



Soyinka's Language Engineering in the Jero Plays and *The Beatification of Area Boy*

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Abstract

Wole Soyinka engineers language to reflect his bilinguality and biculturalism, and to define his style. The paper attempts to debunk some misconceptions about Soyinka's language which portray him as a Eurocentric scholar who often uses obscure diction and foreign imagery in his works. Two of his plays- *The Jero Plays*, published before he won the Nobel Prize, and *The Beatification of Area Boy* published after, serve as points of reference. The systemic functional linguistic theory is used as a framework because it recognizes situational constraints on language use. A content analysis of the texts under review undertakes from the viewpoint of Soyinka's style, his portrayal of the African culture and worldview, and his concern for the language problem reveals that in most of his works, Soyinka has used features which mark out the varieties of English used in a second language situation.

Key words: Bilingualism; Biculturalism; Eurocentricism; Obscurantism; Code mixing; Code switching; Hybridization; Second language; Transliteration; Neologism; Idiolect; Nigerian pidgin; Interference variety

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THE BACKGROUND

English serves as the most prestigious foreign language in Nigeria, having assumed the role of second language as well as that of an official language. In addition, it serves as the language of wider communication and of education. Scholars like Essien-Eyo, Akindele and Adegbite, and Bamgbose agree that most Nigerians are bilingual in their mother tongues and in English, so that as in any other bilingual situation, the hybridization of English and the indigenous languages has resulted in biculturalism.

It is interesting to note that from the time in 1962 when Obi Wali wrote the paper entitled "Dead End of African Literature?" the language question in African literature has remained a major issue in literary debates and conferences. The 32nd meeting and conference of the African Literature Association (ALA) held in Accra, Ghana in May 2006 was one such occasion. The conference, which drew participants from all over the world, had as its theme "Pan-Africanism in the 21st Century: Generations in Creative Dialogue". Here again, the language question was the centre of discourse. Many scholars including Tadjó, an award-winning Ivorian writer, as well as Kofi Anyidoho, Kofi Awoonor, Niyi Osundare, Femi Osofisan, Odiá Ofeimun and Molará Ogundipe all made their contributions on the language question with some taking the extreme position of rejection of European languages, and others taking the moderate position of adoption. All the statements, opinions and contradictions during the conference pointed to one fact: the language question in African literature is a sensitive one, and the question still remains as to which language is most suitable for literature in Anglophone African nations.

First Obiechina and later Adedimeji have confidently asserted that Nigeria cannot do without English, since in Odumuh's words, it "has taken a firm root in the Nigerian

speech community. Its present role may change, but the language has come to stay” (Obiechina, 60).

Rather than ignore the language problem, therefore, African writers are conscious of the choices available, especially in fashioning a new kind of English to suit the African audience, while validating Nwachukwu’s assertion that “English today owes its world language status to its flexibility and readiness to borrow from and adapt to other languages” (216).

INTRODUCTION

This contribution to the debate on the language question demonstrates the need to go beyond analyzing a text merely for its message, to exploring its language use, since it is through language that the message can best be deciphered. Again, the assertion that Soyinka is Eurocentric often causes his language to be dismissed as difficult, leaving the impression that he is not sensitive to the language problem in Nigeria, and leading scholars, especially students, to avoid carrying out research on his works.

The attempt is made here to link Soyinka’s engineering of English in *The Jero Plays* and *The Beatification of Area Boy* (hereafter called *The Beatification*) to an understanding of the relationship between his works and his nation, through a coalition of different forms, one of which is the form of language used. Relevant samples of text are selected and analyzed to reveal how Soyinka has communicated his message through the identified linguistic strategies.

Soyinka has used some Western techniques, which makes some critics— prominent among them, the Chinweizu critics —to accuse him of Eurocentricism and obscurantism, and of a divorce from the African oral poetic tradition in his works. Adejare however notes that “Although Soyinka has not written a literary text in Yoruba, he makes use of the language, where appropriate, in the English texts he has produced. Bilingualism implies biculturalism. Soyinka often exhibits a deep knowledge of Yoruba culture and a studied understanding of English culture” (15):

Although Soyinka is highly educated in English, he still makes positive use of his African linguistic heritage by a combination of techniques, thus establishing his bilingualism with natural ease. Adejare reveals that “What is particularly difficult for any bilingual African writer in English is the representation of the African worldview. A writer has to maintain the delicate balance between representing the local semiotics of his language in his works and ensuring that the semiotics does not lead to misreading.

Further identified by Adejare are the coinages, names, nick-names, titles and titles of printed matter, Nigerian varieties of English, idiolects, functional varieties, register and imagery (vi-ix). To these features we add: transliterations, English words with African referents, and African words.

Adedimeji has further posited that “Writing in English by Nigerian literary artists has also created a distinctive Nigerian literature marked by its own characteristics, imbued with features of intercultural communication and cooperation” (72).

THEORETICAL CONSIDERATIONS

The systemic functional grammar by J. R. Firth was popularized and expanded by Michael A. K. Halliday, one of his students. While Eka summarizes Firth’s theory under the concept of the *context of situation* (25), Firth is reported by Osisanwo to hold the view that for the meaning of a language text to be arrived at, “that language must be studied in its social context, and language text must be attributed to participants in some context or situation...” (6). Thus, this grammar is interested in the function of language as a social phenomenon.

Systemic functional grammar forms the linguistic framework for the analysis in this research because of its grammatical and semantic principles, which aid in the interpretation of meaning. It permits the view of language as a network of interlocking options; accounts for the nature of the linguistic system available to the native speaker of a language; and demonstrates that the meaning to be conveyed determines the choice of words. These words in turn are selected from syntax only, but also from the semantics of the grammar, to produce the combinations that will best pass across the author’s message.

Systemic grammar is therefore concerned with the meaning of words as used in situational contexts, thus allowing for extra-linguistic variables, recognizing the speaker, the bearer and the social context between them, as well as their purpose. Soyinka engineers his language to fit the particular sociolinguistic background, so that the lexical choices he makes are conditioned by the prevailing situation as well as by the meaning he intends to convey.

TEXTUAL ANALYSIS

Two of Wole Soyinka’s plays- *The Jero Plays* and *The Beatification of Area Boy* were analyzed to highlight his semiotic and linguistic universe, and at the same time convey his message. The two plays exhibit the Nigerian social, cultural, historical, religious and linguistic experience. *The Jero Plays* is a light, humorous satire on the corruption that is prevalent in the society, even among the clergy. *The Beatification* dwells on the vices attendant in a corrupt military regime.

Peculiar instances of language use are selected and analyzed. The language variety they belong to, along with their identifying features, are commented upon. In most cases, the linguistic features are assessed as an index to characterization. This is because experienced writers do not ascribe speech to their characters arbitrarily; they strive to employ language use as an instrument of

character delineation. The analysis is presented under subheadings that attempt to classify the language items into the different varieties of language found in the texts.

Nigerian Pidgin Variety

Nigerian literary artists assign the Nigeria pidgin variety to the uneducated, house-helps, motor-park touts and the rank and file of the armed forces. It is also a variety of language employed by the educated in informal situations or in social interactions with their uneducated counterparts. There are several examples of this variety in the two texts. From *The Jero Plays* we have: "You no even sabbe call my name correct and you dey call man illiterate. My name naChume, no too Chummy" (64)

Here, Chume gets into an argument with Major Silva whose accent we are told, "is a perfect repulse, a blend of Oxford". And Silva does not get along with Chume, whose name he cannot pronounce correctly. In the instance above, Chume uses the verb "correct" for the adverb "correctly" the expression "no to" for the word "not", and the superordinate "man" which is also observed in *The Beatification*: "Wey all these reporters self? Man no dey sees them when something extra dey happens" (25).

"Man" is used in place of "one" and could also like the pronoun "me", mean "I".

In that same scene Chume's illiteracy is further emphasized in his ignorance of the meaning of "flourish" – a musical term which Silva attempts to explain and which Chume, now understanding, compares to the "pepper" used in cooking (65),

"Otherwise, the thing no go taste" (66).

Chume also talks about "hypocrisy" (68) but interestingly Silva does not understand what "pepper" is either.

Soyinka thus portrays the conflict of two values and two cultures in the two characters, Silva and Chume, who do not understand each other as a result of the differences in their socio-linguistic backgrounds. There are other examples of Nigerian pidgin from *The Beatification*:

TRADER. Even if to say I did, I fit read. Look, na early morning. I dey prepare for my customers and I want think small. We currency done fall again, petrol dey scarcity, which mean to say, transport fare done double. As for foodstuff and other commodity, even gariwey be poor man diet... I just dey explain why I need small time to put new price for all dese goods... Look, no to this time you begin walka for your circuit... er Circuit court or wetin you dey call am? (7).

The utterances here are characterized by the use of lexical items like "Even if to say" for "Even if"; "na" for "it is"; "done" for "has"; "Mean to say" for "mean"; "wey e" for "which is" and "walka" for "walk." Syntactic features include the use of the strange modal auxiliary "dey"; the complement "scarcity"; instead of "scarce"; the absence of the plural marker in "other commodity"; the absence of the possessive marker in "poorman [’s] diet". At the phonological level the sentence is marked by the deletion of /t/ in "wan"

/ wɒn/ instead of "want"/wɒnt/ and "dese"/diz/ for "these"/ði:z/. Another example is:

Dawn? I only see the sun wey begin expose all those dirty roofs for!sale-eko. Na so e dey do am every morning. wetin get special about one? And wetin concern you for sun and sky? Thewahalawey you get for this earth no do you? (*The Beatification*, 8).

This speech is marked by lexical items such as "wey" for "which"; "for" instead of "in"; "Na so" for "that is how"; "e" for "it"; "wetin" for "what", "get" means both and "have" and "is"; and *wahala* for "problem". This last item is italicized even in the text to show that it is not a standard English word, nor even a misspelled English word, but a pidgin term. Others are "no do" for "not enough for". Syntactic deviation is observed in the use of "dey" as a modal auxiliary, the violation of concord in "begin[s]" and the deletion of the prepositional phrase marker "to" in "wey begin expose". A phonological marker of pidgin here is the use of "kin" instead of "kind" - /d/ is deleted.

There is the pidgin which is a kind of a transliteration from English, for example, "Na trade you come trade or na decorate you just dey decorate the street?" (*The Beatification*, 25). In Standard English it would be, "Did you come to trade or to decorate the street?" Another example: "Na Barber first see am. But like you said, Oga, in bone no get flesh". In Standard English this would be, "He was first sighted by the Barber. But as you say, Sir, he has emaciated."

Soyinka's use of pidgin in the two texts serves many purposes. Besides delineating characters, pidgin provides a kind of poetic rhythm in the plays, for instance, from *The Beatification* we have:

CYCLIST. No to that time de minister of Finance inself boast for budget
speech say, any increment wey no dey, we go increment am?
TRADER. Any allowance wey no dey, we go allow....
BARBER.... any increment wey no dey for worker, we go in-cent!
(*The Beatification*, 27-28).

Okpiliya has also commented on Soyinka's creative use of Nigerian pidgin in *The Jero Plays*. In his words, Soyinka "...is.... interested in the spoken words and in the meaning of their speeches... At the revivalist meetings, the utterances of the crowd make little sense. What one admires is the beauty and rhythm of such statements" (3).

INTERFERENCE VARIETY OF NIGERIAN ENGLISH

The interference variety of Nigerian English is used in *The Jero Plays* and in *The Beatification of Area Boy* to portray character and to define status. This variety has features such as the omission of articles as in "You don't yourself blow trumpet" (*The Beatification* 22). Here the

indefinite article “the” is omitted between “*blow*” and “*trumpet*”. Also the title of the book, *The Beatification of Area Boy* exemplifies this feature. The article “an” or “the” is omitted between “*of*” and “*Area*”. Even Sanda, the educated character in the play, uses this feature:

Well, Sir, you know, Management is very careful about this sort of thing. If it had taken place within our jurisdiction, you understand, by now we would know what to do. But to involve Management, especially if it turns out that we’ve gone and locked up an innocent boy.... (42)

Here, the function word “the” is omitted before “*management*” in the two positions where it occurs. The deletion of the function word makes “Management” seem like an animate noun, or the name of a person, rather than a body. Nwachukwu, noting the efficiency in omitting the indefinite article, says that besides giving local color to the language, the speaker achieves syntactic compression (213).

There are also lexical items such as: “*dash*”, “*kola*”, “*bread*”, “*wetin-you-carry*”, “*donation*”, “*gift*”, “*sweet belle*”.... “*insurance*” (*The Beatification*, 40). These words all have their meanings in Standard British English, but within the Nigerian English context in which they are used, their meanings are extended to include “bribe”.

This interference variety of Nigerian English also has peculiar constructions such as “*I take God’s name beg you; I was not abusing your father*” (*The Jero Plays*, 29) and Nigerian idioms such as: “*I only say time is money, sir*” (56).

In *The Beatification*, there are Nigerian idioms such as “*insurance*” meaning money given to “area boys” to watch over one’s car/property: “*You must have fallen into the hands of the insurance people*” (38). “*There are all these witnesses, all men and women of – as we say – timber and caliber*”. “Timber and caliber” is a Nigerian idiom which in Standard British English could be rendered as “Men and women of substance.”

A feature of the interference variety is found in the utterance,

“I am not going to let you infect my luck with your foul tongue by answering you back” (*The Jero Plays*, 17).

In this context, there is a redundancy in the use of “*answering*” and “*back*” together.

Naming is another peculiar aspect of Nigerian English. As Essien observes, among the Yoruba, “naming can have linguistic, cultural, religious, historical, psychological and even philosophical implications” (12). This explains Soyinka’s use of local names like *Miseyi*, *Kingboli*, *Sematu*; occupational names like *Judge*, *Barber*, *Mama Put*; Nigerian nicknames like *Boyko*, *Area Two-One*, *Area Two-Four*; and titles like *Chief*, *Oga*, *Professor*; and so on, in *The Beatification*.

Names in *The Jero Plays* on the other hand are a part of the religious and official registers. The characters’ names are taken from the Bible: *Rebecca*, *Jethro*,

Ananias, *Caleb*. Ironically, the virtues of these Biblical figures are negated in the characters who bear their names. As Adeoti & Elegbeleye note, “... the characters are sometimes subverted in a way that shows them below the measure of good conduct usually associated with their callings...” (p.310). Furthermore, Oyin Ogunba, quoted in Okpiliya adds:

The characters in the play are, of course, to a large extent, stock-type namely, the roguish prophet, the dense husband, the shrewish wife, the superceded master, the ambitious politician... Soyinka has put his stamp on all the characters, so that they come out fresh and fascinating. (Okpiliya, 5)

Soyinka, thus, deliberately uses the names ironically to present his message of religious hypocrisy. The stock-type characters in *The Beatification* are called by their professional names: “*Judge*”, “*Barber*”, “*Shop-worker*”, “*Mama Put*”, “*Trader*” (also called *Area Two-One*). Names like “*Mama Put*”, “*Boyko*”, and “*Area Two-Four*” are coinages which depict the Nigerian socio-linguistic milieu. While “*Mama Put*” is used to refer to female sellers of low quality food, “*Area Two-One*”, “*Area Two-Four*” and “*Boyko*” are nicknames. Real personal names are few: “*Sanda*”, “*Miseyi*”, “*Professor Sematu*” and “*Chief Kingboli*”.

Soyinka’s use of general/occupational names to refer to many of the characters in the text infers that they are a representation of Nigerians living in similarly impoverished conditions. For instance, “*Judge*” represents those who have been deprived by the law, and “*Mama Put*”, who mourns her husband’s and her brother’s deaths at the hands of the cruel military government (21), represents those whose families and friends were killed without compensation. Names help in projecting the message of deprivation, poverty and tyranny in the text. Titles are also important in providing meaning. In *Jero’s Metamorphosis*, we have titles like “*Executive*”, “*Clerk*”, used not only to indicate the person’s position, but also to name him/her. Other titles in the book: “*Sister Rebecca*”, “*Brother Jero*”, “*Brother Shadrach*”, “*Brigadier Joshua*” and “*Sergeant Ananias*”, are used by Soyinka to lampoon religious fanaticism as well as the military government of the time. The characters bearing biblical names display behavior at variance with the names they bear, thus emphasizing Soyinka’s message of corruption in all sectors of the society.

The Beatification has titles such as “*Oga Sanda*”. “*Oga*” is the Nigerian term for “*Sir*”. One absurd example is “*Chief Honorable Surveyor Kingboli, B Sc. Cantab, order of merit, honorary doctorates and chieftaincy titles...*” (91). The three titles before the name indicate the man’s high position on the social ladder. Soyinka consciously uses these titles in the Nigerian way in order to place the text in its local setting and to pass across the message of the text – the emphasis placed on class. Thus, *Oga Sanda*, represents the poor class and *Chief Honorable Surveyor Kingboli*, the rich class, reflecting in

the opinion of Daramola concerning the love Nigerians have for a multiplicity of titles.

STANDARD NIGERIAN ENGLISH

Soyinka consistently uses the standard variety for the more educated characters in both texts. In *The Jero Plays*, brother Jeroboam sometimes uses this variety, and also Major Silva:

SILVA: That indeed is true, but I do understand music and that really is what I intend to teach. Well, shall we begin? (62).

SILVA: And now we shall begin all over again. (Taking off the music cord) we will forget all about this for the moment, shall we? Captain Winston said that you were a natural on the trumpet and I suppose he is right... Now, shall we try again? I want you to watch me and try and follow their, the movement of my hands – like this. (65)

The anaphoric speech style in the first sentence: the subject “*that*” at the beginning of the sentence, providing the nominal “*that*” with qualifiers “*indeed*” and “*really*”, the use of “*intend*”, rather than “*want*” or “*like*”, these are all near native syntactic and lexical choices. Again, Soyinka’s preference here for the modal “*can*” and “*will*” which are more volitive, and the lexical items “*a natural*” and “*I suppose*” are more characteristic of near-native speaker English than of Nigerian English.

Udofot observes that “there is a tendency for Standard Nigerian English (Variety Two) to be more fluent than sophisticated Nigerian English (Variety Three) (107).” From Brother Jero’s speech, we have this illustration in support of the view:

When he, in his wisdom saw it fit to place wings on my feet and make me fly upon the deserted beach away from your flaming cutlass of wrath, it was not, be assured, my life upon which he set such value: No, Brother Chume, it was yours. Yours! Consider, if you had indeed achieved your nefarious intention and martyred me upon the sands, would not your soul be damned forever?... Could you think to escape the hounds of God’s judgment and the law? See yourself, as you would be a fugitive from man and God, a dark soul lost and howling in the knowledge of damnation.... Brother Chume, you saw that a voice of honey may lurk beneath the sandy tongue of a termagant (*The Jero Plays* 69- 70)

In this excerpt, we have British idioms like “*flaming cutlass of wrath*” and “*hounds of God’s judgment*”. The verbal “*beassured*” is rather complex in the position where it is placed – between the Negator – “*not*” and the Complement. Also the lexical choice is more dense with expressions like “*nefarious fugitive*”, and “*termagant*”.

In *The Beatification*, characters such as *Mama Put*, *Parking Attendant*, *Band Leader*, *Sanda* and *Miseyi* also speak standard Nigerian English, even though they speak other varieties in other contexts, for example:

Sanda: ... is exactly the one you had before the last excitement on our street, what was it now? Oh yes, something terrible happened to Lagos: You woke up one day and there wasn’t any Lagos anywhere. No warning, nothing, just- pouff- Lagos was gone. Disappeared into thin air and you thought that was a calamity! (*The Beatification*, 20)

Here, the word “*excitement*” is polysemous. Sanda uses it to mean an upheaval caused by a group of agitated persons. The expression “*there wasn’t any Lagos anywhere*” is British in the insertion of *any* and the inversion from ‘Lagos was not anywhere’. Also from “*you woke up one day...*” to the end of the excerpt, the verbal groups are in the active voice. Only a competent user of the language could use all these constructions adeptly to point out the reality of the situation of poverty and uncertainty in Nigeria, which is the message of the text. These well-structured constructions are further noted in Mama Put’s speech below:

You are wrong son, woefully wrong. A sky such as this brings no good with it. The clouds have vanished from the sky but, where are they?... In the hearts of those below. In the rafters, Over the hearth blighting the vegetable patch. Slinking through the orange grove. Rusting the plantain leaves and withering them – oh I heard again; last night- and poisoning the fish pond... It’s a deceit. You watch out. We’d better all watch out.

(*The Beatification*, 20)

A line-up of adverbial phrases locates the clouds – “*in the hearts of those below*”, “*in the rafters*”, “*over the hearth*”, then the next group of phrases describe the action of this sun on their complements- “*blighting the vegetable patch*”; “*slinking through the orange grove*”; “*rusting the plantain leaves and withering them*; and “*poisoning the fish pond*”. We note the Predicator-Complement structure of these phrases, and their simple structure, except for the last sentence, from “*Rusting the plantain leaves*” ... to “*Poisoning the fish pond*”, which is a compound construction. Another complex construction involves the use of the adverb “*woefully*” to modify “*wrong*”. By his use of Standard English here, Soyinka represents Mama Put’s utterances in a way that depicts her background, through the nature of the imagery and idioms she deploys. She is not using Nigerian pidgin, but Yoruba, which Soyinka “*translates*” into English.

Adejare sees code-switching and code-mixing as “the most distinguishing features of Standard Nigerian English” (155). They form the “*Nigerian*” part of the variety, and are observed in the use of Nigerian terms within Standard English constructions. In these cases, there is often no English equivalent for the expression (s). The feature is evident in Barber’s speech

A quick wash and a new *agbada*, and no one can tell the difference between me and a retired General. I tell you, an *agbadai* is the greatest leveler in the history of clothing. Of course, the material can make all the difference but, the difference doesn’t show at night. (*The Beatification*, 88- 89)

An “*agbada*” is a loose traditional gown worn by Nigerian males. Since it has no direct British English equivalent, its use is obligatory. By using these three varieties of Nigerian English in *The Jero Plays* and in *The Beatification of Area Boy*, Soyinka has created an “art that is close to the popular mode in terms of language and direction of purpose” (Schumacher in Eshiet). He

has also reflected a realism, thus advancing the message of the texts, since these varieties of Nigerian English place the texts in their real socio-cultural and linguistic environment. Again, by using the language varieties to distinguish between classes of persons in the texts, the message of subordination, disempowerment, hypocrisy and notoriety in both texts is strongly projected.

ENGLISH WORDS WITH AFRICAN REFERENTS, AND BORROWED AFRICAN WORDS

In order to establish a link with his community, Soyinka uses English words and expressions which embody African meanings, as well as some borrowed African words. In the expression: "Amope is calmly chewing kola" (*Jero Plays*, 15)

"Kola" is a cream, pink or red bitter edible seed of the Kolaria tree, which is chewed or used in cooking in African countries (107). Words such as "gangan", "palm tree" (18), "red pepper", "ngwam – ngwam", "stockfish", "bitter leaf", "locust bean" (66), depict a typical setting as these are normal local condiments for soup-making. Chume refers to them as "extra flavour" (60).

From *The Beatification*, we have: "Pot tell Calabash your belle dey show" (19).

The word "calabash" like "clay pot," used elsewhere in the text reinforces the African setting.

Other examples of English expressions with African referents are "elephant tusk" (65); "male yams", "palm oil" (92). The elephant's tusk signifies strength; "male" and "yams" constitute a strange collocate used to refer to large mature yams, while "palm oil" is the viscous red oil made from palm fruits and is used in cooking in many parts of Africa.

Nigerian words used either in code-switching or code-mixing are also foregrounded in the plays and used in naming objects, concepts or persons. From *The Jero Plays* we have:

"And condiments? Iru? Salt? Ogiri? Kaun? And so on and so forth?" (66).

"... The cap... made in local material an 'abetiaja' style" (84).

"Iru", "Ogiri" and "Kaun" are typical Nigerian food condiments; "abetiaja", meaning "like a dog's ears" is a cap designed and worn by Yoruba males. Some African words in *The Beatification* are found in the lines:

Five naira ewa no fit fill picken belle these days. (15).

Na Omolanke go full expressway inself (27)

Wetin be your own for this alawadaman? (62)

"Ewa" is Yoruba for "beans"; an "omolanke" is a pusher of a locally made, commercial luggage cart, and "alawada" means "clown".

Other Yoruba words used in the text are "molue" (30), a locally built passenger bus; "bosikana", literally

"get in the corner" refers to a food shack. The Minstrel's songs have Yoruba titles- "Alaarut'oNjeBuredi" (28) and "Adelebot'oNjeBuredi (28) and "Adelebot'oNwoko" (34).

Soyinka uses English names in *The Jero Plays* to delineate certain characters. But, in *The Beatification*, he uses more of indigenous personal names. Adejare submits that names are important in Soyinka's texts because they are:

... produced by a writer whose mother tongue culture attaches a great significance to names. In contrast with the English saying, "what is in a name?" the Yoruba believes that "the name reveals the child" (Orukoniroomo o). Since Soyinka is well-grounded in English literature and Yoruba culture, it can be reasonably assumed that he would use names to project messages in the literary texts he produces. (44-45)

"Miseyi" is Yoruba for "I did this". The meaning of the name is reflected, in the role of the character in the play. Miseyi, the daughter of a military Governor, is supposedly betrothed to the son of Chief Kingboli. However, on her wedding night, she does the "unexpected". She gives Sanda the gourd meant to be handed over to her husband, thus rejecting marriage to Chief Kingboli's son, and eloping with Sanda, an old school lover, now king of Area Boys. Miseyi breaks tradition and chooses to run away with Sanda into poverty and insecurity. Her choice then is reflected in her name – she did something unheard of.

The Nigerian words and the English words with Nigerian referents are put in their context to show that they are meant to be interpreted within the context of the situations in which they occur – if they are to be understood. Either Soyinka uses these features because there are no direct referents for the words in English, or because a replacement would distort the meaning the playwright aims to project. By code-switching and code-mixing African words with English words he is still able to make his literature intelligible to both local and international audiences.

COINAGE

Neologisms abound in Soyinka's literary idiolect. They reflect his creativity in a language not native to him. For instance, the word "chiefest" (78) is a coinage by Isaac, which is analogous with "greatest", "biggest" and so on. This is an adaptation of the noun "chief," used as a gradable adjective "chiefest," through the simple morphological process of adding the bound morpheme "-est" to "chief" to indicate the highest degree. Again, we have: "By the cut of his tailor shall a man be known" (84), a parody of the Bible text, "By a man's fruits shall he be known."

From *The Beatification*, we have the coinage "time-machine" (32), a coinage through compounding, used by Trader to refer to the bicycle. Here, the characters are surprised to see a bicycle still operating in Lagos after

the oil boom, and so they compose a song for it. "Time machine" is meant to satirize the hurried life now lived by Nigerians, in contrast with the slow speed of the bicycle.

Another example, *Conjurate* (37) can be analyzed in analogy with "saturate" and "postulate". It is a coinage from "conjure," in "*Na from dere 'e take magic conjurate am fly commot*" (37).

This word is used by Trader, one of the uneducated characters to whom Soyinka also assigns Nigerian pidgin, in keeping with his level of education. His preference for "conjurate" may either reveal his ignorance of the correct form of the word, or infer that he has a tendency to be verbose. The sense in which the word is used here, points to the unpatriotic nature of some Nigerians whose poverty has led them into practicing "black magic" to make money. "*Discombobulated*" (93) is yet another coinage, here used by the MC at Misyi's wedding. Like "*disconcerted*" used on the same page, the coinage is derived through affixation: Discombobulated = dis - (bound morpheme/prefix+negative)

+ combobul (free morpheme)

+ ate (bound morpheme suffix = +v)

+ ed (bound morpheme suffix + past tense)

The 'new' word has the meaning (+astonishment), derived from the context "*I am bewildered, mystified, confounded, disconcerted, and discombobulated*" (93). The MC who makes this statement speaks both Nigerian English and transliterated English and succeeds in exciting the crowd, while projecting the meaning of the text and eliciting a display of Nigerians' love for creative expressions.

The coinages in *The Jero Plays* and their contextual meanings depict the disorganized state of Nigeria during the military regimes of the periods when these two plays were written, and the religious and political hypocrisy which attended them.

IMAGERY

The imagery employed in the plays comes from both local and foreign sources. *The Jero Plays* have fewer local images than *The Beatification of Area Boy*. One example from *The Jero Plays* is:

Carry the burden of your crimes and take your beggar's rags out of my sight... (17).

This metaphor is probably derived from Soyinka's Yoruba "carrier image", where there is usually a victim who carries the community's sins for its purification. Amope's insolence is displayed in her use of this statement to insult the fish trader. By this metaphor, Amope equates the trader with a beggar. Yet another instance is when Brother Jero refers to a member of his congregation who is a ministerial aspirant as "poor fish" (39). This Biblical metaphor describes the men (the congregation) as fish caught in the prophet's net. The naivety of the convert is

to be mourned, since he is compared to a fish caught in a net. Another example is:

The hole in a poor man's garment is soon filled with the patchwork of price, so resolutely does nature abhor a vacuum (48).

This metaphorical statement is made by Brother Jero to underscore the false pride that the poor often display.

The imagery in *The Beatification* projects the local setting more than those in *The Jero Plays*. A few of them are listed and discussed here:

Which kin'dawn? I only see the sun wey begin expose all those dirty roofs for Isale -eko (8).

The sun is conceptualized as a device for exposing the poverty of Nigerians. To Africans, the sun symbolizes life and vigor. This is why Judge, in a hyperbolic statement, claims:

I have seen more dawns from every vantage point, more dawns than you can count white hair on my head (8-9).

It is the life symbolized by the sun that Shop Worker also refers to in the statement:

As soon as I open my eyes and look outside, I can tell the time (11).

When on this fateful day, the workers notice the absurd brightness of the sun, to them it symbolizes death, an interpretation reinforced by Mama Put's statement:

E dey like animal wey just chop victim, with blood dripping from in wide-open mouth. (12)

Through imagery, the cloudless sun is seen as an ill omen as Mama Put adds:

Those who did this thing to us, those who turned our field of garden eggs and prize tomatoes into mush, pulp and putrid flesh - that's what they got- medals! They plundered the livestock, uprooted yams and cassava and what did they plant in their place? The warm bodies of our loved ones. (21)

Through these agricultural metaphors, the brutality of the military is sarcastically presented in their looting, plundering and uprooting of crops. Another metaphor drawn from the local scenery is seen in Mama Put's song:

Once the palm-wine tapper's trade was a performance test. How he kept his balance was a sight for jaded eyes. With frothing gourds on either side, his cradle round his chest. The cycle was his camel, a most practical device for navigating bush paths, then rolling into town to quench the burning fire of thirst beneath the bog city on a bicycle. (32-33)

Drawn from rural African life, the imagery of the palm-wine tapper and his cycle, are used as metaphors to express the loss of cultural values and of the sense of pride in things African, because of the new trend of things. Such images enrich the works aesthetically, and depict the socio-linguistic and cultural background of the writer, while contributing to the central theme.

TRANSLITERATION

Soyinka creates characters whom he imbues with Yoruba-English transliterated speech forms. In the exchange between Amope and Trader, for instance, the trader tells Amope:

I am not going to let you infect my luck with your foul tongue by answering you back. And just keep your cursed fingers from my goods because that is where you'll meet with the father of all devils if you don't (*The Jero Play*, 17).

This is a translation from the Yoruba expression, "Mi o ni je ki fee nu burukubaayo mi je"

which in its prime order level means: "I will not allow you to use your cursed mouth to spoil my joy."

As Adejare notes, the "prime order level translation is used mostly to present the speech of ordinary monolingual Yoruba character metaphors such as Amope in *The Trials of Brother Jero*" (193). In the statement above, adjustment from the primitive to the prime order equivalent is observed in the replacement of "allow" with "let", "cursed mouth" with "cursed fingers", "to spoil my joy", with "to ...infect my luck". By making these adjustments, Soyinka makes the speech intelligible to a non-Yoruba audience, while still retaining the cultural source of the text. Thus, Soyinka's use of transliteration techniques could therefore be seen both as a conscious and as an unconscious technique. One example of transliteration in *The Beatification* occurs in the Minstrel's song:

Eggs are eggs, and plenty done rotten. But make I tell you, some are golden (18)

The proverb emphasizes that there are different kinds of people.

Again in *The Jero Plays*, Chume tells the congregation, "Brother Jeroboam says God keep you till then". In British English, the simple greeting would have been "Goodbye", but in Africa, greetings often include the invocation of a blessing. Soyinka's Yoruba version of "Goodbye" therefore transliterates as "God keep you till then". ("Olorun a mu yin da Igbeyin" or "Olorunkotojuyin dada" – May God take good care of you).

In *The Beatification*, the MC at Miseyi's wedding challenges the bridegroom to action with the utterances:

That he should be trailed by bolts of kolanuts would be in order.
That he should be trailed by bolts of akwete cloth would be no surprise.
That he should be trailed by a lorry load of male yams, palm oil and bags of salt would be answering true to his origin. (92)

The MC further uses the device of transliteration to rouse the Bridegroom when he renders an indigenous Yoruba tale consisting of many transliterated proverbs:

Ladies and gentlemen, I think we are about to witness something rarer than the sight of an elephant giving birth. We are about to witness the secrets of the other side of the moon at the end of a fruitless hunt, we sighted and got ready to make do with a wild tuber. When we pulled it from the hot ashes what did we find? A whole roast antelope and they say the age of miracle makers is gone. We plunged our calabash into the animal's drinking hole

and found it filled with frothing palm wine. They told us there were no leaves on the tree because it was harmattan, but they had reckoned without the perennial rain tree. Undoubted son with lockjaw, say I brought it on myself say it was said to the miracle masquerade: surprise me! (93)

This is the most powerfully evoked transliterated passage in the text used to spur the addressee into action. It is drawn from Yoruba hunter's tales, tapper's tales and masquerade chants. This transliteration is used by Soyinka at a traditional wedding setting. Besides adding local color to the text, this kind of transliteration "serves the purpose of indicating to the reader that the character metaphors are discussing in Yoruba rather than English" (Adejare, 178).

The proverbs found in *The Beatification* illustrate other instances of transliteration:

...it was the cockatoo who pecked too deep inside iroko wood pursuing a worm, that is why its beak is bent till today... the fact that the drum is at rest doesn't mean that the leg won't tap. The rhythm of yesterday still lingers in the head of the trained dancer.... (8-9)
When the gods mean to be kind to us, they draw up the gloom to themselves (20).

From the analysis thus far,

...it is clear that transliteration in African plays does not distort meaning, rather it embellishes the play and makes it pure African. Since the immediate audience is the African people, it is imperative that their immediate language is realized in an L2 language for aesthetics and entertainment (Oha, 225 - 226).

Adejare notes that "Soyinka uses translation to present the dialogue of compound and co-ordinate bilingual characters, who speak Yoruba as the mother tongue and English as a second language" such as: Trader, Brother Jero, Chume, Amope and others in *The Jero Plays*, and in *The Beatification* – the MC, Mama Put, Cyclist, Mother of the Day, Judge and Trader.

The source further notes that transliteration also helps in the derivation of new idioms (183) such as "Eggs are eggs.... But some are golden", "We are about to witness something rarer than the sight of an elephant giving birth" and "Na cudgel go teach crazeman sense; na hunger go reform labourerpickenwey dream say in papa na millionaire" (27).

The language charges against Soyinka as being Eurocentric should be dropped. The features of language he uses reveal his bilingualism and provide an insight into his style. The two plays under study have yielded ample evidence of Soyinka's bilingualism and biculturalism. And one tends to agree with Eshiet, that

From the innovative communicative patterning of *The Beatification of Area Boy*, including its sustained cultivation of a sub-variety of English registers and idioms the urban masses written about could identify with, it would appear that the playwright is committed to a popular mass oriented drama. In addition, he appears positively keen to reverse damaging criticism avidly marshaled against him for what has largely seemed to be unpleasant obsession with turgid, obscurantist and convoluted modes of dramatic delivery (2).

The presence of the Nigerian English features shows that the texts are similar to some extent not in theme, then at least in style, and that because of the regularity in the use of these features in both texts, despite the time span of twenty six years between them. One can therefore assert that this is Soyinka's style.

Soyinka does not ignore the language question. The claims of obscurantism and Eurocentricism leveled against him are not totally correct. He could be described as Eurocentric and difficult to understand in works such as "Telephone Conversation", *The Man Died*, *A Play of Giants*; but not in others like, *The Jero Plays*, *The Lion and the Jewel*, and *The Beatification of Area Boy*. One possible reason for the alleged obscurantism especially in his poetry may be traceable to the genre, since poetry is generically regarded as more dense. In the case of his novel *The Interpreters* and his play *A Play of Giants*, two texts for which he is most readily accused of obscurantism, a detailed critical appraisal and a consideration of the social and contextual situations in each work would facilitate comprehension and interpretation. For an audience unfamiliar with Soyinka's textual strategies however, there could be a problem (Adejare, 186 -187).

Moreover, if some texts are easy to understand and others difficult, then it is part of his style, if indeed as Jones asserts, style is marked by a deviation from a norm.

Soyinka's plays have the complexity of organization and of language, that distinguishes literature from mere writing. The seriousness of their content makes him a vital voice to his generation, but it is his art that sets him apart from a large number of well-meaning writers with the message his work responds to serious criticism, and indeed needs it, for in the more serious plays there is a surface difficulty which has to be penetrated before the essence of work of this important writer is fully revealed. (7)

Soyinka's linguistic experimentation in *The Jero Plays* and in *The Beatification of Area Boy* has implications both for the English language and the indigenous language. The author recognizes the existence of regional varieties of English, the position of English as a world language, and the subjection of the language to different kinds of use in each environment where it operates. Soyinka's variety forms one of the many varieties of English helping to keep the language alive.

CONCLUSION

From his pre-Nobel progressively to his post-Nobel days, Soyinka has manipulated language, taking into consideration the actual language situation of Nigeria, and by so doing reflected the multilingual situation of Nigeria. Like Achebe, Soyinka has localized English in some of his texts, so that one need no longer view it as a "foreign language" (with the implied meaning of non-indigenous, strange, new) but as a language which over the years has

become acculturated to the Nigerian environment, as reflected in the many ethnic and regional varieties which have developed from it. Dadzie and Awonusi affirm this in their description of a category of African writers:

Represented by Wole Soyinka, Chinua Achebe, Ola Rotimi and others... The reason for choosing them is that they use English in the full awareness that it is no longer just the language of British and United States, but it is also a part of the linguistic heritage of many Nigerians. The role of these writers as novelists and poets is to mould the English language to make it capable of expressing their creative impulse and their cultural roots (309).

Soyinka has, therefore presented the English language in such a way that the African readers can feel, taste, smell, see and even hear his experiences while at the same time having his foreign reader in mind. This serves as a symbol of group solidarity and proves him as a conscious African writer, not only in his concern about the language issue, but also about every other problem faced by Africans: poverty, tyranny, or oppression. This analysis of Soyinka's use of language also serves to debunk the misconception about his Eurocentricism.

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