NIGERIAN ENGLISH IN *DRY LEAVES ON UKAN TREES*

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The material for this study, Ahmed Yerima's drama book, "Dry Leaves on Ukan Trees", exemplifies Nigerian English. This paper thus identifies with current research assumptions that a Nigerian canon of the new world Englishes has evolved, with systematic indices at all levels of linguistic enquiry. The present study demonstrates this reality as it investigates the core indexical properties of the language expression in this drama book which is set in the culture of the Esan people of Nigeria. Our study thus directly accounts for Nigerian English, and implies the existence of an Esan variety of this canon, among the cline of educated Nigerian English varieties influenced by mother-tongue and associated cultures. Up till now there has been little or no attention paid to the contributions of minority languages such as Esan. Two patterns of lexical variations are presented which involve choice of lexical items in this variety of Nigerian English: one is the infusion of Esan language vocabulary, i.e. loans from Esan, and the other is choice of vocabulary of English that may be peculiar to Nigerian English. We however make no case for an Esan variety of Nigerian English specifically, but that Esan contributes to the Nigerian national canon. Our data for this study consists in linguistic resources in the book as well as corresponding cultural materials and information

La matière pour cette étude, le livre dramatique d'Ahmed Yerima, 'Les feuilles sèches sur les arbres ukan', est un exemple de l'anglais nigérian. Nous acceptons donc les présomptions de la recherche courante qu'un canon nigérian de l'anglais du nouveau monde a bien évolué, avec des indices systématiques à tout niveau de recherche linguistique. La présente étude démontre cette réalité par son examen des traits fonciers indexiques de l'expression du langage de ce livre dramatique, qui nous situe dans la culture du peuple esan du Nigéria. Notre étude explique donc l'anglais nigérian et implique l'existance d'une variante esan de ce canon, parmi la gamme des variantes de l'anglais nigérian éduqué influencé par la langue maternelle et par les cultures associées. Jusqu'ici on n'a tenu aucun compte, sinon très peu, des contributions des langues minoritaires telles que l'esan. Nous présentons deux modèles de variations lexicales qui touchent au choix d'items lexicauz dans cette variante de l'anglais nigérian: l'une est l'infusion de vocables de la langue esan, c-à-d les emprunts de l'esan, l'autre est le choix de vocables anglais qui peut être particulier à l'anglais nigérian. Toutefois nous ne proposons nullement une variante spécifiquement esan de cet anglais, mais une simple contribution esan au canon national nigérian. Nos données pour cette étude comprennent les ressources linguistiques de ce livre ainsi que les matériaux et les renseignements culturels qui y correspondent.

0. INTRODUCTION

Research on national varieties of English is fast growing (Crystal 2003, Kachru 1990, Trudgill and Hannah 2002, etc.) Dominant interests have concentrated on providing fuller descriptions of these varieties and defining appropriate models for pedagogic purposes. While for the former, the resource materials are largely linguistic and literary data, the latter relies essentially on grammatical resources or language structures. Scholars agree that, among African literatures of English expression, Chinua Achebe's (1964) "Arrow of God" is most illustrative of African canons of national Englishes in general and the Nigerian canon in particular (Emenyonu 1995, Kachru 1995, etc) . In the opinion of this paper, Ahmed Yerima's drama book (1997), "Dry Leaves on Ukan Trees", the material for this study, is one other that exemplifies Nigerian English. The paper thus, identifies with current research assumptions (Kachru 1995, Bamgbose 1995, Banjo 1995,

Jowitt 1991, etc) that a Nigerian canon of the new world Englishes has evolved, with systematic indices at all levels of linguistic enquiry. The present study demonstrates this reality as it investigates the core indexical properties of the language expression in this drama book which is set in the culture of the Esan people of Nigeria. Our study thus, directly accounts for Nigerian English and implies the existence of an Esan variety of this canon, among the cline of educated Nigerian English varieties influenced by mother-tongue and associated cultures. Whereas dominant literature shows evidence for Nigerian English as a cline of varieties along ethno-linguistic and socio-educational axes involving the major national languages, there is little or no attention paid to the contributions of minority languages such as Esan. We however make no case for an Esan variety of Nigerian English specifically, but that Esan contributes to the Nigerian national canon. Our data for this study consists in linguistic resources in the book as well as corresponding cultural materials and information.

In his Foreword to *New Englishes: A West African Perspective*, Professor Braj Kachru of the University of Illinois asserts the existence of new canons of English in Africa arising from indigenisation; and the best case among African writers has been made not in terms of vocal defence but by ingenious, innovative and highly skilful imaginative usage. Experts point to Chinua Achebe's (1964) *Arrow of God* as one of the best illustrations of an African canon (Kachru 1995, Emenyonu 1995, etc.) *Dry Leaves on Ukan Trees*, in the opinion of this paper evinces an African canon of English in which the so-called non-native varieties of English language are irreversibly taking root and having to be reckoned with in all their innovative imaginations (see Tiomajou 1995). In the light of the new world democracy, this English usage is a means of expressing cultural identity, not suppressing it, not a means to muscle ingenuity, creativity and novelty; where this is not possible, communicative incompetence is assumed or second or foreign language situation.

English language which has now become the world's lingua franca is shown on sociolinguistic grounds to comprise an inner and an outer circle. The outer is the expanding circle (Kachru 1990). The inner circle is made up of those national varieties spoken within relatively monolingual ecologies (such as British English and American English), and the outer circle comprises those spoken within multilingual and multicultural ecologies (such as Nigerian English, Indian English and Singaporean English). While the latter is also referred to as 'indigenised', the former is referred to as 'indigenous'. The expanding circle accounts for situations involving English as a foreign language. As an indigenised variety, Nigerian English consists of the English of colonial and decolonised times as its base enriched by the socio-cultural materials which may be uniquely Nigerian. It represents the perfected compromise made of African thoughts of Nigerian instantiations and the more traditional English language expressed in English. In other words, Nigerian English can be described as that English that was extracted from England by the English, processed in Nigeria by Nigerians and used for her intra-national, national and international communication needs (Ugorji, forthcoming).

In the new world democratic order, the freedom of nationalities is asserted (see Banjo 1995) and these new national Englishes are recognized. Winning this sociolinguistic recognition constitutes part of a successful resistance to cultural and linguistic imperialism worldwide, as part of the need to promote democratic and egalitarian ideals in language use. In this way, these national Englishes are no more

deemed to be the socio-cultural possession of Britain in UK but native to the given nations as languages in their own rights (cf. Kachru 1995, Bamgbose 1995, Mesthrie 2000, Crystal 2003, etc.)

One of the facts crucial to accounts of Nigerian English is that it is non-monolithic. The Nigerian English is growing on a very rich linguistic ecology; and this accounts for variations whose parallel appears uncommon but characterise the indigenised varieties (Gut 2004, Mesthrie 2000, Jowitt 1991, etc.) The implications of this complex multilingual and multicultural environment include the fact that because the substrate languages and cultures are different, their contributing to the indigenisation process seems to lead the development of this English in relatively non-uniform directions. Thus, it is in perspective to account for Nigerian English as a cline of varieties with identifiable core centres that may not be delineated in discrete terms. This is the position adopted in Banjo 1995, among others. He proposes four varieties (see also Gut 2004) auspiciously on the bases of the extent of mother tongue influence and of approximation to a world standard:

1. mother-tongue based (associated with heavy mother tongue transfers characteristic of the semi- educated, generally below post primary education)
2. influenced by mother-tongue (shows mother tongue transfers and lack of vital phonological distinctions, associated with speakers who may have at least primary education)
3. close to Received Pronunciation (RP) (British English) (characteristic of some speakers with university education)
4. indistinguishable from RP (associated with speakers who may be more highly educated and some who have some training in the Humanities and phonetics)

Nigerian English thus, ranges from the English of the semi-literate (variety 1) to variety 4 which is equivalent to RP. As shown, variety 4 hardly differs from standard British English, i.e. RP. Variety 3 may refer to near-native forms and 2 and 1 show various degrees of mother- tongue influence.

In this consideration, it makes sense to assume that 'the usage of every Nigerian user is a mixture of standard forms and popular Nigerian English forms' (Jowitt 1991); precisely that speakers may be expected to speak any or all of the varieties in the continuum, moderated by pragmatic considerations including linguistic accommodation. *Dry Leaves on Ukan Trees* (hereafter referred to as *Dry leaves*) appears to exemplify this position. All the varieties in this cline are thus Nigerian; and following Banda:1996, among others, it is in the spirit of the new Englishes that they are describable without recourse to the norms of their historic substrates or the inner circle varieties. Experts agree that Banjo's varieties 3 and 4, above, approximate the normative variety which pedagogic engagements should pursue. Accordingly, any reference to standard English assumes the endonormative form unless otherwise indicated.

1. OUTLINE OF THE DRAMA AND DRAMATIS PERSONAE

1.1 NOTES ON THE DRAMA

Dry Leaves is a play written by Ahmed Yerima, the Artistic Director of the Nigeria National Troupe. It is a drama, not a novel – a distinction which Forster 1974 considers pertinent to the more intellectual appreciation of literary materials. As he demands, 'in drama, all human happiness and misery does and must take the form of action. Otherwise its existence remains unknown, and this is the great difference between the drama and the novel.'p.85. The drama is set in an ancient Esan[1] (also Ishan) culture in Edo State, Nigeria, about the pre-colonial life of Esan people. It dramatises the monarchy, the people and the social echelons including the pantheon of gods portrayed as the 'disembodied' but present and active members of the human families and communities (cf. Parrinder 1962). Both the disembodied[2] and the living hold a delicate social equilibrium governed by cause and effect and inescapable consequences of wrongs, and rewards. The gods and the ancestors are thus the chief custodians of social justice and order.

The book opens with a newly crowned Onogie, i.e. king, who acceded to the throne following an early demise of his father, the incumbent; and this premature death is deemed abominable. It is a critical day, which has bizarre consequences for the community: another doomsday for the new Onogie and the entire citizenry, barely three days after his coronation. It is a complicated mystery, and great bewilderment has befallen the community as a result, from the sovereign to his subjects. Medicine men, priests, wise men, leaders and the gods - all pull forces together to unravel the mystery. A preliminary find reveals that some unknown person felled the Ukan trees, a high altar, which are the abode of the gods; the token of ancient ancestral mystical orders of cosmic networks with mortals, and the fulcrum of Esan culture and sociology.

Who felled the Ukan trees becomes the question. It takes the gods working through the medicine men to unravel the mystery. Esogban did it. He is an exalted elder and a chief in the king's caucus and an uncle to the usurper. Esogban is driven by vengeance; so, he takes to suicide revenge, if only that could redress the injustice. The injustice is about the enthronement of the new Onogie, a usurper to the traditional throne. But the gods reject his suicide as lawlessness and as felony that may not be expiated by sacrifice; making Esogban the sacrifice. Ruthless judgement, whose ground is as vague as it is reckless, is evoked. Idehen whose innocence and ignorance are silenced by Esogban's use of the royal cutlass for the act, is implicated for destruction along with the king, except that the king may be saved and the community purged by some lavish sacrifice to the gods, including a human life, a volunteer who loves the king.

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[1] The Esan constitute one of the minority groups in Nigeria. The population is put at about 398,103 (cf. Okojie and Ejele 1987). Esan language belongs to the Edoid family of the New Benue-Congo phylum (Williamson and Blench 2000).

[2] The dead members of families are perceived as participating still in the day-to-day social interactions of the family, i.e. they are considered to be living but not embodied. This seems a clearer explanation to the belief in the involvement of ancestors in family life in many African cultures (see Parrinder 1962). It is thus analogous to grammatical 'empty' category or 'ghost' which is a trace of a moved item which participates in grammatical operations yet unlexicalised but coindexed with the moved item (Chomsky 1975, cf. Ugorji 2003).

It is thus a mirror of the social reality of its time, perhaps, a true or historical experience or a report, but the author calls it a fiction. It reflects African cosmology and religion typified in Esan culture, and expresses actions, attitudes, lifestyle and penology in African traditional thoughts and beliefs. It celebrates ancient tradition and rituals and makes a vague representation of the ultimate triumph of good over evil.

1.2 NOTES ON DRAMATIS PERSONAE

The Onogie is newly crowned. His personal name is not indicated. Only three days has he been on the sacred stool vacated by his own father, who died prematurely in mysterious circumstances, but some misery afflicts the soul of the new king soon after being crowned. *Izaka*, now queen-mother. She in turn was Esogban's bride who was given to Onogie's late father when he committed adultery with her while living with Esogban. The outcome of that affair is this new Onogie. The late Onogie had previously married *Omoze*, Esogban's sister, and Izaka became his second wife following that adultery. Omoze's son by the late Onogie is *Idehen*, who is his first son. Customary law required him to accede to the throne after the demise of his father. But Idehen was supplanted through Izaka's schemes, and Izaka's son is crowned instead. He nonetheless neither takes offence nor nurses any grudge, neither does Omoze, his mother.

That the gods allowed this, and the illegitimacy gained institutional support, is Esogban's ground for his complaint. He insists that this injustice must be redressed. But justice does not take its course; so he cuts down the ukan trees housing the gods, an act understood by custom to invoke death, hence his redress will be suicide. He also breaks the king's pot of life, so that the king too will die, and the stool reverts to its lawful owner, Idehen, since the king has no son. He however miscalculates on one point. His use of Idehen's royal cutlass is intended to provide the gods with a clue as to the meaning of his course of action. But the involvement of Idehen's cutlass is interpreted as linking him with liability. He, thus, becomes implicated in an action and a course he knew nothing about.

Esogban is a high chief, closest to the Onogie. The other members of the cabinet, i.e. his advisors are *Iyase*, *Eholor*, *Osoh* and *Oliha*. The monarchy is administered by the king and his advisors, in close cooperation with a team of medicine men. They are *Ogie-obo*, the head of the team, *Obo* and *Isibor*. *Ohen-olokun* is the priestess of *Olokun*, the river goddess that is central to the culture and foremost in the conflict, because the felled trees provided covering for her and her river. *Obeni* is another woman in the village and *Idahota* is the newly married wife of *Ululo* and granddaughter of *Odion*. *Ululo* and *Odion* are palace slaves. Others are *Okeke* and *Udin*. The first three have major roles in the drama. Ululo bonded to the king with heart and mind. He serves him with love and passion. He believes he is ordained, not only to serve the king, but also to give his life for him; hence he opts for the substitutionary death required to save his king from the impending destruction determined against him by Olokun and other gods. Okeke gives him no break as he presses him to re-examine his sincere service. But Ululo is not a man to be dissuaded. Odion, the old-man slave and palace hangman, has a duty to give Ululo his voluntary passage to the ancestors by strangulation. He, too, presses Ululo to choose freedom and life. Eventually, he prevails and Ululo is set free, but not until he has offered to take Ululo's place as the sacrifice for the king, and not without a catalogue of reasons, namely:

(1) So that you may live as a free man;
So that my granddaughter Idahota
may find joy and meaning to life;
So that dreams in life will be fulfilled.
And so that I can honour a debt. (p.69)

It is also Odion's scheme for his own freedom in a future incarnation) p.70), when he plans to become a son to Ulolo through Idahota, so that all will be free for ever.

2. LEXICAL ITEMS

The domain of language structure has to be considered as central, including vocabulary and phonology, in investigating the linguistic distinctiveness of New Englishes (cf.Crystal 2003).Variations in human languages may thus occur predominantly at lexical and phonological levels. Not much may be said about the latter in written literature for obvious reasons but the former makes a conspicuous occurrence. In this section, two patterns of lexical variations are presented which involve choice of lexical items in this variety of Nigerian English: one is the infusion of Esan language vocabulary, i.e. Loans from Esan and the other is choice of vocabulary of English peculiar to Nigerian English. The former is explicable in terms of a gap that appears to exist due essentially to less than perfect ability of English language to capture all aspects of Nigerian culture (cf. Jowitt 1991); and the latter may be due to distance, including geographical, social and historical (Trudgil 1974, Hudson 1980, Milroy 1980, etc.). We also provide here a note on a rather lone example of phonological material.

2.1 ENGLISH LEXIFICATION AND AFRICANISMS

Generally, about the strongest evidence for a Nigerian canon of new Englishes is in the selection of lexical items (cf. Jowitt 1991, Igboanusi 2002). Some examples are shown below:

(2) I could feel the dying glory of my village flow with the *liquid* of the trees.
(p.30) (*liquid* as against *fluid*);

Whereas the former occurs largely in variety 2, variety 1 may select *water* instead. *Fluid* is preferred in 3 and 4, and *sap* in technical discourse. It is also more appropriate for 3 and 4 to speak of *fading glory* instead of *dying glory*.

(3) May judgement take its course .
(p.49) (*judgement* as against *justice*)

The latter is preferred in varieties 3 and 4; and the former may occur infrequently in 2.

We also note some Africanisms; and the following are common examples:

(4) *tempt to death* (p.4): in 'do not tempt the doctor to death'

(5) *...you will kill me with your act* (p.56).

This may be better appreciated with its text fully shown:

IDAHOTA: so I am condemned before my time, am I? as I too shall never know the sweetness of life. Instead, you shall make me a widow before my hungry nipples feel your touch. Ulolo, I beg you, do not kill the girl in me.
ULOLO: Go home, woman.
IDAHOTA: I have been home, husband, all day and all night and the walls made of clay, ask me, they crawl into my mind and, ask me. Sadly, good answers elude me, shamefaced, I answer lying. That the Onogie needs you more than your wife. Then stronger, I listen to the brown walls ask me, and indeed they ask me, where the second voice in the hut is. Ulolo *you kill me with your act*.

(6) *I beg you* on p.14: I beg you, grant me peace;
and in the above excerpt: I beg you, do not kill the girl in me, on p.56

Whereas *I beg* may characterize varieties 2 and 3, 4 prefers *please*.

(7) *Dane gun* on p.47 refers to a (single barrel) gun fabricated by indigenous technology. The term occurs in all varieties of Nigerian English.

(8) *message to send to the people* on p.30:
The expression is common with varieties 1, 2 and 3 but *to be sent* is preferred in 4.

(9) *That is why you are here* on p.26: the ground shakes all around me, the pith of palace walls threaten to move into nothingness. That is why you are here, to find meaning to this dark bowl of emptiness.

This way of introducing a meeting is typically Nigerian, and may derive from traditional oral discourse, particularly as people are invited to meetings without written circulars which may include an agenda. Consider also p.53:

(10) Elders, *you all know why we are here*. Please let us know why chief Esogban died like a chicken during my reign.

(11) *Uses to eat*, on p.22:
the ukan trees whose foliage Olokun uses to cover her nakedness,
the ukan tree whose leaves Olokun uses to eat.
The ukan trees which Olokun uses to shade her shrines,
have been cut.

This may occur in variety 2 with strong Esan mother-tongue influence in place of *eats* or *feeds on* in varieties 3 and 4. However, its use in the context of the above data appears to be informed by a scheme to achieve poetic effect by repetition.

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2.2 LOANS FROM ESAN

In what follows, we find the creative infusion of linguistic items of Esan in the composition of the new English. Consider the items in italics:

(12) do not tempt the doctor to death by giving him the *sacrilege* of *ihieghe* (p.4)
Ihieghe is a type of bean whose sauce is bitter and may be poisonous if not properly processed.

(13) the *Odu-ne-ame* (a god) will protect us (p.11).

(14) the maidens are dancing the *ijeleghe* dance and song (p.21).

(15) I tilled my land and planted a*bhuru* yam from Ozigolo and precious *Ikpen* yams.

Others include the dramatis personae and the gods (see also notes in section 6): *Olokun*, *Ogun*, and God, *Osanobua* and so on:

(16) then stand by us, *Olokun, Odu, Oza, Ezelomo, Ogbebhiohen* (p.10).

(17) *Ogun* forbid! *Olokun* forbid! *Osanobua* forbid!
… I have also consulted the shrines of *Ogun*, my god, and he says that you shall find the evil mind (p.31).

There are also more typical exclamatory expressions:

(18)…leave the man to find the shooting star: *Iyeh !*(p.28).

(19) *Ahwa*! May the gods forbid! (p.13).

Further notes appear necessary here with respect to the forms which illustrate loan-blends, which comprise items of English blending with those of Esan. Such patterns occur widely in the cline of Nigerian varieties and readily suggest mother-tongue background; (see Igboanusi 2002 for similar accounts involving Igbo). Examples include:

(20) Ikpen yam
Abhuru yam
Ijeleghe dance
Sacrilege of ihieghe beans

Generally, these forms appear to be the outcome of an intermediate measure in the management of untranslatabilities on one hand, and a pragmatic strategy towards specifying referents on the other, namely, *ikpen* is a type of yam, *ijeleghe* is a type of dance, and so on.

2.3 LEXICO-PHONOLOGICAL VARIATION

One good example of phonological material occurs on page 35, in which 'Portuguese' is realised as *epontokis*, auspiciously arising from an assimilation of Portuguese into Esan and its being loaned into Esan English:

(21) I have just come back from Warri, and the Epontokis have taken over the market.

As a first step, the assimilation would require resyllabifying the word to agree with Esan phonological patterning, which does not permit consonants to occur at initial or final positions in nouns. Consequently, a vowel is inserted in the initial position, usually a phonological /i/ that has two or more allophonic realisations, in the Edoid languages. In the final position, the final /z/ in Portuguese is elided, to end the noun in an unchecked syllable following the phonology of Esan, and so on. The outcome of the process so far described for the assimilation into Esan is *epontoki.* This indigenised form is therefore adapted or loaned into Esan English as such but pluralized by affixing the plural morpheme, {S}.

2.4 LEXICAL CATEGORY ADJUSTMENTS

There are instances in which this variety of English seems to employ shifts in lexical functions of words: on p.20 for instance, *mature* (adjectival) is rendered *matured* (verbal):

(22) their *matured minds* must understand why the sea haunts me…

The above may characterise varieties 1, 2 and 3, while variety 4 would prefer *mature minds* in that context. Consider also the following:

We note some deviations in the use of articles: there may be three or more possibilities but only two are observed, namely, (a) and (c), below:

(a) the selection of the definite article in place of the indefinite article;
(b) the selection of the indefinite article for the definite article;
(c) non-use of an article where there ought to be one.

For type (a), consider the following excerpt:

(23) Who does not know the game of putting *the* piece of meat in the mouth, hiding it, under the tongue, and then asking people to spend time finding it (p.36).

Here *the* occurs instead of *a*..Consider another example:

(24) The Benin empire shakes, and yet when *the* big tree falls, its weight might crush the innocent standing by.

Concerning type (c), consider the following, inserted article is in brackets:

(25) Haa, Ulolo, a woman's touch will only confuse the mind [*the*] more. (p.17)
And besides, the queen causes more harm to my thoughts than good.
She is huge, she *will* suffocate me. To date I still wonder who I offended
to deserve such an affliction as her presence. Oh, they wound
me, Ulolo.The queen's voice rattles and deadens my bodily desires
all over. Anyway, she was my mother's choice.

This type of deviation involving the articles is widely attested in Nigerian English and is thought to derive from the influence of native languages (cf.Oluikpe n.d). However, highly educated people tend to stigmatise them (see also Jowitt 1991).

Note also the use of *will* in contexts where *would* is preferred in variety 4. See also p.26:

(26) she set the savannah shrubs deliberately on fire thinking that the doctor *will*
die in the process, little did she realise that fire can hardly kill a fly, it's a taboo.

3. SEMANTIC ADJUSTMENTS

This category accounts for two directions of innovation involving some semantic shift. One part has to do with semantic extension, while the other has to do with semantic restriction. Prominent in this category are kinship terms. Their meanings in African canons derive from African concepts of family and associated relationships. In such conception, one's siblings consist not only of those in the nuclear family but also of those

in its extensions including cousins. Similarly one's parents, father and mother, include parents in the extensions involving aunts and uncles, among others:

(27) you call me *brother* even if I was born to be your king (p.18)

(28) this is the royal cutlass of your *brother* prince Idehen

On p.23 Ohen-Olukun calls the Queen-mother, *my mother*, and on p.44 Esogban refers to Ogie-Obo, the medicine man, as *father*:

(29) but tell me, *father*, can something be done?

See also on p.45:

(30) she protected you, and now you make her bleed. Why, *son*?

4. TRANSLITERATION [3]

This section discusses those syntactic constructions that are patterned after indigenous languages and thoughts, a testimony of the creativity characteristic of Second Language situations, consisting in the skilful weaving of indigenous cultures into English expressions. In this way the patterning of constructions follow after Esan, but the lexicalisation is English. Examples follow below:

(31) okeke, *your tongue will kill me (*p.14).
o□là□me□n/u□nu□ e□ a□ gbe□ me□

(32) does a man carry porcupine on his head, not minding the spikes, all because he killed it with a stone? I beg you *grant me peace* (p.14)
re□ i□me□ ọ□fû . re□

The preferred variety 4 equivalent would be: *give me a break.*

It is part of the creative skills of the African writer of English expression to try to surmount the dilemma of how to forge his thoughts and worldviews into English; the other task is how to do this and remain intelligible to the home audience as well as the wider speakers of English in Nigeria and the rest of the world: it seems to be this dilemma and the writers' ingenuity consequently that accounts for the variation in syntax which tends to copy the patterns of the indigenous codes, or adopt the patterns as they are if no adaptation is necessary, as further illustrated below:

(33) our new burden makes us *tire easily*
ọ́s ẹ́ má ọ̀gbọ̀n ̀ìh ẹ́ rẹ́ ́ìmà égbèlọ́ k ẹ̀

The preferred variety 4 equivalent is *get tired easily* .

[3] The term is one of those forms which have become established in African studies involving linguistic, literary and stylistic analysis, etc.; see for example Banjo 1995:228, 230. Others are 'extra text' shown above and 'orature', an expression for oral literature (see also Uhunmwangho 1999, among others). Another way of expressing 'transliteration' would be 'literal translation'. It is not the same as transcribing an indigenous word letter for letter without translating it, as in Section 2.2 above.

(34) my friend, *I worry* (p.12)

The preferred variety 4 equivalent is *I am worried* or *I have a worry*. *Worry* used in the context of an activity or a performative without predicate complements seems a deviation peculiar to Esan English. It may however have its parallel in the more typical Nigerian patterns in expressions such as 'I appreciate', 'you are enjoying' etc. heard among educated speakers. (See also Jowitt 1991)

(35) what harm did you commit that Olokun's wrath has been *called upon the head of your son*? (p.23)

The preferred variety 4 equivalent is *invoked on your son*.

(36) I shall not sit and fold my hands and have toothless women talk about *me and my son* at the market square (p.23). (equivalent: *)*.

The former occurs very widely in spite of pedagogic emphases on the preferred equivalent *my son and me*.

These properties constitute part of the variations or deviations which characterise the English usage in the book as Nigerian. There are however some deviations which should not be mistaken for the proven properties of this variety of English. We consider them deviant simply because they do not appear attested, and are by this consideration in want of justification in the conception of Nigerian English, and in that of any other national or international varieties in contact with Nigeria. Consider the following:

(37) 'pave way' on pp.10-11 would read 'give way' in English English, 'leave the road' or 'give chance' in educated Nigerian English:

Evil/ill-luck *pave way,*
so that those innocent travellers can walk free unhindered.
Ill-luck *pave way* for all of us.

(38) To all my ancestors I greet you.
I am before my god, The lips of the seer must not lie.
The chameleon changes its colour not to deceive, but to find peace
from hungry wanton boys, let me find peace with my Ogie

In the first line of the above, the use of *to* in that context is not readily explicable except as an error which however is outside the usual types.

Other deviations concern punctuation and writing rules, as (38) already makes obvious. Some use of punctuation marks in the book are considered to be deviant in the sense that current pedagogy views them as such and for loss of the pragmatic gains thereof and for lack of consistency. The other fact is that such do not characterise any other varieties of educated Nigerian English. Research shows that variations may occur between tonal languages that are syllable timed and those like English that are stress timed and show differences in juncture properties (Oluikpe n.d). Esan is syllable timed, while English is stress timed. We thus expect punctuations to pattern after English or Esan or show compromise but remain consistent. The placement of punctuation marks appear consistently inconsistent in a number of instances. In 38, for example, a comma may be in

order after 'ancestors' in the first line and a full stop after 'god' in the second line and after 'boys' in the last line. Consider more examples below:

(39) Should I call her my lord? (p.17)

instead of 'should I call her**,** my lord?' The omission of a comma suggests some subtle ambiguity; others suggest deficiencies in sense balance.

(40) Queen-mother weep for the Olokun shrines have been desecrated .(p.22).

instead of 'Queen-mother**,** weep, for the Olokun shrines have been desecrated'

(41) The ashes thrown, was meant to blind (p.27).

instead of 'the ashes thrown was meant to blind'
(other reservations may be permitted by poetic licence attributable to divination chants.)

(42) My lord, I swear the trunks weep (p.30).

instead of 'My lord, I swear**,** the trunks weep.'

(43) War has come, the enemies have taken the whole village, the women and children are dying, and all we hear is that the head of the army, the dreaded General shall join us presently. When? (pp.33-34)

instead of 'War has come**.** The enemies have taken [over] the whole village**.** The women and children are dying**;** and all we hear is that the head of the army, the dreaded General**,** shall join us presently. When?'

The above examples may suffice for our illustration. What is crucial here is that the placement of punctuation marks appears in the cases shown irrational, and does not typify educated Nigerian English.

5. FIGURATIVE EXPRESSIONS

It goes without saying that proverbs are the palm oil with which words are eaten. This is a celebrated truism for Igbo literature. Esan literature also exemplifies this as an African type. In this conception, the term 'proverb' expresses figurative expressions and imageries, including idioms, parables, proverbs, metaphors, simile, personification, hyperbole, etc. These characteristics replicate oral literature types and therefore appear convincingly to derive from them. (cf. Finnegan 1970, Igboanusi 2002). Thus, the imageries in the play are exponents of traditional Esan oral literature, as a variety of African literature; and are as such oral literatures in content and form (Adeleke 2005, cf. Uwajeh 2002). These figures of speech, characteristically African of the Esan instantiation, occur extensively and often in stacks in the discourse patterns; and are estimated to occur approximately three in every page. They vary in length and in the forms of images employed, apparently for stylistic elegance and aesthetic effects of the African thought types. It is noted (Igboanusi 2002) that when African writers use proverbs, it may not merely be to add a touch of local colour or merely for aesthetics, but to emphasise an important traditional value of African culture and sociology. Some roughly classified examples follow below, but the classification makes no strict claims to any theoretical distinctions; it serves only for convenience in this presentation:

5.1 PARABLES

Ulolo, the Onogie's servant and friend, bewildered by the rather ill-explained but imminent death of the Onogie, which will consequently mean his own death, muttered an eloquent worry:

(44) I also wonder why the eagle is always eager… too eager to outdive the vulture in order to find the mystery of burning embers (p.12)

Another example is:

(45) the python can live in your house quiet and friendly, putting a mark on each one to avoid crushing even the infant with its weight. But the day you step on his tail, the line is drawn. The huge talking drum is torn, and you ask for the message to send to the people (p.30).

5.2 PROVERBS

When words are eaten with oil in African speech events, the words are more readily taken as mature talk in contra distinction to childish talk or communicative incompetence. To meet this expectation for the African audience and still remain intelligible to the wider world of competent English speakers is part of the task of African writers of English expression; and the latter addresses the economic sense for such works in more or less fiscal terms. Thus, to employ proverbs is customary, and to do so in English is pragmatic; the English expression more often than not is a translation; and imperfections in such translations are the outcome of inertia arising from the mother tongue intuitions of the writer, but they characterise the usage as African. Some examples include:

(46) rains always beat the parents first. The children are shaded in their shadows (p.13).

(47) she set the savannah shrubs deliberately on fire thinking that the doctor will die in the process, little did she realise that fire can hardly kill a fly, it's a taboo (p.26).

(48) the chameleon changes its colour not to deceive but to find peace from hungry wanton boys, let me find peace with my ogie (p.26).

There is an African saying that wisdom abounds in the wise, and elders, like oracles, are its repository; and they speak in proverbs both to men and to gods. So to introduce the agenda for a meeting, oral traditions are re-enacted in archetypical proverbs, as in (49)-(51):

(49) the ground shakes all around me, the pith of palace walls threaten to move into nothingness. That is why you are here, to find meaning to this dark bowl of emptiness (p.26).

(50) can you ask the bed bug why it bites the little child, even if the child is innocent and tender? (p.32)

(51) the Benin empire shakes, and when the big tree falls, its weight might crush the innocent standing (p.27).

(52) the toothless old witch cries all night of hunger. By the dawn of the day, the only infant in the house dies. Who does not know that the old witch used the infant to quench her thirst? (pp.41-42)

5.3 IDIOMS

Part of the radical innovations which characterise Nigerian English essentially is found in the use of English idioms in a facile blend with indigenous culture and worldview, as on pp.48-51:

(53) why does Olokun want *to have a hand in this matter*? (p.33)

(54) the news in Warri is that the whitemen intend *to march on Benin (*p.36).

(55) my lord, *the hand of your brother is clean… Idehen's hands are clean*, even though he must make sacrifice to appease the goddess Olukun for the use of his cutlass to commit the evil act (pp.38,39).

(56) your gifts… you must take them away from here. I cannot *pitch my tent on your land* (p.45).

5.4 METAPHORS

Metaphors in this drama, like proverbs, are reflexes of the extra ordinary novelty of expressions in English blossoming on the indigenous language roots. In them, the traditional images are articulated in English. It is traditional, for instance, that to refer to an esteemed man calls up the image of a big tree, as on p..61; others follow in 57-62), below:

(57) I see the big tree in this palace fall,… I see death, waiting…smiling, yet waiting for the big tree to fall (p.27).

(58) the ashes thrown to blind have blinded them instead (p.27).

(59) the evil hands have lit the burning fire under my throne. They expect me to burn with it (p.30).

(60) but their drums will tear midway to the in-law's house (p.30).

(61) what concerns a cockerel in a sacrifice where a goat is required (p.31).

(62) death must tell me. Or by my act, I must tell myself, why the sun must set in the morning (p.32).

The Ukan trees provided Olokun a covering, a dress; and felling the trees amounted to undressing her or stripping her naked, as already shown . Her own way of seeking redress also calls up the image of undressing as in (63); more metaphors follow in 64-65, below:

(63) Olokun undresses me in the eyes of my enemies (p.33)

(64) why walk into the dark valley without a twinkle of light, why? (p.42)

(65) there goes the devil in a man's dress, walking hand in hand with death.

The figurative expressions whose samples are shown above pervade the entire drama, constituting a rich profusion, a mark of African mature rhetoric (cf. Finnegan 1970). Thus, of its 72 pages, these images occur approximately three in a page, as part of the core indices of African literature derivable from traditional oral types.

6. NIGERIAN CULTURES AND THE NEW ENGLISH

In addition to the preponderance of figurative expressions, there are other properties of the culture which ingeniously constitute the English language in Nigeria. This relationship between language and culture, according to Emenanjo (2002:2) is 'the sum of all complete language situations in which all levels are connected expressively, descriptively or through transfer'. There is thus, no doubt that there's a correlation between form and content of language and the beliefs, values, worldviews etc. of its speakers (Saville-Troike 1982, Hudson 1980, Trudgil 1974). In the text, we have noted, among others, the lexicalisation process in which Nigerian English is built up with loans from Nigerian languages (Esan in this case) and a choice of items of English. We also noted that the thoughts and conceptions that the lexical and grammatical resources represent are indigenous arising from Nigerian cultural materials, experience, environment and worldview. Materials in the extra text (cf. Uhunmwangho 1999) are thus, crucial to the comprehension of the text; otherwise some parts of the text may appear incomprehensible. These consist largely of culture information which being part of the text, specify intended meaning in the text. In the extra text thus, lie the resources that account for the indigenisation of English beyond the linguistic structural items, in Nigeria and the rest of Africa whose property this new English is, on historical and cultural grounds. The materials we present in this section are thus those that are expressed in English in the text but may only be comprehensible to competent speakers of English elsewhere whose proficiency in English includes familiarity with African or related cultures:

A people without religion are yet to be discovered (cf. Parrinder 1962). Part of the main defining characteristics of African traditional religion is the belief in the existence of God, e.g. *Osanobua* and of gods, e.g. *Olokun (*sea goddess), *Ogun* (god of iron), and others, *Odu,Oza,Ezelomo,Ogbekhiohen* or godlings. The latter are perhaps comparable to Igbo *chi*, definable as that destiny and a being that directs it and determines personality and fate, or to *agbara*, the deified departed souls or ancestors. For the Esan, the Onogie is an exalted personality and king; he is only next to the Oba of Benin and to God, and is worshipped. The Esan, like other African groups, practise polytheism; and the patterns of language use correlate this fact, as evident in this book under consideration. Communal life, culture and practices revolve around the pantheon of gods; and this drama is set on these, the most prominent in this drama being Olokun, the river goddess, whose Ukan trees were hewed down. Olokun and Ogun occur also in Bini and Yoruba cultures, among others. The cultures are contiguous. We prefer to consider the terms as cultural cognates, given that doing otherwise may have implications which may offend the culture sensibilities of people groups, particularly in view of Okoduwa's objections (Osiruemu 2005). It suffices therefore to assume that these deities are Esan; and that is how far the drama leads us. The Ukan trees grow by the river banks and provide some covering for the river that harbours *Olokun*, the river goddess. Felling the Ukan trees thus implies

uncovering the goddess or striping her naked. The goddess braced for a fight; hence the crisis:

(66) Then act before the river overflows its banks.
Act, for Olokun is livid with rage.
Her eyes continue to search for the culprit whose hand
has created the turmoil of shame in her shrines.
Queen-mother weep for the Olokun shrines have been desecrated.
The Ukan trees whose foliage Olokun uses to cover her nakedness,
the Ukan trees whose leaves Olokun uses to eat.
the Ukan trees which Olokun uses to shade her shrines,
have been cut. (p.22).

But it is thought customary, not only for Olokun to put up a fight, but for the war to be executed by allied forces of the forces including ancestors and of the medicine men and diviners. Notably, these constitute essential parts of what gives African literatures (of English expression) an identity in the new world Englishes.

Part of the beliefs includes ancestral worship:

(67) Your son, the Onogie, must call on his fathers now,
or his reign shall be received with hisses long before his death (p.24).

The materials for comprehending the above include information obtained from the cultural practices in which ancestors are thought to be those departed fathers who participate in the life of the family and the community yet are disembodied. They are deified and worshipped, usually both for fear and for affection and prayed to (cf. Parrinder 1962). See also p.26:

(68) To all my ancestors I greet you.
I am before my god…

It is also thought that the departed return into physical existence for another life on earth. This appears most pronounced in the Odion-Ulolo dialogue. Its reality is thought certain and definite. Reincarnation appears thus so sure and reassuring that it could constitute the motivation for Odion to volunteer to be the substitutionary sacrifice in Ulolo's stead, the sacrifice to save the Onogie; and consequent to his substitutionary death, obtain a birthright of a freeborn and both slaves, himself and Ulolo, would be free 'for ever'. Consider the following:

(69) I loved him like a brother.
I always knew he would come back,
Your father was not him…but you…tonight…
You remind me of our earlier encounter,
and this frightens me (p.65).

See also p.70:

(70) Go son, go!
Through you I shall return,
Then we all shall be free for ever!

Go son, go!

In addition to these beliefs, there are references to the sociology of witchcraft. (cf. Parrinder 1962) among Esan people:

(71) Obeni, this is a task for you.
Tonight, when the full moon is up,
and the night birds are gathered, fly to me,
and I shall address the park…(p.25).

See also pp.41-42:

(72) The toothless old witch cries all night of hunger.
By the dawn of the next day, the only infant in the house dies.
Who does not know that the old witch used the infant to quench her thirst?…

Along these lines, we also consider a mystical metamorphosis from the human kind to an animal kind and vice versa, auspiciously established by customary legitimisation. We refer to this phenomenon as 'transcarnation'[4], though the Encyclopedia Britannica uses the word 'zoomorphology.' That such is customary is not in doubt as the credibility of Osaze's testimony was not the question, but that a life was taken anyhow:

(73) My farm and that of my late friend Ihinose lie side by side.
Ihinose would not come to the farm.
I tilled my land and planted Abhuru yam from Ozigolo and precious Ikpen yams.
Osanobua was kind and my yams did well.
Ihinose planted cassava on his farm, and refused to clear the shrubs around
the cassava.
The shrubs and the cassava soon became one on his farm.
Soon, a hog started to eat up my yams.
I told my friend about it, and we both resolved to set a trap for the hog.
When it got too much, I got my dane gun and waited all night for the hog.
As the first set of clouds moved to usher in the morning dew, the hog came.
I waited patiently until the hog started to eat my yams.
I aimed, and shot straight at the head of the hog.
It fell, and I started to scream for help from the other farmers who had stayed
the night in the farm.
They were three in number, but as we tied the hog in order to take it to the village,
strange things started to happen. First, it started with the legs.
Gradually, his two forelegs became human hands and the two hind ones,
became human legs. We ran at first, but came back as the head
became that of Ihinose. (pp.47-48).

The point remains that part of the essentials for understanding African texts of English expression includes familiarity with the culture within which the thoughts are

[4] The term is built up from the readings of 'to incarnate', 'to embody', or 'reincarnate' and 'trans'- to cross (over), as in transform, trans-national, transplant, trans-Saharan, etc.

constructed. This new English thus derives its distinctiveness largely from the creative assimilation of English into African cultures.

It is noted that accounts of Nigerian English to date essentially relate mother-tongue background with educational attainments. Specific focus has been on the contributions of the three major languages, Igbo, Hausa and Yoruba (see Jowitt 1991, Igboanusi 2002, Oluikpe, n.d, Ugorji 2002, Gut 2004, etc.). This drama therefore becomes a pointer to a gap in research, the contributions of minority languages; particularly as such contribute to a more adequate characterisation of the continuum along the line of mother-tongue influence (c.f. Banjo 1995). This is predicated on natural sociolinguistic processes involving language and culture contacts. Thus, considering the ethnolinguistic properties contributed by Esan in the development of Nigerian English is not thought to be premature. Materials in this drama suggest it, stating the minimum; and we present here some sign posts in this regard:

First, we consider some lexical items beginning with *ukan trees* in the title of the drama, a type of loan-blend. Details are discussed in section 2.2. Close to this are personal names shown as dramatis personae in section 1.3 as well as names of the pantheon of deities.

Second, we note some expressions which capture Esan cultural worldviews. On p.20, we find *home leopard* which expresses the belief in the existence of a spirit which protects people from enemy onslaughts. *Dog* occurs on p.15 roughly equivalent to 'servant' and calls up the image of the basest sort of servitude associated with waste-eating and marked idiocy. In *toothless woman*,(p.23), the reference is to persons considered social misfits or nonentities; it may also refer to distasteful agedness, as context makes appropriate. *Pot of life*, (p.29), refers to a sacred pot believed to house the cosmic entities for an individual's material existence; and imminent death of the individual is conceived as the automatic outcome of its being broken.

Third the conflict in the text linked with the felling of the ukan trees: ordinarily, the felling of trees could probably count for deforestation, which may be unlawful if not authorised; but here its implications are religious and cultural within which it is considered sacrilegious and criminal. It is also believed to occasion untimely deaths for the culprit and for the populace; the king is not also spared, particularly because his 'pot of life' is also broken in the process. As a criminal offence, a ruthless capital punishment is inevitable without trial and without option. This cultural meaning is reposed in the oral tradition of Esan people and this conflict may be inexplicable without this cultural backdrop.

Fourth, we consider time reference: whereas in traditional terms events may be timed with reference to sunrise, sunset, etc., among the mother-tongue based varieties (and Esan is no exception, see p.39: *we shall all return at sunset*), Esan appears unique in using the movement of the cloud: *as the first set of clouds moved to usher in the morning dew, the hog came* (p.47). In this context, Igbo for instance, would refer to 'cock's crow' (first or second cock's crow) instead, or to '(first) partridge laughter'[5] As shown, there is no doubt that Esan like the better studied mother-tongues in Nigeria contributes to the development of Nigerian English. However, materials from this book alone are inadequate

[5] Birds may *sing* in England but *cry* in Igboland or *laugh* if a partridge.

to establish the existence of Esan English. But it suffices as a preliminary indicator in this respect which future research should explore.

7. CONCLUSION

As so far shown, English usage in Ahmed Yerima's *Dry Leaves on Ukan Trees* evinces Nigerian English, whose primary indices in the drama comprise resources in the linguistic text and extra textual materials involving cultural information, among others. Prominent among these are lexical elements. Two patterns of lexical variations are presented which involve choice of lexical items in this variety of Nigerian English: one is the infusion of Esan language vocabulary, i.e. loans from Esan, and the other is choice of vocabulary of English that may be peculiar to Nigerian English. The former is explicable in terms of a gap that appears to exist due essentially to less than perfect ability of English language to capture all aspects of Nigerian culture; and the latter may be due to distance, including geographical, social and historical. Some other lexical units are accounted for in terms of semantic extensions to their more basic meaning; here, kinship terms illustrate the point.

Another testimony of the creativity characteristic of 2nd language situations consists in the skilful weaving of indigenous cultures into English expressions. In this way the patterning of constructions follows the patterns of Esan, but the lexicalisation is English. It is part of the creative skills of the African writer of English expression to try to surmount the dilemma of how to forge his thoughts and worldviews into English; the other task is how to do this and remain intelligible to the home audience as well as the wider speakers of English in Nigeria and the rest of the world: it seems to be this dilemma and the writers' ingenuity consequently that accounts for the variation in syntax which tends to copy the patterns of the indigenous codes, or adopt the patterns as they are if no adaptation is necessary.

An account of Nigerian English that omits figures of speech might be dubious because such constitute the oil with which words are eaten. These characteristics replicate oral literature types and therefore appear convincingly to derive therefrom. The images in the drama are exponents of traditional Esan oral literature, as a variety of African literature; and are as such oral literatures in content and form. When African writers use proverbs or figurative expressions, it may not merely be to add a touch of local colour or merely for aesthetics, but to emphasise an important traditional value of African culture and sociology.

The drama also shows linguistic texts to comprise not only of structural items but culture elements as well without which comprehension might be crucially impeded. Thus, some texts though expressed in English may only be comprehensible to competent speakers of English elsewhere whose proficiency in English includes some familiarity with African or related cultures. Its evidence as a Nigerian or African literature of English expression along the lines of Chinua Achebe's *Arrow of God* is as we have shown a reality. It approximates Jowitt's (1991) educated Nigerian English, a likely candidate in the search for a national model for pedagogic needs and international communication.

It is noted that accounts of Nigerian English to date essentially relate mother-tongue background with educational attainments. Specific focus has been on the contributions of the three major national languages, Igbo, Hausa, and Yoruba. This drama raises the

question of the contributions of minority languages; particularly as such contribute to a more adequate characterisation of the continuum along the line of mother-tongue influence. Thus, considering the ethnolinguistic properties contributed by Esan in the development of Nigerian English appears rational; and we have presented some sign posts to this effect. As shown, there is no doubt that Esan, like the better studied mother-tongues in Nigeria, contributes to the development of Nigerian English. However, materials from this drama alone are inadequate to establish the existence of Esan English. But it suffices as a preliminary indicator in this respect which future research should explore.

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