

YORUBA BASED NIGERIAN ENGLISH IN THE DRAMA OF OLA ROTIMI AND FEMI OSOFISAN

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This paper discusses the issue of ethnic influence on English language with a particular focus on the Yoruba language and its interference on the Nigerian English variety. Data for the study are drawn from the plays of Ola Rotimi and Femi Osofisan, two Nigerian playwrights of Yoruba extraction. In a descriptive approach, the data evince the fact that while it can be readily deduced that many of the characters speak a variety generally referred to as Nigerian English, evidences of a Yoruba linguistic background are equally quickly noticeable in the semantic and phonetic contents of the utterances. The speeches of the lead characters especially are fraught with various usages of Yoruba language which manifest as code mixing, code switching, coinage of new words, literal translations and Yoruba proverbs among others. The study discovers that, contrary to earlier claims that ethnic difference in Nigerian English usage is noticeable mostly in pronunciation, the influence of tribal background on regional English extends beyond the issue of articulation.

Cet article met en exergue la question de l'influence ethnique sur l'anglais en se focalisant sur le yoruba et son interférence sur la variété de l'anglais nigérian. Cette étude a comme source les données issues des pièces dramatiques de Ola Rotimi et de Femi Osofisan, deux dramaturges Nigériens de souche Yoruba. L'analyse descriptive des données montre que le substrat linguistique yoruba est remarquable dans le contenu sémantique et phonétique des énoncés même si beaucoup de personnages parlent apparemment une variété connue généralement sous le nom de l'anglais nigérian. Les échanges des personnages principaux sont pleins d'usages multiples de la langue yoruba qui se manifestent sous forme de mélange codique, de changement de code, de création de nouveaux mots, de traductions littérales et de proverbes Yoruba pour ne citer que ceux-là. L'étude met à nu le fait que, à l'opposé des déclarations précédentes que la différence ethnique dans l'usage de l'anglais nigérian se remarque surtout dans la prononciation, l'influence du substrat tribal sur l'anglais régional va au-delà de la simple question d'articulation.

0. INTRODUCTION

The question of which language to use in the proper presentation of their art is one that Nigerian writers and indeed other African writers, have had to grapple with since the beginning of the practice of creative writing in the country. Garuba (2009:439) observes this and rightly says that "in the criticism of African poetry, the issue of language is often highlighted". Language, as the means of expressing literature enjoys special consideration among critics and creative writers who have come to realise how woefully literary works would fail if the ideas are not conveyed properly by appropriate use of language. Olu Obafemi expresses the magnitude of the relevance of language to literature in the following words:

We can only comprehend in a small way the identity of the writer – his/her religious beliefs, folklore, myths, proverbs, superstition, humour, attitude to life and death – in other words, the totality of his/her world view, if we know his/her language. (2006:17)

The discourse on which language to serve as the medium of expression in African literature has been polarised with some notable writers like Ngugi and Wali on the side of indigenous languages and Wole Soyinka and Chinua Achebe on the side of the English language. Both sides are not without tenable reasons and support for their claims. The faction in support of the use of African languages in African literature is 'headed' by Obi Wali (2009:282) who states without prevarication that

...until these writers and their western midwives accept that any true African literature must be written in African languages, they would be merely pursuing a dead end, which can only lead to sterility, uncreativity and frustration.

This view contradicts the one expressed by the promoters of the use of English language in African literature. Mbughuni's (1976:85) point later encapsulates the position of this sect and it is strongly opposed to Wali's opinion above:

There are now many good works of drama which remain unknown or 'undiscovered' outside our national boundaries, because they are not in English or French, and because local promoters fear to battle against the language barrier, quickly falling prey to the easier prospects of success with a work in an international language.

Time, research and existing literature texts have proven the two dichotomous perspectives expressed above to be false especially in Nigeria where creative works are neither expressed absolutely in indigenous languages nor in perfect Queen's English. Nigerian drama, with specific reference to Rotimi's and Osofisan's works are written in domesticated English, otherwise referred to as Nigerian English, coupled with an indiscrete mixture of Nigerian Pidgin English and items of Yoruba language. In this paper, our interest lies in exploring how Yoruba language influences the playwrights in their use of English.

1. LITERATURE REVIEW

The contact that the English language has with Nigerian languages has affected and impacted a kind of 'Nigerianness' on the language such that scholars now only talk of Nigerian English and not the English language in Nigeria (Igboanusi, 2002). This issue has generated multifarious debates and essays, but at the end, evidence has been given for the existence of Nigerian English (Ajani, 2007; Adekunle, 1985; Bambgose, 1982). However, the heterogeneous linguistic situation in Nigeria has its own effect in the variety termed Nigerian English, and this has been an area of interest for scholars.

It was Odumuh (1987) who first propounded the notion of the ethnic based Nigerian Englishes because of the linguistic and cultural diversities that characterise any Nigerian phenomenon as a result of the heterogeneous nature of the Nigerian nation. In his words,

One way to discuss variation in Nigerian English is to consider ethnolinguistic influences on the English language usage of Nigerians ... There is the influence of the mother-tongue such as Hausa in the far Northern provinces or Yoruba in the central areas. Here the 'language' becomes a way of life with religious and traditional overtones. (1987:19)

With this analysis of the ethnic influence on Nigerian users of the English language, Odumuh goes further to classify the ethnic based Englishes into Yoruba English, Hausa English and Igbo English. While it is easy to deduce a Nigerian speaker's tribe from his/her pronunciation, Odumuh insists it is more than that, claiming further that

such influence on self-expression in English transcends the phonetic and tonal difficulties or straight forward matters of syntax, word-order, and the whole thought-process of translation (ibid).

Jowitt confirms Odumuh's point above and attests to ethnicity as one factor to use in the description of types of Nigerian English:

An obviously attractive parameter for determining varieties within NE is the ethnic one, i.e. distinguishing the various kinds of English that result from the interference of MTs. We could then talk of Hausa English, Igbo English, Yoruba English, etc. (1991:38)

We must mention here that Jowitt is not conclusive on this point and actually expresses some reservation by saying,

The relevance of these considerations to the debate about NE is that as the debate developed scholars became interested in seeking to identify 'varieties' of NE. This is perhaps an ambitious task when NE as a whole has not yet been adequately described... (1991:37)

Jowitt (2007:11) later notes that "skepticism ...about the varieties as discreet objects" is expressed notably by him and Okoro (2004). Apart from these two initially dissenting voices, scholars have often shared a belief in the existence of varieties of NE from time to time though they have not all used ethnicity as basis; Bamgbose (1982) posits education as the yardstick for categorizing the different varieties of NE whereas Banjo (1993) sees the linguistic parameter and not education as the deciding factor in identifying varieties of NEs. Jowitt (1991:38) says of the education factor that,

The educational parameter has proved much more productive, at least of hypotheses. This is because the type of English spoken and written by Nigerians manifestly varies according to the level of general education attained, and because there is an obvious rough correlation between the level of educational attainment and the level of proficiency in English.

Yet findings have revealed that the influence of mother tongue sometime overrules the issue of education. Ugorji and Osiruemu (2007:4) are also of the opinion that there are "Nigerian English varieties influenced by mother tongue and associated cultures." In pursuing this point, Bamgbose (2004:613-614) says,

For example when an otherwise well-educated person consistently pronounces *cheque* or *check* as *sheck*, and says *I am coming* when he or she means *I am off* ... the impression created is that the speaker has not been able to rid himself or herself of indexical features typical of non-standard varieties.

Igboanusi (2002) later picks up the matter of ethnic Englishes in Nigeria while raising the issue of varieties in Nigerian English usage. He explains that the 'ethnic criterion' is one parameter for determining varieties in NE. This is further corroborated by Ajani who says,

...we observe transfers from the local languages (especially the three major, regional languages: Yoruba, Igbo and Hausa) and mostly from the following areas: music, clothing, indigenous foods, traditional religious beliefs, local institutions, flora and fauna, etc... (2007:5)

The fact is thus established that there are varieties of Nigerian English based on the ethnic nationality of the particular user at the same time. Some of the indigenous items conflated with English in Nigerian literary works from the areas of music, foods and

clothing as noted by Ajani above may not be translated without losing at least a part of their meaning so the writers often prefer to leave such words in the native language.

Ethnic and regional considerations are not the only factors employed in the description of types of Nigerian English. Other parameters include education, status, occupation and age. (Igboanusi 2002, Ajani 2007, Jowitt 1991). Our concern here however is in ethnic based NE with special interest in the variety that is largely influenced by the Yoruba language. Both Ola Rotimi and Femi Osofisan are Yoruba playwrights who often create Yoruba characters in their plays, while setting the plays in Yoruba land as well. The data for the study is taken from their works and we have attempted to reflect the levels of language usage therein: lexis, semantics and phonetics and in the sample data.

2. RESEARCH DESIGN AND THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

The study approaches the investigation of the varieties of English language research using speeches from drama text of two prominent Nigerian playwrights as data. The research is premised on the theory of language variation and variation in usage. Though the concept of Nigerian English forms the basic background for the study, the idea of evolving varieties within this variety equally forms a strong point of contention here.

3. AIMS AND OBJECTIVES

This research intends to establish and substantiate the fact that indigenous languages have a gross effect on Nigerian English and there are varieties in Nigerian English as the drama (and in essence literature) of a people is a representation of the reality of their lives. We also attempt to prove that ethnic influences on Nigerian English go beyond pronunciation and extend to other areas such as syntax and semantics. Beyond this, the paper intends to study this variety of NE with specific consideration of the cultural background leading to its evolution vis-à-vis the future of NE in the face of ethnic Nigerian Englishes.

4. ABOUT THE DRAMA OF ROTIMI AND OSOFISAN

Ola Rotimi's protagonists are often carved out to be tragic heroes after the order of Greek tragedies as popularised by Aristotle in his *Poetics*. Just as in the Greek texts, he also specialises in writing tragedies and creating tragic heroes who are royal personages with essential human flaws that bring about their misfortunes. His three popular plays, *Kurunmi*(1971) *Ovonramwen Nogbaisi*(1974) and *The Gods are Not to Blame*(1971) have kings as the lead characters and they are Yoruba kings, except Ovonramwen who is Benin. Other adaptations from Greek tragedy include the language of the tragic hero which is of utmost relevance to this paper. Greek tragic heroes, being royal personalities are expected to use sublime and poetic language as that would be the only type befitting their status in society. In adapting this style, Ola Rotimi has used literal translation, mainly, to preserve the grandeur and meaning of Yoruba utterances while rendering them in English language. Thus the speeches of both Kurunmi and Odewale are fraught with instances of, borrowing, literal translation of free sentences and Yoruba proverbs. In his comedy, *Our Husband Has Gone Mad Again* (1971), we find him projecting the comic traits and attributes of the lead character, Lejoka Brown, through the use of a Nigerian English variety spoken with Yoruba lexis, accents and pronunciation. What is clearly evident from these plays is that the characters, even though they speak the English language, are Yoruba.

Generally the theatre of Osofisan is a theatre of humour where the most salient truth and messages are passed across to the audience in a humorous manner. (Lanrele, 1996) The playwright's major means of achieving this is through the linguistic medium where he, like Rotimi, maneuvers the characters to use the English language flexibly so as to reflect their Yoruba and English language backgrounds at the same time. In his attempt at conflating a humorous presentation with the depiction of socio-political realities therefore, the playwrights employ such sociolinguistic contexts as coinage, slang, borrowing, literal translation among others. The intentions of the authors in employing this linguistic style include the need to make their works accessible to a good section of the populace - educated and semi-educated alike thus crossing what Obi Wali (2009) regards as the dead end of African literature. Though the plays are often premiered in Nigerian Universities in Yorubaland, they are intended to be read by all and sundry both in the country and beyond. The next section of the paper draws data largely from plays by the two playwrights mainly to validate the claim that ethnic influences are deducible in Nigerian English.

5. DATA

5.1 THE LEXICON

The lexicon of NE is fraught with a great deal of 'Nigerianisation' which indubitably and almost instantly betrays the ethno-geographical background of the user and hence serves as an index of the speaker's identity. The presence of extra-Anglophonic items in the NE arises out of the difficulty in translating some indigenous words, and the religious origin and socio-linguistic context generally. The native items often reflect in NE as loan words in code mixed sentences and newly coined words visible in sample speeches in the following illustrations from the plays.

5.1.1 CODE MIXING

One feature of regional varieties of Nigerian English is the inclusion of indigenous words from the society and culture to which the English language has been exported. Native words are often included in the expressions of second language users of English either because an accurate equivalent of the word in English is not readily available or because the meaning essence of such words would be lost by an attempt at translation. The instances of Nigerian English in the following statements betray the Yoruba background of the speakers but not as much as the use of Yoruba words in English statements do. The inclusion of Yoruba words is a feature of Osofisan's drama that distinguishes his works because of peculiar inventions that patents his loan style, and the plays are replete with indigenous words inserted into English sentences for various purposes ranging from the etymology of the words which renders them rather 'untranslatable' to personal preference. In the following statements by Mama Kayode, while play-acting as Baba, the leader of the group, we find copious examples:

- (1) MAMA KAYODE: ... Your council officials and the **akodas** harass us minute to minute and collect bribes from us ... Your Marketing Board seizes our cocoa, and pays us only one third of what it sells it to the **oyinbo**. We have no electric, and we still drink **tanwiji** from the stream (*Morountodun*, 65).

The words **akodas**, **oyinbo** and **tanwiji** may not be rendered in English without the real meaning intention of the playwright being distorted. The word **oyinbo** for instance does not only mean European, or American, it extends far beyond that. It

does not mean expatriate since an expatriate may be black in complexion yet 'whiteman' may still be inappropriate because even a very light Egyptian or Arab can be called **oyinbo** in Yoruba parlance. The real impression of the speaker here of the word **oyinbo** is foreign traders with whom cocoa exporting agents do business and these could be of any nationality though they are mainly Europeans. Generally Yoruba speakers use the word **oyinbo** to mean 'fair-skinned' and this is sometimes applied to even Yoruba people who are very light in complexion. The **akoda** word is used to mean guards and/or security agents. The real meaning of the word **akoda** is **a ko ida** 'one that handles the sword' and it is used to designate the king's hit man in Yoruba monarchies. An **akoda** is the one to behead somebody who gets a death sentence. The words 'guards' or 'security officers' are the nearest to it but they still do not fully represent it because the sense of terror attached to the word is not connoted in either of the two. The addition of the 's' suffix to **akoda** is an imposition of the English system of pluralisation on a Yoruba word because of the fact that the word is being used within an English sentence. **Tanwiji** is the Yoruba word for mosquito lava found in stagnant water and is associated with dirtiness by Yoruba people. Rotimi's use of the same idea is seen in the following statement by Lejoka-Brown in *Our Husband Has Gone Mad Again*;

(2) Now, I know you think he is one of those tiny little Sanitary Inspectors who come here every Wednesday morning to peep in your water-pots in search of **mosquito eggs!** (5)

Though **tanwiji** is truly mosquito egg, it is hatched and in the process of maturation hence the appropriate term for it is mosquito lava. The discrepancy between both makes **tanwiji** a more appropriate word in this context.

While agreeing that a word like **tanwiji** has options to choose from in English lexis, some do not and this accounts for the retention of the indigenous words in the following speech:

(3) ODEWALE: May the gods of our fathers – **Obatala, Orunmila, Sango, Soponna, Esu-Elegbara, Agemo, Ogun** – stand by me. (24)

Obatala, Orunmila, Sango, Soponna, Esu-Elegbara, Agemo, Ogun are gods of Yoruba pantheon that are worshipped only in Yorubaland and where Yoruba people are found. The names cannot therefore be substituted without the cult represented by each one of them being wrongly identified.

5.1.2 Coinage of new words

The next set of indigenous items observable in Rotimi and Osofisan are coined words which are used as slang in that they are highly informal, colloquial and some others are of unknown etymology and onomatopoeic. The following speech is an example:

(4) MAMA KAYODE: Hen-hen that's what it is, this dirty, smoky, cob-infested **jagbanjantis!** I bet it's got lice in it too Well, it's under arrest. You're lucky. I cant ask you to detach your mouth, which is exhibit one, Queen versus Baba Alabi, alias Titus, nineteen **gbongbonrongbon** (MTD, 63)

The word **jagbanjantis** is a Yoruba word meaning rubbish, nonsense or trash. It contains no real meaning and always connotes a sense of humour. The case is the same with the word **gbongbonrongbon** which should mean very long or endlessly

long. To say ‘nineteen **gbongbonrongbon**’ really means countless number of years but in a very humorous sense. Rotimi is also fond of using this type of ideophones as seen in the following utterance of Lejoka-Brown:

- (5) LEJOKA-BROWN: Now she’ll come and mess things up **jagajaga** for me...(8)

The playwright later in the Glossary at the end of the play translates **jagajaga** as “A Nigerian pidgin English word for chaos, disorderliness, confusion.”(p79) Borrowed words are common place in Rotimi’s plays and this is exemplified in this song of Kurunmi, lead character in Rotimi’s play of the same title:

- (6) The frog is kicked – **kpa**
It flattens
y-a-k-a-t-a!
on its back
We shall all die
gbere
We shall all die
gbere. (*Kurunmi*, 27-28)

Yakata is the word used in Yoruba language to imply that somebody falls flat. ‘It flattens’ here is therefore tautological and the real intention of the writer may be to say ‘it falls flat’ which is the real meaning of ‘it falls **yakata**. Ordinarily, it is ‘flat’ that **yakata** should be substituted for. **Kpa** is simply onomatopoeic in that it only imitates the sound made by a kick while **gbere** really means ‘forever’. The word **gbere** is most commonly used to bid a dead person farewell and this is the meaning here though in a bitterly sarcastic sense.

Humor is not only expressed through purely Yoruba words in the drama of Osofisan. There are other situations where domesticated English is used with the assistance of native or Yoruba words and the result is often a word such as found in the following exchange between Alabi and the sanitary inspector, here play-acted by Molade and Mama Kayode respectively:

- (7) **Molade:** Sah? Can I go now, sah?

Mama Kayode: Nonsense and sorbodination! I am talking to you and you tell me can I go?

Molade: Sorry sah. But my wife.

Mama Kayode: Shorrop! Concobility! My wife! My wife! Do you ever hear government mention his wife? I mean if the governor were to talk of his wives, private, personal, official and confidential, do you think they will have time to run government? But you, bush man with your only wife, it’s always my wife my wife!
(*MTD*, 62)

Here, the playwright reflects the Yoruba background of the speakers of English by his attempt at spelling the words the way a typical Yoruba man pronounces it. This is responsible for his manner of spelling such words like ‘sir’ as **sah**, **sorbodination** as **sorbodination** though ‘insubordination’ is the word that the speaker really intends to use. The substitution of ‘**sorbodination**’ for ‘insubordination’ is occasioned by the fact that the Yoruba language does not permit nasalised vowels in the initial position. However, the spelling of the word ‘**sorbodination**’ is tailored after the English

language because of the presence of consonant clusters which Yoruba language will not admit though the first and second syllables of the word are not compatible with the English spelling of the word. The words **shorrop** meaning ‘shut up’ and **concobility** clearly reveal that the speaker is a half-educated Yoruba sanitary inspector trying to impress villagers with his spoken English and he confirms this by finally calling his addressee a ‘bush man’, a Yoruba based Nigerian English expression for one who is not exposed to a life of civilisation. The essence of these words is not seen only in the spelling but equally in the process of coinage which is achieved by the admixture of English words and Yoruba spelling and the words (like **concobility** and **sorbodination**) to be neither English nor Yoruba. Coinage here reflects two distinct languages and may not be too easy to pin to either of the languages since **concobility** is neither English nor Yoruba but written after the pattern of English words as evident in the inclusion of the suffix **lity** in the end.

5.2 PHONETIC ASSIMILATION

Instances of phonetic assimilation which point directly at the Yoruba linguistic environment of the speakers are found in the plays as well. The phonological interference which Osofisan slightly touches with the use of ‘sir’ by Molade above is amplified in Rotimi with the following display by Lejoka Brown in *Our Husband Has Gone Mad Again*.

- (8) a. LEJOKA BROWN: [*offstage*] **Ah lef, ah lef, ah lef rai ah lef compana-a-, go**
[*A baritone and tenor duet croons lustily*]

LEJOKA BROWN AND OKONKWO: [*approaching*]

Ai remember when **ai** was a **soljar,**
Ai remember when **ai** was a **soljar,**
Ai remember when **ai** was a **soljar,**
Ai remember when **ai** was a **soljar,**

[LEJOKA BROWN AND OKONKWO march into the living-room.]

Hippy ya ya, hippy hippy ya ya,
Hippy ya ya, hippy hippy ya ya,
Hippy ya ya, hippy hippy ya ya,
Hippy ya ya, hippy hippy ya ya,

[*Sikira kneels in greeting. The Major responds with a quick side glance, then changes the marching tune.*]

One more **rivah** to cross:

One more **rivah,**
One more **rivah,**
One more **rivah,**
To cross.

(*Our Husband...3-4*)

The expression written above is really a humorous version of the instructions given to soldiers on the parade ground and should read something like this:

- (8) b. Ha left, Ha Left, Ha left right ha left company go

I remember when I was a soldier
I remember when I was a soldier
I remember when I was a soldier
I remember when I was a soldier

The playwright intentionally spells such words as **soljar** (soldier), **ai** (I) and **rivah** (river) this way because this is a pseudo-phonetic transcription of how the words would be pronounced in a variety of English such as the one under study. The whole instruction given here is not reflective of what will be in a real parade ground. Thus it is a portrayal of either Lejoka-Brown's level of incompetence as an untrained officer just used in the wars or his short memory.

5.3 CODE SWITCHING.

There have been instances where Osofisan switches completely to Yoruba language or one of its dialects because he finds it contextually exigent to do so. Femi Osofisan's characters once used the Ijebu dialect in a situation where the women in *Tegonni: An African Antigone* decide to curse the Governor. They drop their dresses, bearing their chests, which have been smeared with ashes as they begin to chant wildly:

- (9) a. **É ní bósi !**
- **É le se lè!**
We le dide!
- **Wò tí jègò!**
We le bèrè!
- **Wò tí jègò!**
We le loso
- **Wò tí jègò!**
we le nòga!
- **Wò tí jègò!**
wò tí gbodó mi!
- **wo ti kabuku!**
Wo ti te!
Wo ti kabuku!
wo ti gbèpè!
wo ti gbèpè!
wo ti gbepe!¹

the playwright then translates the curse into English:

- (9) b. It can't happen!
- No, it won't!
You can't stand!
- You've swallowed trouble!
You can't bend!
- You've swallowed trouble!
You can't squat
- You've swallowed trouble!
You can't stretch your neck!
You've swallowed trouble!
You've swallowed torment!
- You've come to grief!

¹ Yoruba is a tone language, but the playwrights do not mark tone in their plays, except for the instances illustrated in Example (9).

You've met disgrace!
 - You've come to grief!
 You've been cursed!
 You've been cursed!
 You've been cursed! (Tegonni, 105)

The playwright remarks later in the footnote that he has “preferred the Ijebu dialect here, just to enhance the oral power of the curse”. (139) A closer look at the curse and the translation would reveal that leaving the curse in the Ijebu dialect does more than that. The translations given in the play are rather inadequate and they do not convey the meaning of the Yoruba words accurately. **Wo ti jego** literally means ‘you have eaten bottle’ and not ‘you have eaten trouble’ offered by the author. **Wo ti gbodo mi** literally means ‘you have swallowed mortar’ and **wo ti kabùkù** can be more accurately rendered as ‘you have come to ridicule/disrepute or, literally translated, you have met ridicule the playwright’s translation therefore cannot disclose the full intentions of a Yoruba person in making this type of utterances. This offers a better explanation as to why the curse is written in a dialect of Yoruba language. The intensity of the curse being invoked on the Carter Ross can only be fully grasped when read in the original form and not the translation and this better explains the reason for the author’s preference for the use of the Ijebu dialect in this case. The premiere production of the play was in the Emory University, Atlanta, USA hence the author’s use of the Ijebu dialect is truly the belief that it shows the intensity of the curse more accurately because the real power of the curse is in the chanting, as indicated by the author. The implication of the place of premiere production on the choice of language is that the playwright is not using the language because he had a mainly Yoruba speaking audience but because that is the best way to achieve his intention in the statements. In *Morountodun*, Osofisan gives a list of songs sung various times in the play at the end of the play and they are written in Yoruba without accompanying English translation. One of such songs is:

(10) a. **Kondo olopaa**
Jaguda lo n gba
Kondo olopaa
Ipata lo n gba
Ye-ye-ye (80)

The song can be translated thus:

(10) b. The policeman’s baton
 Hits the criminal
 The policeman’s baton
 Hits the stubborn
 Yes-yes-yes

The only explanation the playwright offers in the notes is that

Directors need not feel bound to use the same songs, especially where the linguistic circumstances call for other substitutions, although it should be remembered that songs in Yoruba help to preserve the Yoruba locale of the action. (80)

This explanation reveals that the retention of the songs in Yoruba by the author is intentional and is meant to serve a purpose just as is the case with the curses above. Being a partly historical play, it is pertinent that there remain some linguistic signals

in the play to point to the original environment where the story took place. Besides, since the songs are composed in the Yoruba language and are meant to motivate the people to action and sustain their interest, the oral effect is felt more in the original language. In the scene where the same type of motivational song is found in Rotimi, it is intended to keep hope alive in a situation where sickness plagues the town and gloom is a natural reaction. Rotimi however accompanies his by the translation:

- | | |
|---|--|
| (11) a. Ewe gbogbo l'ogun
Ogun gbogbo l'ewe
O ya
E je k'alo
E m'ada l'owo, e gbe koko
Igbo ya, igbo ya
At'onile, at'alejo
At'omode o, at'gba
Igbo ya, igbo ya. | (11) b. All herbs are medicines
all medicines herbs
so, come round everybody
let us all go
into the bush.

Landlord get up,
Guests, join in too.
Everyone, young and old
Into the bush. (17) ² |
|---|--|

As in the case of the curse issued on the Governor earlier, the author's translation here is inadequate and does not reflect the true meaning of some of the Yoruba expressions. For instance **at'tonile, at'alejo** means 'including the native and the stranger/visitor'. **Onile** may mean 'landlord' but in this particular surrounding it implies the opposite of 'guests' which is not landlord but the indigene.

Apart from occasions of complete switch to Yoruba above, characters especially in Osofisan oftentimes mix Yoruba and English statements in a discourse in a manner stronger than mere borrowing of individual native words as earlier examined. Here is an example:

(12) MAMA KAYODE: A riddle? Shall I tell it?

WOMEN: Tell it!

MAMA KAYODE: Listen:

Oruku tindi tindi
Oruku tindi tindi—

WOMEN: **Oruku gba gbo !**

MAMA KAYODE: I say

Oruku is in my hands:

Catch it!

I launch a riddle-o!

MOSUN: **Oruku bi gba omo:**

A thousand kernels

Nestle in a thousand nuts:

We await your riddle-o!

² The translation is copied directly from the printed text of the play, although Yoruba readers will see that there appears to be a misalignment of gloss to text.

MAMA KAYODE: **Oruku tindi tindi**
I launch a riddle-o!

WURA: I catch your riddle-o! (67-8)

And she goes into the thrust of her riddle after this folkloric introduction. Obviously the refrain **oruku tindi tindi** cannot be rendered in English since the meaning essence of the word is in its onomatopoeic nature hence while launching into the story-telling session, Mama Kayode and other characters use both English and Yoruba language for linguistic and semantic effectiveness. Yoruba riddles are often begun with a poser shouting any of such sayings as **aalo**, or **oruku tindi** and it is after the audience reply that the riddle is posed (Olatunji, 1984)

Though instances of code switching are not frequent in Rotimi's plays, there are a few occasions when the characters are overwhelmed or seem to have been carried away and they burst out in Yoruba language as in the following case when Liza narrates her ordeals to Sikira, one of the women with whom she shares a husband in *Our Husband Has Gone Mad Again*:

(13) LIZA: ...When I walked into this house three weeks ago,
I took you for a housemaid, and thought Mama
Rashida was a washer-woman or something.

SIKIRA: [tickled] **O ma se o!** (54)

The Yoruba expression **o ma se o** in essence means 'what a pity' and it comes usually with an outburst of emotion of pity and a feeling of understanding.

5.4 LITERAL TRANSLATION

This is one of the best pointers to ethnic influence on Nigerian English and it is a ubiquitous feature of Rotimi's drama. For instance in the heat of dramatic conflict when the crisis between Odewale and Aderopo is at the climax Odewale accosts Aderopo thus:

(14) ODEWALE: If you think that you can drum for my downfall,
and hope that drum will sound then your head
is not good.

ADEROPO: So be it, I shall greet you in like manner
then... [*prostrating himself*] Your highness,
if you think to have heavy suspicions is wisdom,
then your head is not well. (32)

The real intention in saying 'your head is not good' and 'your head is not well is to say something like 'you must be crazy' or 'you must be out of your mind'. This altercation, though written with English words, betrays the speakers as Yoruba men, using the English language against the backdrop of their Yoruba language and culture. Odewale's speeches betray this tendency most and we have further examples below:

(15) ODEWALE: First he shall be exposed to **the eyes of the world** and
put to shame- the beginning of living death. (24)

(16) ODEWALE: You put words in his mouth. (64)

(17) ODEWALE: When
The wood-insect

Gathers sticks,
On its own head it
Carries Them (72)

In (15) above, **the eyes of the world** is translated literally from the Yoruba phrase **oju aye** which in essence means 'the public'. 'The eyes' in the statement therefore is a figurative expression for public view. Putting words in one's mouth also means suggesting what to say for or assuming a speaker's next statement. There is really no insect called the 'wood insect' in English but there is one in Yoruba called 'arigisegi' whose translation is near to 'wood insect' especially since it lives in the wood and often breaks wood and lifts it in its head. The act of the insect is usually equated with nemesis in Yorubaland.

5.5 THE POETIC

5.5.1 USE OF PROVERBS

The Yoruba language is rich in proverbial sayings which are believed to be a mark of age and wisdom. Proverbs play an essential role in African cultures and the Yoruba is no exception. One incontrovertible feature of the speeches of Rotimi's tragic heroes is their use of Yoruba proverbs and this is especially so because their royal status makes the people expect them to be a repertoire of wisdom, culture and knowledge. The proverbs are often transliterated into English by the playwright as can be seen in the following examples:

- (18) The gaboon viper!
When the gaboon viper dies,
Its children take up its habits,
Poison and all.
The plantain dies,
Its sapling take its place,
Broad leaves and all.
The fire dies, its ashes
bear its memory with a shroud
of white fluff. (*Kurunmi*, 15)
- (19) The bull-frog that rivals the size of the elephant will burst. (29)
- (20) A man who does not want strange foot-prints in his
backyard must fence it up. (29)
- (21) A chicken eats corn, drinks water
Swallows pebbles,
Yet she complains of having no teeth.
If she has teeth, would she eat gold?
Let her ask the cow who has teeth
Yet eats grass. (*The Gods*...26)

These are but a few of the Yoruba proverbs that fill the pages of his tragic plays and they are spoken characteristically by the royalty. The best the author can do for the proverbs is to translate them literally so as to leave the listener to ponder the meanings. Even then the translation may still not represent the meaning of the proverb as in (19) above which should actually read 'the bull-frog that competes with the elephant in

matters of size wants to burst' . An explanatory translation would lose the potency of the words hence literal translation remains the only option for the playwright.

5.5.2 CHANTS AND INCANTATIONS

Yoruba incantations are restricted poetic forms which are mystical in intentions. The incantations are chanted with an expectation of controlling natural and supernatural terrain according to the will of the speaker. This concept is found in the background scene in *The gods are not to blame* where Odewale and Adetusa try to overpower each other and possess a disputed piece of land. Odewale is the first to revert to incantations when he observes that his opponents want to overcome him through the use of physical force and number. He commands;

- (22) What are these before my eyes?
 What are these before my eyes?
 Are they mountains or are they trees?
 They are human beings and not trees
 They are human beings and not mountains
 For trees have no eyes
 Then let these eyes around me close.
 Close, close in sleep, close in sleep
 Sleep... sleep
 (Assailants begin to sway drowsily) (*The gods*, 47)

Adetusa's response shows he is equally versed in the art and is more metaphysical in dimension. He commands:

- (23) ... The plant that rivals the Opa tree in size
 Is killed by Opa;
 The tree that over-reaches the Oriri
 Seeks its own death;
 And the plant
 That entwines its branch
 With the branch of
 Omoluwere
 Will be strangled by
 Omoluwere.
 Drop dead . . . drop dead. . . I say, drop dead . . . (49)

5.6 ALTERNATING CODES OF ENGLISH AND PIDGIN

Even the use of Pidgin English in the plays reflects the Yoruba background of the speakers. Just as Nigerian English pushed its way into prominence and acceptance through consistent usage of Nigerian users of English language, the reality of Nigerian Pidgin English is also confronting language scholars in a manner that may prove difficult to ignore. It is found in Nigerian free speeches and literature where characters use it with impunity though the use is still sectionalized to the illiterate class, the lower class and the uneducated. In the excerpts below from *Morountodun*, Alhaja uses the Standard English while Warder speaks pidgin:

- (24) a. WARDER: Alhaja.... Alhaja! **Oga** dey come! Quick, quick!
 ALHAJAH: (unmoved) Yes?

WARDER: Please, I beg, come. Come he go ruin me, I beg...

ALHAJAH: who?

WARDER: **Oga... Oga patapata**. We head for this place... (21)

(24) b. WARDER: Alhaja.... Alhaja! The boss is coming! Hurry up!

ALHAJAH: (unmoved) Yes?

WARDER: Please, I plead with you, come. Come... he will ruin me, I beg you

ALHAJAH: who?

WARDER: The DSP, the boss. Our superior officer here... (21)

The Pidgin English here, just like Nigerian English in other parts of the texts betrays the Yoruba background of Warder. The word **oga** is Yoruba for 'boss' and **patapata** means 'overall' yet the phrase **oga patapata** really means 'most senior officer' though it may be rendered as 'overall boss' in Nigerian English. What is of paramount interest here is that, whether in using Nigerian English or Nigerian Pidgin English, the Yoruba user of English is easily noticeable. We observe the same usage of the word and others in Rotimi as seen in the following cases:

(25) MAMA RASHIDA: (to POLYCARP) You don finish **patapata**
(47, OHHGMA)

(26) LEJOKA-BROWN:
I say listen,
B.A. Woman, make you run o!
Brother listen,
Doctor woman, **na katakata** o!
If you marry her –
Ugbarugba na him go kill you. . .
Katakata dey come. . . (43)

(27) MADAM AJANAKU: ... Because why? Because una mout'
get one bad teeth inside. And **una** mout' go get **wahala tel-e-e-e una** take dhat
rotten teet' commot! (67)

(28) MADAM AJANAKU: Man wey carry **Ogbono** soup-pot for hand,
and di man wey carry **foo-foo** for head, **na** who go find
who go? (68. ibid)

The word **patapata** above, just like every other indigenous word in the play, is translated in the glossary at the end of the play as 'pidgin for totally, completely' (80). In the sense and context of usage here, **patapata** truly means completely which is a different usage from what we have above where it means 'overall' or 'most senior'. Indeed **patapata** is one item of Nigerian English from Yoruba language which has cut across ethnic boundaries just as **walaha** in (27) above. **Wahala** is a Hausa word now used in Pidgin to mean 'trouble', 'bother', 'harassment', 'inconvenience' or 'discomfort'. It is a noun that is also used as a verb in certain circumstances. **Ugbarugba** is equally a pidgin word for calamity originating from the Igbo language hence we see that some words are crossing tribal boundaries though instances of such are more noticeable in pidgin usage. **Ogbono** and **foo-foo** in example (28) refer to a local soup and a staple food in the Delta and Eastern regions of Nigeria and both are

known and used by Nigerian speakers of English nationwide. Besides, the two items form part of what Ajani describes as transfers from the local languages in the areas of food and others.

6. FINDINGS AND CONCLUSION

The major discovery of the study is that the influences of Yoruba language on Nigerian English transcend the confines of pronunciation though it is included. Lexical choice is an early pointer to the ethnic background of some second language users and this is made readily discernible by the use of indigenous words. The occurrence of native items in a speech will reveal the speaker's regional background as much as pronunciation would do. In the same vein, semantic implications of certain utterances can give away a user's linguistic background just as in the case of the confrontation between Odewale and Aderopo presented earlier in the paper.

Whereas major studies have focused on education as the main criteria in the study of Nigerian English varieties (Jowitt, 2007) certain mother tongue inferences still cut across the boundaries of education. This factor is responsible for situations whereby the ethnic backgrounds of Nigerian users of English are easily detected in their speeches and writing even though they are highly educated. Ethno-linguistic differences will therefore remain an issue to grapple with in the consideration of types of Nigerian English.

An interesting discovery of the work is that coinage can reflect two distinct languages and may not be too easy to pin to either of the languages as in the case of a word like 'concoability' which is neither English nor Yoruba but written after the pattern of English words as evident in the inclusion of the suffix 'lity' in the end. Other words, as found in the course of the study, are fast becoming Nigerian rather than tribal since they are understood and used by most Nigerians in spite of their ethnic background.

One incontrovertible feature of Yoruba based Nigerian English as used in the dramaturgy of Rotimi and Osofisan is the fact that the characters whose utterances are studied are first and foremost first language users of the Yoruba language who bring their knowledge of the Yoruba language to bear on their English usage. The plays further substantiate the claims of ethnic based Englishes in Nigeria since a modicum of the Yoruba language will be required in order for a listener/reader to come to full grasp of the message of the playwrights.

This study reveals that ethnic based NEs are a fact in the linguistic composition of NE and any attempt at standardising NE will have to take their existence into consideration. The fact that the lexicon of the English language itself is made up of a conglomeration of words from other languages especially the members of the Indo-European language family substantiates the position that indigenous words be allowed access into the lexicon of standard Nigerian English especially now that some native items of Nigerian English are already attaining a national status.

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