

Postcolonial Reverberations in Soyinka's *The Lion and the Jewel*: A Study of Decolonization through Linguistic Deviation

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Abstract

During colonization, the colonial rulers imposed their language on the people they colonized, forbidding natives speak their mother tongues. In some cases, the colonial rulers systematically prohibited native languages. In response to the systematic imposition of colonial languages, some postcolonial writers and activists advocate a complete return to the use of indigenous languages. However some may see the English language imposed by their colonial rulers as a more practical alternative, using the colonial language both to enhances inter-nation communication and to counter a colonial past through de-forming a "standard" European tongue and re-forming it in new literary forms.

Language is a central feature of human identity. When we hear someone speak, we immediately make guesses about gender, education- level, age, profession, and place of origin. Beyond this individual do not matter; a language is a powerful symbol of national and ethnic identity. (Spolsky 181)

Norton in this regard opines, 'Neither identity and language use is a fixed notion; both are dynamic, depending upon time and place' (1995).

BrajKachru says:

Nativization must be seen as the result of those productive linguistic innovations which are determined by the localized function of a second language variety, the culture of conversation and communicative strategies in new situations, and the transfer from local languages. (21-2)

The way we perceive ourselves changes with our community of practice, allowing us multiple identities over the years or even within a day. Literature, which is the major source of language, has become the means through which cultural sentiments are projected and expressed. For a long time, Africans have been subjected to cultural imposition and displacement by western culture. Certain African writers feel that to use English extensively in African literature is to cave in to hegemonic pressures. NgugiWaThiong'o is one such author. WaThiong'o is disappointed with the African acceptance of English. He writes 'it is the final triumph of a system of domination when the dominated start singing its virtues. (20)

However, Wole Soyinka is one among the most celebrated writers of English language belonging to the African descent who deviate from such a rigorous thinking as that of Ngugi. Soyinka's writings not only portray the politics, culture and history of the African world he belongs to but also are an important area for linguistic enthusiasts. Since, his writings are rich in ethnic language and there is abundance of possibility to research, retrieve and recuperate the wealth of language he has incorporated in his writings.

Soyinka's plays have made a considerable difference in the area of linguistic postcoloniality, since his language is deviated and nativised according to the subtleties of African culture. This study highlights that Soyinka has used a language in his plays

which is a mix of creativity in English language and colloquial Nigerian English. Soyinka has used various forms of deviation in his plays such as transliteration, code-switching, neologism, compounding, archaism, linguistic borrowing, punctuation, omission, reduplication, capitalization, progressive verb forms, restructuring, tag questions, etc. thus it is aimed to highlight the linguistic postcoloniality in Soyinka's works by establishing the playwright's native identity in the linguistic choices he has incorporated. Postcoloniality is used as an embodiment of Soyinka's rejoinder to linguistic colonialism in place of postcolonialism. Postcoloniality is an adjective coined to deviate from the norm 'postcolonialism' and to include the deviations that define the paradigm of linguistic postcoloniality in works of Wole Soyinka.

Unlike Ngugi, Soyinka has tried to retain his history of the colonial past. He has not rejected the whole idea of dominance of English language, rather has taken into his stride the burden of achieving a respectable position in the English language literature while maintaining and continuously creating his identity of an English writer. Wole Soyinka continuous representation of ideas presents an account of the fact there are many African writers who reject the supremacy of English language such as Ngugi who considers the acceptance of English language by African writers as victory of the subjectification, oppressors and colonizers since the colonized then forget about their own rich culture, history and language and is overshadowed by the virtues of the language of dominance, but Soyinka has made English language a tool in his hand to depict the identity of his own and his people. Like the multiple modernities of the West, Asia and Africa there are multiple postcolonialities too. This celebration centre-lessness is indicated in the in-depth account of the works of various postcolonial writers such as Ngugi (1986), Raja Rao (1938), Fanon (1961), Said (1978), Spivak (1987), 3 Ashcroft. et al. (1989), Kachru (1983), Soyinka (1990), Achebe (1975) Calvet (1998) Phillipson (1982) and others. The study discusses linguistic imperialism and propounds linguistic postcoloniality as an answer to it. After a brief discussion of the key concepts of the research, that is: language, identity and linguistic postcoloniality, the study has been narrowed down to Wole Soyinka and his plays. Plays written by Soyinka such as *The Lion and the Jewel* (1963), *Kongi's Harvest* (1967), *The Trials of Brother Jero* (1964), *The Swamp Dwellers* (1964), *The Road* (1965), *A Dance of the Forests* (1963), are read in cognizance with the idea that these represent holistically the range of Soyinka's linguistic postcoloniality that encompasses Africanisation and Yorubisation of English. The social, cultural, political and moral background of the plays is purely African in their essence and exhibit the social reality of native Africans and the language they speak is of significance to the linguistic enthusiasts.

Soyinka as a writer not only writes to explain the social dilemma of the African people with whom he shares his genesis but also explains the atrocities, the customs, the linguistic expression peculiar to their culture. Thus, Soyinka's plays make a valid point of study within the framework of linguistic postcoloniality for analysis of the language to scrutinize linguistic behaviours and to convey ideas which ensure the native identity of the writer. This paper focusses on the linguistic attitudes and perspectives creating new dimensions to the existing critiques in the present context of expression and dilemma of the postcolonial writers and for this study. The focus has been on the works of Soyinka as a playwright as well as a voice of the postcolonial writer of English language by making an attempt to assess the nature and incidence of the linguistic deviation in Soyinka's use of deviant language as a means to establish his identity as discussed by significant writers in the field of deviation

such as Kaplan (1980), Kachru (1983), Brumfit and Carter (1986), Adinjare (1992), Alo (1998), Leech (1957), Osundare (2004), Leech [(1966) (1969)], Short (1996), Crystal (2003), Pandharipande (1987) Bamgbose (1998) among various others.

Soyinka through his writings has tried to emphasize the authenticity of the African values in the contemporary world which is dominated by the colonial powers. Crow and Banfield suggest:

He (Soyinka) has pioneered, with extraordinary imaginative and technical resourcefulness, the creation of dramatic and theatrical forms capable of such an exploration incorporating and working the mythic forces and actual performances of his traditional culture. (90).

Soyinka's plays with postulation that each one of the African writers conducts his own experiments upon language usage in order to propound linguistic postcoloniality. Therefore there is a need to read Soyinka's plays through an exclusive focus against the backdrop of linguistic postcoloniality. Adejare 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)

Wole Soyinka holds his Yoruban identity very dear. In order to emphasise the ethnicity he has used Nigerian English mainly to write his plays while deviating from the specified norms of traditional English Grammar in diverse ways. One finds many such examples in his plays where deviation from the SE is a major attribute. For instance:

Lakunle: That is what the stewpot said to the fire.

Have you no-shame-at your age

Licking my bottom?

But she was tickled Just the same. (The Lion and the Jewel, 2, 3)

In the above example Soyinka starts the third line of the dialogue with a capital letter without ending the previous one with a punctuation mark. However if we go by the norms of the written English, a sentence in a dialogue cannot start with a capital letter unless the previous sentence has been ended with a punctuation mark. One can verify this very deviation by looking at various examples from the plays of Shakespeare or Shaw. Soyinka himself has used the other form in some other dialogues:

Lakunle- [bounds forward, dropping the wood.]:

What! The greedy dog!

Insatiate camel of a foolish, doting race;

Is he at his tricks again? (The Lion AndThe Jewel, 19)

Here, before initiating another line in the dialogue the previous one has ended with a punctuation mark which can be traced only at one instance throughout various plays of Soyinka. However, this is not one of the major deviations which can be

exclusively attributed to Soyinka, and this may not even be considered as a deviation. Yet at the level of language one can say that it is a characteristic of a sentence that it starts with a capital letter and ends with a punctuation mark such as, a full stop, an exclamation mark or a question mark. Also it is only then that it makes a complete sense. However, literature has always used language as a medium and not a barrier and thus it gives the 'poetic licence' to the writers, which allows them to deviate and yet make sense.

Another example of deviation which can be traced in abundance in the plays is the excessive use of ellipses and hyphenated words. Ellipses when used in an excess can be seen as author's attempt to be artsy or to create an effect. Traditionally an ellipsis is used in a dialogue to indicate a trailing off of speech. Ellipses can be defined as 'where narrative time is avoided altogether by the omission of large or small portions of the story either because they are implied in the narrative or are left out in the telling' (Sinha, 63). For instance:

Lakunle: ... A grown up girl must cover up her...

Her...shoulders?

I can see quite...quite A good portion of-that!

And so I imagine

Can every man in the village Idlers

All of them, good-for-nothing shameless men

Casting their lustful eyes where

They have no business... (TLATJ, 5)

Such deviations exist throughout the play, for instance:

Baroka: yes, yes...it is five full months since last

I took a wife...five full months... (TLATJ, 18)

BiodunJeyifo in Wole Soyinka: Politics, Poetics and Postcolonialism (2004) has deliberated on the idea of use of technique of ellipses in Soyinka's poems. He considers this use of ellipses as 'noticeable but carefully structured...' (242). He explains that Soyinka uses ellipses:

to deploy a plethora of images, metaphors and symbols that sculpt the incommensurable acts and processes of evil responsible for both the poet's 'perils' and those of past, present and future victims of oppression and dehumanization. (242)

In another dialogue Soyinka writes:

Sidi: Sadiku Stop...

...Let me to the palace for

This supper he promised me... (TLATJ 32)

The correct usage will be:

Let me go to the palace...

The finite verb which is an essential part of the sentence has been omitted in the above

sentence. Another example of deviation is:

Lakunle: Within a two year...

...

You neither read, nor write nor think? ... (TLATJ 35)

'Neither' and 'nor' are correlating conjunctions which mainly occur in a pair in its usage but in the above example an extra nor is used to further show a double negation, which is an attribute of spoken English but that too with a deviation. Even if we try to justify it with the usage in the spoken English yet in the written English usage it should be preceded by the comma. Moreover, the question mark in the end lies to believe that the statement is actually a question, which again requires intonation markers to understand. 'Neither' as a conjunction is used with 'nor'. It connects two or more negative alternatives. But, a 'neither' additional 'nor' used in the above example is a feature of Soyinka's language in the plays. Another example of coinage found in Soyinka is in one of the dialogues of his play:

The drums resuming the beating, a different, darker tone and rhythm, varying with the journey. Full use of 'gangan' and 'iyailu'. (The Lion And The Jewel, 15)

The same can, also be found in the narration of one of Soyinka's another play *The Trials of Brother Jero*, written by Soyinka:

Towards the end of this speech the sound of 'gangan' drums is heard, coming from the side opposite the hut. A boy enters carrying a drum on each shoulder. (The Trials of Brother Jero, 152).

and in another play by Soyinka *Kongi's Harvest*:

DANLOLA: [to the beat of 'gbedu' drum, steps in slow, royal dance.] (Kongi's Harvest, 62)

Here, apart from the coinage of new terms one can see instances of direct transfer from Yoruba to the English language text. The strategy, Soyinka uses here is to leave the Yoruba words in quotes as a signal to the reader that these are direct loans. *Gangan* and *gbedu* are type of drums used in Nigerian culture. They are also referred as 'talking drum' sometimes. *Gangan* is common among the Yoruba and is used to sing the praises of people, following the tonal patterns of the speakers of Yoruba language while *gbedu* is a type of practice on drums which is carried to praise king only, and, thus are considered as royal drums.

In one of the dialogues in the play, we find another type of deviation, where Soyinka has used the feature of translation and transliteration at the same time in the same context. Soyinka writes:

They are in ugly mood, and in spite of his protests, haul him off to the town centre, in front of the 'odan' tree. (The Lion And The Jewel, 16)

Here Soyinka has not translated the word 'odan'. This is done to uphold the native flavour of the text and also to show the significance of odan tree. But he does translate the word 'tree' which can be written in Yoruban language as 'odanigi'. One can notice that Soyinka has transliterated 'Odan' to connect to the native audience and retains the Nigerian genesis of the play. However 'tree' is translated to give the English flavour along with a mix of deviation. Alo (1998) defines transliteration as a, "process whereby the units of one language, e.g. words, structures, are replaced by those in another language e.g. from a Nigerian language into English ..."

Among various means of asserting linguistic identity one is to carve out a niche for one's identity in the layer of the colonial power. Therefore, the deviations by Soyinka have managed to establish a sub-system within the system of English language. These deviations in the plays by Soyinka, represent orality or to use Ngugi's 'orature' of native language, which is Yoruba, in this case. There are not merely deviations but this is also an assimilation of the oral patterns of Yoruba language into English. Although a comparison with SE has been used to juxtapose those deviations but it will be also viable and interesting to juxtapose this linguistic postcoloniality with any other linguistic postcoloniality. The linguistic postcoloniality thus represented in the plays also needs to be situated in the then contemporary socio political scenario perpetuated because of the civil war in Nigeria. Soyinka constantly mocks the ruling class through a linguistic tool when he rejects and deviates from the system of English language which embodies the ruling class as well as the coloniality.

The language of the plays, replete with Yoruba and other African terms and expressions, terms and sounds appears natural manifestation of the negritude rather than being a forced construct of radicalism. Soyinka's efforts to reach out to his audience is visible in his narrations and footnotes and he is often found attempting hard to make his readers savour the test of Yoruba humour and linguistic power.

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