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Levels of English and Identity in Some Selected Texts from African Commonwealth Literary Discourse

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Abstract

This work shows that African Commonwealth writers in their use of the English language have the possibility of deploying the three levels of English language identifiable in the African Commonwealth, in order to convey a veritable African experience with the needed authenticity. These levels include Acrolectal English, Mesolectal English, and Basilectal English. By using data from African Commonwealth Literary Discourse, selected from the writings of Achebe (1982), Asong (1995), and Tah (2015), and basing the analysis on structural linguistics, semiology, and Critical Discourse Analysis strands, the work proves that African Commonwealth writers succeed in this endeavor to varying degrees. It also establishes with empirical evidence that by using strategies like grafting, code-switching, code-mixing, punning, transliteration, intertextuality, and interdiscursivity, African Commonwealth writers through language competence can always meet their objectives. The work ascertains that the effective use of Acrolectal English helps in characterization, social criticism and creation of humour rather than a usurpation of the speech of characters, and that various forms of both Mesolectal English and Basilectal English often lead to a redefinition of identity. Thus, modern African Commonwealth writers who operate only at a single level of English language do so to their detriment, and risks degenerating into a startling anachronism.

Keywords

levels, authenticity, grafting, code-switching, code-mixing, intertextuality, interdiscursivity

1. Introduction

Over the years, the English language has gained and consolidated its status as the most widely spoken international language in the world, and the question for most communities and individuals today, is no longer whether they should use this language, but rather how to use it to their best advantage. Indeed, after the incisive debate sparked off by Wali (1963) as to whether African writers should use a

European language to communicate their African experience (Wali, 1963), most African Commonwealth writers seem to have laid the debate to rest, and opted for Achebe's strategy that:

The African writer should aim to use English in a way that brings out his message best without altering the language to the extent that its value as a medium of international exchange will be lost. He should aim at fashioning out an English which is at once universal and able to carry his peculiar experience. (Achebe, 1965, p. 28)

To attain this objective, the African Commonwealth writer has had to strive for a greater mastery of the English language, and to demonstrate such mastery in his writing in various ways. Thus, in the way their chosen narrators relate the stories, and in the speeches of their characters, they tend to use all the three levels of English rightly as identified and defined by Bamiro (1991a): Acrolectal English, Mesolectal English, and Basilectal English (Bamiro, 1991a, pp. 7-8). In their strive to use the English language to the best of their ability through meaningful modifications, translations, and transmutations, the African Commonwealth writer has also tended to reveal the identity of the users of this English that are their characters (Bamiro, 1991a). Achebe (1982); Asong (1995); and Tah (2015) seem to be some of the most successful African Commonwealth writers in this mastery, and manipulation of the English language to desired effect.

In view of the above, it becomes imperative to ask the following questions:

(a) How do Achebe (1982), Asong (1995), and Tah (2015), modify the English language in order to exhibit the African experience?

(b) How many levels of English do they use, and what are the functions of these levels of English in their works?

(c) What is the significance of these different levels of English to this work and to language studies as a whole?

The expression "levels of English" refers to the varying degrees of competence of English language users, especially in communities where English is used as a second language. Bamiro (1991a) identifies three main levels of such competence, "the higher variety (Acrolect), which is the internationally intelligible variety; the intermediate variety (Mesolect), which is the internationally accepted variety; and the lower variety (Basilect), which is the context variety association with the illiterate, and semi-literate population" (Bamiro, 1991a, pp. 7-8). Since the core population of regular Pidgin English speakers in the African Commonwealth belong to the lower social strata educationally, occupationally, and economically, Pidgin English is generally considered as a Basilectal form of the English language in terms of its sociolinguistic classification (Maiwong, 2020, p. 95). This paper sees levels of English as Acrolectal, Mesolectal and Basilectal.

The word discourse refers to verbal or written communication between people that goes beyond a single sentence. Importantly, discourse is more than just language. The term "language" can include all forms of linguistic and symbolic units, and language studies can focus on the individual meanings of words. Discourse goes beyond individual meanings of words and looks at the overall meanings

conveyed by language in context. "Context" here refers to the social, cultural, political, and historical background of the discourse, and it is important to take this into account to understand underlying meanings expressed through language. Cook (1989) and Fairclough (2003) viewed discourse as well-formed grammatical sentences, speech or text beyond the sentence. Within the context of this work, the word discourse is used to refer to the "well-formed grammatical sentences, speech, or text beyond the sentence" that make up the literary works of African Commonwealth writers.

2. Relevant Literature Review

Prominent authors like Chinua Achebe from Nigeria, Protus Tah and Linus Asong from Cameroon have left behind not only a literary heritage, but a linguistic legacy on pre-colonial, colonial and postcolonial Africa. The cultural and psychological conflicts, fallacies and other contradictions arising from colonialism and failures to address socio-political issues in post-independent Africa remains topical in their writings. These issues have caught the interest of many critics and scholars in and out of Africa. Most researchers have tilted interest to issues like grafting, varieties of English, interdiscursivity, intertextuality, code-swiching, code-mixing, idiomatic expression, proverbs, transliteration, transmutations, marked verbs as seen in Young (1973), Dunton (1982), and Maiwong (2019). Young (1973) declares that:

> An examination of the West African scene shows that authors there have a number of problems to solve – personal, literary, linguistic – when they begin to make choices about the way in which they write and the things that they write about. (Young, 1973, p. 23)

He points out the influence of oral tradition as one such problems to tackle, and grafting as a possible solution when he argues:

> When, to take a simpler type of example, an Ibo writer chooses to transfer into his use of English certain words for which there are no suitable translation equivalents in the language (…), he is not much being influenced by his mother tongue as being compelled by simple denotational necessity. When, however he transfers such a word as dibia, for which none of the possible English translation equivalents will do (for example, 'priest', 'witch doctor', which in its West African use is nearer than either of the other two), he is up against a more difficult problem. (Young, 1973, p. 25)

Young further purports that though such grafting partly solves the problem, it does so mainly for the Ibo reader. The principal inadequacy of Young's article is that he does not bring in enough data to demonstrate his case, and hardly examines these linguistic difficulties and possible solutions with enough methodological rigour. It is on this note that Dunton (1982) further expatiate through Soyinka's use of English that, "Soyinka's plays are written in English, but to state this without qualification conceals the great variety of language he actually employs." He points out that Soyinka achieves a great range of effects by, "using different varieties of English from Pidgin to highly compact, image – packed descriptive prose – and interspersing in the English text Yoruba proverbs and songs" (Dunton,

1982, pp. 9-10). The problem with Dunton's assertions, is his vague comments on Soyinka's commendation of use of interdiscursive enrichment from Yoruba oral literature, without attempting a methodical analysis to show how Soyinka achieves "the greater range of effects" he talks about.

Further, Moba (1988) in an attempt to analyse other varieties of English in a systematic study of the Basilectal English (Pidgin) used by Frank Aig-Imoukhuede and Niyi Osundare in their poetry arrives at the conclusion that, "As seen, translation from one language to Pidgin reveals a high degree closeness to the original speech patterns, notably, in attempts to preserve syntactical equivalents" (p. 131). This, of course, is a solution to the problem of authenticity, but his study stresses on the relationship between Pidgin and African languages (without thorough systematic linguistic analysis to prove), and without relating it to the English language. He points out the usefulness of this Basilect in social criticism, and the creation of humour, but it is not in a position to point out its other uses like characterization, social accommodation, identity etc, since his corpus is exclusively limited to poetry, and cannot permit him to identify issues, which can best be manifest in a long narrative like prose.

Obiechina (1992) on his part, probes into interdiscursivity, translations and transmutations in the process of enriching literary discourse, and its effects on communication (Obiechina, 1992). Despite his elaborate exploration of interdiscursivity, and its relation to translations, and transmutations, his paper exploits only a very small aspect of the representation of the oral tradition in the novel of Africa as he himself acknowledges. Indeed, he tackles only "narrative proverbs", and so cannot draw definite conclusions on the impact of orature on the English language.

Like Obiechina (1992), Maiwong (2019) on his part glosses over the interdiscursivity and intertextuality of literary discourse, since his focus is on tackling issues related to the dynamism of English Language in Commonwealth Literature. He examines, for example, grafting, code-switching, code-mixing, idiomatic expressions, proverbs, and transliteration in the discourses of p'Bitek (1966), Nortje (1973), Lenrie (1967), Rotimi (1977), the Ngugis (1982), Maimane (1968), and Nkengasong (2004). Then, he more pertinently x-rays the revisionist use of 'Black' and 'White', 'Marked Verb', etc. in the poetry of Nortje, which is mostly the Acrolectal level (Maiwong, 2019). However, in terms of scope, Maiwong's work embraces too many issues, and does not sufficiently focus on the levels of English in African Commonwealth Literary Discourse which is the focus of this paper.

Similar to this venture is Bamiro (1994), who handles the different levels of English systematically, though focusing on the discourse of Ngugi (Bamiro, 1994). His analysis on nativization or indegenization of the English Language dismisses the idea of relexification of Gikuyu and ascertain the appropiation of indegenous structures, rhythms, into the English Language. He equally acknowledges that these transmutations in Ngugi's largely Acrolectal in nature are more unconsciously done as is the case in Achebe's writings. Despite his succinct contribution, his analysis is largely lexical, and grammatical, and does not delve into the functioning of Acrolectal English from Semiotic, and Critical Discourse Analysis dimensions.

The work differs from the aforementioned in that it handles three different authors who consciously and/or unconsciously modify the English language to transmit their messages. These authors are Achebe (1982), Asong (1995), and Tah (2015), all from West Africa. In addition, Tah (2015) consciously conveys the complex linguistic situation that arises when English is used alongside French, another European language, in a bilingual environment as Cameroon. Thus, it stands a better chance of examining the levels of English and identity in African Commonwealth Literary Discourse, and contributing to some reliable findings on language studies.

3. Methods

3.1 Theoretical Considerations

Since the paper sets out to investigate the extent to which African Commonwealth Literary Discourse respects the underlying phonological, lexical, and grammatical patterns of the English language, structural linguistics becomes a vital tool in analyzing it. Considering language as an abstraction derived from the very large number of languages existing in the world, Saussure (1959), Barthes (1964), and Eco (1979) have argued that the above three patterns hold good for any language, and can be used to study it (Barthes, 1964; Eco, 1979; Saussure, 1959). Yet, in terms of communication, the linguistic patterns established by structural linguists are related to human experience, and especially the experience of the community that speaks that language. Hence, the usefulness of semiology becomes inevitable. Barthes (1964) points out that certain patterns are indices of the link between discourse and culture, and thus, the analysis of any text should not take the first value of it, but its implied meaning or point of view within a given culture (Barthes, 1964). Saussure (1959), Barthes (1964), and Eco (1979) consequently proposed two steps:

(a) Inventory and establishment of patterns

(b) Interpretation of patterns in relation to culture (Barthes, 1964; Eco, 1979; Saussure, 1959).

Another outstanding semiologist, Eco (1979) corroborates with Saussure (1959), and Barthes (1964), when he writes about language as a code of communication, thus pointing out that, “Every item in the code maintains a double set of relations, a systematic one with all the items of its own plane (content or expression and a signifying one with one or more items of the correlated plane)” (cited by Riffaterre, 1983, p. 212). The systematic relation is linguistics, while the signifying begins from the linguistic plane, and extends to the semiotic dimension, revealing the implications of what is expressed when matched to the culture, history, beliefs or myths of a given community (Barthes, 1964).

Furthermore, Critical Discourse Analysis (C.D.A.) comes in as another theoretical paradigm for this analysis. Discourse is viewed here as a well-formed grammatical sentences, speech, or text beyond a sentence (Cook, 1989; Fairclough, 2003). This enables us not only to see clearly what a discourse is, but also facilitates its analysis by proposing a procedure to be followed:

(a) Discern connections between language and other elements of social life which are often opaque.

(b) Look for representations of aspects of the world which can be shown to contribute to establishing, maintaining and changing social relations of power, domination and exploitation (Fairclough, 2003, p. 9).

Further, due to the complexity of the African Commonwealth writer's discourse, given their possibilities to make references to written texts as well as the oral literature of their community, intertextuality comes in as a welcome tool of analysis from Critical Discourse Analysis (C. D. A.). Scheub (1973) on this note intimates that vital to African literature is the relationship between the oral and the written word (Scheub, 1973). This double source intertextuality accounts for the additional complexity of African Commonwealth Literary Discourse whose analysis must consequently subsume, or take into consideration the following steps proposed by insightful theorists on intertextuality like Kristeva (1985), and Wodak (2001):

(a) Identification of a reference which may be an allusion, a quotation, a plagiarism, a parody, a translation, a calque or a pastiche.

(b) Establishing the writer's intention and the significances of the reference (Kristeva, 1985; Wodak, 2001).

Interdiscursivity as another tenet of Critical Discourse Analysis (C. D. A.) introduces us into the co-existence of competing discourses (Wodak, 2001, p. 37), as African Commonwealth writers draw from oral literary sources. Iyasere (1975) points out that, "The modern African writer is to his indigenous oral tradition as a snail is to its shell. Even in a foreign habitat, a snail never leaves its shell behind" (p. 107).

As can be observed, these theories agree in a number of ideas, and analytical procedures, and can, therefore, be conveniently used together with a sharper awareness.

3.2 Justification of Analytical Approach

All three authors endeavor to communicate their experiences through the manipulation of English language and the deployment of a gamut of literary techniques, hence, the need for a pluridisciplinary approach involving structural linguistics, semiology and critical Discourse Analysis.

3.3 Procedure

To arrive at its findings, the work focuses its analysis on a literary corpus. Data related to linguistic and literary strategies used by the authors was gathered from the three novels, and patterns revealing the three levels of English established.

3.4 Brief Biography of Authors under Study

Achebe, Asong and Tah are all products of colonial education and have experienced the denigration of their indigenous languages to the advantage of the colonial English language. Their experiences have prompted them to delve into writing works that can truly represent their own perspectives vis-à-vis the English language. These authors have distinguished themselves as seminal authors and giant voices of

the African Commonwealth writers (Nigeria and Cameroon precisely), with outstanding works focusing on pre-colonial Africa, the cultural and psychological conflicts arising from colonialism and the fallacies, contradictions and failures of political leadership in post – colonial Africa.

3.5 Synopsis of the Three Works in Focus

Achebe's ***Anthills of the Savannah*** (1982), presents a situation of power tussle in the remote African State of Kagan. Sam takes over power through a military coup, and his reign is oppressive, nepotic, dictatorial and undemocratic, leaving him almost isolated as leader. Unable to bear his ruthlessness, the people plot against him and overthrow him in another coup. The novel ends with a return to cultural leadership symbolized by the naming ceremony of the child (Amaechina, meaning, May the path never close) born to Ikem.

On its part, Asong's ***The Crown of Thorns*** (1995) revolves around the theft of Akeukeuor, the supreme deity of small Monje. The village head, the Divisional Officer and one village elder are involved in the theft. They are caught and punished and the land is cleansed. The novel ends with a return to pure traditional ways.

Tah's ***The Immortal Seed*** (2015) presents the corrupt influence of modernity on traditional practices. The novel most especially exposes the role of fate in human life and ends with a deterministic perspective.

4. Findings and Discussions

Anthills of the Savannah (1982) is a novel in which Achebe examines the causes, and consequences of the failure of leadership, and the rise of dictatorship in post-Independence Africa. In it, he focuses on two main social classes – the ruling elite class, made up of highly educated Africans, trained in European universities, and the common people who are oppressed. Attempts at efficient communication within the elite class and between the elite and the commoners, inevitably lead to various levels of English. It is also a novel that Achebe writes to ascertain the strategies he has prescribed for the African Commonwealth writers, in tackling problems arising from using English language to convey the African experience after independence.

In a similar vein, Asong (1995) and Tah (2015), all Cameroonian novelists who have evidently been influenced by Achebe in many ways, also use their own strategies to indigenize the English language in *The Crown of Thorns* (1995) and *The Immortal Seed* (2015) respectively.

At Acrolectal level, Achebe (1982) readily grafts some words, which have come into his characters' vocabulary from other languages in order to attain authenticity, local colour and characterization. These lexical items include: "Kabisa", "Ise", and "Wahala". Achebe uses these words to suggest that there are no English equivalents that can adequately convey the African experience. Unlike other African Commonwealth writers who laboriously use footnotes to explain such words, he rather deploys syntactic structures that make the meanings of such words evident to the reader. Here are some examples: 'You're wasting everybody's time, Mr Commissioner for Information. I will not go to

Abazon. Finish! "Kabisa!" 'So I have a standing answer to all of them. No! "Kabisa"! "Come for traffic office for Monday morning eight o'clock sharp. If you no come or you come late you de go answer for court. "Kabisa!" (Achebe, 1982, p. 1, p. 10, p. 78). This word "Kabisa" evidently means 'Finish' or 'Final', and it is used to illustrate the dictatorship of His Excellency who has borrowed this word from President–for–life, Ngongo, whom he admires. It is used to castigate a budding dictator who has a ready answer for his suffering citizens, if they come to ask for his intervention – 'No! "Kabisa"!' Due to his Excellency's frequent use of this word, it has become very popular even with lower caste characters in the story to the extent that even the taxi driver says: "charging battery na pure waste of money; once battery begin de give trouble you suppose to buy new one. "Kabisa"! Thus, Achebe surrounds the grafted word with familiar words from the lexical pattern of the English language as structural linguist points out (Suassure, 1959), and these words help define the grafted word, and his English remains intelligible.

Another word he skillfully grafts in the same manner is "Wahalla". Here are some syntactic structures in which it is found: "For Mad Medico has a strange mania for graffiti, which was the cause of all the "Wahalla" that would have cost him his job, and residence in the country…" "Never mind", said Ikem, "That "wahalla" for road no be such bad thing as he come make use friends now for house." "Na him make I no de gree come for dis una big man quarter. Na so so "wahalla" (Achebe, 1982, p. 32, p. 83, p. 21). The meaning of "wahalla" is evidently "trouble", and even the English native speaker will not have difficulties inferring this, even though the word definitely smacks of Nigerian Pidgin, and identity.

Another significant word under grafting, is "Isé". The word "Isé" is grafted in the naming ceremony ritual of Ikem's daughter. "Isé" insinuates "Amen!" Listen to the following: 'What brings us here is the child you sent us. May her path be straight …" 'Isé! Replied the company. 'May she have life, and may her mother have life.' 'Isé!' 'What happened to her father, may it not happen again.' 'Isé!' (Achebe, 1982, p. 126). The same strategy with some peculiarities of identity, can be found in the novel of Asong.

Indeed, an important strategy Asong (1995) uses at the level of Acrolectal English is grafting. At the syntactic level, his grafting goes with apposition such that the reader does not need to search for the meaning of the grafted word. Examples:

1) Akeukeuor, the god of gods of the tribe of Nkonkonoko Small Monje had been cut off, stolen and sold to a white man.
2) 'We shall all swear our innocence in this matter by licking the ashes of the demon, in the name of Ku-ngang'.
3) The day was Saturday. It was the people's Ale-assaa, their market day.
4) She had caused the Ngwi–Nkongho, the chosen girl for the throne, to sleep out of the chief's bed on the first day of his coronation (Asong, 1995, p. 2, p. 23, p. 146, p. 107).

It is true that this strategy succeeds only at the level of denotational meaning, and that the deeper meanings of the above statements would require a semiotic analysis, necessitating a lot of biongong

cultural knowledge. But communication wise, he does succeed to some extent.

Besides grafting, Achebe (1982) equally delves into Acrolectal English at a phonological level, since the political elite master English, and operate at a high Acrolectal level. In this light, they can pun to criticize themselves, and sometimes cause humour, even if it is grim humour. For instance, when the honorable Commissioner for Information is referred to as "The Honorable Commissioner for Words". "The Honorable Commissioner for Works" vigorously protests that it sounds very much like a reference to him. Thus, by playing on the lexical items "Words" and "Works", Achebe successfully brings out the petty jealousies that exist among ministers on the cabinet, as one of the weaknesses of leadership in post-Independence Africa. This points out that the phonological pattern of the English language can be manipulated to convey the African experience.

More so, John Kent (alias Mad Medico), a friend to the Head of State, and some cabinet ministers, puts up some mischievous graffiti in the hospital in Bassa, the capital of Kagan, where he works. At the cardiac ward, he posts the following message: "Blessed are the poor in heart for they shall see God." In a similar vein, outside the men's venereal diseases ward, he puts up another notice which reads: "TO THE TWIN CITIES OF SODOM AND GONORRHEA" (Achebe, 1982, p. 33). These postings do not only cause a stir to readers, but bring into the limelight his successful manipulation of the phonological system of English, which results in punning: "Gomorah", and "Gonorrhea". It is worthy of note that the syntactic structures of both statements remain the same as in their Biblical form, confirming the assertion of structural linguists that language is opened and closed at the same time (Barthes, 1964; Eco, 1979; Saussure, 1959).

Similarly, the ruling class, perhaps because of its guilt, and in an attempt to hide its brutality, and cruelty, invents certain expressions that are made up of English words, but do not represent what the native, and ordinary English user would normally understand from such lexis. Their denotational meanings are misleading, then one needs to infer within the cultural matrix to understand them. On this note, Barthes (1964) points out that certain patterns are indices of the link between discourse and culture (Barthes, 1964). The expressions are euphemistic references to the terrible arms of dictatorship portrayed. Examples:

"The State Research Council (SRC)"

"The Directorate of State Research Council"

"Director of State Research Council" (Achebe, 1982, p. 8, p. 98, p. 102).

These expressions abound in Achebe's narrative, and give one the impression that this council is made up of seasoned university professors who can come up with some useful findings for the country, whereas they refer to the terrible secret police led by Colonel Johnson Ossai, who passes for "Director of State Research Council!"

Like Achebe (1982), Asong (1995) uses certain words as indicators of the community's ignorance of the English language. These words have a common phonological distortion in the whole community whose mother tongue seems to lack certain sounds – a linguistic fact which is revealed in their

mispronunciation of such words. Thus, we have words, and expressions like the following:

"Goment" for Government

"Helly Melly": for Holy Mary

"Coplatif Sosaty" for Co-operative Society (Asong, 1995, p. 8, p. 59, p. 64).

Evidently, their language lacks the (v), and the (r) sounds, which they tend to omit in the pronunciation of words. This is community characteristic, resulting from linguistic substratum, and resulting from community identity (Bamiro, 1996, p. 27). Asong finds it difficult to insert the explanations of these words, and expressions in his narrative, and tends to use footnotes.

Tah also displays a high linguistic competence in a witty dialogue between Barister Ngome and his girlfriend, Eposi, which the learned barrister resorts to punning in order to free himself from the responsibility of an alleged pregnancy: "You missed your period?" He asked with a slur and a dramatic squint. "Yes, honey!" Eposi replied, snuggling nearer to him. "Look here, my dear girl", he hissed abruptly rolling out of bed. "If you can't find your period, look for it where you left it. Period!" (Tah, 2015, p. 103). Thus, Achebe (1982), Asong (1995), and Tah (2015) proves that the African Commonwealth writer who masters English has possibilities to use the English language in expressing their African experience.

Achebe (1982) at the Acrolectal level projects highly educated, and well–read characters like Chris Oriko, and Ikem Osodi to produce discourses that are challenging to native English speakers because of its high degree of intertextuality as presented by proponents of Critical Discourse Analysis (Fairclough, 2003; Kristeva, 1985; Wodak, 2001). Oriko for example quips:

> The Cathedrals of Europe, the Taj Mahal of India, the Pyramids of Egypt, and the Stone Towers of Zimbabwe where all raised on the backs of serfs, starving peasants, and slaves. Our present rulers in Africa are in every sense late – flowering medieval monarchs, even the Marxists among them. Do you remember Mazrui calling Nkrumah a Stalinist Czar? (Achebe, 1982, p. 44).

Intertextuality, as such, is one of the tools, which African Commonwealth writers use to manipulate the English language to desired effect.

Likewise, Asong (1995) successfully deploys the Acrolectal English used by Antony Nkoaleck in his letters to portray character. Antony's lexical choices which amount to bombast, show not only his level as the first university graduate from Small Monje, but also his proud, and choleric nature. For example, he writes to Nchindia:

> I do not blame you at all, at least for now. I blame but that mean, dirty, stupid, political nonentity – that wretch who styles himself the D.O. I blame the Elders for deliberately trampling on the tradition, which they subscribed to. I blame Ngobefwo most especially – that most incorrigible rock of ages whose myopic intransigence is the exact canker, which will surely destroy the tribe. If you will rule, and not just reign, then you will have to handle these people carefully. (Asong, 1995, p. 86)

His lexical choices proves that language is both a close and open system as affirm by structural linguistics (Barthes, 1964; Eco, 1979; Suassure, 1959).

Tah (2015) on his part, displays the Acrolectal English used by the narrator, to portray the author's mastery of the English language. This Acrolect is seen in the use of marked verbs, which conveys his condemnation of the ruling class for its bestiality, laziness, and lack of a sense of direction. Evidence:

1. Constable Akono bellowed ……
2. The offices strolled …..
3. 'Arretez!' Sergent Atangana barked …. (Tah, 2015, pp. 6, 7, 8).

The following table shows the colouring of the verbs:

Verb	Definition
Bellow	To shout in a loud, deep voice, especially because you are angry, make a loud deep sound like a bull.
Stroll	To walked somewhere in a slow, relaxed way.
Bark	To give orders, ask questions etc in a loud unfriendly way.

Furthermore, interdiscursivity comes in to enrich Achebe's narrative through the high presence of proverbs, and myths. Transliterations make the proverbs intelligible discourse at the denotative level, but when the signified at this denotative level become signifiers for signified that can only be found in the people culture (Barthes, 1964), they now demand more knowledge from the reader. We have striking examples like the following:

1) "We praise a man when he slaughters a fowl so that if his hand becomes stronger tomorrow he will slaughter a goat."
2) "A wise man agree with his wife and eats lumps of smoked fish in his soup."
3) "What is brought out before a masquerade cannot be taken indoors again."
4) "A man whose horse is missing will look everywhere even in the roof."
5) "If you cross the Great River to marry a wife you must be ready for the risk of night journey by canoe."
6) "Better to marry a rascal than to grow a moustache in your father's compound" (Achebe, 1982, p. 126, p. 125, p. 126, p. 177, p. 127, p. 88).

The foregoing analysis has already shown that even at the Acrolectal level, Achebe (1982) is able to evolve strategies to modify the English language in order to attain authenticity, and how strategies like grafting, punning, euphemism, intertextuality, and interdiscursivity enable him to castigate the Kagan dictatorship, while still maintaining the international intelligibility of the English language.

On his part, Tah (2015) also uses proverbs to express African thoughts. Here are some few examples:

1. 'A market place is not the best place to buy a hen you intend to rear' (p. 17).
2. 'When our brother is on the plum tree, we should eat black plums' (p. 17).

3. '…the scent of wine does not leave the calabash easily' (p. 20).
4. '…if you want a wife that will withstand the carving knife of time, look at her mother first' (p. 26).
5. 'A fisherman …casts his look even in rainwater following by the roadside' (p. 56).
6. 'A man does not oil the Fon's back and clean his hands on the ground' (p. 56).
7. 'A masquerade from a distant land must watch the sun while it dances' (p. 81).
8. 'He who hides faces between his legs shall be betrayed by the fly' (p. 86).

The functions of these kinds of interdiscursivity, through proverbs, are both didactic and humourous.

Tah (2015) also deploys interdiscursivity where the English translation will not enable authenticity, and enhance local colour. Thus, in his largely Acrolectal narrative, he inserts a Fulani song as follows:

Solo: A yidi goro?
Chorus: Ey, mi yidi goro
Mi nyame goro
Solo: a yidi Mbaiji?
Chorus: Ey mi yidi mbaiji,
Mi nyame mbaiji etc (Tah, 2015, p. 173).

Here, interdiscursivity does not only enable authenticity, but also proposes new words that could be effected into English. The English language has borrowed from Latin and French, why not from Fulfude? Thus, the narrator comments about the song:

> The kids sang merrily, and freely. Bi and Tebene mastered the tune, and felt proud tossing in Fulfude. They learned with more pleasure that the song was a series of questions asking if the audience liked a particular type of food. The audience responded by saying that they liked the type of food, and that they ate it. Thus, gaori was corn, marore was rice, Kosam was milk, mbaiji was cassava, and goro was kolanut. (Tah, 2015, p. 173)

The level of English used by Tah's omniscient narrator is definitely Acrolectal. This reflects the mastery of the English language by the author who is not only a seasoned writer, but also an experienced teacher of the English language. For example, omniscient narrator notes:

> From the moment they found each other, Tebene and Bi groped back silently to the cluster of frees. With the cautions aid of the flash light, the fugitive pair located Tebene's bag and then a sleeping place. Tebene spread out the loincloth and some of his clothes on a clear space on the ground. He gave some of the clothes and socks he had put on to Bi. Using the knapsack as a pillow. Both, lay down pretty comfortably. (Tah, 2015, p. 134)

This excerpt sanctions the idea that Tah uses English at Acrolectal level to desired effect. In addition to using English at the Acrolectal level, these writers also employ the language at the Basilectal level.

Asong (1995) is at his best when he uses Basilectal English, or Pidgin to convey the grievances of the people of Small Monje, through Old Kunzia to the D.O. He attains authenticity, local colour, and social criticism (Bamiro, 1996) very efficiently through this level of English. Kunzia outlines his people's

grievances as follows:

> Dem say mison take dem land, them talk fo Goment, no helep. Road no pass for hoss for all man.an I spoll all the the farm. Ngangabe gib mison wan lan – mission take ten. Dem talk for Goment, no helep. Achiebefuo die, I kill I sikin, I say Goment ikillam. Chief take Akeukeuor I sellam. Dem say dem no want chief. Dem want to more chief. Dem tell Goment, Goment I no gree. We pipo vely vex to you Goment. (Asong, 1995, pp. 146-147)

So, at the underlying level, it is clear that the three institutions (the chief, the church, and the Government) are conniving to exploit the people. Thus, confirming the idea of proponents of Critical Discourse that institutions serve the interests of certain powerful groups … (Kristeva, 1985; Fairclough, 2003; Wodak, 2001).

Of course, in addition to the other functions already mentioned, this medium elicits humour (Moba, 1988). To sum up, therefore, it could be said that Asong's use of both Acrolectal English, and Basilectal English averagely help him convey the African experience. But it can also be seen that in his largely Acrolectal narrative, he partly usurps the speech of his characters, and this also threatens to mar his authenticity. This means that the African Commonwealth writer who wishes to genuinely convey the African experience must use various levels of English as much as possible. In the similar situation, Tah deploys code-mixing as another strategy to express his African experience and attain authenticity.

The Basilectal English spoken by those in authority at the beginning of Tah's novel is a product of the co-existence between English and French in the community portrayed in the text. This English reveals the strong influence of French both at the phonological and lexical levels. The offices even indulge in code-mixing. Listen to constable Akono teaching the new recruits how to march. "Lef – rize! un – deux! Lef – rize! Un- daux!" A few moments afterwards, he orders: "Be the lef, forwa-a-and ma-a-arsh! Lef - rize! Un – daux! Lef - rize! Salopa!" Then, Superintendent Atangana commands: "Le-e-e-ef torn!" (Tah, 2015, p. 6). The distortions made on the phonological pattern of English point to a national identity – possibly a country where English, and French co-exist like Cameroon.

Furthermore, even when using the English language, one of the strategies that the African Commonwealth writers use to carry out efficient communication is the naming of characters, which does not interfere with the grammatical system of English, but conveys a deep meaning. The native English speaker, coming across these names would hardly suspect that there is another underlying code of communication, which has been slotted into that English. As a matter of fact, besides the commands, which are given to the new recruits in a Besilect that smacks of Francophone domination, there is an insinuation that there is a ruling clan – an idea which is clearly conveyed through the names of the commanding officers:

> Akono, Essono, Atangana, and Medou.

In view of this communication through the naming of characters, Asong (2015) states:

> Many of the appellations, especially those of the major characters, are not names as such, meaning that if you went to Lebialem you would not meet anybody called as such. But you will

> hear people attaching those labels or adjectives to certain individuals implying that they behave in peculiar ways. Ndenwonto means an old man, Ngangabe means a rabble rouser, a firebrand; Nkoaleck is used to describe somebody who just returned from the white man's country, been to. (p. xi)

The underlying codes brought in by the naming of characters can effectively be interpreted at the syntagmatic level, because these names are indices of a culture (Barthes, 1964), as indicated above.

Some scholars have observed that the naming of fictional characters in African languages amidst discourse produced in European languages, makes some literary works more profound since an interpretation of these names tends to give such works an allegorical character (Izevbaye, 1981). This is the observation made by Mbock (1981) about the characters of Mongo Beti. Even though, such a profound meaning can only be available to those who master the African language concerned, it is a strategy in appropriating the European language, and using it to communicate the African reality.

Achebe's characters equally use Basilectal English (Pidgin) for in-group solidarity and social communication. These are the poor citizens who are victims of the failure of leadership in Kagan, where dictatorship has reached an astounding proportion as reflected in the statement of a military truck driver who narrowly misses killing a citizen, but arrogantly tells the complaining citizen that, "If I kill you I kill dog." It is also this Basilectal English that Achebe uses to castigate the moral decadence in Kagan as seen in Elewa's statement to Ikem, when she suspects that he is going out with another woman, "Another time you wan poke make you go call dat sister of yours, you hear?" (Achebe, 1982, p. 30, p. 21).

At a lexical level, this Basilectal English is a blend of English, and African languages. At the phonological level, it is characterized by the omission of some sounds of English, and the substitution of others. At the syntactic level, it is characterized by the omission of articles. So, it does not respect the patterns of the English language, but as many scholars have argued, it effectively portrays character, provides local colour, enhances social criticism, and humour, and also conveys inbuilt group solidarity (Bamiro, 1991a). Syntagmatically, it provides indices of the political culture of Kagan.

Even among the elite class, Basilectal English is used for the purpose of social criticism, and humour. For instance, when the Mad Medico genuinely feels embarrassed at the high consumption of alcohol by the governing elite in Kagan – a consumption that evidently contributes to the failure of the country's leadership - he expresses his worry in humorous poetic Pidgin as follows:

> ALL DE BEER
> DEM DRINK FOR HERE
> DE MAKE ME FEAR (Achebe, 1982, p. 32).

In addition to being an expression of in-group solidarity, the leaders of the Taxi Drivers' Union equally use Pidgin to communicate with members of the elite class like Ikem Osodi, to whom they pay a visit of gratitude for his crusading editorials that have helped improve on their lot. The conversation between them and Elewa exemplifies this.

> My friend de drive taxi like myself and he be member for central committee of Taxi Driver Union Welcome
>
> Thank you madam. Thank you Oga.
>
> Even na this my friend tell me that day say na oga be Editor of Gazette–Wonderful! And me I no know that.
>
> How you go know? You de read paper?
>
> Ah, Madam I de try read small. The thing we this oga de write na waa. We like am plenty. (Achebe, 1982, p. 82)

This Basilect acts as a bridge between social classes (Bamiro, 1991a). In addition to the Acrolectal English and Basilectal English, African Commonwealth writers use Mesolectal English to express their African experience and attain authenticity.

Further still, Mesolectal English in African Commonwealth is not only used by the middle class that is not highly educated as Bamiro posits (Bamiro, 1991a), but it is also used by those who speak English as a Second Received Language (SRL) as is the case with Cameroon. They have mastered French, which is their First Received Language (FRL), and now speak an English, which phonologically, has a lot of interference from French though it may be syntactically correct. Witness the First Lesson from Superintendent Essono to the new recruits:

> "Recruits!" announced Superintendent Essono.
>
> From zis simpol operation, you can see how dizonest you are. For zis reason, you small lose all zis mani. As ze citizens about to be trained for ze sacred duty of ze maintenance of ze law and ze order, ze protection of ze property and ze human lives, it is obligatoire for you to be honest and obedient at all ze times. Ze lesson one, repeat after me: a police officer must alwez be ze most honest citizen in ze country! (My emphasis). (Tah, 2015, p. 9)

Grammatically, the wrong use of the definite article 'the', which Essono pronounces as 'ze', is an interference from French in which every noun takes an article. At the level of identity, this points to an African country where French, and English co-exist, and where French is the First Received Language (FRL) for some citizens. This, of course, is unmistakably Cameroon where this kind of Mesolectal English can be heard.

To sum up, in the course of grappling with the problems arising from the use of English to communicate the African reality, Tah succeeds to raise a new problems that has not yet been raised by other writers – the influence of French on English in a bilingual environment. He raises it through a modification of the phonological, and lexical patterns of English as Saussure establishes (Saussure, 1959), and affirms the position of Bobda and Wolf, (2003), Neba et al. (2006) and Maiwong (2019) that there is a Cameroon Pidgin English, which other scholars called "Cameroon Pidgin Creole English" (Bobda, & Wolf, 2003; Neba et al., 2006; Maiwong, 2019; Mbonwuh, 2022). Ngefac (2014) also confirms and explains that Cameroon Creole English has witnessed different names, including: Cameroon Pidgin English, Cameroon Pidgin, Cameroon Creole, Kamtok, and so on (see Ngefac, 2014

for a full list of names that have been used to refer to the language).

From the foregoing analysis of data from the three novelists, we can come up with the following findings:

1. The African Commonwealth writer who uses only one level of English (especially the Acrolectal) tends to usurp the speech of his characters to the detriment of authenticity.
2. The African Commonwealth writer with a high mastery of English can manipulate the nuances of Acrolectal English for the purpose of characterization, social criticism, and creation of humour.
3. That Pidgin English is a blend between English and local languages, and that at a phonological level, linguistic substratum throws further light, and reveals identity.
4. That skillful grafting at the Acrolectal level tends to suggest that, as the English language has borrowed from Latin and French, it could also borrow from African languages.
5. That grafting tends to solve the problem of intelligibility at the denotational level, but fails to enable an interpretation in the semiotic, and Critical Discourse Analysis (C. D. A.) realms.
6. That where Pidgin English manifests, a strong influence from another powerful language (like French in the case of Cameroon), there is a striking revelation of identity.

After a systematic investigation, we can state that in their endeavors to attain authenticity in expressing the African reality, all the aforementioned three African Commonwealth writers use at least two levels of English. Also, with the empirical evidence adduced, it is clear that these writers attain varying degrees of success in this indigenization of the English language, with Achebe scoring the best successes. Finally, it is evident that the future of African Commonwealth Literary Discourse depends on the successful use of the three levels of English, that is, Acrolectal English, Mesolectal English, and Basilectal English, and the writer who uses only one level, does so to their own detriment. In sum, it could be said with a lot of evidence that the African Commonwealth writer who is able to indigenize the English language in this manner, gains in self-confidence, and creativity, and can face the world with purpose, poise, and pride as Nforbi (2019) points out when he writes about the need to master language (Nforbi, 2019, p. 43). Thus, a literary writer in the African Commonwealth, ignorant of the benefits of using the three levels of English, can only be a startling anachronism.

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