, and communal values with linguistic evidence. This agrees with Adeoti (2019) discoveries that proverbs are deeply rooted in African traditions, serving as compact vessels of wisdom, truth, and history. They adapt to changing socio-cultural contexts while retaining their traditional significance. Hence, this study reemphasises that proverbs are the products of a particular society which provide the natural badge for the sociocultural, psychological and existential identities of the people.By integrating interpretation with numerical evidence, this study has unveiled the ideological underpinnings of the proverbs from distinctly African perspectives. This approach not only highlights the linguistic intricacies of the proverbs but also reveals their broader socio-

cultural and historical significance with stylistic evidence that supports interpretations and findings.

In conclusion, the study establishes that African literary proverbs are not merely ornamental or decorative. In *Things Fall Apart*, they communicate action-driven morality, resilience, and hierarchical accountability, while in *Kurunmi*, they foreground agency, collective action, and immediate justice. Both corpora affirm that proverbs serve as structured meaning-making resources, embedding moral, ideological, and cultural knowledge in linguistic form. These insights contribute to understanding how African writers use English-language texts to reproduce indigenous epistemologies, moral philosophies, and social worldviews, reinforcing both individual and communal identity formation within the African literary tradition.

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