



# **Sankofa**

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# Communicative Competence and the Quest for the Total Man

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## **Introduction**

The quest for the total man is a continuous process which goes on throughout life time. How can one search for this totality? Who is the total man? He is the one, who, in addition to his/her specialty is able to discuss on areas outside his discipline. He has a comprehensive knowledge or understanding of issues that affect his life as a human being.

The search for the total man involves the ability to communicate since communication is an integral part of man. Communication is:

a process involving the sorting, selecting and sending of symbol in such a way as to help a listener perceive and recreate in his own mind the meaning contained in the mind of the communicator. (Okon 40)

In addition, we wish to extend a scholar's definition of communication which asserts that "communication is the life and blood of any organization [man]" (Lanihun 25). We observe that without communication the total man can not be developed. Furthermore, Indeed one important indication of one's mastery of a language is the ability to communicate effectively in the language in both oral and written forms. (Ogunsiji 27)

From the foregoing, it shows that the quest for the total man necessitates the knowledge of "what to say, how to say it, to whom, when and why?" That means, the total man must be able to sort and select items that would

enable him to fit into his society as well as contribute meaningfully and positively to the development of his society in a competent manner.

### **Communicative Competence**

Communicative competence is a sociolinguistic theory which is very relevant to the development of man in any society he finds himself. Hymes defines communicative competence as the "ability to construct and interpret appropriate utterances in particular linguistic and social contexts, with specific goals or purposes" (Hyme, 274). Appropriateness implies consideration of the social context in which the language is used. In addition, the following factors are important: participants (status and roles); purpose of interaction, norms or conventions of interaction, that is know what to say; and how to say it (Okon 99). That means, communicative competence is a skill which must be acquired because it is indispensable in almost all social and cultural interactions. For one to achieve, the ultimate goal of the total man he needs to acquire communicative competence. The implication in the acquisition of communicative competence shows that "the commonsense views of linguistic and discourse competences are not ignored." That is, man acquires the skill to handle connected discourse and the intelligence to do this in real time [Life] without prior rehearsal (Stubbs 36).

Furthermore, a speaker or listener in any society is capable of speaking different languages to suit the context (Hymes, 274). Communicative competence involves the combination of the elements of language as well as the social features of the environment. Communicative competence is embracing, as it integrates the "attitudes, values and motivation" of a speaker. It can therefore, be



adduced that communicative competence is affected by social experience, needs and motives. The search for the 'total' man considers these three factors.

Besides Hymes and Miller, another exponent of communicative competence expatiates on the components of the theory. He enumerates the features of communicative competence as grammatical, phonological, sociolinguistic and acquired competence. In addition, Stevick asserts that it also deals with personal competence. In essence, communicative competence attempts to link situations, interactions, sequences, functions and grammatical realizations in a systematic way. In this section we have discussed a sociolinguistic theory which is very relevant to the development of the total man. This concept calls for communication competence in a speech community and the analysis of the novels under study will explicitly illustrate how the communicative ability/skill has contributed to the development of the total man.

### **Analysis of Literary Texts**

This section focuses on the application of communicative competence, as man searches for the totality which will enable him develop a comprehensive knowledge of issues that affect his existence. The quest for the total man can be achieved in different ways viz: educationally, morally and spiritually but all these call for the ability to communicate effectively as one considers the issues raised.

### **Educational Views in the Novels**

Education as a term, can be discussed on two levels the formal and informal. For this section of discussion, this paper will use formal education as the foundation on which man goes in quest of his totality.



Education is the provision of learning experiences that lead to desirable change in the individual that enables him to function well in the society in which he finds himself. Fafunwa defines it as:

*The aggregate of all the processes by means of which a person develops abilities, attitudes and other forms of behaviour of positive value in the society in which he [she] lives. It is a process for transmitting culture in terms of continuity and growth and for the disseminating (sic) knowledge either to ensure social control or to guarantee national direction of society or both (Fafunwa 17).*

We hereby posit that, for one to be an educated man, it goes beyond the acquisition of collection of facts. The educated 'man' in any society knows how to organize the facts which he has learnt, and his outlook is transformed as he looks critically at the standards that exist in his society and asks questions. The educated man has initiative and is creative. These help him to generate new ideas that may help in development. In order to achieve this development, the acquisition of communicative competence skill helps him to express his knowledge effectively. This achievement in the word of Maslow portrays 'man' as having 'achieved' self actualization'.

Education prepares an individual for life and it is a continuous process from cradle to the grave. It is therefore, not surprising to note how Wa Thiong'o has made the search for education, a theme in the novel *Weep Not Child*. The novel starts with the great question "Would you like to go to school?". The essence of education is shown, as Njoroge, the hero pleads with his mother to allow him to go to school. Wa Thiong'o stresses the

usefulness of education as a means of development in the conversation between Kamau and Njoroge:

*"don't you worry about me. Everything will be all right. Get education, I'll get carpentry ... but some, you know, must get learning and others this and that trade (Wa Thiong'o:45)*

These people have immediately established the fact that education is the key to development, for the family and the society at large. It is the education which Njoroge will get from his learning that will help him to contribute his quota to the development of his environment.

The importance of education is highly stressed as everybody believes that a single person's education is for all of them. "Your learning is for all of us... education is the light of Kenya". It is the light which will help the people recover their lost land. Njoroge understands the suffering of his people and he thinks that with his education, he will be able to create a better future for his people. Wa Thiong'o illustrates this fact:

*"he knew that for him education would be the fulfillment of a wider and more significant vision, a vision that embraced the demand made on him not only by his father, but also by his mother, his brothers and even his village.(Wa Thiong'o 44)*

Njoroge looks at himself as a Messiah whose education will help him to rebuild his country because this is the sole aim of his education. His education prepares him as he tells his mother about his fear at school. Nyokabi, (his mother) is of the opinion that education prepares the man, for, she asserts that "a man should never be afraid". Njoroge tries to comprehend life as well

as view life objectively irrespective of the numerous problems in life. Therefore, the total man is portrayed as follows:

*"his outlook, on the world is marked by a fresh enquiring spirit, a knack for perceiving simple truths, and a constant reaching out for knowledge and experience to make a coherent picture (Robson 35).*

This quotation succinctly recalls Stevick's words that communicative competence embodies personal competence which Njoroge reflects in his words and statements.

Kane's *Ambiguous Adventure* portrays his hero-Samba Diallo who is also in search of the total man. His quest like Njoroge's is educational as well as being spiritual. In his educational quest, Samba Diallo like the other hero is made to realize the usefulness of education by his aunt the most Royal Lady. Samba Diallo's quest for knowledge takes him out of his native place to France. This novel which portrays the growth of the hero from childhood to manhood calls to mind man's quest not just for knowledge but also the development of man in its entirety. Sambo Diallo, echoes the same quest in Achebe's *No Longer at Ease*, where the hero, Obi Okonkwo goes to England in quest of knowledge, to read classics. Samba Diallo goes to France and reads philosophy.

The quest for education is instilled into Samba Diallo through his aunt's stance that he must go "in search of knowledge by going to school abroad where he learns the principle of conquering without being in the right." As Samba Diallo is finishing his course, he is ready to go back home now a total man, which has been achieved through



the acquisition of the components of communicative competence and also education.

### **Spiritual Development**

The quest for the total man includes the spiritual development of man. Samba Diallo vividly portrays this aspect of man's growth. At the start of the story, he is in quest for the Lord. It is worth expressing that, whether the spiritual quest is through Islamic religion as in the example of this hero Samba Diallo, or through Christian religion as in the case of Njoroge or through African traditional religion as in the example of Nnu Ego in *The Joys of Motherhood*, it makes no difference. The important aspect is that man develops educationally, spiritually, morally and socially to be a man who has a comprehensive view of his environment and can act as well as react positively to the growth of his society.

Preparations are made for this great quest. Samb goes in search of the Lord. He succeeds and his friends acknowledge his totality thus: "Your Prince is not only a Prince of the blood. Nothing is lacking in him. He is also a Prince of the mind and Spirit" (Kane 18). The spiritual quest is very pungent, and as the spiritual leader admits at the Glowing Hearth what we teach the children, is God."

The element of spiritual development is clearly typified as Samba Diallo carries out the age long tradition of his people to keep alive their culture:

*Samba Diallo .... recited the prelude to the flight of the Koran, ... Samba Diallo was repeating for his father what the knight himself had repeated for his own father, what from generation to generation through centuries the sons of the Diallobe had repeated for their fathers, from knowing that, he had not failed on this respect and that he was about*

*to prove to all who were listening that the Diallo would not die in him ... (Kane: 71-72)*

This recitation from the Koran gives happiness all the people since it plays a dual role as he remembers his ancestors, while the ancestors sing his birth. The spiritual search is complete as he realizes the importance of unity between God, man and his work. It is clear that unity with God justifies life and gives it meaning because the welfare and happiness of man is guaranteed with the omnipresence of God. In order to achieve this unity, the essence of communicative competence is clearly shown when the hero knows what to say as he considers the social/religious contexts in which he communicates with both the living and the dead.

From these two heroes, the idea of the quest for the total man raises pertinent questions like what is the relationship between school and society? What should a person in his society know? In trying to answer these questions, the idea set up by Obiechina states that in African literature, a child is portrayed within a particular culture, therefore, the child's behaviour and aspirations are modelled towards the expectation of that society.

The protagonists in the two novels show how their aspirations in life aim at the needs of their different societies. The relationship between the school and the society is vital in that, the school acts as an agent for the transmission of the culture, folklore, knowledge, skills, attitudes and appreciations that are acceptable within the society. To further illustrate the importance of this relationship, the summary of what the society expects of the school is as follows:

*Most societies held that it is important for the younger members to learn something of ...*

*collective past as well as elements of their present culture (Okon & Anderson 8)*

Acquisition of communicative competence develops the total man who lives a befitting life in his different society. An educated man will use his knowledge to look at the societal needs and develop plans to enable him to meet the needs of his society by communicating his attitudes, values and motivation effectively to other members of his society. The idea of the man who knows the needs of his society tallies with the African concept of man.

*In African view, man must strike a balance between his collective identity as a member of society and his personal identity as a unique individual (Ray 132)*

As the protagonists of the novels discussed have shown, they interact with the people in their different societies as they shape their environment, and their behaviour in turn are shaped by the same environment through communicative competence.

### **Moral Development**

The other aspect of the article deals with the moral development of a man in his quest to be an integrated person. A man is morally developed when he feels it is his duty to act as the conscience for his society, in that, he should be able to point out what is right and wrong in his society. Okolo, the protagonist of Okara's *The Voice*, thinks he is responsible to help create a change in his society. Okolo which means 'voice', is the lone voice crying in the wilderness "make ye his paths straight". He wants the people of Amatu to look at their ways of living and change. "Okolo means 'voice'..., the voice of wisdom, the voice of vision" (Taiwo 33). He is the prophet who



wants to see a bright future for the members of his society. In his endeavour to change the attitude of his people he does not only ask questions, he goes in search of it as well. Okolo like 'Professor' in Soyinka's *The Road*, goes in search of the "word". While Professor searches for 'it' among the "dead, the church and in books", Okolo searches for 'it' by asking the living, because it is the living who are in a position to change the society.

Okolo's questions are for every body when he asks: "have you it? " "Do you have what it takes to create or build a society free of corruption?" Like the unknown man in Armah's, *The Beautiful Ones Are Not Yet Born*, Okolo is deserted by the people of his village because he wants to see a society where all have food to eat and can express their beliefs freely. Tebeowei who is set as a foil to Okolo knows what is wrong with the society, yet he closes his eyes to the evil in the society. Okara asserts that "everything in this world has changed. The world is no longer straight. So if a person turns his palms down I also turn mine down" (Okara 19). Okolo with his acquisition of communicative competence raises an argument which performs the miracle. He cannot change his ideals to soothe a corrupt society and at this point he disproves the cliché "majority carries the vote". As Okolo questions the attitude of the people, no one likes it, he is told to stop his search, for even the white man's Jesus failed to make the world fine. So let the spoilt world spoil (Okara 82).

It is worthy of note that the people are aware of the corrupt society and yet do not have the courage to effect changes. Though Okolo was sent on exile to Sologa, he came back to Amatu. His vision did not die with him because as he is tied and sent down the river to his death, Ukule the cripple promised to continue with what Okolo

had started. "Your spoken words will not die". The lone voice will continue to communicate his message, "untill it falls on the fertile ground which will produce the change in the society".

### **Thinking and Total Development:**

Emecheta's novel *The Joys of Motherhood* explores the art of thinking. As an art, it is a type of behaviour which is both personal and social. Thinking as a personal behaviour calls for perception as one explores experience, applies knowledge to help him solve his problems. Thinking as a skill, helps to develop enquiring minds to enable the total man to examine critically the society. As de Bono observes: "the educational trinity is "knowledge, intelligence and thinking". This ability to reason provides the total man with the capability to think and act for himself". The development of the skill in thinking and communicating helps the total man to cope with the world around him. Learning and education are continuing processes which can take place outside the confines of schools and other educational bodies. This example is portrayed through Nnu Ego the heroine in the novel.

The search for the total man involves parenthood, a basic African belief that the young shall grow into an adult and eventually become a parent. Nnu Ego whose first marriage is not blessed with children, blames herself for this misfortune: "How can I face my father and tell him that I have failed?" In her quest for that totality which will enable her to become a woman, she decides to try another marriage, just to see if she will have children. She becomes married to Nnaife Owulum whose physical appearance does not appeal to her, for she describes him as a man with a belly like a pregnant cow with a pale skin".

As some one in search of totality, she asks herself "why, marrying such a jelly of a man would be like living with a middle-aged woman", yet she prepares herself to accept the inevitabilities of fate, that the man is the one destined to help her fulfill her womanhood.

As she searches for totality in life as a woman, she adapts quickly and makes friends with her neighbours. After the death of her first son, she makes plans for her next child and eventually her grand children. She offers her prayer knowing that the attainment of man's totality lies in the harmonious existence between man and God.

*Please God, let this child stay with me and fulfill all these future hopes and joys (Emecheta 79).*

The quest for the total man involves different situations and Nnu Ego is able to pay such price to enable her to be a woman. She performs her duty as the good wife, who knows and accepts the idea of polygamy. She welcomes Adaku the inherited wife of her husband. Her totality is remarked upon by others "... yes magnificent. A full woman, full of children". The search for the totality makes her realize the importance of education as she encourages Adaku to send her daughters to school, so that they can teach and earn salaries at the end of each month. She knows that times have changed as she changed her attitude towards life and in her environment.

*For you, the younger generation, it's a different kind of learning .... I'm not sure that I'm not beginning to like it. My only regret is that I did not have enough money to let the girls stay at school (Emecheta 213 214)*

### **Conclusion**

From the foregoing discussion, it is hoped the quest for the total man can be achieved by human beings.



It is clear that education must seek to give optimal development to man. A total man develops the ability for critical and creative thinking. The quest for the total man must inculcate in man the ability to develop and live the life that will be useful to man and the society through communicative competence which will enable him to contribute meaningfully to the development of the society. The search for the total man prepares him for living in different societies, as it instills in man, forms of thought and awareness which transform him in any environment. In sum, "what does it mean to be a total man?" He is one who is able to accept different cultures and is able to make moral, spiritual and intellectual contribution in an irrational world. The total man is able to achieve totality as he has love for God and for his fellow man. He proves the wise saying "man know thyself".

The adventures and struggles of the characters point towards the universal need of man who tries to adapt to the changes of the society in which he finds himself.

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