

## AFRICAN LITERATURE AND THE DELIMMA OF A CORRECT LANGUAGE

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**Abstract:** *This article evaluates literature in terms of language and activates the usefulness of literature. Thus, the main interest in this article is the study of the implication and the importance of dialect in African literature; and as a result, the reader notices that the use of dialect offers a special glamour and beauty to Modern African literary works. Moreover, it makes the reader eager to know the meanings of these words and strange expressions and willing to figure up why they are merged within the standard language. Thus, literature and any piece of writings are the keys to learn a language and build a chance for communication and the development of language.*

**Key words:** *African novels; Language; Non-standard language; Nationalism.*

### 1. Introduction

Literature and language are closely related and this is a fact none can deny. As well as literature naturally includes different linguistic varieties and styles as it is a reproduction of real life through the eyes of an artist which also seems as a picture and an interpreter of people's culture which carries with it the language of that people, their culture, policy, philosophy, and identity.

On the other hand, language is an essential aspect in literature because the way novelist produces his work he does it with and through language which is regarded as a fundamental aspect in our life it is a mirror which could reflect who we are as members of groups - ethnic, national, religious and gender. Thus, the individual is affected by the language that is spoken; where this influence extends to the way of his thinking, perceptions and feelings. Linguistically speaking, verbal communication that is to say, *language* is not just a tool that draws the knowledge and thinking but instead it is the thinking itself, and there is no cogitation naked from symbols of language. Therefore, many writers try to include a specific variety in their works like the use of dialect or vernacular. However, dialect has always been seen as old-fashioned, strange and informal way of speaking, it was also viewed as bizarre when dealing with the study of dialect as a science in relation to an artistic discipline which is literature.

As a consequence for lay people this kind of language is considered as non-standard form of a language and is usually associated with uneducated group of people whereas linguists observe dialect as a form of language that has its own features and characteristics.

### 2. Modern African Literature

Literature consists of a lot of language changes that reflects the real life of an artist as well as it is rich in cultural and ideological aspects by which reflects the similarities and differences of these aspects. Because literature was introduced to us by the West, hence, African literature may decide to follow the dictates of colonial languages or not. However, since orature has an original connection with Africa, then it must be in our indigenous languages.

It is our orature we should sell to the world and to properly convey our experiences, and rebel against the forces of oppression, colonialism, and neo-colonialism, because it is innately ours. What is more, books are the key to learn a language and we can consider children's literature as a substantial tool to build a chance for communication as well as language skills development such as listening, speaking, reading and writing in a given language. Literature evaluates the interest of the learner whether he is young or adult to understand the life's values and activates usefulness of literature. Moreover, the most challenging and demanding portion of teaching a language through literature is the issue of developing the critical thinking and creative capacity of the learners.

Black literature has a rich storytelling heritage and more and more Africans are seizing the opportunity to tell their stories in their own way. The modern African fiction comes as a result of the combination among oral storytelling and Western narrative style i.e. novel. It describes the progress of socio-cultural in African community from pre to post colonial era. According to the German scholar August Seidel the word African Literature was absent in the world until 1896 when he finished his first historical collection of black literature in the form of a large selection of oral literature in his book "Stories and Songs of Africans" where he convinced his European audience to see the wild African and imagine him thinking, feeling, imagining and organizing poetry like all the humanity.

Among the oral literature properties is being a committed literature that doesn't know the logic of art for art's sake neither the expression of emotions and individual selfishness. Generally speaking, oral tradition or orality in Africa can be distinguished into poems, folktales, legends, storytelling, riddles and myths which are models of literary production. It is as portrait of educational literature that is synonymous to say, the whole community is needed because oraliture is the tongue of the idea and values of a collective community, thereon, This kind of literature seems as a mirror which reflects the life of the community in terms of the customs and beliefs and even the environment in which it is taking place.

### 3. The Concepts of Diglossia and Pidgin

Diglossia is a word that originated from the Greek which means a state of being bilingual and this expression was primarily applied in English in 1959 by the linguist Charles Ferguson, on the other word; it is a situation in which a community uses two different varieties of the same language, the way it typically works is that one dialect or language is used in casual everyday speech and we call it as "*low variety*" and here the speaker doesn't pay attention to the grammar rules or how to write in that language it is the language of friendship, family and street. While the "*high variety*" or as it is called also prestigious variety is considered as the first language that is used for more official and formal situations such as in public speaking, taught in schools. In this process, Ferguson defines diglossia as follow;

*"A relative stable language situation in which there is a very divergent, highly codified (often grammatically complex) superposed variety, the vehicle of a large and respected body of written literature, heir of an earlier period or another speech community, which is learned largely by formal education and is used for most written and formal education and is used for most written and formal spoken purposes, but is not used by any sector of the community for ordinary conversation."*

*(Ferguson, Diglossia, 1959: 325)*

On the other hand, pidgins have non-native speakers, they arise because of the need of lingua franca, but if that language survives and becomes the native language of the next generation then it is now a Creole language. For example, Emigrants from several, different countries are working, studying or living in a foreign nations where they are finding themselves in need for language contact, in that case, they develop their Pidgin and it quickly becomes their expanded Pidgin, the language that used for daily purposes as well as their children grow up in environment with that Pidgin language and it becomes their native language that is now a Creole language.

In the light of that, the one may say that both Pidgins and Creoles are fascinating because they are proof that languages are living entities that are constantly changing and adapting to their needs of their speaker.

#### **4. Cultural and Language Aspects in Literature**

African peoples have repeatedly come into contact with peoples from other continents. These successive contacts have in varying degrees marked the linguistic evolution of huge portions of the continent. We know, for instance, that Arabic today has become a mother tongue to many African peoples who initially spoke indigenous African languages.

A literary text contains in its meanings and terms the touch of the aesthetic, as well as the issue of real life such as social, political, and cultural. For Atikins (1952) declares that "Criticism is the play of mind on the aesthetic qualities of literature, having for its object an interpretation of literary value" (Atikins, 1952). In this context, theories are seen as rules, principles, and techniques that are put in an application to a subject or a matter and this is a literary criticism. Criticism on the other hand is a word that derives from the Greek term "Kritikos" which signifies 'to judge'. It refers to the act of explaining and examining literature. The critic was a follower of the book in the early stages of criticism, such as impressionism criticism and journalism, but later on, the concept of monetary movement was developed in the field of academic and cultural criticism by which criticism became a real and effective partner, influential and compelling to see the creative literary writings. In this process, literary criticism is an autonomous domain of research which shows and proves the right or reasonable of the literary work consistently; besides it examines the privilege and deficiency of a literary work and finally evaluates the worth of it.

Furthermore, literature in genders includes the cultural and linguistic diversities which reflect the identity of such a writer or a novelist. In this sense Edward B Tylor says, "A language is a part of culture and culture is a part of language so that the one cannot separate two without losing significance of either language or culture" (Taylor, 1871). In addition to what is mentioned, novels may provide the reader with a wide range of language varieties like sociolects, idiolects and dialects as well as literature in general develops the sociolinguistic competence in the target language. For example, *The Adventure of Huckleberry Finn* a novel which is written by Mark Twain was full of dialect words the same thing with many other works like the African novel *Things Fall Apart* by Chinua Achebe and so on. Hence, the reader of those novels is going to get an idea about living in a specific place North or South, East or West also what it was like to live in such a period of time and how people talked, thought and acted. Thereon, literature whether it is a novel or a poem or drama is considered as an ideal way to teach people the histories and peoples of other time and places as well as to be aware about other cultures and identities.

Linguistic diversity in literature, according to the famous scholar and linguist Duranti in his book *Linguistic Anthropology* is related to many cultural factors

including social class, gender, age, setting and style. In this process, the one may find that many literature works contain a specific language such as language of religion, language of history (wars, victories), language of politics and even language of taboo. As an example of that we have the novel of *Incidence in the Life of a Slave Girl* by Harriet Jacobs which reflects the culture of slavery in the American society. In the light of that, the one may recognize that the use of linguistic and cultural diversities in a novel attracts the reader to keep and enjoy reading literary works, thus, the one may understand that the novel cannot succeed unless the writer could get the reader's attention and interest by using not only figures of speech but also to mix both the cultural and linguistic varieties in the novel because this is a proof of the identity of such a writer as well as a truth that he/she masters both the language and cultural elements in his literary writing.

### **5. The sense of critical thinking in literature**

It is obvious that literature appeared before criticism because the rules derived from the study of literature, where the critic looks at literature and then begins to reveal the places of ugliness, and beauty, to raise the souls honestly what he says, that criticism has changed from one era to another.

On the other hand, the literary criticism of the style defines the method as the way of thinking, or the doctrines of expression, or the picture of words that reflect the writer's thinking and interpretation, knowing that the style of putting words and even thinking of it differs between the writer and the world, and between the writer and others, and the style of the writer between time and other depending on the subject that is talking about. In this process, *Ideas* are the monetary measures to judge the work of the writer and writer himself. *Emotion* is known as the direct impulse to say, an element determines the attitude of the writer towards what he presents. *Imagination* is the language of passion and the means of photography in terms of the writer and sent in the same reader and *Language* which is known as the verbal picture of facts and feelings.

In addition, the standard of our lives relies on the standard of our thoughts. Critical thinking as an intellectual skill and psychological habit includes the art of analyzing arguments, using inductive or deductive reasoning and evaluating thinking with a view to improving it. That is to say, critical thinking is not an easy skill that can be enriched at any time or context but it is the action or process of thinking that may enable the child of Three years old to engage in and contrary even a trained expert can fail in it.

Generally speaking, critical thinking is thinking about thinking in order to improve thinking and critical thinkers attempt to be objective with evidence and argumentation. However, literature plays a big role in both facilitating and developing the skill of thinking critically through reading a short story, a novel a poem or even watching a play; but the question here is How? According to many thinkers and psychologist literature helps the reader to be not only critical thinker but also to develop his reading, listening and even speaking skills. He will be open minded person who understands the world better and he will use cognitive strategies such as asking for examples when something is unclear and be willing to read more works of literature like novels and poems so as to prove his capacities through critical thinking.

In the light of this, a British writer and thinker Riessman (1993) says that "Thinking aimed at forming a judgment and literature aimed at facilitating the job of thinking such a way" (Riessman, 1993). Here the one may see that literature facilitates critical thinking by giving a new ways of seeing and knowing things, it smoothes the

progress of understanding how communication takes place in a given country, thanks to literature the one will think deeply before making decisions.

For a long time, readers discussed and evaluated literature from a set of standpoints. Some of them examined a literary work from a moral perspective bearing in mind how values are appeared in a text. Others may assess a story or a poem in terms of its form; whereas some critics looked at literature to sight what it has been said about society, political, gender roles, or eroticism and from this sense literary criticism is divided in terms of the basis on which it evaluates literary works and making judgments of satisfaction, approval or discontentment.

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### 6. Types of Literary Criticism

The following are some of the fundamental types of literary criticism that may help the reader to identify what a criticism should include:

✓ **Formalist criticism:** 1920 and 1926 represent the stage of formalism maturity and formalist criticism reviews literature as a single, unique form of people's realizations that views neatly at the work itself, analyzing the different aspects of the work as a way of explicating or interpreting a text moreover, Formalism is a tendency to give preference to form and aesthetic values more than the content of literary work and what it contains an idea, imagination or feeling

✓ **Gender criticism:** gender studies have been originated during the feminist movement where critics started exploring, testing and assuming the role of each gender in a piece of literature. Thus, this type of criticism tests images of men or women in literature as well as explores the influence of the sexual identity on the formation of literary works.

✓ **Mythological criticism:** This type of criticism is a combination of anthropology, psychology, history, and comparative religion in order to explore how the text uses myths and symbols to various cultures and eras, in this sense, the principle notion of mythological criticism is an archetype that analyses characters, symbols, situations, or images to find a deeper concept; according to Northrop Frye, archetypes is a symbol, usually an image, which recurs often enough in literature to be recognizable as an element of one's literary experience as a whole. And we may take the example of Harry Potter which is a common mythological part of literature, working on the notions of myths, history, signs, and epochs. Another example that mentioned by the critic Joseph Campbell, in his literary works such as *The Hero with a Thousand Faces*, this book explains how the journey of the hero with the same epic personalities and circumstances appear in effectively in each culture.

✓ **Reader-response criticism:** This type of criticism tries to draw out what occurs in the mind of the reader while understanding a text and it overlaps with gender criticism in discussing how men and women look and read the same literary text but with different assumptions. This kind of critics might also seek to examine a particular text on his or her own ideas or values. For example, one might think about how a special character gives the impression or sensation of being admirable or unlikable and why. On the other hand, one might reflect on how one's religious, cultural, or social values affect readings.

✓ **Sociological criticism:** Like historical criticism, this may analyze the social contents of a literary work and evaluates a given text whether implicitly or explicitly in

a cultural, economic, or political way. Sociological criticism studies literature that has been written or received in terms of culture, economics, and politics.

### **7. English Is a *Lingua Franca***

One of the complicated questions in modern philosophy and social sciences is "what is identity?" Or "who am I?" the debate over this notion has puzzled many philosophers since the time of the ancient Greeks while the question on the interrelationship between language, culture and identity caught the interest of many sociolinguists, cultural researchers and theorists such as the English philosopher and leader of the Enlightenment age John Lock, the German psychologist and the developer of the theory of the Identity Crisis Erik Erikson and the Canadian philosopher Charles Taylor who have particularly looked upon what makes someone unique and the qualities that go along in forming one's identity.

In support of the scholar Taylor a famous linguist researcher, identity is not only a network or moral goals and principles that structure a person's life and help him/her actions, but also it crucially depends on one's relationship and interactions with others in a given community. It is in these interactions and dialogues with others people that one knows who he/s is, where he/s stands and what is the worth and importance him/her. Moreover, language reflects culture as it also serves to maintain one's identity and self-belonging. Among the prominent expressions that are culture-bound and represent part and parcel of every society are proverbs through which a given groups' identity is embodied as well as constructed.

As a result, society is a prominent element in the construction of identity. This particular clue of society and identity finds resonance in literature where it takes hold of various literary products among them the African literature which plays a vital role in describing and questioning the issue of identity and sense of belonging. Moreover, the writer may thus choose to use an indigenous African language to address fellow Africans who speak and identify with that language, because it is the language of their childhood, of their dreams and their ancestors. But the writer's immediate audience will be fairly limited in many cases, considering the extent of home- language diversity in many parts of the continent.

### **8. African Literature and the Question of Language**

Literature is an expression of the feeling of any human being as well as it is known as the mirror of the society, nevertheless, it always seems as a matter of dilemma when it comes to the subject of African literature where a lot of critics and analysts unable to find sublime and stable definition concerning what is African literature. Some define it as a literature that describes the reality of Africa in all its dimensions, including the struggles with the dominant power on the continent and conflicts within it, whether the writer is from an African descent or others.

Whereas others disagree with this definition like the poet Christopher Okigbo who sees that African literature is simply a literature that exists in Africa. On the other hand, most of them go beyond this definition and view that African literature is the literature of the sub-Saharan regions accordingly the Sahara divided Africa into two parts: a Northern part of Arab Islamic states and a Southern part of sub-Saharan Africa or as it is known as "Black Africa".

In addition to that, perhaps the most appropriate definition of the issue of African literature is what we find when the Nigerian novelist Chinua Achebe goes on to say that African literature has a set of associated units, that is to say, is the total number of national and ethnic works of literature in Africa. However, many views have equally

been expressed about national identity in general and about the identity of African nations in particular. Most discussions of identity issues agree that there are objective criteria for determining identity and objective markers of identity.

Among all what it has been said, Language here plays a vital role in identifying the African literature. Language has been regarded as a dialectical issue among African critics and writers. In the middle of the plight for the search of African cultural identity, besides, there was a keen disagreement over the position of English, and the European languages that are brought by colonialism generally on African literature, from the things just mentioned, Africans divided into two parts of the dispute, on one hand, a part believes that the colonizer imposed English language on the African tongue, and it is for the benefit of the African writer to use this foreign language and adopt it to dispatch his literature to the world in a velvet glove. On the other hand, a section sees that the true liberation cannot take place without the revivification and fulfillment of authentic African languages as well as English is the language of the colonizer, which cannot be an African language in any way.

### **8.1. English VS National Language**

In the middle of the most famous writers of this opinion are authors such as Chinua Achebe and Wole Soyinka, as well as a wide range of young writers in general such as Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie and others. Those authors view that the English language due to colonialism became a fact that imposed by a large segment of the African peoples in the continent which cannot be avoided or denied.

Therefore, it is incumbent on the African writer to use English in order to transfer his voice first to his people and second to the world, taking put in a favorable the fact that the English language is a universal language with widespread throughout the world, and one of the factors that support the status of those authors is that African languages are too many which they vary from each other. It is thence difficult for the writer to convey his literary work to all these peoples who have different African languages. In this process, Chinua Achebe sees that using English can be regarded as an opportunity to employ the weapon of colonialism against colonialism itself. As a consequence, he calls for the idea of owning the language of the colonizer and making it pronounces the language of the peoples that colonized it, and reflect their culture and identity, which has long been obliterated by several actions.

All the same, it is obvious to agree about how difficult it is to communicate many languages among one continent. In addition, many African languages do not have clear and agreed writing systems. As it is known that many people of black continent used the idea of *Orature* or oral literature only without the use of paper and pen at all. The most notable example is the language of the Igbo tribes, the native language of Achebe. Even so, English comes here in order to summarize all this effort and present itself as a language of communication available and accessible to all different sects.

### **8.2. The Dilemma of a Correct Language**

On the other side of the issue of African language and literature, there is the issue of English language in which there is a completely opposite view in this regard supported by the writer and thinker of Kenya Ngugi Wa Thiong'o who is one of the most prominent advocates of writing in African mother languages. Thus, he believes that the true liberation and emancipation of colonialism can only be accomplished through the revival, restoration, and development of the African language through literature, art and culture. In an interview in 2013 on the BBC titled "English is not an African language," Wa Thiong'o points out his view by saying; "Can you imagine a novel

that is attributed to English literature but it is written in Chinese?" The thing that gives an idea about the importance of a given language that used in a literary work.

That's why; the language according to Wa Thiongo is an extremely dangerous weapon in the hands of the colonizer to control the sons of his colonies from inside. In addition, Language facilitates the assimilation into the intellectual, ideological and social systems at the expense of the original identity. At the same time, it is the most important weapon in the hands of colonial peoples to achieve their independence and independent existence.

Moreover, language is identity and literature is the image that embodies the identity of the author in the eyes of readers. In this context comes the role and the importance of translation to activate the literary text so as for the issue of multilingualism and languages and the difficulty of cultural communication between them, Wa Thiongo presents translation as a viable solution. At the same time as there are many literary works that have reached the fame and affection around the world many times more than it has reached in their mother countries thanks to the translation which was the most important achievement. As soon as a literary work goes out into the open air, if we may say so, it has escaped the grip of its author and has its own independence. Then whenever the writer is absent in his person and departs from this world, leaving his works and ideas behind him wandering the whole world by the currents of cultural exchange and knowledge among peoples.

## 9. Conclusion

In support of to Schilling-Estes, a professor of Linguistics, language is an essential aspect in literature because the way novelist produces his work he does it with and through language which is not just a tool that draws the knowledge and thinking but instead it is the thinking itself, and there is no cogitation naked from symbols of language. . As a result of all what mentioned before the one may understand that the main interest in this article is the study of the implications of dialect in African literature especially Modern African Novels; and as a answer, the reader notices that the use of dialect offers a unique glamour and attractiveness to this kind of African literary works. What is more, it makes the reader raring to go to know the meanings of these words and expressions that are regarded as a weird but wonderful in the same time and willing to figure up why they are merged within the standard language. Thus, literatures as well as any piece of writings are the keys to learn a language and build a chance for communication and the development of language.

For this motive, literature is considered as the mirror of all sciences that contains a set of written texts like novels, poems, short stories and plays which are relating to fiction and transfer a specific message.

Literature, in general, includes many linguistic varieties and styles as it is a reproduction of real life through the eyes of an artist as well as it is rich in cultural and ideological aspects by which reflects the similarities and differences of these aspects. A lot of scholars interested in the phenomenon of dialect use in novels more than ever dialectologists. Hence, it is of crucial importance to mention that there is a wide range of different varieties related to non-standard English that are used in modern literature nowadays, for example the use of Black English vernacular in most American literary works since it enables the author to portray his own experience and adventure by drawing an authentic picture of different varieties of language in order to make reader more involved in reading such kind of novels and stories.

Moreover, literature is considered as an expression of the feeling of any human being as well as it is known as the mirror of the society, nevertheless, using dialect in

literature makes the artistic work more richer, complex and more interesting as well as attractive. Also, many researches improved that novels including such kind of mixture of languages (Standard language & dialect) has contributed to the outstanding success of literature.

Generally speaking, the use of non standard language is a good contribution to diversity and characterization, which reflects the folkloric beliefs of various characters. The combination of styles in literature seems to be enjoyable and may encourage its spread among authors. What is more, lots of African writers and novelists such as Chinua Achebe, and Wole Soyinka, plus Ngugi Wa Thiong'O, in addition to Ayi Kwei Armah, as well as Cyperian Ekwensi, with Camara Laye, besides Nadine Gordimer and scores of others have tried to go forward activities in literature as fiction and poetry works that are based on both African reality and African identity in all its complexities which go beyond political and racial compulsions. Adding up to that, they strongly search for African identity through their literary works where they have the same opinion that the African novelist should write in his African indigenous languages.

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