
Hybridity in Literary Works in Nigeria: An Aftermath of the English Language in Nigeria

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Abstract

Hybridity as the creation of transcultural forms within a contact point is a result of colonization, which creates room for exchange. This exchange exists in different forms which includes; racial, cultural, political, linguistic, religious, etc. This study examined hybridity in literary works in Nigeria from the linguistic point of view. It highlighted the meaning and different forms of hybridity, narrowing it down to linguistic hybridity which is the thrust of the study. It identified samples of Nigerian English generally used in communication and in literary works. Nigerian literary works and the concept of contact literature were also examined which laid the foundation for analyzing the debate on English use in Nigerian literary works. The study adopted a descriptive qualitative research design. The population of the study comprised literary works of Nigerian authors. However, the study paid close attention to prose works. The sample was selected using convenient sampling technique and five prose works were selected. The data collected from the sample was analyzed within the framework of sociolinguistics and the examples analyzed in the novels illustrate specific types of linguistic behavior among Nigerian users of the English language.

Keywords: Hybridity, Language, Transliteration, Nativization, Bilinguals, Literature.

Introduction

Every society has specific means of expressing the people's world view. This is generally done through language and literature. Language and literature hence constitute aspects of the culture of the people through which the people's ways of life are expressed. According to Brown (2000), a language is a part of culture, and a culture is a part of language. The two are intricately interwoven so that one cannot separate the two without losing the significance of either language or culture (p. 177). Similarly, UNESCO (2013) remarks that:

Culture is the distinctive spiritual, material, intellectual and emotional features of a society or social group, encompassing all the ways of being in that society; at a minimum, including art and literature, lifestyles, ways of living together, value systems, traditions, and beliefs (p. 10).

The above corroborates the tripartite relationship between language, literature and culture and all of these are expressed in literary forms such as poetry, drama or prose.

Within the Nigerian sociolinguistic environment, English has been adopted as an official and a national language. This is partly due to our colonial history and the lack of agreement, based on politics, to have an indigenous national language that can provide a bridge among the different ethnic and sociocultural groups in Nigeria. English, thus, plays the role of accommodating all Nigerians, irrespective of the linguistic environment. It serves as a link between people of multilingual and multicultural societies. According to Effiong (2008), English "has exerted considerable influence in almost every sector of the national life. Its dominant role in the field of education, administration, science and technology, trade and commerce, mass media, creative literature, linguistics and sociolinguistics, among other areas, cannot be underestimated" (p. 2). Hence, Nigeria as a nation with over 170 million people is distributed into more than 250 ethnic groups and nationalities, and each with unique linguistic, literary and cultural identities (Opeoluwa, 2014). In spite of the divergent languages and other aspects of the Nigerian culture, English has played unifying and accommodating roles among the different components of Nigerian nation and it has

become a major language of communication and literature.

However, when people come together and interact, there is bound to be exchange and this is mostly expressed through the use of language. Therefore, the English language spoken in Nigeria has some linguistic elements borrowed from the indigenous languages. These peculiar nuances and features associated with the use of English in Nigeria have marked it out as one of the World Englishes. This variety, in spite of our sociolinguistic and multicultural environment, gives us a unique identity in our peculiar expressions in English and literature. This paper, therefore, examines hybridity in literary works in Nigeria. Beyond this, it looks at linguistic hybridization and usage in selected Nigerian literary works.

The Concept of Hybridity; Types

Hybridity is the creation of transcultural forms within a contact point as a result of colonization. It brings together two cultures, offering the possibility of creating a third one called the “Third Space”. According to Bhabha (1994), the “Third Space” is a theory of identity that is realized through language. This explains the uniqueness of identity as a hybrid. It is the “in-between”

space that differentiates one from another. Hybridity in its most basic sense refers to mixture; that is consisting of two very different things. It takes place in many forms such as: racial, cultural, political and linguistic, religious etc.

Racial hybridity is defined as reflecting the merger of two genetic streams. Linguistic hybridity refers to elements from foreign languages that enter into a given language, whether it’s the adoption of English words into African languages, or the advent of African words into English. Literary hybridity is hybridity at the level of narrative form. It is fundamental to what we now know as postcolonial literature. African writers like Ben Okri have experimented with modes of storytelling that blend local traditions and folk culture with experimental (postmodernist) ideas.

Cultural hybridity is also extremely widespread today. Culture, defined in terms of art, music, fashion, food, and so on, might be the broadest and perhaps also the easiest place to think about hybridity.

Religious hybridity seems important, in part because religion (specifically, religious conversion) is such a widespread theme in colonial and postcolonial literature. However, for the purpose of this seminar, it

may not be that useful to speak of hybridity in general. Hence, the bulk of what is discussed will be on linguistic hybridity; examining how it exists in selected literary works of Nigerian authors.

Nigerian English and the Concept of Hybridity

The language one chooses to use is usually the one that is closest to one's heart or the one which one wants to be affiliated with either through accident of history or natural endowment. Schmid (2001) submits that "language is a powerful instrument for promoting internal cohesion and providing an ethnic or national identity. It contributes to values, identity, and a sense of peoplehood (p. 9). Language is, therefore, a mark of identity and every sociolinguistic group is usually associated with a particular language, either as first or second language.

The use of English in Nigeria dates back to the first part of the 19th century which was the period of "the great influx of colonizers, missionaries, even undisguised exploiters to the coast of West Africa" (Eka, 2000, p. 59). As then, some form of "broken English" was spoken. However, with the passage of time, the language has gone through some processes or development and has

metamorphosed into an official and general language of communication.

English, as an official language, is the language that is used by the government to conduct its businesses at different levels. For instance, it is the language of official communication in schools, organizations, government offices and departments. It is the language of the legislature, international relations/politics, commerce, education, science and technology, sports, politics, and the press. English is a language of communication between the diverse multilingual groups in Nigeria. Going by this, Akindele and Adegbite (1999) remark that there is no gainsaying the fact that English has become a Nigerian language (p.58). This statement is borne out of the unifying role the English language has played in bridging the communication gap among the different ethnic groups in Nigeria as well as the mixture of indigenous linguistic elements therein.

Hence, the English language in Nigeria, during these years of usage, has evolved a consistent and remarkable identity which makes it different from other varieties of English. This phenomenon is as a result of linguistic exchange between the English language and the indigenous languages,

thereby fulfilling the linguistic reality that when a language leaves its original home and gets in contact with another linguistic group, the second language is bound to develop new features that are different from the original language. Weinreich (1968, p.1) notes that this interference phenomenon entails:

the rearrangement of patterns that result from the introduction of foreign elements into the more highly structured domains of language, such as the bulk of the phonemic system, a large part of the morphology and syntax, and some areas of the vocabulary (kinship, color, weather, etc.)

This is the true picture of the experience associated with the use of English in Nigeria. Since English came into the shores of Nigeria, it has undergone domestication (Achebe, 1975), localization (Kachru, 1992) and nativization (Odumuh, 1993) processes. These terms are used to explain the fact that English used in Nigeria is a different hybrid and variety as compared to other varieties of World Englishes.

Nigerian Literary Works and the Concept of Contact Literature

Literature is any creative, factual and imaginative work of art expressed through any of the any of the literary genres (prose, drama, poetry) in order to showcase the attitudes, morals and values of a society. The underlying fact about literature is that it addresses the emotional, spiritual, intellectual and cultural concerns of humanity. In its explication of the concept of literature, Ayakoroma (2014) remarks that:

literature mirrors society; it makes us think about ourselves and our society; it allows us to enjoy language and beauty; and it reflects on the human condition and can be didactic. It reflects both ideology and changes ideology, just like it follows generic conventions, changing them. Literature is the creation of another world by a writer, a world that we can only see when we read such literary pieces (p. 2).

Nigerian literature is "the literature of Nigeria which is written by Nigerians, for Nigerians and Nigerian literature addresses Nigerian issues" (Wikipedia). It is written in English mostly and in some Nigerian languages. Since English is a national language, those literary works written in English have a wider audience (national and

international) than those written in the mother tongue in which the readership is restricted to the sociolinguistic environment where the language in question is spoken.

Nigeria has produced a number of prolific writers who have contributed immensely to the growth of the different genres of literature. Among some of the old generation writers include Amos Tutuola, Chinua Achebe, Wole Soyinka, Femi Osofisan, Ken Saro-Wiwa, Cyprian Ekwensi, Buchi Emecheta, Festus Iyayi, Isidore Okpewho, T. M. Aluko, Gabriel Okara, Flora Nwapa, Zaynab Alkali, Elechi Amadi, Tanure Ojaide. Also, some of the new generation writers include Chimamanda Adichie, Helon Habila, Kaine Agari, Dele Momodu, Vincent Egbuson, Wale Okediran, Abubarker Gimba, Sam Omatseye, Yahaya Dangana, Helen Oyeyemi, Ogaga Ifowode, Chris Abani, Nuzo Onoh, Sefi Atta, Igoni Barret, Chika Unigwe, among others. Some of these writers, for instance, Chinua Achebe, Wole Soyinka, Ken Saro-Wiwa, Femi Osofisan, Chimamanda Adichie and Lola Shoneyin, among others, have won accolades for their work and have gained international recognition for their contributions to the development of literature.

Creative writing in English as a second language in Nigeria illustrates the features of contact literature. Akindele and Adegbite (1992 p.37) define contact literature as “the literature in English written by the users of English as a second language to delineate contexts which generally do not form part of the traditions of English literature”. They add that it involves a transfer of discursal patterns from the writer’s other dominant linguistic codes and cultural and literary traditions. Contact literature therefore is creativity based on a target nativized thought process of the first, which is a product of bilinguals.

Creative writing in English in Nigeria shows a blend of the English and the Nigerian literary traditions, thereby providing the English language with extended usages, as well as its lexicon, structure and discourse (Onyema, 2010). Hence, the English language right from Achebe's time to the present time can be said to have been indigenized, nativized or acculturated in an attempt to express the writers' thoughts and feelings. Alo (1998) remarks that African writers use the following devices to reflect local or indigenous nuances in their writing: coinages, borrowing, the use of native similes and metaphors, the transfer of rhetorical devices from native languages, the

translation of native proverbs, idioms, the use of culturally dependent speech styles, the use of syntactic devices and deviation, code-switching and code-mixing and translation. Some of these devices or linguistic resources are adopted by Nigerian writers to bring out the Nigerianness in their work. This is most dominant in the novels. Hence, it can be said therefore that Nigerian literary works in most cases is an archetype of contact literature.

The Debate on English Use in Nigerian Literary Works

Before examining hybridity in selected Nigerian literary texts, it is necessary to mention one or two strands of argument that form the backdrop against which the usage patterns can be appreciated. There has been differing points of view over the decades, as scholars within the Nigerian and pan-African community at large have debated the role of former colonial languages (English and French in most cases) in National literatures. The Nigerian context of this debate is considered within the larger, black-African context of academics, authors, and scholars, who, historically, have simultaneously staged the language debate in both national and continental arenas.

For writers like Achebe, ethnic and national literatures can coexist, occupying different

ideological niches, respectively. It is, however, undoubtedly English that must serve as a unifying, national language of literature, despite its primarily colonial inception in Nigeria.

According to Achebe (1964), the English language, and not the African writer, should be the one to bend, and made to serve the unique needs of the African author. This should be done without sacrificing the language's mutual intelligibility. What this mean is that inasmuch as the African writer will introduce indigenous linguistic elements into the English language, it should not affect the semantic as well as grammaticality of the English used in a given context. While English provides many possible modes of artistic expression and is a language medium that Achebe feels capable of holding the "weight of African experience," English remains a tool, a relatively apolitical artistic medium, nonetheless.

Contrary to this assertion by Achebe, other scholars, such as Ngugi Wa Thiong'o (1986), have also argued that English is absolutely antithetical to the indigenous writer's expression of imperial resistance. According to him, when the African writer will naturally turn to African languages for

his creative imagination, the African novel will truly come into its own (p. 85). Obi Wali in Osuafor (2000) suggests that the (African writer) should write in the African language in order to be able to convey a truly African experience. For Obi Wali, a literature that is truly African simply cannot be expressed and/or written in English. He views this act as an irreconcilable contradiction. Wali, moreover, suggests reforms in the Nigerian and black-African educational system in which young people are not taught to “devote their tremendous gifts and abilities to their own languages” (p. 334).

For Emenyonu (1995), the path towards the decolonization of Nigerian literature is a job that will be executed not by discarding the colonial language (English as the case in Nigeria), but by adroitly nigerianizing it (p. 328). What is implied is not a case against the English language; it is the need to nativize it through linguistic hybrid and exchange.

Methodology

The main focus of this study was to examine hybridity in literary works in Nigeria. It sought to find out how the use of English Language has influenced the language used in creative writing among scholars and

creative writers in Nigeria. Hence, the study adopted a descriptive qualitative research design. The population of the study is literary works of Nigerian authors. However, the study paid close attention to prose works. The sample was selected using convenient sampling technique and six prose works were selected. The selected texts include: *Things Fall apart* by Chinua Achebe; *Americanah* by Chimamanda Adichie; *The Concubine* by Elechi Amadi; *The Secret Lives of Baba Segi's wives* by Lola Shoneyin; *The Voice* by Gabriel Okara and *Everything Good will Come* by Sef Atta. The data collected from the sample was analyzed within the frameworks of sociolinguistics and social psychology.

Findings and Discussion

This section of the paper examines the issue of nativization of English in Nigerian novels by the following writers: Chinua Achebe (*Things Fall Apart*), Elechi Amadi (*The Concubine*), Gabriel Okara (*The Voice*), Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie (*Americanah*), Lola Shoneyin (*The Secret Lives of Baba Segi's Wife*) and Sef Atta (*Everything Good Will Come*). Their peculiarities and nuances in the use of English have distinguished them out and given them the identity as Nigerian authors. The following are the findings of the study:

1. Use of Loanwords in the Texts

In *Things Fall Apart*, Chinua Achebe draws loanwords mostly from his Igbo linguistic background as indicated in the following examples:

1. It is an *ozo* dance..." (p. 41)
2. "He called his son, Nwoye, to sit with him in his *obi*. " (p.44)
3. "All the *umunna* were invited to the feast, all the descendants of Okolo, who lived about two hundred years before." (p. 117)
4. It was the full gathering of *umuada*..." (p. 93)
5. Your *chi* is very much awake, my friend. (p. 34)
6. Some kinsmen ate it with egusi soup and others with *bitter leaf* soup. (P.117)

Chimamanda Adichie equally makes use of loan words in *Americanah* as demonstrated in the following examples:

- "Kedu"(p.31)
 "Oga"(p. 32 & 103)
 "Abi?" (p. 83 & 439)
 "Sha" (p. 85 & 95)
 "Biko"(P. 108 & 140)
 "Okada" (p. 109)
 "Sheay" (p. 145)
 "Mba" (p. 280)
 "Oyinbo" (p. 304)

- "Haba" (p. 523)
 "Eziokwu" (p. 277)
 "Abeg" (p. 304)
 "Tufiakwa" (p. 167)

2. Use of Proverbs in the Texts

Proverbs are short familiar sentences expressing supposed truths or moral lessons. They express practical wisdom in homely terms. The use of proverbs in novels is common with the Igbo authors; generally, they translate Igbo proverbs into English in order to give literary significance to their work. Achebe's *Things Fall Apart* for instance is replete with samples of proverbs. According to Achebe, "Among the Ibo the art of conversation is regarded very highly, and proverbs are the palm-oil with which words are eaten." (p. 5). Samples of proverbs in the text are given below:

1. "He who brings kola brings life."(p. 5)
2. "Our elders say that the sun will shine on those who stand before it shines on those who kneel under them." (p. 6)
3. "As the elders said, if a child washed his hands he could eat with kings." (p. 6)
4. "When the moon is shining the cripple becomes hungry for a walk." (p. 10)
5. "A chick that will grow into a cock can be spotted the very day it hatches." p. 46)

6. "A baby on its mother's back does not know that the way is long." (p. 71)
7. "Eneke the bird says that since men have learned to shoot without missing, he has learnt to fly without perching." (p. 16)
8. As the elders said, if one finger brought oil it soiled the others." (p. 87)
9. "Never kill a man who says nothing." (p. 100)
10. "I cannot live on the banks of a river and wash my hands with spittle." (p. 150)

Elechi Amadi equally makes use of proverbs in *The Concubine*. The following samples are illustrative:

"But a man S god may be away on a journey on the day of an important tight and that may make all the difference." (p. 5)

"The hunter who is never satisfied with small game may be obliged to carry home an elephant one day." (p. 73)

"A hen cannot scratch for food with her two legs simultaneously". (p. 107)

"She is the quiet dog that eats up the hen's eggs without a bark." (p. 157)

3. Use of Transliteration in the Texts

Transliteration is the manifestation of mother tongue interference by which lexical

items are substituted literally from Nigerian languages to English. It is a process in which the units or o language are replaced by those of another language. This feature is present in the work of most Nigerian authors. In *The Voice*, Gabriel Okara records the following examples:

1. "Your head is not correct." (p. 22)
2. "Search with all his inside." (p. 23)
3. "His eyes were not right." (p.23)
4. "Okolo had no chest." (p.23)
5. "Take the canoe to the ground." (p.53)
6. "Hunger held him." (p. 52)
7. Tell me the bottom of it." (p.40)
8. "Entered our ears." (p. 51)
9. Put a law." (p. 51)
10. "When Okolo came to know himself." (p.80)

In *Things Fall Apart*, Chinua Achebe also uses transliteration in the following sentences:

1. "Who will drink the dregs?" he asked. "Whoever has a job in hand." (p. 15)
2. "Who killed this banana tree?" (p.)
3. "How can he when he did not even understand our tongue?" (p. 124)

4. "The other people were released, but even now they have not found the mouth with which to tell of their suffering." (p. 125).

Elechi Amadi in *The Concubine* similarly demonstrates this feature as shown in the following examples:

"I think it was lock-chest."

"But what brought about the lock-chest?" (p. 21)

"You really have a lucky face." (p. 204)

"Who will prepare my afternoon meal?" (p. 78)

Madume had one fault most villagers disliked. He was big-eyed... (P.4)

Still Ekwueme and his people will be coming Eke to knock at my door on your behalf (p. 96)

In *Americanah*, Adichie uses the following translated sentences:

"Ifemelu held her tongue." (p. 131)

She went to America and her eyes opened and she forgot about me." (p. 278)

"What's Shine your eyes?" (p. 480)

"My brother, that's a little too much...please try and come down. p. 288)

Another new generation writer, Lola Shoneyin, adopts this literary style in her

work - *The Secret Lives of Baba Segi's wives*. The following samples are illustrative:

"Thank you for returning our mouth to the matter at hand my friend". (p. 5)

"...he hoisted himself onto his feet using the bedpost for support and prayed that morning would wake them well." (p. 14)

"Has this woman's head scattered that she now scrubs my mouth?" (p. 62)

"Let me tell you one of the things I did. Laughter kills me when I think of it." p. 67)

"My daughters were born with eyes in their stomachs so they are quick to digest all that they see.. Like I said, they have eyes in their stomach." (p. 88)

"My mother despised her; she said the woman had the disease of the eye: everything she sees, she wanted." (p. 121)

"Iya Femi picked me up with her eyes and threw me to the floor." (p.55)

"Now you want to remove yourself." (p. 56)

4. Use of Reduplication in *Americanah*

Reduplication, as earlier noted, is a process which involves of repetition of lexical items in a sentence. The reduplication could be for

emphasis or to create new meaning. Chimamanda Adichie has employed this device in her work as shown in the following examples:

1. "I need somebody with gra-gra." (p. 36)
2. "They call it big-big name." (p. 39) p. 48)
3. "Please carry your bag and go now-now.
4. "Do it fast fast." (p. 107)
5. "Make small small." (p. 121)

5. Use of Code Mixing and Code Switching in the Texts

Code mixing refers to a speech act in which an utterance contains elements from language A and language B. Code switching on the other hand is a speech phenomenon in which a speaker makes utterances Sometimes in language A and sometimes in language B. Sefi Atta uses these devices in *Everything Good Will Come*. The following examples are illustrative:

"You're so funny, aburo!" (p. 34)

"Not even the eyo who dressed in white sheets like spirits..." (p. 35)

"They were omo-ita, street children." (p. 45)

"Don't mind her jo." (p. 232)

"You and your aje butter friend in the corner who cannot take the smell of... (P. 24)

"Maybe he thought I was a prostitute like Born Again over here or a crazy Do-Re-MI. (p. 252)

"Sanu, madam." (p. 96)

"Private transport vans we call kabukabu and danfo." (p. 95)

"...whereas my life story was straight, all of a sudden my life story got k-legs?" (p. 252

"... Are we equals? I thought not. Christian Ko shit-strain Ni' (p. 250)

Conclusion

Hybridity as the creation of transcultural forms within a contact point is a result of colonization, which creates room for exchange. This exchange exists in different forms which includes; racial, cultural, political, linguistic, religious, etc. This study examined hybridity in literary works in Nigeria from the linguistic point of view. It highlighted the meaning and different forms of hybridity, narrowing it down to linguistic hybridity which is the thrust of the study. It identified samples of Nigerian English generally used in communication and in literary works. Nigerian literary works and the concept of contact literature were also examined which laid the foundation for

analyzing the debate on English use in Nigerian literary works. The study further examined hybridity in selected Nigerian literary works. The analysis of language hybridity in these selected literary works by Nigerian authors corresponds with the assertion of Achebe (1964) and Emenyeonu (1995) on the need to nativize the English language through linguistic hybrid and exchange.

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