

## *Original Paper*

# Hibridization, Linguistic and Stylistic Innovation in Cameroonian Literature and Implications for Translation

Suh Joseph Che<sup>1\*</sup>

<sup>1</sup> ASTI, University of Buea, Cameroon

\* Suh Joseph Che, ASTI, University of Buea, Cameroon

Received: April 23, 2019

Accepted: May 10, 2019

Online Published: May 17, 2019

doi:10.22158/sll.v3n2p165

URL: <http://dx.doi.org/10.22158/sll.v3n2p165>

### **Abstract**

*Drawing from Cameroonian drama written in French and translated into English, this paper demonstrates how Cameroonian literature written in European languages and translated into other European languages is characterized by linguistic and stylistic innovation. It examines the reasons and motivations underlying this phenomenon, first from the perspective of the ambivalent situation of the Cameroonian and African writer writing not in his native language but rather in a European language, and secondly in the light of the prevailing literary creative trend and attitude of Cameroonian and, indeed, African writers in general.*

*In this context, it is argued and posited that Cameroonian literary works are heavily tinted with linguistic and stylistic innovations such that the source texts actually intervene and exert considerable influence on the mode of their translation into the target language, particularly if the translator is to preserve the Cameroonian/African aesthetic which informs them and constitutes their driving force.*

### **Keywords**

*hybridization, linguistic innovation, stylistic innovation, translation, Cameroonian literature*

## **1. Introduction**

As a result of Africa's turbulent history marked by imperialist interventions, European languages have had to pay a certain price as vehicles of communication in the former European colonies of this continent. The tendency has been (and still is) for African writers writing in European languages to use these languages differently from their metropolitan counterparts by altering them to suit their new African environment. The Africanization or indigenization of these languages is thus the result of their appropriation particularly by African writers using them as a medium of literary creation and expression.

The plays of Guillaume Oyono Mbia, prominent Cameroonian playwright, constitute the corpus chosen to illustrate this phenomenon which is examined mainly at the following three levels: borrowings from the Cameroonian indigenous languages, lexical distortions of European words and names, and syntactic/stylistic calques of indigenous language elements in the European languages.

## 2. Borrowings from Cameroonian Indigenous Languages

In the corpus examined, borrowing from the indigenous language is manifested at four levels: words and expressions designating peculiar local realities and practices, ideophones, swearwords and forms of address.

With respect to words and expressions designating peculiar indigenous realities, the influence of Oyono Mbia's Bulu mother tongue is very evident in his French source texts as testified by the numerous Bulu language signifiers embedded in the plays. For instance, the words "Oyenga", "Nyeng", "Mvet", "Mbôlô ô ô", "Arki", "elum", "balafons", "kpwem", "Bikud-Si", "Ozila", etc., are loan words from Bulu. The pervasive presence of these native Bulu words enables the playwright's primary Bulu and Cameroonian readers/audience to fully identify themselves with the setting and action of the play. The following examples illustrate usage of some of these highlighted loan words in the source texts:

i) Bella: (Se lève avec autant de vivacité que l'âge lui en permet) Elle a réussi! Ma petite-fille a encore réussi à son examen! Ah Nane Ngôk! (Pousse le cri de joie traditionnel des femmes, l'«**Ôyenga** ») Ou-ou-ou-ou...! [(Jumping up as excitedly as she can) She passed again! My granddaughter passed again! Ah Nane Ngôk! (She utters the women's traditional cry of joy, the "**Ôyenga**") Ou-ou-ou...!] (TPUM: 18/TSOH: 13) (Note 1).

ii) (Au lever du rideau, Sanga-Titi chante une mélodie en s'accompagnant de sa harpe « **Mvet** ») [(When the curtain rises, the Witch-doctor begins by playing a theme on his harp "**Mvet**", then he sings the solo part of the melody)] (TPUM: 83/TSOH: 59).

iii) (Tous se regardent, très impressionnés, Missa Majunga met son électrophone en marche: c'est un air de Messi Martin. La femme se lève en titubant et va danser devant le public, sous les yeux amusés des consommateurs qui claquent des mains en cadence...C'est un air de «**Bikud-Si**». A la fin du morceau...) [(All are deeply impressed, and silently look at one another. Missa Majunga switches on his record player, and plays a record by Messi Martin. The woman takes a few unsteady steps towards the audience and begins dancing "**Bikud-Si**" much to the amusement of the others...)] (LTSSE: 18/HEST: 18).

iv) (La scène est à Mvoutessi, petit village situé au sud du Cameroun Oriental, chez Abessôlô. Les acteurs sont installés sous un petit hangar recouvert de palmes, un «**elum**» érigé temporairement devant la maison principale comme il est d'usage chez les Bulu et les Beti lorsqu'on attend de nombreux visiteurs...) [(We are in Mvoutessi, a little village in the southern part of East Cameroon. This is Abessôlô's home, and the actors will mainly be sitting inside a temporary palm-tree hall "**elum**" which

had been erected in front of the main house, as is customary in the Bulu region when important visitors are expected...) (JNA: 11/UFN: 88)].

v) All the songs in *Trois Prétendants...Un Mari* are in the native Bulu language. It is worth noting that in all the instances where the author introduces the Bulu words into the plays he really highlights them and makes them stand out from the rest by placing them between inverted commas. As concerns ideophones, these elements as used in Oyono Mbia's plays are special types of words which convey a kind of idea-in-sound. They are mainly interjections or inarticulate utterances used by the author to inject emotion or vividness to the dialogue and descriptions. They are thus effective rhetorical and emotive tools which further dramatize the action of the play. They enable the speaker to sustain and heighten the audience's interest in what is said. In the plays examined, they are used to express a very wide range of things and effects including feelings of fear, awe, apprehension, disappointment, disgust, admiration, scorn, contentment, surprise, impatience, irritation, exasperation, mockery, nostalgia, incredulity, horror/abject fear, discouragement, urgency, etc., some of which are illustrated below and highlighted in bold. Consider

the interjection "Éé é é kié" in the following examples:

i) Mezung: (Un peu gêné d'avoir à le dire dans un bar) Euh...Il m'a donné dix mille Francs! [(Understandably ill at ease, being in a bar) Well...er...He only gave me ten thousand francs!] Tous: (Ahuris) **Éé é é kié!** Dix mille francs! [All: (Amazed) **Éé é é kié!** Ten thousand francs!] (LTSSE: 16/HEST: 16)].

- Emotion expressed is that of awe and pleasant surprise at such largesse and magnanimous display of wealth.

ii) Missa Majunga: (Il élève encore la voix) Ah Folinika ! (Folinika entre avec grand fracas...tout en cherchant un chiffon derrière le comptoir, elle invective son mari) [(He calls out again) Ah Folinika! (Folinika storms in...She aggressively addresses her husband while looking for a duster behind the counter)]. Folinika: **Éé é é kié!** Quand vas-tu donc cesser de me faire courir à droite et à gauche? Tu crois que je suis encore jeune moi? Je suis déjà vieille, tu m'entends? [**Éé é é kié!** When will you ever stop ordering me about? You think I am still a young woman, eh? I am an old woman, you hear? ] (LTSSE: 22/HEST: 22).

- Emotion expressed is that of exasperation at being pestered by her husband.

iii) Missa Majunga: (Après un coup d'oeil du côté de la gare) Ah! Le voilà qui arrive! Tu peux y aller, Folinika! (Folinika se met bruyamment au travail) [(After a glance towards the railway station) Ah!... there he comes! You go ahead now, Folinika! (Folinika begins noisily cleaning the special table)] Folinika: **Éé é é kié!** Regardez-moi cela!...Des mégots de cigarettes, des biscuits, toutes ces saletés-là qu'on laisse traîner sur la table spéciale de Monsieur le Chef de Gare ! [**Éé é é kié!** Just look at this!...Cigarette butts, biscuits, all sorts of dirty things on Mr. Stationmaster's special table! (LTSSE: 23/HEST: 23)].

- Emotion expressed is that of irritation and disgust at the dirty habits of some of her customers.

iv) Mbia: (Même jeu) Tu mettras que les gens de ce village sont insolents à l'égard des grands fonctionnaires...(S'indiquant, majestueux) Comme moi ! [(Same as above) Write that the people of this village have no respect for important civil servants like...(Pointing at himself)...like me!] Tous: **Eé é é é kié é!** [All: **Eé é é é kié é!**] (TPUM:78/TSOH:56).

- Emotion expressed is that of apprehension and fright at the impending danger looming over the entire village following Mbia's threats.

v) Sanga-Titi: (Brandissant sa corne d'antilope) Si quelqu'un d'autre ose douter de moi, je jette un sort à tout ce village! [(Brandishing his antelope horn) If anyone else here dares to contradict me, I'll bewitch this whole village!] Tous: (Reculant, terrifiés) **Eé é é é kié!** [All: (Rushing back in terror) **Eé é é é kié!**] (TPUM: 96/TSOH: 68)].

- Emotion expressed is that of extreme fright following the threats from the witch-doctor to bewitch the whole village.

As can thus be observed in the above five examples, the same sound "**Eé é é kié**" is used to express awe and surprise, exasperation, irritation and disgust, apprehension and fright, and extreme fright. It is equally observed that varying degrees of the same emotion (i.e., fear) may be expressed by simply stretching the length of the vowel (the "é" sound is longer in (iv) and (v) above than in (i) to (iii).

All the above variations as well as the many others not highlighted here obviously imply that the audience/listener, particularly the non Bulu/Cameroonian audience, must be attentive enough to grasp the intended meanings of the sounds from their diverse contexts of usage.

Another device which Oyono Mbia uses which introduces local colour in his plays and further dramatizes the action in his plays are swearwords and oaths. All of them are in the author's native Bulu language and he has introduced them untranslated in his plays. The oaths in the names of his Bulu ancestors are used by his characters to express various emotions such as shock, pride, disgust, stress and despair/helplessness at having been overtaken by events. Some highlighted examples include the following:

i) Bella: (Qui vient de s'installer à côté de Matalina) Qu'est qu'il y a encore dans ce monde d'aujourd'hui mon pauvre mari ? Je vois les femmes manger même des vipères, des sangliers, des...(Claquant des mains, scandalisée): **Eé é kié Oyônô Eto Mekong ya Ngozip é é é!** [(Now sitting near Matalina) What's left in this world of today, my poor husband? I see women eating even vipers, wild boars, and...(Clapping her hands in disgust): **Eé é kié, Oyônô Eto Mekong ya Ngozip aah!**] (TPUM: 15/TSOH: 10)

The expression "Oyônô Eto Mekong ya Ngozip" refers to Oyônô Eto Mekong, an illustrious figure of the past from the Ngozip village. The Bulu people also have as custom to express their surprise, pain or any strong emotion by invoking aloud their most illustrious ancestors. The emotion expressed here is that of shock and consternation at the women's audacity and impudence to violate with impunity such a

deeply entrenched custom. The author thus ironically puts across his message through the expression of this emotion. In the play, the author is castigating the subjugation of women in the traditional society through outdated and anachronistic customs which impede the emancipation of the women. It is therefore ironical that it is Bella, a female character, who disapproves and is scandalized and shocked at such despicable, unbecoming and reprehensible behaviour of some of the women who dare to eat vipers and wild boars reserved exclusively for men.

ii) Bella: (Fièremment) Un vrai blanc! Ma petite-fille Juliette va épouser un vrai blanc!...Ah **Nane Ngôk!** [(Proudly) A real Whiteman! My granddaughter's going to marry a real Whiteman!...Ah **Nane Ngôk!** (TPUM: 16/TSOH: 11)]

“Nane Ngôk!” is the illustrious ancestor invoked here and the emotion expressed is that of pride and satisfaction. Bella feels very proud that her granddaughter will be married to a man who is as civilised as a Whiteman (i.e., a European).

iii) Oko: (Tranquillement) Pour qu'elle m'épouse, il faut qu'elle suive sa volonté à elle [(Quietly) If she's to marry me, she must do as she wants! (TPUM:112/TSOH: 80)]. Abessôlô: (Ecoeuré, aux autres) Qu'elle suive sa volonté à elle ? Une femme? Zua Meka! [(Disgustedly, staring at the others) Do as she wants? A woman? Zua Meka! (TPUM: 112/TSOH: 80)].

“Zua Meka” is another Bulu illustrious ancestor. The emotion expressed by Abessôlô by invoking aloud this figure is that of complete disgust and revolt. Indeed, he is utterly disgusted and revolted at the suggestion from Oko that Juliette should be the one to freely choose her husband rather than for one to be imposed upon her by her parents as required by custom.

iv) Atangana. Hi yé é é ...ah **Zua Meka!** Quelle journée! [Hi yé é é...Ah **Zua Meka!** What a day! (TPUM: 81/TSOH: 59)].

The same illustrious ancestor as above is also invoked here but this time the emotion expressed by the character is that of stress and despair/helplessness at having been completely overtaken by the events of the day.

A strong coloration of the playwright's native Bulu society is equally conferred on the plays by his introduction into the plays of forms of address typical of his society. In the author's society, and indeed in most Cameroonian traditional societies, the words used to address people are closely related to the life in those traditional societies. In these traditional societies, it is considered polite and respectful to address one's elders, superiors or people of importance by their titles, for example, Grandpa Abessôlô, Grandma Bella, Father Majunga, Uncle Mezoé, Aunt Cécilia, Chief Mbarga, Teacher Oyono, Witch-doctor Sanga-Titi, etc. These honorifics could be very troublesome for the non-Bulu/Cameroonian person, particularly a European one. For instance, Witch-doctor Sanga-Titi or Teacher Oyono sounds awkward in English.

Furthermore, the notion of the extended family in certain African societies (as opposed to the nuclear family characteristic of the West) is stretched even further in the society depicted in the plays, whereby the entire village is considered as one big family, such that a woman old enough to be one's mother is addressed as mother or conversely, a girl young enough to be a woman's daughter is addressed as daughter by the woman. Consequently, Grandma Bella may well be a neighbour of the speaker and Father Majunga is likely not to be a family member at all as in the following exchange between Missa Majunga and Owoundi in *Le Train Spécial de Son Excellence*:

i) Missa Majunga: (Ahuri) Quoi? Il t'a dit d'attraper une chèvre? [(Astounded) What? He said you should catch a goat?] Owoundi: Oui **Tita** Majunga! Une chèvre que le grand homme doit emmener avec lui à Yaoundé! L'oncle Atangana m'a dit d'aider les autres enfants à l'attraper [Yes, **Tita** Majunga! A goat for the great man to take with him to Yaounde! Uncle Atangana said I should help the other children to catch it.] (LTSSE: 41/HEST: 41).

- The word «Tita» means «Father». Owoundi thus addresses Missa Majunga as “Father” whereas the latter is no blood relation of his at all.

However, in another exchange, this time in *Jusqu'à Nouvel Avis* between Ada and Meka, the relationship between the characters is different from the example just cited:

ii) Ada: (A un petit rire sans joie) En paix avec lui? Hum!...Pas du tout, Tita Meka! Mon mari ne cesse de me battre ces jours-ci! [(Putting on an unhappy smile) Living in peace with him? Hum!... Not at all, Tita Meka! My husband keeps beating me these days.]

Meka: (Ahuri, s'arrête de nettoyer sa pipe) De te battre? Le grand fonctionnaire te bat? Pas possible! [(Incredulously, stops cleaning his pipe) Beating you? The great civil servant beats you? That is not possible!] Ada: Il me bat, Tita Meka! [He beats me Tita Meka!] (JNA: 23/UFN: 96).

- In this second example, Ada addresses Meka as Tita who is actually her older family relation, though not her biological father.

The other forms of address used in the three plays examined include “Na”, “Tit” and “Ah”. The form “Na” is illustrated in the following examples:

i) Ada: Tiens, Mezoé! [Take, Mezoé]

Mezoé: (Prenant les deux assiettes) Merci, Ada! ... Hmm! l'odeur de la cuisine de Na'Cécilia! [(Taking the two plates) Thank you Ada! ...The good smell of Na'Cécilia's food!] (JNA: 19/UFN: 93).

iii) Bella: (A Juliette) Qu'est-ce qu'elle t'a envoyé? De la viande d'antilope? [(To Juliette) What did she send to you? Antelope meat?] Juliette: (Se dirigeant vers les étagères) Je crois bien que oui, Na'Bella! On mangera cela après avoir fini de préparer le repas [(Moving towards the shelves) I think so, Na'Bella! We will eat it when we finish cooking.] (TPUM: 61/TSOH: 43).

The form of address “Na” refers to “Mother” or the “Grandmother” as illustrated in the above examples. In the first example, Ada and Mezoé are Na'Cécilia's children, while in the second example Juliette is Na'Bella's granddaughter. Similarly, “Tit” refers to “Father” or “Grandfather” while “Ah” which

precedes the name of the addressee is a mark of respect and politeness.

### 3. Lexical Distortions of European Words and Names

In Oyono Mbia's source texts a number of words have been distorted such as "Sieur" for "Monsieur" (TPUM), "doiche" and "jaman" for "Dutch" and "German" respectively (TPUM), "Haut...Comm...euh" for "Haut-Commissaire" (TPUM), "Un secrec...un gene..." for "Un secrétaire general" (JNA), "Clima...quoi" for "Climatiser" (JNA), "Missa" for "Mister" (TPUM and LTSSE), "Messié" for "Messieurs" (LTSSE) and "Majunga" for "Maijoca" (the label of a Spanish red wine produced in the Spanish wine-producing region of Maijoca) (LTSSE).

Names too have been distorted and these include "Matalina" for "Madeleine" (TPUM, JNA and LTSSE), "Makrita" for "Margherita (in the Italian language) (TPUM and JNA), "Cécilia" for "Cécile" (JNA), "Sinabé" for "Sheramy" (JNA) and "Folinika" for "Véronique" (LTSSE). These distortions further dramatize the action of the play by producing a comic effect.

Through these distortions, in addition to depicting the traditional society with its naïve and unsophisticated ways and beliefs and whereby the villagers are mostly illiterates, Oyono Mbia also portrays the conflict between the indigenous and imported European/Westernised cultures. The fundamental issue addressed by the author is the ability of the indigenous society depicted to cope with modernity, particularly with the imported Western style of life. The author persistently deforms the way some of the characters say European names or pronounce certain words. The effect thus produced by this massacring of words and names is humour. But beneath this humour is the author's message. Due to the difficulties faced by the villagers in pronouncing the words or in handling these foreign names properly, they are forced to modify them and adapt them to the phonology of the native Bulu language thereby making them as natural as possible and easy to use just like any other local word or name. This apparent failure at the level of mere names poses a more profound question: is there no risk that the foreign ways/ideas, which the traditional, simple and unsophisticated Cameroonian societies are increasingly and inevitably exposed to, would also be modified and interpreted in terms of the local habits? The words and names are modified into a hybrid which is neither European nor Bulu/Cameroonian. Are the Western ways/ideas therefore not subject to the same fate?

### 4. Syntactic/Stylistic Calques of Indigenous Language Elements in the European Languages

In his source texts, Oyono Mbia expresses Bulu cultural and linguistic phenomena through a French syntactic mould, thereby giving the French language in the plays a peculiar and exquisite Bulu colouration and flavour. In other words, he uses French such that it reflects not the French culture but his Bulu culture by trying as far as possible to utilize traditional Bulu thought processes and turns of phrase, as in the following exchange between Juliette and Oko:

Juliette: Ce n'est pas tout: le fonctionnaire a versé deux cent mille francs à ma famille cet après-midi! [That's not all: the civil servant paid two hundred thousand francs to my family this afternoon!] Oko: (épouvanté) Deux cent mille...**quoi?** [(Appalled) Two hundred thousand...**what?**] (TPUM: 52/TSOH: 38).

- Oko's reaction to Juliette's revelation looks like a question (as highlighted in bold) but it is in fact a statement expressing his surprise and shock at the amount of money paid as Juliette's dowry. Other examples of stylistic calques in the source texts which we have equally highlighted in bold include the following:

i) Sanga-Titi: (D'une voix inspirée) C'est moi Sanga-Titi, le grand Sorcier qui avait hérité des secrets du passé! Ah Mbarga, on te dit sage, mais moi je t'appelle fou, car **tu n'as pas plus de deux yeux**. Voici la preuve de ce que j'avance: où est maintenant ton trisaieul? [(In an inspired voice) I am Sanga-Titi, the great witch-doctor who inherited the secrets of the past! Ah Mbarga, people consider you a wise man, but I call you a fool because **you have got no more than two eyes!** Here is proof of what I say: Where is your great-great-grandfather now?] (TPUM: 88/TSOH: 62)

The highlighted expression means to be naive and stupid. The Witch-doctor, Sanga-Titi, reproaches the Chief Mbarga by telling him that he is naive and stupid.

ii) Nkatefoe: (Mettant ses lunettes rondes) Voilà bien **trois lunes** que Matalina et son mari sont revenus de France! [(Putting on his glasses) It is now **three full moons** since Matalina and her husband returned from France!] Abessôlô: **Trois lunes tout entières!** Et Matalina n'a jamais songé à dire à son mari: «allons saluer mes pères et mes mères à Mvoutessi, le petit village où je suis née» [**Three full moons!** And Matalina has never said to her husband: "Let's go and greet my fathers and mothers in Mvoutessi, the little village where I was born"] (JNA: 16/UFN: 91).

- The highlighted expressions «trois lunes» and «trois lunes tout entières» evoke the past in that "time" is presented in the way the "months" were calculated by the ancestors of the villagers, a way still very much in use today in traditional Cameroonian society. In this traditional system, the natives are not interested in knowing whether there are 28, 29, 30, or 31 days in a month as the case may be. Rather, what is of importance is the face (shape) of the moon (i.e., quarter, half or full moon). Thus, according to the traditional system, a month stretches from one full moon to the next one.

i) Nkatefoe: Nos oreilles **se refroidissent**, ah Mezoé ! [**Our ears are getting cold**, ah Mezoé!] (JNA: 18/UFN: 92)

- This is the traditional way of expressing impatience in the society depicted in the plays. Nkatefoe means that they are waiting impatiently to hear Mezoé's story.

iii) Missa Majunga: (Nostalgique) Hi i i! Tout comme à **l'époque où la terre était encore terre!** Les grands hommes d'alors ne buvaient que du rhum, du cognac, du whisky, du champagne et d'autres boissons importées. On ne connaissait pas encore cette vogue de vin de palme et de boissons distillées localement. Une honte! [...] [(With nostalgia) Hi i i! Just the way it used to be **when this land was still**



**a land!** The great men of the time only drank rum, brandy, whisky, champagne and other imported drinks. Nobody knew palm wine or any of these locally distilled spirit drinks which become popular today. What a shame!] (LTSSE: 24/HEST: 24)

- The expression highlighted is also a calque of the traditional way of saying «In the good old days». Missa Majunga expresses nostalgia at the good old days and disappointment at the present situation. Syntactic/stylistic calques of indigenous language elements in the European languages are also manifested in the use of proverbs and repetition.

Oyono Mbia's plays contain proverbs from his native Bulu background. In the author's society (and in traditional Cameroonian society in general) proverbs are the kernels in which popular wisdom is stored. They are used for elucidating ideas and impressing listeners. They are philosophical and moral statements condensed to a few words and in society are used by those who have acquired the wisdom of their forefathers and are the upholders of the beliefs and philosophy of the community. Thus, they also signal and reveal the distinct identities of individual characters or character-types in the plays such as *Abessolo* (in *JNA* and *TPUM*), *Meka* (in *JNA*), *Mbarga* and *Sanga-Titi* (in *TPUM*), *Cecilia* (in *JNA*) and *Missa Majunga* (in *LTSSE*). These proverbs also signal and identify the speaker as belonging to a particular ethnic group. Indeed, in addition to all of the above, some of the proverbs in Oyono Mbia's plays actually carry the author's satire on certain traditional and cultural practices which he condemns. Very often the decoding of these proverbs by the non-native speaker/listener entails prior knowledge of the specific socio-cultural practices and which reflect the thought patterns of the native speakers and their ways of perceiving reality. Consider the following highlighted examples:

i) Abessôlô: (Hors de lui) Y a-t-il rien de plus exaspérant au monde qu'une vieille femme ? **Ton fils va déjà atteindre le sommet de l'arbre, et toi tu viens lui dire:** «redescends». Tu ne peux pas écouter? [(Exasperated) is there anything more infuriating than an old woman! **Your son is about to reach the top of the tree, and you say to him: "Come down, so as to start climbing again!"** Can't you listen? (*JNA*: 31/*UFN*: 101)

- The saying «Ton fils va déjà atteindre le sommet de l'arbre, et toi tu viens lui dire: «redescends» » derives from the indigenous proverb « atteindre le sommet de l'arbre et redescendre », i.e., to reach the peak of progress or of one's career and to drop from there soon after and suddenly. The character Abessôlô uses it to disapprove of the egoistical attitude of the villagers who want to hinder the progress of his son-in-law.

ii) Abessôlô: Elles ne m'entendront pas! Quand Cécilia et les autres femmes de ce village se mettent à rire, c'est comme si personne n'avait versé de dot à leurs parents pour les épouser! Hé toi, Tita-Mongô! Cours demander à la grand'mère s'il faut **que nous mangions comme des oiseaux!** [They won't! Cecilia and the women of this village always laugh like unmarried women! You Tita-Mongo! Run and ask your grandmother **whether we should be eating like birds!**] (*JNA*: 13/*UFN*: 89).

- The phrase «que nous mangions comme des oiseaux» derives from the indigenous proverb «Manger comme des oiseaux». The traditional belief in the society depicted is that birds which fly in the air do not drink water. They have no teeth and so do not chew their food before swallowing. Consequently, they do not need to drink water or any liquid to push the food down their throats when it is stuck there or simply to use it to clear their throats after eating. Thus, to talk of eating like a bird means to eat without drinking water.

iii) Mbarga: Qu'est-ce que nos ancêtres disaient à propos du caméléon et du margouillat? [What did our ancestors use to say about the chameleon and the grey lizard?]

Abessôlô: «**Quand le caméléon meurt, le margouillat hérite de son sac de kola**» (“**When the chameleon dies, the grey lizard should inherit his sack of cola nuts**”) (TPUM: 80/TSOH: 58).

- In this exchange between Mbarga and Abessôlô who is the custodian of tradition, the latter replies to the former's question with a proverb which provides information with regard to who shoulders what responsibilities and when in that society: when a person is in difficulties or is hit by misfortune it is the duty of their closest relation or friend to step in and bail them out.

iv) Sanga-Titi: (S'asseyant, imperturbable) Tu sais comme nos ancêtres disaient: «**Les fantômes ne parlent jamais avant que la pluie ne soit tombée!**» [(Quietly sitting down) You know what our ancestors used to say: “**Dead men never speak unless it has rained!**” (TPUM: 84/TSOH: 60).

- The proverb «Les fantômes ne parlent jamais avant que la pluie ne soit tombée» is the indigenous Bulu equivalent of «there is no smoke without fire» or generally, «every effect has a cause». It reveals some of the spiritual beliefs of the Bulu such as their cult of the ancestors whom they believe can talk to the living at times.

As it is evident from the above examples as well as the many other proverbs in the plays, they are literal translations from the native Bulu language whereby the thought patterns and world-view of the Bulu society are consciously adopted by the author sometimes for plausibility in character depiction, sometimes for humour and sometimes to convey his satire. These literal translations into French could be termed “Bulu French”, i.e., indigenized French.

Oyono Mbia, like any other Cameroonian writer drawing from his background but writing in a European language learnt only much later in school rather than writing in his native language may be said to be often confronted with a difficult choice. He has to decide either to express the local proverb literally in the European language so that stylistically it should at least read and sound as a proverb to the readers/audience in the European language or he has to decide to look for a semantic equivalent in the European language to express it. A semantic equivalent which fully satisfies the author's intentions is rarely attainable given the cultural gap between the traditional Cameroonian and European sociolinguistic communities. In their desire to portray or capture the cultural realities of their society in their works, most Cameroonian authors, like most other African writers writing in a European language, therefore, deliberately opt to express these realities in the European languages literally and in a way as

close as possible to the native African languages in an attempt to preserve the images and thought patterns of the indigenous societies.

In his plays, Oyono Mbia has also made use of repetitions in order to reflect the spirit and flavour of his native village ways of oratory. These repetitions create a rhetorical effect thereby further dramatizing the action of the plays through the emphatic expression or communication of the speaker's intention as illustrated in the following highlighted examples amongst the very many which abound in the three plays examined.

i) Abessôlô: (Aux autres) Mariage **impossible! Impossible!** Rendez-lui sa bière! **Parenté! Parenté!** [(To the others) Marriage **impossible! Impossible!** Return his beer! **A relative! A relative!**] (TPUM: 33/TSOH: 23).

- The intention expressed is that of emphatic refusal.

ii) Ondua: **Sans aucun doute! Sans aucun doute!** [Without any doubt! Without any doubt!] (TPUM: 17/TSOH: 12).

- The intention communicated is that of great hope or optimism.

iii) Abessôlô: (S'écroule sur le sol, loin de Ndi) Eé é é! **Je suis mort ! Je suis mort!** [(Collapsing on the floor, away from Ndi) Eé é é! **I am dead! I am dead!**] (TPUM: 74/TSOH: 54).

- The intention communicated is that of total despair and helplessness.

iv) Cécilia: (Aux autres) Mais **elle s'est enfuie! Elle s'est enfuie** parce qu'elle n'était qu'une petite grenouille chétive et...[(To the others) But she ran away! She ran away because she was nothing but a little puny frog] (JNA:35).

- The intention communicated is that of emphatic derision of a rival.

iv) Missa Majunga: Très bien! Une dernière chose maintenant: tu dois revenir **le plus vite possible. Le plus vite possible**, tu entends? Si par hasard tu trouves le grand homme en train de manger, **tu vas alors te planter là à le regarder** comme si tu n'avais jamais vu de nourriture de ta vie ; **tu vas te planter là à le regarder**, hein? [Very good! Now one last thing. You must come back **as soon as possible. As soon as possible**, you hear? If you happen to find the great man eating, then **you should stand there staring at him** as if you had never seen food in your life; **you should stand there staring at him**, eh?] (LTSSE: 35).

- In the first instance of repetition the intention communicated is that of insistent instruction. In the second instance, the intention conveyed is that of strong admonition.

It is worth noting that in the above examples as well as in many others in the plays, in virtually all the instances of repetition as it is characteristic of native Bulu oratory, the second segment of the repetition comes in as an immediate and quick succession to the first segment and is juxtaposed to it.

The motives underlying the above linguistic and stylistic innovation can be explained by the prevailing literary trend and attitude of Cameroonian and African writers ensuing from the colonization of the African continent. As pointed out by Ade Ojo (1986, p. 296), under the colonial educational system in

Africa, every educated indigene was restricted to the learning of the language of the colonizing master and the classics (Latin and Greek). Coupled with the situation was the fact that the indigenous African languages were not codified or reduced to writing (as even today, most of them have still not been reduced writing). As a result, it was impossible for African writers to write in the mother tongues. There thus arose the need for the writers to write in the languages of the colonizers, a situation which gave rise to African literature written in European languages. Indeed, today, this form of African literature expressed in European languages can be considered to occupy a unique position in the world literary landscape and the African writers who are at the origin of this literature can be considered to constitute a special kind of bilingual creators. The situation gave rise to certain consequences, the first being that because historically these writers found themselves placed in such a linguistic situation, they tended to consider the colonial languages as mere tools or means to achieve the objectives and they started striving in their writings to destroy the stereotypical images of Africa and to project their own African world view.

As pointed out by Adejunmobi (1998, p. 168), there developed a move to reflect or portray Africanness in their writings, undoubtedly motivated by a desire to compensate for certain consequences of the colonial encounter. The marginalization of the indigenous African languages in significant spheres of life in many parts of contemporary Africa lies at the heart of this move, and modification of European languages in their writings as a response to this state of affairs has, today, become an established tradition in African writing. The writings thus reveal a conscious attempt at literary decolonization through the language of writing and it can be said that by choosing to Africanize, that is, to translate their languages and models into the European languages by appropriating the latter, the African writers question the historically established authority of the European languages and establish their languages as equally viable means of producing literary discourse.

Another consequence of the colonial and ambivalent linguistic situation of the African creative writer writing in a European language (mainly English and French) is that he soon realized that he was confronted with a dilemma: how to reproduce equivalent cultural experiences in a European language and still retain the rhythm and structure of the oral tradition inherent in the African unwritten original language. Obiechina (1973, p. 12) has spelled out this dilemma as follows:

The West African writer has to transfer his structure of thought, feeling and expression from a West African language into English, has to recast his material in a fundamental way if his West African experience is to remain West African, while at the same time making sure that the English in which it is expressed remains intelligible to users of the English language all over the world.

This situation is therefore very evident in and characteristic of not only the works of Oyono Mbia examined herein, but also the works of other Cameroonian writers (cf. Beti, 1945; Ferdinand, 1956;

Philombe, 1971; Mendo, 1987, etc.) and African writers (cf. Laye, 1953; Achebe, 1958; Boni, 1962; Soyinka, 1963; Okara, 1964; Kourouma, 1970, etc.).

Boni's effort at imprinting the French language with the mark of his native language, like many African writers of his generation (including Oyono Mbia), is a conscious attempt at sustaining an authentic African discourse albeit in a foreign language. He, like the other African writers of his generation, made a conscious attempt at literary decolonization through the language of writing, and saw a major role for literature as the expression of African cultural authenticity.

These writers thus use the word of European languages as they like and from the perspective of their own cultural and intellectual background thereby altering the European languages to suit their new African environment. The result of this is that they have so localized the use of their acquired European languages by passing them through the matrix of their own cultural background and some of them have even pushed the phenomenon so far that much of their work could be lost to the on uninitiated non-African reader or translator. For instance, Kourouma's *Les soleils des independences* (1970) could prove "knotty" to the non-Ivorian/African translator. Similarly, Soyinka's interlarding of most of his works with Yoruba words and expressions, as Oyono Mbia equally interlards his works with Bulu words and expressions, will definitely create enormous headaches for the non-Yoruba or non-Bulu-speaking translator respectively.

Okara's *The Voice* (1964) too could be really difficult to transfer into a different European language by a non-Ijaw/African translator. Consider the following example:

Shuffling feet turned Okolo's head to the door. He saw three men standing silent, opening not their mouths. "Who are you people be?" Okolo asked. The people opened not their mouths. "If you are coming-in people be, then come in" Okara (1964, p. 20).

As it is very evident from the above passage, Okara has endeavoured to let his native Ijaw tongue speak in the English language. When Okara makes his characters speak or think, he pushes them to literally translate their language. In effect, what is common to the writers mentioned above (i.e., Oyono, Ferdinand, Philombe, Mendo, Beti, Soyinka, Achebe, Kourouma, Laye, Boni and Okara) as well as all the others of their generation, in varying degrees, is a form of translation that takes place from the African languages into the European language given that it is the African languages that give form and meaning to modern African writing in European languages.

African writers writing in European languages could thus, in effect, be qualified or described as creative translators and their works as creative compositional translations. This point seems to be corroborated by Briere's (1988, p. 34) observation with respect to Laye's *L'Enfant Noir* (1953) that this author's work is not simply an African novel in French but the author's attempt to translate into French, the essence of his life as a Malinké as well as the Malinké society and culture. Some African writers too have explicitly described the process involved in their writing as translation. For instance, Nigerian

writer Gabriel Okara (1963, p. 15) states:

As a writer who believes in the utilization of African ideas, African philosophy and African folklore and imagery to the fullest extent possible, I am of the opinion the only way to use them effectively is to translate them almost literally from the African language native to the writer into whatever European language he is using as his medium of expression. I have endeavoured in my works to keep as close as possible to the vernacular expressions. For, from a word, a group of words, a sentence and even a name in any African language, one can glean the social norms, attitudes and values of a people. In the same vein, the Ivorian writer Ahmadou Kourouma declares as follows:

J'ai pensé en Malinké et écrit en français en prenant une liberté que j'estime naturelle avec la langue classique...J'i donc traduit le Malinké en français en cassant le français pour trouver et restituer le rythme africain (In Koné, 1992, p. 83) [I think in Malinké and write in French, taking what I consider to be natural liberties with the classical tongue. I have thus translated Malinké into French by breaking up the French language so as to recreate an African rhythm.].

It can even be asserted without any fear of contradiction that such translation activity is unavoidable and, indeed, the fact of the matter is that, although by his educational exposure and intellectual experience the African writer has acquired a metropolitan literary inheritance and in most cases has mastered the European language of his literary composition, his head and ears have remained tuned to the rhythm and expressions of his indigenous language which he transliterates into the European language. This means therefore that the literary work of the Cameroonian/African writer writing in a European language released to the public by the publisher on behalf of the writer is a combined version of other literary by-products resulting from an indigenous speech pattern, thinking pattern and world view, all of which are transliterated into the European language.

## 5. Conclusion

It thus seems important for the translator to constantly bear in mind that African writers writing in European languages systematically adapt the European languages to the African reality. In effect, it is evident from the author's translational creative writing strategies that if the translator wants to capture the African cultural as well as express the African imagination portrayed in this category of African literature, he cannot put aside the African language in favour of an academic European language.

African authors who write in European languages have tended to adopt a foreignizing mode which preserves African culture-specific aspects in their works. Such intent has a direct incidence on the

translation of the works of these authors as the strategies employed therein by them would to a large extent condition those of the translator translating from one European language into another. It can thus be argued and asserted here that in the translation of this category of African literature, since for the most part, the African content and form have already been captured by the African author in the process of creative compositional translation in his European language of writing, what the translator moving from one European language to another simply needs to do is to carry across into the target European language the same African content and form.

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### Note

Note 1. In order to avoid being cumbersome by referring to the full title of the play each time a feature is analyzed and examples cited from each play, *Trois Prétendants... Un Mari*, *Jusqu'à Nouvel Avis* and *Le Train Spécial de Son Excellence* are henceforth referred to by their abbreviation TPUM, JNA and LTSSE respectively. Examples abound in these plays for the various categories of linguistic and stylistic innovation discussed in this paper but due to the constraints of space, only a few examples are cited for each category.