

**LANGUAGE USE AND STYLE, AS A DEPICTION OF AFRICAN LITERATURE:
AN EXAMPLE OF NIYI OSUNDARE'S *THE STATE VISIT***

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ABSTRACT: *The continued domination of English language in the African world especially in literary field has caused various doubts on what could be termed the African Literature. Therefore, the purpose of this research is to examine, how African writers have used language and style of writing to depict their continental identity in works of art. Researchers have established that the some parts of Africa had their literatures (either oral and or written) long before some parts of Europe. Therefore, the advent of English language is not the genesis of literature in Africa. The research, having examined this paramount discourse from Niyi Osundare's *The State Visit* has concluded that language use and style are very significant beacons of African Literature.*

KEYWORDS: Language, Depiction, African Literature, Niyi Osundare's *The State Visit*

INTRODUCTION

Language is a medium of communication of ideas or feelings via conventional signs, sounds, or marks with distinguishable denotations and connotations (Eme, & Mbagwu, 2011) Hall maintains that language is the institution whereby humans communicate and interact with each other by means of habitually used oral- auditory symbols.

The use of language in communication reveals its relationship with the mind. Chomsky's Universal Grammar Theory (UGT) shows this relationship. The importance of UGT is its attempt to integrate grammar, mind and acquisition at every moment. The mind in this case suggests creativity. Literature is obviously one of the decoding and encoding and constituting and deconstructing capabilities of its language in the course of establishing reality, which is its object. In other words, literature depends on language (Eme & Mbagwu 2011).

Because literature depends on language, that is why it is possible to talk about literature in English, literature in Yoruba, literature in Igbo among others. The life of a people is embedded in their literature and the life in this perspectives stands for cultural values of the people. According to Ukpai and Orji (2002) literature has become an important means of understanding and interpreting human beings and aspects of society such as politics, religion, economics, social conflicts class struggle and human condition. It is important to note that in talking about literature two factors are essential, a language and a human society that speaks the language, where the language is the medium of expression and the society, the provider of beliefs and manners which are expressed. Consequently, it is possible to talk about English literature, Yoruba literature, Igbo literature Hausa literature among others.

Literature is described as a discipline that attempts to depict man and his environment within a creative mode. The creative imagination and the use of specialized form of communication medium –language and style make literature different from all other disciplines. In other words,

the use of words and styles of writing to a large extent are the major distinguishing factors between literature and other writing works (Josephine, 2011) Literature intentionally aims at re-creating the human society through the expression of human experiences, religions beliefs and socio-cultural motifs of that society within the imaginative framework of arts.

The ultimate thrust of the debate on the language of African Literature is aimed at enthroning the use of African Languages in writing rather than the European Languages. This linguistic Evangelism is a deliberate effort by some African Scholars to totally wipe-off the traces of European colonialism and influence on the African race. Since there is no African language that can reach entire Africans, then the African writer may continue to adopt English to accommodate the African thought pattern. No wonder Achebe maintains that as a result of the reality of present Africa, the only option is to write African Literature in English. He explains further that there are many languages in Africa which might even make it difficult for Africans to communicate with others because of their many languages. Achebe therefore submits that the only reason why we can even talk about African unity is that when we get together, we have a manageable number of languages to talk in-English, French, Arabic.

Achebe however asserts that the use of language by African writers would differentiate African literature from any other ones. He quoted a small example from Arrow of God to exemplify this.

The chief priest in the story is telling one of his sons why it is necessary to send him to Church:

I want one of my sons to join these people and be my eyes there. If there is nothing in it you will come back. But if there is something there you will bring home my share. The world is like a mask, dancing. If you want to see it well you do not stand in one place. My spirit tells me that those who do not befriend the white man today will be saying had we known tomorrow.

Now supposing it had been put another way thus:

I am sending you as my representative among these people —just to be on the safe side in case the new religion develops. One has to move with the times or else one is left behind. I have a hunch that those who fail to come to terms with the white man may well regret their lack of foresight.

The material is the same. But the modes of presentations are different. It is therefore imperative to examine how Nigerian writers creatively use English in various ways to put across their messages.

Creative Use of English In Nigeria

Nigeria writers have been creatively using English in various ways to put across their messages. This creativity has been referred to as a variety of English use in Nigeria. This variety is what Achebe (1975) describes as belonging to Nigeria “but still in communion with its ancestral home altered to suit its new African surroundings. In other words, it is an attempt to capture Nigerian socio-cultural milieu in order to mark it off from other dialects of world English in a global contextualization. Some of these features are discussed below.

Transfer

Transfer of meaning, according to Adegbite (1989), is the feature in which a meaning foreign to English but present in the mother tongue is directly translated into English. Its pattern of meaning changes to put local colour. It can involve coining of new lexical items from local languages either directly or in translation.

For example:

MOTHER TONGUE	NIGERIAN ENGLISH
<i>Eran igbe</i>	<i>Bush meat</i>
<i>Ara oko</i>	<i>Bush man</i>
<i>Akara balls</i>	<i>Beans cake</i>
<i>I am coming</i>	<i>I will soon be back</i>
<i>Branch</i>	<i>Stop over</i>

Adegbija (1989) notes also that cross natural pollination has accounted for various new meanings in line with Nigerian culture. For instance, expressions like

<i>Bride price</i> <i>woman</i>	-	<i>Payment made by man before marrying a woman</i>
<i>Introduction</i>	-	<i>Presentation of bridegroom and his relations to the bride and her relations</i>
<i>Big men</i>	-	<i>Affluent men of Nigerian society</i>
<i>Wrapper</i>	-	<i>Waist cloth/loincloth</i>
<i>Finished the quarrel</i>	-	<i>end</i>
<i>Son of my mother</i>	-	<i>brother</i>
<i>Father of their father</i>	-	<i>grand father</i>
<i>Daughter of my mother</i>	-	<i>sister</i>

Some examples from The State Visit are

<i>Their father's father</i>	-	<i>grand fathers</i>
<i>Their fathers' fathers' fathers'</i>	-	<i>great grand father</i>
<i>Son of his father</i>	-	<i>Son</i>
<i>Wrapper</i>	-	<i>waist cloth/loincloth</i>
<i>Bride price</i>	-	<i>the culturally demanded payment made by a man before marrying a woman</i>
<i>Children's children</i>	-	<i>grand children</i>
<i>Sorry</i>	-	<i>take caution/be blessed</i>
<i>Brother Head of state</i>	-	<i>neighboring country's head of state</i>
<i>Father of the nation</i>	-	<i>Head of state</i>
<i>My head</i>	-	<i>My God</i>

The expressions above are used by the author to give detailed description. Apart from this, expressions like “their fathers’ fathers’ father”, “son of his father”, “children’s children” are used to connote solidarity or closeness of relationship. The expression “Father of the nation” connotes respect and emphasizes the position of the Head of State as the highest and most prestigious in the nation. This is in comparison with “father” in the African setting which connotes the Head and the controller of the family. Apart from this, expressions like “our eyes”, ‘bride price’ and ‘my head’ are used by Osundare to achieve freshness and originality. They are also used to properly contextualize the text in the Nigerian setting. They show the text as a product of a second language situation.

As pointed out in Bamiro (1994:425) examples like “son of my mother” and “father of their father” which are kingship terms are subjected to a detailed descriptive technique. Apart from modes of address that connote solidarity or closeness they also serve as respect and emphasis markers. Adegbija (1989) notes that no matter how distant a blood relation is, he is still considered a member of one’s family. This extended concept of the family in the indigenous language has been transferred into Nigerian English. Hence, as noted above, kingship terms like wife, co-wife, husband, mother, uncle, aunt etc have a wider all inclusive meaning in Nigerian English. Adetugbo (1980:73) as explained in Bamiro (1994), the native English speaker is not likely to say “I am sorry” when somebody trips or sneezes. Other expressions like “watch out” and “be blessed” respectively are considered more appropriate. But in Nigerian English so that many Nigerians say “sorry” to someone even when they do not wish to imply that they are responsible for the mishap that occurred (Adegbija 1989:172).

Analogy

Bamiro (1994) defines analogy in Nigerian English as similarity of formative or constructive processes of lexical items or the formation of new words on the basis of a partial likeness or agreement in or in sense with already existing words either in the mother tongue or in English. Word formation processes in English such as suffixation and prefixation are very productive analogy model in Nigerian English (Adegbija 1989:172). The newly formed item could entirely be English or could be a hybrid of English and the mother tongue.

Examples include:

Awoism	-	Awo (a person’s name)
Zikism	-	Azikwe (a person’s name)
NE		NE
<i>Gatemen</i>		<i>gatekeepers</i>
<i>Headtie</i>		<i>headgear</i>
<i>House boys</i>		<i>house keepers</i>
<i>Senior brother</i>		<i>elder brother</i>
<i>Junior brother</i>		<i>younger brother</i>
<i>Security man</i>		<i>watchman</i>

Some examples from **The State Visit** are

<i>Headtie</i>	<i>headgear</i>
<i>House boy (p. 32)</i>	<i>housekeeper</i>
<i>Birthday girl (p. 32)</i>	<i>celebrant</i>
<i>Mouth of night (p.54)</i>	<i>midnight</i>
<i>Caves of the jaw (p.10)</i>	<i>teeth ridge</i>

The expressions “house boy” and “birthday girl” are hybrid of English and Yoruba. They are used to express foreign ideas. Also, the expressions “mouth of night” and ‘caves of jaw” are metaphorical. Here, Osundare uses analogy to achieve originality and freshness of language. In addition to this, the metaphorical expressions show poetic quality of the play.

Direct Translation and Euphemisms

Direct translation is an attempt to translate words or expressions from one language into another while euphemism is an attempt to say something offensive or unpleasant in mild manner. Examples of direct translation here is from Yoruba to English. For example:

- (1) **EXT. AFFAIRS:** I think professor is loyal citizen and deserves whatever honour our government can bestow ...
FINANCE: (cutting in) And obedient too! And respectful ...
AGRIC: Yes, he is not like those other too-know troublemakers who are proud because they know book ... (p 49)
- (2) **AGRIC:** ... The student knows many of our spies among them. They even know how much we pay them. And in times of crisis, they always pounce on our eyes on campus as traitors ... (p 24)
- (3) **AGRIC:** (Feigning anger) My head, warn this woman oo! Just see where she hit me (demonstrating), dangerous place! Aaah! Too close to the power house! (p 43)
- (4) **PUB. MORALITY:** I have another suggestion: sine it is the men who make trouble all the time, let us ban female visitors from the campus. That will make them impotent ... I mean powerless (p 43)

As shown in the above, “know book”, “too know” and “our eyes” ‘show Osundare’s attempt to translate those expressions directly from Yoruba to English Language. The use of direct translation by Osundare here depicts the text as a product of second language situation. Also, “power house” and “power less” are euphemistic. The author is trying to say something offensive in a mild manner because the Yoruba culture forbids its language users to call the male and female sex organs original names. Mild expressions are used whenever calling it becomes imperative. As stated earlier, the use of direct translation and euphemism by Osundare depicts the text as a product of second language situation.

Semantic Shift or Extension

In semantic shift (Loan shift) the meaning of a word or group of words in the basic language is extended to cover a new concept. Bamiro (1994) explains it as words which already exist, and are attested in English and are imbued with new meanings and connotations in consonance with the Nigerian world view. It also denotes a change in the meaning of words under influence of Nigerian primary languages. In other words, lexical items in native English have had their semantic range restricted, shifted, or extended in Nigerian English.

For example

WORDS	MEANING IN NE
<i>Dress</i>	<i>to move at the end of a row to create space</i>
<i>Station</i>	<i>the place where a person works</i>
<i>Chase her love</i>	<i>to go after a woman with intention of winning</i>
<i>Escort</i>	<i>to see a guest off</i>
<i>Machine</i>	<i>a motor cycle</i>
<i>Lesson</i>	<i>private tuition</i>
<i>Time</i>	<i>menstruation period</i>
<i>Corner</i>	<i>bend</i>
<i>Kola</i>	<i>bribe</i>

Examples from **The State Visit** includes the following

<i>Know book (p. 49)</i>	-	<i>can read and write</i>
<i>Too know (p. 21)</i>	-	<i>brilliant</i>
<i>Our eyes (p. 24)</i>	-	<i>informant/spies</i>
<i>Powerless (p. 24)</i>	-	<i>impotent</i>
<i>Power house (p. 23)</i>	-	<i>male sex organ</i>

Coinages or Neologism

Longman Dictionary of Contemporary English (1995:751) defines neologism as “a new word or expression, or a word used with a new “meaning”. Adegbija (1989:174) asserts that the necessity for accommodating new experiences, feelings, thought patterns, modes of life culture and customs etc which English in Nigeria has encountered, has compelled the creation or invention of lexical items with nativised meanings. It should be noted that this category of lexico- semantic coinages of neologism cuts across all other types that convey new cognitive and socio linguistic reality peculiar to the Nigerian environment. The followings are some examples of coinages;

Examples from existing English words to produce new meanings;

- (a) *Yellow fever* - *traffic warden in Nigeria*
Khaki boys - *a derogatory name for soldier*

(b) *Examples from existing lexical statement in the mother tongue;*

- Agbada* - *a Yoruba name from a kind of gown in many parts of Nigeria*
Tuwo - *a kind of food usually made in the northern part of Nigeria*
Abiku - *a reincarnated child*

(c) Hybrid of the lexical stock of indigenous languages and English:

- Akara ball* - *bean cake*
Bukateria - *a place where food is sold*

Generally, some other examples are

- Pass out* - *to graduate from a school or college*
Portable - *slender or small body*
Headtie - *a scarf for covering the head*
Kola - *bribe*
True son of - *legitimate child of a mother*
House girl - *a house maid or a house help*
To kill e.g. a goat - *slaughter*
To smell pepper - *to face a tough time*
Sure banker - *certainly*
Sleeping wrapper - *coverlet*
Chewing stick - *a traditional stick for brushing the teeth*
Senior wife - *eldest wife in polygamous marriage*

Some examples from **The State Visit** are

- Agbada (p. 21)* - *a kind of gown*
Gele (p. 20) - *headgear*
Oyinbo (p. 20) - *An European person*

<i>Dibia (p. 30)</i>	-	<i>diviner</i>
<i>Babalawo (p. 30)</i>	-	<i>diviner</i>
<i>True son of his father (p. 21)</i>	-	<i>legitimate child of his father</i>
<i>House boy (p. 32)</i>	-	<i>house help/house keeper</i>

Coinages are used for rhetorical effect and syllabic idiosyncrasy for which Osundare is known. In most of Osundare's works, he is known for using Yoruba language or direct translation from Yoruba to English in order to achieve originality. That is why it is not surprising that words like "babalawo", "dibia", "oyinbo", "gele" and "true son of his father" are used here.

Clipping

Clipping, according to Longman Dictionary of Contemporary English (1995:238), is a small cut from something bigger. Bamiro (1994:53) defines it as "the subtraction of one or more syllables from a word which is also available in its full form." The subtraction may occur at;

- (a) The beginning of the word e.g. phone; telephone
- (b) The end of the word e.g. photo; photography
- (c) At both end of the word e.g. flu; influenza

Clipping is a lexical innovation which aids the speaker or writer to economize his expression (Bamiro 1994:53) other examples of clipping are

<i>Perm. Sec.</i>	-	<i>Permanent secretary</i>
<i>Expo.</i>	-	<i>Expositions</i>
<i>Police</i>	-	<i>Policemen</i>
<i>Cert.</i>	-	<i>Certificate</i>

The followings are some examples from **The State Visit**

<i>Uiyanke (p. 24)</i>	-	<i>University of Yankee</i>
<i>O.K (p. 34)</i>	-	<i>Okay</i>
<i>Pub. Morality (p. 14)</i>	-	<i>Public Morality</i>
<i>Agric (p. 14)</i>	-	<i>Agriculture</i>
<i>Ext. Affairs (p. 15)</i>	-	<i>External Affairs</i>

Osundare uses this lexical innovation to economize his language. For instance, instead of University of Yankee, it is alright, minister of public morality, Agriculture, External Affairs,

he clips them to Uiyanke, o.k, Pub. Morality, Agric, and Ext. Affairs respectively. This innovation is used to achieve economy of expression and text conciseness.

Loan Words

A loan word is a word taken over from one language into vocabulary of another language. This transfer of words, phrases even ideas from one language to another is technically called borrowing. It is to be noted that no language in any society which has come in contact with any other society or societies is totally pure. To accommodate loan words from English which allows consonant cluster and can end either with a vowel or consonant, the borrowed words have to undergo what is called Phonological process. For instance, these examples from Yoruba and Hausa

YORUBA

Bread	-	Buredi
Table	-	Tabili
Ball	-	Bolu
Doctor	-	Dokita

HAUSA

Doctor	-	Likita
Hospital	-	Asibiti
Motor	-	Mota

Examples from the text are

<i>Poliisi</i> (p. 38)	-	<i>Police</i>
<i>Allah</i> (p. 25)	-	<i>God</i>
<i>Jehova</i> (p. 25)	-	<i>God</i>
<i>Mesi</i> (p. 10)	-	<i>Mercedes</i>
<i>Mba</i> (p. 33)	-	<i>Never</i>
<i>Dokita</i> (p. 16)	-	<i>Doctor</i>
<i>Pankeeki</i> (p. 16)	-	<i>Pan Cake</i>
<i>Amorika</i> (p. 17)	-	<i>America</i>
<i>Ewi</i> (p. 18)	-	<i>Poem</i>
<i>Koboko</i> (p. 56)	-	<i>Whip</i>
<i>Atorin</i> (p. 56)	-	<i>Whip</i>
<i>Ase</i> (p. 58)	-	<i>Amen</i>

Osunadre uses loan words from Ibo, Hausa and Yoruba in order to retain the freshness and originality of meanings that the text conveys. It also reveals the multilingual, multi-religious and multi-cultural settings of the African society which the text portrays.

It should be noted that Nigerian writers carry and transfer some of their cultural nuances of the indigenous Nigerian people into English in an attempt to reflect their socio cultural features. Achebe, a popular Nigerian writer, as cited in Igboanusi (2001), in his article “English and the African writer” in 1995, advocates that the real African creative writer must alter the English language to suit African surroundings. The English that emerges from this consideration must be “new” in the sense that it can “carry the weight” of the African writer’s experience (and worldview).

Sociolinguistic Features

Code Mixing

Code mixing is the random alternation of two languages within a sentence. That is, mixing words or phrases of different languages within a given sentence or utterance. Some examples of code mixing in **The State Visit** are given below;

A woman does not bear the name Kumolu (p. 13)

Ah! Sopomo O! that is an impossible task ... (p. 13)

... One shouting “Jehofa!” the other Allah! ... (p. 25)

Those Oyinbo, ah they helped me to the top ... (p. 26)

A young woman in iro and buba ... (p. 30)

... men in flowing agbada .. (p. 31)

The first and second examples above are used to achieve freshness of and originality because there might not be perfect and accurate English words to replace “Kumolu” and ‘Sonpono’ without losing their authentic meanings. Also, the second example above, where the words “Jehofa” and “Allah” are mixed with English, shows the multi lingual and multi religious nature of the Nigerian society which the text portrays. Osundare also achieves texture in Nigerian linguistic situation through the use of code mixing.

Code Switching

It refers to a total shift from language to another within the same context or discourse, that is, the alternative use of different sentences or expressions of different languages in a given situation (Oluga et al 1998:19). Banjo (1983) sees it as a phenomenon in which, in a speech event, an interlocutor makes sentences sometimes in language A and sometimes in language B.

For example

As our people say, ko ju maa ri bi ese loogun re. (p. 16)

Ori mi o ! we are playing with a revolution o ! (p. 29)

... while the other chorus! “jaguda o ri ja” (p. 30)

Aaah! Ina piti ! sure fire ! Akiika (p. 43)

... Akiika! Iwin inu iwe. Book wizard (p. 440)

... O kare! Good of you! (p. 45)

Thank you again. E ki le o (p. 64)

O ti oo! Tell me it is not true! (p. 62)

The expressions above are used for clarity of expressions and serve as indication of originality and freshness of expression. Apart from these, the multi lingual and multi cultural settings of the text are revealed for better understanding of the text as a whole.

CONCLUSION

In conclusion, Nigerian writers use English as their creative medium in the consciousness of the fact that they are presenting a Nigerian experience, and most of them reveal in their works a specific mode of imagination which derives from their Nigerian background. Therefore, Nigerian writers always reflect in their socio-cultural features linguistically and culturally. This is particularly true, since these writers grew up within Nigerian environment and acquired at least a Nigerian indigenous language in which they also think. The fact that these writers now write in English in order to reach a wider readership does not make them English

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