



INTERNATIONAL
STANDARD
SERIAL
NUMBER
INDIA

2395-2636 (Print);2321-3108 (online)

APPROPRIATION OF THE ENGLISH LANGUAGE: THE CASES OF BOLE BUTAKE IN *LAKE GOD AND OTHER STORIES* AND ALOBWEDE D'ÉPIE IN *THE LADY WITH A BEARD*

CHARLES ESAMBE ALOBWEDE

Faculty of Arts, Letters, and Social Sciences,
University of Yaoundé I, Cameroon

Email.calobs@yahoo.com



Article info

Article Received:11/06/2023

Article Accepted:27/07/2023

Published online:02/08/2023

DOI: [10.33329/rjelal.11.3.56](https://doi.org/10.33329/rjelal.11.3.56)

Abstract

It is commonly held that language is the psyche of a people, a strong tool for transmitting knowledge and in the effective communication of feelings and the expounding of cultural realities. African dramatists and novelists in the likes of Bole Butake and Alobwede d'Épie have been able to use a non-African language, the English language, in their works to transmit African cultural realities to both African and non-Africa readers. The question is whether African cultural realities, as seen in the plays and novels of these African writers, can effectively be transmitted through a 'non-African' language without distorting cultural realities. In *Lake God* and *The Lady with a Beard*, Butake and Alobwede make use of African rhetoric to express the feelings of the dramatis personae and the characters, and to send through the message they convey. The purpose of the present article is to exemplify, in two representative write-ups, the central place of linguistic expressions, the verbal art as an artistic response to the written word of Bole Butake and Alobwede d'Épie. The writers use English linguistic elements as tools to expound the cultural values of the *Noni* and the *Bakossi* cultural heritages in *Lake God* and *The Lady with a Beard*, two linguistic communities found in the Northwest and Southwest Regions of Cameroon.

Keywords: English language, non-African language, cultural realities, rhetoric, pre-colonial, post-colonial, cultural heritage.

1. INTRODUCTION

In the legacies of Butake and Alobwede, the historical, colonial reality necessitates that premium validity be put on the use of pre-colonial as opposed to post-colonial alphabets. The present article examines how the use of language, adequately expressed, becomes itself an art of expression, a philosophy, the tool that approximates a world, a state of being, and the creativity of its stake. Language, a veritable tool, becomes the material for

formulating and invoking action; a situation in which a language of self-expression becomes a substitute for a lived experience. In a sense, this is similar to the affirmation of Robert July that African art puts a great premium on action and that, some African writers, as artists, live through their convictions.

Postcolonial writing is an amalgamation of protest and imitation. It merges the desire to revolt and the desire to reconcile with the former colonizers; this has practical didactic implications for intellectuals and writers within the era of

contemporary African writings. The current central concern and debate surrounding works written by African authors is the issue of language, what language should the author write in? Should the author use the language of the former colonizer, often a language of wider communication such as the English Language? If the author writes via this language, is it a form of imitation or exchange? Is it a by-product of colonization or a continuation of colonial policies and mindsets? Imitation presupposes choice, albeit subconsciously.

"In 1915, Edmond Laforest, a prominent member of the Haitian literary movement called La Ronde [...] stood upon a bridge, calmly tied a Larousse Dictionary around his neck, then proceeded to leap to his death by drowning". This astonishing event as reported by Gates (1987) brings into relief the dilemma of the non-European writer trapped in the language of the colonizer (past or present). In particular, it can be seen as a symbol of the problematic linguistic legacy bequeathed by the colonizers to the colonial people in sub-Saharan Africa.

Concerning African writings, Biodun (1976) affirms that language is not a barrier to the profound universality of music but a cohesive dimension and clarification of that wilful independent art form that we label music. Language reverts in religious rites to its pristine existence, eschewing the sterile limits of particularization... and words are taken back to their roots, to original poetic sources when fusion was total and the movement of words was the very passage of music and the dance of images. Language is still the embryo of thought and music where myth is a daily companion, for there, language is constantly mythopoeia.

From the viewpoint of theory, it is clear that Butake's and Alobwede's forte and the fundamental of their artistic creations incline largely toward the deployment of language as a trope and as virtual activity. Language, as seen by Biodun (ibid), is "*the embryo of thought and music*" and that language is "*constantly mythopoeia*." This means that, to a large extent, the genetic basis of the art of Butake and Alobwede depends on the cloning and manipulation

of words, and the extraction of meanings from words and being.

It can also be said that it is this attitude of the limitless potential of language and its tropes that account for the cryptic and elliptical nature of both authors' writings. One is tempted to say that these writers believe that language is an organic entity that grows in and of itself. For them, language, thus, constitutes a world in which the writer, thinker, and artist regale himself. Society is, consequently inter-mediated by a writer's understanding of its expressive tendencies and its pre-disposition to act or celebrate both its achievements and its foibles.

The aim of this article is therefore to determine and justify the language of African writings in English as used by Butake and Alobwede in *Lake God* and *The Lady with a Beard* respectively. The task itself is a curious – if not mischievous – adventure, for it seems uncomfortably understood that African literature in English is written in English unless there is more to it than meets the eye. Indeed, there is more to the language of African writings in English than just the English language as it is known and spoken by native speakers. This article is an attempt at defining the language of both authors' writings in English, an undertaking not entirely novel, for one might hazard that all that needs to be said about the language of African writings in English has been said, thanks to such African writers, thinkers and critics as Achebe, Ngugi wa Thiong'o, Soyinka, etc. But that will be a sweepingly lazy conclusion, given the recent offerings from new African writers and the refreshing insight into language use that they bring into the art.

2. THE DEBATE

Among African writers, there has sprung a heated debate about what the language of African writing should be. Some African writers in the light of Achebe, Butake, and Alobwede have taken English as their language of imagination and creativity; others have employed English only to reach a wider audience in an era where the world is seen as a global village that has accorded English a hegemonic status; and some like Ngugi wa Thiongo (1986) and Wali Obiajunwa (2007) take English as a symbol of

psychological domination that writers should do away with.

In *Peau Noire Masques Blancs*, Fanon (1952) delved into the psychology of racism and dehumanization which he states is inherent in colonial dominance. Under colonization, the colonized subjects are forced to assimilate, to use the colonizer's language(s), for instance, English or French, and to renounce their own culture and identity; by doing so, the colonized essentially become a replica of the colonizer without the 'respect' or 'awe' that comes with having the 'white' skin color. Fanon says that this 'cultural assimilation' (similar to W.E.B. DuBois' term 'double consciousness') occurred because the colonizers sought to eradicate the culture and lifestyle of the colonized, fully replacing it with their image. Wali (1978) writes in *Dysfunctionalism in African Education*, "There is some feeling, that what is traditional is incompatible with what is progressive". This is mainly because those things that are worth preserving in the so-called primitive African societies have been so caricatured, ridiculed, and indeed condemned as savagery and decadent by the Europeans who set the norms of acceptance. Thus, the African is accidentally caught in a dualism of equally vicious sets of cultures militating against each other. As a consequence, he either becomes a caricature of himself or an imitator of others. Language, through the fostering by colonial powers, was transformed into a pervasive component of the psychological conditioning of the colonial subject.

Fanon asserts that one cannot learn French or English or Portuguese without subconsciously accepting the cultural meanings of the languages. He uses the symbolism of whiteness and blackness that is embedded in the French language: to be white is good, and to be black is bad. By speaking the language of the colonizer, one is acknowledging, whether knowingly or not, these dubious racial categories. Fanon vies for the complete renunciation of the culture of the colonizer. He believes that "a man who has a language consequently possesses the world expressed and implied by that language. What we are getting at becomes plain: mastery of language affords remarkable power".

When deliberating on language, one often thinks of a particular culture to which the language in thought appertains. Language is representative of culture and people; it is a way for people to create a unique identity and empower themselves. By controlling a people's culture, you are controlling their tools of self-definition and their tools of self-relation. Language is power.

Vocal on this same side of the debate have been writers and intellectuals like Obi Wali, Amilcar Cabral, and Ngugi wa Thiong'o; the latter has, during recent decades, spearheaded the movement for writing in African languages. Wa Thiong'o is a Kenyan author, deeply influenced by Fanon's thoughts and works. Wa Thiong'o has made the call for African writers to begin writing in their languages; he says that when writers begin to speak to their people, instead of trying to gain recognition and justification from their former colonizers, that is when they truly become powerful.

Wa Thiong'o is reminiscent of Fanon when discussing the colonization and decolonization process: "The bullet was the means of the physical subjugation. Language is the means of the spiritual subjugation". He claims that by using European languages, African writers are deliberately perpetuating this subjugation. Africa will not be fully rid of the legacy of colonization until Africans begin to welcome African languages and the mindset of monolingualism into their writing – by writing in their native language, the audience will be directed towards the people as opposed to the bourgeoisie and the former colonizers.

The mental colonization which Fanon spoke about more than half a century ago, which Cabral referenced in his address, and wa Thiong'o continues to fight for today, is something that, they together argue, can only be overcome by a complete decolonization of the mind. To do this, one must quit paying homage to the former colonizers by writing in their languages; one must overcome modern-day neo-colonialism and imperialism by taking the reins of their linguistics and culture. As Fanon (1961) said in *Les Damnés De La Terre*, until this is done, one will never truly be free.

Wa Thiongo (ibid) argues that the English language remains a relic of the colonial past, calling to mind the bitter experience many Africans went through at the hands of their colonial masters. He sees English as an instrument the colonial masters left to complete the task they started. To him, since language embodies culture, the white man still seeks to foist his culture on unsuspecting Africans who are helping the propagation by employing English for literary creativity. He avers that for colonialism, [domination] involved two aspects of the same process: the destruction or deliberate undervaluing of a people's culture, their art, dances, religion, history, geography, education, orature, and literature, and the conscious elevation of the language of the colonizer. The domination of a people's language by the languages of the colonizing nations was crucial to the domination of the mental universe of the colonized.

Wali (2007) sees the African's embrace of a foreign language for expressing his imagination as short-sighted, if not unjustifiable. He sees African writers who do this as "playing to the gallery of international fame". He opines that neglecting indigenous African languages in the composition of literature places the languages at risk of extinction. He argues that literature, after all, is the exploitation of the possibilities of language. It is the African languages that are in crying need of this kind of development [of being used in composing African literature], not the overworked French or English. There is, for instance, a good deal of scholarly work being done in the linguistic structure of several African languages, but there is practically no use being made of these in creative writing, simply because we are all busy fighting over the common places of European literature. If linguistic science devotes so much energy and attention to African languages despite their tribal and limited scope, why should imaginative literature which has more chances of enriching the people's culture, (sic) consider it impossible to adventure in this direction?

Wali is concerned about safeguarding African languages from extinction. He advances the view that literature is a potent tool for developing a language. He cites the example of Milton who composed good poetry in his mother tongue. But as

Achebe rebuts, Milton was fortunate to have English as a mother tongue.

2.1. THE OTHER SIDE OF THE COIN

When one turns to the vast and flourishing works of literature from Africa written in English, the impact of the colonial legacy may be somewhat less obvious but it is nonetheless real. In a convincing example of what he calls "extending the frontier of English to accommodate African thought patterns", Achebe (1965) writes:

Allow me to quote a small example from *Arrow of God* which may give some idea of how I approach the use of English. The Chief Priest is telling one of his sons why it is necessary to send him to church: 'I want one of my sons to join these people and be my eyes there. If there is nothing in it, you will come back. But if there is something there you will bring home my share. The world is like a Mask, dancing. If you want to see it well you do not stand in one place. My spirit tells me that those who do not befriend the white man today will be saying had we known tomorrow'.

Now, supposing I had put it another way. This for instance:

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

"The material is the same. But the form of the one is in *character* and the other is not".

In the quotation above, the father is meant to be speaking his mother tongue. In the quotation, Achebe has masterfully captured the flavour of Ibo imagery. The language impacts the sense of authenticity in the prose. It is what Soyinka calls the 'stretching' of the European language. Such experimentation or stretching has occurred in the works of such Anglophone authors as Gabriel Okara and Ken Saro-Wiwa, and with the 'more or less

unconscious' liberties that Bole Butake and Alobwede d'Epie have taken with the Queen's language. Gabriel Okara, expressing his intention, holds that, as a writer who believes in the utilization of African ideas, African philosophy, and African folklore and imagery to the fullest extent possible, "I think the only way to use them efficiently 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 words to keep as close as possible to 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 life of a people.... [A] Writer can use the idioms of his language in a way that is understandable in English. If he uses their English equivalents, he would not be expressing African ideas and thoughts, but English ones. Some may regard this way of writing in English as a desecration of the language. This is of course not true. Living languages grow like living things, and English is far from being a dead language". (African Speech: 137).

Chantal Zabus says that African writers like Okara and Achebe apply the technique she terms 'relexification' which uses European vocabulary, 'but indigenous structures and rhythms' (the formulation is Loreto Todd's, qt. in Zabus 101).

Achebe (ibid) avers that the African writer can adopt English to express his imagination. This, he adds, takes pre-eminence over the need to reach a wider audience, since the principal aim of the writer is to express his mind. He writes: So my answer to the question: *Can an African ever learn English well enough to be able to use it effectively in creative writing?* Is certainly yes. If on the other hand, you ask: *can he ever learn to use it as a native speaker?* I should say, I hope not. It is neither necessary nor desirable for him to do so. The price a world language must be prepared to pay is submission to many different kinds of use. 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 an English which is at once universal and able to carry his experience.

Achebe's stance is that English should be employed by the African writer. The African writer who is not as fortunate as Milton, encounters the invidious task of choosing between his mother tongue and a foreign tongue. His problem is made even more knotty by the fact that he writes to be read by everyone. He does not necessarily appeal to a wider audience; he rather feels he has something to say that the world must hear. So he ought to write in a language accessible to the rest of the world. Like Achebe, the African writer must therefore not seek to be able to speak English like the native speaker but learn it enough to envelope his experience in it. Achebe's argument, it seems, feeds the question at stake in this article. Reflective of what was already the philosophy of many African writers was Achebe's submission, "I feel that the English language will be able to carry the weight of my African experience. But it will have to be *new English*, still in full communion with its ancestral home but altered to suit its new African surroundings".

3. THE LANGUAGE OF BOLE BUTAKE AND ALOBWEDE d'EPiE

African writers, who have chosen to write in the English language, have done so to express their culture. In that way, it is indeed a new language that they write in. But then again, what is that language? The answer to this question is not certain, but, certainly, the language is not strictly English. This is partly because the African writer is not sequestered from his people, culture, and mother tongue, and partly because he wants to score a point – that he can adapt English to his culture.

The discussion in this article does not concern deviant forms, but rather forms of deviation are the focus. *Linguistic deviance*, as used here will refer to forms and expressions in English that would be regarded as substandard or unaligned with the grammar and syntax of Standard English. *Linguistic deviation* is used in this article to refer to linguistic forms that align with the structure of Standard English, not flouting any morpho-syntactic rule, but used peculiarly to describe African experiences. It is the deviation that we find, that brings out the beauty of the texts under study.

Arguably, the linguistic deviation of the African writer is more palpable in the novel genre than in other genres.

In *Things Fall Apart*, Achebe introduces non-English words into the narration, examples of which are *udala, chi, ndichie, obi, egwugwu, umuada, ochu, etc.* In some cases, he takes pains to give equivalences in English of each of the words, especially at the beginning of the novel. He keeps the Igbo words intact in the novel only to give the story its local color.

Butake and Alobwede equally employ the Achebian style of narration. Both authors make use of lexical items not found in Standard English. This is what Achebe calls 'New English', English that borrows from African cultures and realities. In addition to linguistic deviations, the works of Butake and Alobwede are full of rhetoric, given that the richness of African languages (especially black African languages) lies in the excessive use of proverbs and other figures of speech. This is what gives beauty to the works of these authors.

The use of proverbs in speech is a characteristic of Bantu languages in both the Northwest and Southwest Regions of Cameroon. In the speeches of the Noni and Bakossi people (represented here by Butake and Alobwede), meaning lies underneath the structure of the sentences and lexemes which are of Standard English. The semantics of the utterances comes from an understanding of the culture and tradition of the people.

In light of Achebe's stand, examples can be seen in the following extract from *Lake God*. Butake writes:

- When death strikes, it is your Kinsman that mourns you. It is he who wipes the tears from your eyes and brings comfort to you (p. 6)
- Only yesterday, I was just one person in a teeming village of several hundred people. Today, I am the weather-beaten scampering into dark groves at the approach of dawn, fearful of the terrible silence descending over the land (p.7).

- The things that are happening in this land are pregnant (p. 20).

In the same vein, Alobwede in *The Lady with a Beard* similarly uses language as exemplified in the following extracts.

- Etame-Ngole has killed an elephant at the crossroads and even women have drawn knives to butcher it. I shall never up myself to that. (p. 16).
- Let me say something. If what I say does not please you, throw it away but not me. I want to say that if we are tackling Nye Emade's problem, we should be deep-rooted. Nye Emade is not an empty woman. She is full to the brim. As I am here before you, I am as empty as a broken jar. She who wants to fight a tiger must have claws and fangs," Munge said. (p.17)

Butake and Alobwede equally make excessive use of euphemisms which is another typical characteristic of Bantu languages. In *Lake God* and *The Lady with a Beard*, both authors coin language in such a way as to express the feelings of the speakers. In *Lake God*, Forgwei, Lagman and Father Leo exchange in the following excerpt:

Forgwei: My first wife is nursing a baby. The other has the periodic sickness.

Lagman: But it looks like they are also making use of the other weapon, hunger of the loins.

Forgwei: Let me see. I think she mumbled something about Ngangba. Since she had already mentioned her periodic sickness, I did not pay attention.

Father Leo: How can you be one in flesh when you refuse your husband's food? How can you be in flesh when you refuse to sleep with your husband? You Christian women have a duty to obey your husbands and to satisfy the hunger in their stomachs and in their lower parts (p. 28, 29, 33).

In the exchange, we realize that Forgwei and Lagman, both Africans, avoid the use of what can be considered taboo words, and in the place of these, they use euphemisms. For instance, they use words like 'periodic sickness' for menstruation, 'hunger of

the loin' for sex. On the contrary, Father Leo (a European) is a bit more direct in his choice of words.

3.1. THE USE OF PIDGIN ENGLISH

A pidgin is a grammatically simplified means of communication that develops between two or more groups that do not have a language in common: typically, its vocabulary and grammar are limited and often drawn from several languages. It is most commonly employed in situations such as trade, or where groups speak languages different from the language of the country in which they reside (where there is no common language between the groups).

Fundamentally, pidgin is a simplified means of linguistic communication, as it is constructed impromptu, or by convention, between individuals or groups of people. Pidgin is not the native language of any speech community but is instead learned as a second language.

Butake and Alobwede make use of Pidgin English in their works. The use of the language is yet another deviation from Standard English. The following excerpts are found in *The Lady with a Beard*.

- Na you we bin be de wait. People dem dong taya. So show them weti we get for do,' Wobe responded. (p. 52)
- Make wuna bring the coffin. Chris, huside de blanket dem dey? Bring all,' Mr Okore said. (p.52)
- Muyo, dat woman wey e die, na ma papa yimami, yi sister e bornam. Me na yin a so we dey. (p.57)
- Muyo, I go know wuna all. No worry. If my papa e no bi die, weti dem di call shirt?' Mr Okore replied.

Pidgin English is equally used extensively by Butake. We can cite the following instances:

- Fon: (to Dewa) you bin talk all dat foolish talk? (p. 16)
- Dewa: Kai! Me no talkam no noting, Mbe. Allah! Me no talkam no noting.

- Fon: Na weti happen? (p. 16)
- Dewa: Cow dong go drink i water for Ngangbasai wey na kontri fo Bororo. (p. 16)
- Fon: Fo sika sey me tell you fo go shiddon dere da wan mean sey na wuna kontri? (p. 16)
- Dewa: No bi na gomna don talk sey na place fo cow? (p. 16)
- Fon: Which gomna, you bloody fool? You look the palaver wey you don bringam fo my head? (p. 16)
- Dewa: Allah! Me no bringam no trobou fo Mbe. (p. 16)
- Fon: Angie, na weti don happen? (p.35)
- Angela: I beg, lef me da white man palaver. You ought to listen to your people. (p. 45)

3.2. CODE-MIXING

Code-mixing refers to the mixing of two or more languages or language varieties in speech. Some scholars use the terms 'code-mixing' and 'code-switching' interchangeably, especially in studies of syntax, morphology, and other formal aspects of language. Others assume more specific definitions of code-mixing, but these specific definitions may be different in different subfields of linguistics, education theory, communication, etc. Code-mixing is similar to the use or creation of pidgins, but while a pidgin is created across groups that do not share a common language, code-mixing may occur within a multilingual setting where speakers share more than one language.

Code-mixing is thus a linguistic device extensively used by Butake and Alobwede. In their separate works, both authors code-mix the English language with their respective Cameroonian indigenous languages, that is, the Noni and Akosse languages which at times leads to linguistic corruption.

In African drama, there exists deviation at the lexico-semantic level. In Soyinka's (1963) *The Lion and the Jewel*, Baroke, the village chief, is made to say to Lakunle, a young teacher, "Guru morin, guru

morin', that is all you get from an alakowe when you are at his house... will 'guru morin' wet my throat?" [12]

Guru morin in the excerpt is easily discernible as a corruption of *Good Morning*. The lexical entry *alakowe* is what will get the native speaker of English at a loss. The word means *one who writes* – used by the Yoruba people to refer to the educated and elitist.

Of course, several other playwrights have exploited the English language in this direction. Examples include Ola Rotime, Bate Bisong, Bole Butake, and Alobwede d'Epie. In *Lake God*, Butake mixes the English language and his Noni mother tongue. We find instances of this in the following structures:

- Before guards can move *Shey Bo-Nyo* makes his entrance, clutching the *Ngem*. The guards bar his way. (p.9)
- Doggo: They will desecrate the palace, *Mbe!* The Fon does not see a corpse and live. (12)
- Maimo: The following morning, I went to inspect my traps of *Kingongoo*. (p.29)
- Man: To your mother and I will keep the rear. Now, are we ready? Old one, do you remember the *Mangvun*? (p. 58)
- Shey Bo-Nyo: Wait a little; I am encumbered. Son, since you wanted to be helpful, here, hold the staff of *Kwifon* and guard it well. (p.58)
- Their heads are adorned by colorful hand-woven cotton caps, or by the *nkeng*, scrub of the gods. (p.39)

We equally find similar structures in *The Lady with a Beard* where the author mixes the English language and Akossé, his home language:

- She spread it on the cocoyams and got *melem*, *ndong*, and *ndere*, washed them, and placed them on the perforated leaf. She then covered the pot'. (p.7)

- Presently, she opened the pot and after piecing a few cocoyams with *mwed* (knife) she concluded that the cocoyams were ready. (p.8)
- Mother, she called Ntube, '*mbeh e bii*' (p.8)
- Good evening neh Emade', Ebude greeted. (p.8)
-that if you have small *alem* you should send to her. (p.8)
- While the bundle roasted, she pounded the foofoo and Ntube ground the *nzabengen*. The success of any good foofoo pounding depends on how the pot is arranged. The small tender cocoyams and colocassia are put at the bottom of the pot, and the hard cocoyams are put at the top. (p.9 – 10).
- Mother, *esubag e chii*. Give me the bowls,' Emade said. (p.10)
- I shall defeat the wizards of this village. I, *Emad'Akwe*, slaughter-of-slaves, lion of the unbroken tradition, widow of the upstream-python. I shall defeat you – principalities of the night. (p.12)
- She ground three spices together – *esange*, *essisang* and *mbulekang* added salt, topped them with red palm oil and stirred vigorously to have a delicious paste. (p.12)
- Furthermore, it was the first time she referred to him as *Mue* (friend) instead of *awem muan* (my son). (p.13)
- Daughter-of-the-dreaded-deity, good morning. *Wowoe*, *wowoe* the owner of this village would have realized by now that flies can soar the ears of the little dog without assistance.
- That, in a village where men incarnated *Muankum* a woman could not occupy the first compound – the entrance to the village. (p.18 – 19)

3.3. SYMBOLISM

It is worth knowing that African writing is inter-textual. The English language is used to

describe the African culture but the underlying message is enshrined in the tradition and culture of the people. In Achebe's (1963) *Things Fall Apart*, Okonkwo is made to speak of his son, Nwoye, thus, "I am worried about Nwoye. A bowl of pounded yam can throw him in a wrestling match". The term, pounded yam, is in itself not strictly English, but a description of an African meal. But the concern here is the second sentence. The sentence, having a grammatical subject (*a bowl of pounded yam*), a predicator (can throw), and an adjunct (*in a wrestling match*), is un-English. This is based on the semantic properties of the entities *bowl of pounded yam* and *him*. This reminds me of Chomsky's *Colourless green ideas sleep furiously*, which is grammatically correct but semantically odd. In Achebe's sentence, the subject is inanimate; and the object is animate. The semantic property [animate] of the subject renders the predicator inappropriate and the entire sentence nonsensical to an English native speaker. An African will easily see in the statement the oratorical beauty of speeches rendered in African languages. Uzoечи Nwagbara holds that Achebe's exploitation of English in this manner has been regarded as his greatest contribution to Nigerian-African-Writing.

In the same way, Butake and Alobwede have exploited the English language with the use of African symbols to give it an African touch. In *The Lady with the Beard*, Alobwede makes use of Akossé symbols either to describe events or to name his characters.

- Mother, come and eat. Daughter-of-the-upstream-python, the bowls are broken but they cannot end my resolve to survive. (p.12)
- *A mwe Ewang*, are you alive? I thought you were dead.....although I did not have a wink, I think if they count people now they will count me too. (p.13)
- *A nye muan*, some people are very unfortunate on this earth. If upon birth one is glued with the wax of misfortune, even cold water burns her. (p.15)

- The *Atieg* woman who clings to her now will soon realize that an empty hand is of no good to the mouth. Return to your hut and watch. Don't become the dog that eats its vomit' (p.19)
- *A nye Nsum* are you begging beggars to eat that meat? Does Eduke think I can look for shelter in storms like her? Can I look for an umbrella in the rain like her?' (p.24)
- When male-rain water fell on me I didn't wear raincoats. Now it is female-rain, shall I bother myself? As the file wears out the cutlass so does the cutlass wear out the file...' (p.26)
- If the twine resembles a snake, it should send shock waves in those who step on it.' (p.26)
- The plantain stem begets the bunch but it is not the bunch that dictates where the stem will incline. If the stem and the bunch agree where to incline they will withstand not only storms but also gales.' (p.27)
- there was no stir, no smoke, no groan. The hut just stood silent'. (p.30)
- If we did not come here she would have died alone, alone like a spider. She would have died as if she were a tree with a thin bark that produces no wax. And who knows, dogs would have eaten her corpse'. (p.31)
- Our people say, 'If a man is shot in the forehead, the whole world should blame him for he was looking for trouble. But if he is shot in the back, he should be defended for he was fleeing from trouble'. (p.49)

The analysis done here shows that going from an oral culture to a production in the English language within a certain context, the works under study have witnessed transformation which seems like a betrayal of their originality both from the point of view of their morphologies and from that of their moral values. Considering the English versions as a betrayal does not mean that we are condemning the enterprise of Butake and Alobwede. Literature does

not need dogma and every history of literal creation is some sort of a brilliant betrayal. African works, pre-colonial or post-colonial, written in the colonial languages, aimed at promoting the African culture through languages of wider communication.

CONCLUSION

Fanon discussed the issues of mental colonization during the 1950s, yet the use of the languages of the colonizers remains intact. The language debate surrounding Fanon's idea of 'mental colonization' has been heated following the independence movements within the world of African writing. Many 'giants' of literature in Africa, such as Chinua Achebe, Leopold Senghor, Wole Soyinka, and Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie, have all defended their use of European languages in their writing. Butake's and Alobwede's argument to write in English is not because they want to write to the world in a world language, or to write to only white people for that matter; they want to write to Cameroonians and argued that the only way to access all Cameroonians was through the English language. They disclosed that it is sometimes difficult to give proper translations or to put their thoughts into English words, but that they must shape English instead of letting English shape them and limit what they have to say. Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie, one of the best Nigerian novelists has made similar claims to her fellow Nigerian writers, stating that if she wrote in her mother tongue, Igbo, many Igbo-speaking people would not be able to read it.

In an interview with Dr. Ada Uzoamaka Azodo, President of the Women's Caucus of the African Literature Association, Adichie further clarified that she will like to say something about English as well, which is simply that "English is mine". Sometimes we talk about English in Africa as if Africans have no agency as if there is not a distinct form of English spoken in Anglophone African countries. "I was educated in it; I spoke it at the same time as I spoke Igbo. My English-speaking is rooted in a Nigerian experience and not in a British or American or Australian one. I have taken ownership of English." (<http://www.l3.ulg.ac.be/adichie/>)

Finally, no discussion of the use of European languages by African writers can ignore the larger

language controversy currently in African literary circles. Many Africans have called into question the authenticity of any work by an African not composed in an African language. As earlier said, one of the most vocal of this point of view is Wa Thiong'o, who holds that books by such authors as Soyinka, Sembene, Senghor, Butake, or Alobwede in English or French cannot be called 'African'. At the very most, one can term them 'Afro-European literature'. By their very choice of language, moreover, these writers cut themselves off from the great mass of the African public who, by and large, do not know enough English or French to read them. "Some are coming round to the inescapable conclusion", WaThiongo (1986) asserts "[that] African literature can only be written in African languages". But many Africans writing in English or French do not share this view, as can be inferred from the viewpoints of Achebe and Okara. Only time will sort out this immensely complex issue.

From the foregoing, one may conclude that following Mare's (2000, cited in Adedun (2010) classification of the linguistic strategy employed in fiction, African fiction employs the strategy of evocation (a strategy that enables the writer to make characters speak in a way that denotes the original language in which actions take place). One can thus conclude that the *language* of Butake and Alobwede is structurally English, but essentially African English. But one should not just run away with this conclusion. The discussion of the language of African writings in English in all scholarly circles appears not to be up to date. This is because the discussion has always been limited to the works of early African writers. Newer and younger writers than Achebe, Soyinka, Clark, Ike, and their likes have come to see the world as a small, global village. They gravitate therefore the Western style. One begins to imagine that contemporary African writers no longer wish to do with the English language what early writers did with it, for there is a glaring difference in the application of language by these two broad categories of writers. And yet, we stand at a crossroads, for English remains but a second language to them. The question then is, when shall we extend the scope of our question to

accommodate newer, global-village-conscious, adventurous African writers?

When we understand the nature of language in terms of expression, we give it a more comprehensive definition by incorporating expression, as one among many activities, into the total economy of those achievements by which man makes himself. Lessons from popular tales, which are related to moral ethics, advocate values of community solidarity and condemn individualism within African society. Because Africans have to expose these aspects of their culture to the other world, African writers can only do that using the other world languages.

REFERENCES

Primary Sources

Alobwede E (2005). *The Lady with a Beard*. Edition Cle, Yaoundé.

Bole B (1999). *Lake God and Other Plays*. Edition Cle, Yaoundé.

Secondary Sources

Achebe, C. (1965). *English and the African Writing*. Transition 4 (18): 27-30.

Achebe, C. (2008). *Things Fall Apart*. 3rd edition, London: Pearson Education Ltd.

Adedun, E. (2010). The Sociolinguistics of a Nollywood Movie. *Journal of Global Analysis* 1(2).

Adichie, C. N. (2008) Interview with Dr. Ada Uzoamaka, President of the Women's Caucus of the African Literature Association. <http://www.l3.ulg.ac.be/adichie/>

Biodun, J. (1976). *Wole Soyinka: Politics, Poetics, and Post-colonialism*. Cambridge UP:147.

Emeka, M. (1978). *Dysfunctionalism*. Afrikan Education: An Introduction to the Philosophy of Modern European Education in Africa. New York: Vantage Press.

Fanon, F. (1952). *Peau Noire, Masques Blancs*. Paris: Éditions du Seuil.

Fanon, F. (1961). *Les Damnés de la Terre*. Éditions Maspéro.

Gabriel, O. (1986). The Voice as a paradigm. *Language as Power*, <https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1467-971X.1986.tb00731.x>

Gates, H. L. (1987). *Editor's Introduction: Writing 'Race' and the Difference It Makes*. *Race, Writing and Difference*, University of Chicago Press: 13.

Ngugi, w. T. (1986). *Decolonizing the Mind: The Politics of Languages in African Literature*. Nairobi: Heinemann.

Wali, O. (2007). *The Dead End of African Literature? African Literature: An Anthropology of Criticism and Theory*. Tejumola Olaniyan and Ato Quayson, eds. London:Blackwell.

Wole, S. (1963). *The Lion and the Jewel*. Oxford University Pres.