

## LANGUAGE DEBATE IN THE DEVELOPMENT OF AFRICAN WRITTEN LITERATURE

*Maxwell Mpotsiah*

This study seeks to examine the debate on the language used in the development of African written literature. Such a need has resulted in the emergence of two different schools of thought, i.e., ‘Relativists’ and ‘Universalists’. The study further presents an assessment on the historical review of the debate, examines the two different forms of ideological orientations and the basis of their arguments towards the development of African written literature. However, the researcher’s standpoint is also explored in order to critique the nature of the arguments that are raised in support of these ideological orientations. The study also concludes that the type and the source of language to be used to discuss Africa’s lone experience is not an important agenda that should be considered at all in African written literature. Rather, enough attention must be given to the presentation of the Africa’s rich values, traditions, philosophy and colonial experience; and this will go a long way to help Africa regain its ever-soiling stuck image in the outside world.

Keywords: *language debate, African literature, written literature, Relativists, Universalists*

### **1 Introduction**

The debate on which language (either indigenous or foreign) to be used to write African literature dates back to several years ago (see Ukam, 2018; Ndede, 2016; Eme & Mbagwu, 2011; Wiwa, 1992; wa Thiong’o; 1986). This is because the African literary writers were caught in the act of linguistic dilemma (Nwabunze, 2016, p.76) as to who qualifies to be an African writer and

who does not qualify to be so based on the medium of expression used to carry out Africa's message or story to the rest of the world. By this development, an African writer is obliged to choose a particular language or medium of expression which can help to contextualise an African way of life and its identity.

In this regard, the call for foreign and/or indigenous language to be the mode of transporting Africa's message and to create awareness through the exposure of its hidden or an open truth about Africans and their culture has received a great harvest of scholarly attentions. Some of the scholarly works in the area of language debate were carried out by researchers who dwelled so much on how culture, language and evolution can contribute to the development of African literature (Anaso & Eziaba, 2014; Boyejo, 2011), the use of language and theme as a form of writing African literature (Yakubu, 2014; Obiechina, 1990), African literature and the use of English language (Amase et al, 2013; Eyisi & Ezeuko, 2008; Achebe, 1975a), the language of African literature (Adeseke, 2016; wa Thiong'o, 2007; Wiwa, 1992), the anamnesis in the language of African literature writing (Djebar, 2007), the language and the identity of African literature (Adejunmobi, 1999; Owomoyela, 1992), African literature in second language (Irele, 2000; Emenyonu, 1995) among others are all part of research areas that have been explored over the years.

However, there appears to be lack of attention on the nature of the debate that was carried out from the varied perspectives (i.e., 'Relativists' and 'Universalists') in order to influence a discussion on the development of African written literature. Such a need represents the gap that the present study tries to explore in order to indicate whether or not the views expressed by 'Relativists' and 'Universalists' have a great influence in a traditional African literary work as a whole. As a result, the core aim of the study is to seek to (a) assess various viewpoints expressed in terms of the language that is to be used in developing African written literature and (b) to critique the appropriateness or otherwise of the debate within the context African written literature.

### 1.1 The Concept of Literature

Literature has been identified as a work of art that concerns human society (see Nwabunze, 2016; Agyekum, 2013; Amouzou, 2007). This is because it involves the actions and inactions of human behaviour in a manner that reflects a particular instance of social activities. Again, literature is characteristically nurtured to serve as a source that premier everyday life reality of the people

as well as seeking to serve “as a satellite on the society” (Agyekum, 2013: 14) so that “untainted picture and true image of human behaviour” (ibid.) could be revealed.

According to Nnolim (1988: 6), literature represents that writing which primarily deals with a make-believe world, and whose language is highly connotative rather than denotative, symbolic rather than literal; figurative rather than plain; and whose ultimate aim is to produce an aesthetic effect to reflect the lives of the people and their society. Okune (2011: 127) also maintains that literature has always dealt with the core values of the life of the people and their living experiences in the society as a whole. Since those experiences often reflect the needs of the people, literature only seeks to practicalise itself as a therapeutic weapon of the society with a view to correct the imbalance that has been occasioned by flaws and human errors (ibid.). This development is determined by the fact that literature provides a certain form of model that champions the course of societal needs, values and visions so that the ills in the society can be corrected to reflect the acceptable practices of life.

## 1.2 The Development of African Written Literature

African written literature emerged out of its oral traditional story-telling form (i.e. oral literature) (see Nwabunze, 2016; Agyekum, 2013; Angmor, 2001; Amouzou, 2007). This form of art (i.e. oral literature) was derived out of an indigenous fireside narrative which contained stylistic traces of the verbal arts and people’s traditional values (Angmor, 2001: 39). The main aim of this art was to seek to educate and orient its members about the values of African society (Nwabunze, 2016; Boyejo, 2011), to conserve the ideals of the people and forestall or correct abuses in African society (Angmor, 2001: 44).

However, the influx of the European community into the world of African society, the introduction of formal education and African’s continuous engagement with European culture and language over a period provided a platform for a change in the way Africa’s story is being told and presented from its oral traditional story-telling to a written form. Through this process, Africa’s story has often been represented to encounter itself with the highly regimented and stereotyped language of its colonisers (Gikandi, 2003: 11) in order to communicate to its people that Africa has had, since time immemorial, traditions that should be respected and a culture to be

proud of (Okpewho, 1992: 293) within the remit of European language to serve as its form of presentation.

Since then, African written literature emerged to champion the collective mark of the people as well as a canon for Africa's traditional heritage and practice (Agyekum, 2013). According to Amouzou (2007: 330), African written literature is a separate entity and therefore, departs from all other forms of literature. This is because it has its own unique traditions, models and norms which make it solely different from European and other literatures (*ibid.*). In this sense, Africa's central values are often maintained by the writer through the literary description of ideas in words that reveals the much more growing concerns of Africa's social problems and its unpardonable colonial experience. This development has made African written literature to be described as a product of lived experiences for its people as well as the raw material for its writers to set up an African agenda.

### 1.3 What is a language?

Language has been the only means through which people can communicate and share ideas about their experiences in life. Such a means only occurs in the form of speech, writing and/or gesture that is usually developed or acquired within a system of arbitrarily structured symbols. According to Sapir (1921: 8 as cited in Lyons, 2002: 3), language is purely human and non-instinctive method used in communicating ideas, emotions, and desires by means of a system of voluntarily produced symbols. These symbols are seen, in the first instance, as auditory which are often produced by various organs of speech. Such a fathom of reality makes it reflective of the fact that language is a sole human activity; and as a result, it is used to influence the thoughts and also shape the way human beings see things around their respective domains (*ibid.*).

The interesting nature of a language is centred on the culture of the people within a society. By this, language reflects what the people do, their perception, their system of values and how their social and economic lifestyles are formed to influence their culture. Such a development makes it possible for language to be seen as the only medium of expression of the people and the human society is the provider of beliefs and manners in the society which are expressed and lived by the people (Eme & Mbagwu, 2011: 116). This argument seeks to suggest that every society has a knowledge of a language that defines its socio-cultural worldview and practices. Therefore,

language and society are characteristically co-dependent and represent a critical domain in human life and development.

### 1.3 The Role of Language in the Development of Written Literature

Language has been an important element in human life. As such, Essien (1990 as cited in Eme & Mbagwu, 2011: 115) describes it as the “quintessence of humanity”. This is because it is a universal product that allows people to communicate and talk to others. wa Thiong’o (1986: 16) admonishes the fact that language remains obviously inseparable from a community of human being which has a specific form and character, a specific history, and a specific relationship to the world of the people. Sapir (1963: 162) emphasizes that every human being is at the mercy of a particular language which has become the medium of expression for the society in which one lives. The crust of the matter in this regard is to point to the fact that the real world does not exist alone for the social activity to be ordinarily understood and striven, but as a society well-grounded with a language from its people who always want to foster some form of relationship through communication and interaction.

Even though language grows and evolves over time, it becomes the surest way for the written literature to provide a distinctive means of realities and ideas to the people. This is because the life of the people in any given society is believed to be embedded in the language used and its written literature in order to response to their needs (Nwabunze, 2016). According to Ndede (2016: 3), language exists within a written literature; and that both written literature and language are eclectically interwoven in one simple form in order to speak to the people. This sense of seeing literature as defined and described by the existence of a language in which literature is written is quite limiting since human experience forms the basis of written literature and language is used as just a vehicle to carry out such an experience home (ibid.). Nwabunze (2016: 72) has also maintained that there is no written literature that can exist without language since language is used as the pre-requisite tool for any literary work to strive. To him, without language there can never be any written literature where a writer can exercise his or her artistic impulse. This, therefore, points to the fact that language is the critical instrument for the creation of literature (ibid.).

By this development, one can argue that language and written literature have a very common cooperative value. As such, they have become a social product as well as a fulcrum to carry out the experiences of human activities in the world. This is so because written literature is

commonly transmitted through language in its universality and in its particularity as a language of a specific community with specific history and value system (wa Thiong'o, 1986: 15). With this relationship, the use of language as a source of written literature forms a combined force in visualising the reality of people's identity from different cultural perspectives and diversities.

## **2 Language Debate: A Historical Perspective**

After independence from the imperialists' rule, Africa community was found to be in a tattered force. A situation that took African continent away from a state of nationhood and further kept it into the struggle for the search of its self-identity. It is because Africans believe that the influx of foreigners has derailed their rich cultural legacy, thereby making them addictive to the pastiness of colonial authorities (see Onwumere & Egbulonu, 2014; Palmer, 1981). Such a force affected the way they speak and write, and the type of language that could be used and made easily applicable in communicating their own socio-economic needs as a continent to the entire world.

This development became a social reality in the literary world where writers and critics of Africa literature have had a problem with the sort of language to be used to address the core issues in the Africa continent. Such an exercise became much more profound after series of international engagements by members of creative writings from Africa (see Ukam, 2018; Nwabunze, 2016; Adeseke, 2016; Ndede, 2016; Wali, 2007). Some of these engagements included 1962 Makerere Conference of African Writers of English Expression in Makerere University College, Kampala (ibid.) and The Great Literature Debate of 1968–1969 at the University of Nairobi which unfortunately led to the abolition of English Department in that institution (i.e., University of Nairobi) and the Teaching of Africa Literature in Kenyan Schools as a whole (Lillis, 1986). The core item discussed was to look at the best way that writers from Africa could use language to deal with issues that affect Africans. Those present in all of these conferences agreed to the fact that language constitutes the only means through which an individual can develop his/her thinking and also determine cultural thought, perception, worldview and the reality of the people in the society (Sherzer, 1987: 295). With this common ground of recognising on the use of language as an important social act in human development, the problem then, however, has to do with the type of language to be used to express the sense of Africa's values and realities, since Africa continent is

well endowed with different languages and dialectal differences (see Nwabunze, 2016; Adeseke, 2016).

Interestingly, a discussion that started as a fruitful deliberation, later, ended up in a very tendentious and ‘fistful’ discourse amongst its members because of a strong disagreement on a particular language type (thus, foreign or local) that has to be used as the core instrument to engage African audience. After the abrupt endings of these conferences, the debate on the type of language used in Africa’s written literature became so remnant all over Africa. As a result of this development, two different stratified schools of thought emerged, with each group trying to propagate a varied hegemonic standpoint on this subject matter. These views are grouped into ‘Relativist’ and ‘Universalist’ (Mazrui, 1992: 65) or what Udofia (2011: 90) describes as the ‘Radical/Revolutionary’ and the ‘Liberal’ respectively. Even though the fundamental output of these views is to accept that written literature can be achieved through “language” from ‘different tongues’ (Whorf, 2012: 307) in order to form a certain pattern of thought with personal and socio-cultural systems of classification, influence, and memory and the aesthetic judgement of the people (Lucy, 1997: 294); yet, there seems to be no way out to find a solution to this fracas. Up till date, this debate has attracted much needed attention and currency in the African literary arena; and has therefore arisen to become a regular continental curzon in current literary studies.

## 2.1 Examining Various Views: Relativists versus Universalists

### 2.1.1 Relativists’ Approach

The Relativists’ view to the language debate is sometimes described as a radical approach (Udofia, 2011). According to those who hold this view, they believe that the use of African language in the writing of its literary text is the best and obviously indispensable in the quest for an authentic African written literature. They further “consider non-Africa languages less than adequate in conveying an Africa cultural-cognitive essence” (Mazrui, 1992: 68). To them, literature is about the life experiences of the people and that the only way to reach out to the people is through the use of their language as a medium of communicating those experiences back to them.

Mazrui (1993, p.352) has argued that the core value of Relativists’ approach was premised out of the fact that the mental liberation of Africans is to be seen in terms of reducing the

imperialists' linguistic holds on the continent by elevating the indigenous African languages to a more central position in an African society. This is to say that the effort by African writers to write in their indigenous languages is not only an exercise for reaffirming the dignity of African languages; but also, a modest attempt to counteract the influence of the imperialists' languages on African minds (*ibid.*). Such a development makes it possible for the people concern to relate so well to the core practicality of various events in their respective communities. This view has been widely championed by some literary luminaries, with its front runners such as Ngũgi wa Thiong'o (1986), Wali (1963), Nkosi (1981), Kunene (1992), and a few others (see Ukam, 2018; Nwabunze, 2016; Adeseke, 2016; Ndede, 2016).

The argument generated in support of the use of local language in the writing of Africa literature is meant to provide an African literary system that is imbued with African's way of life. This position holds, because one sees African literature to be the literature of the Africans and as such, it must therefore be created to protect the sterling values of an African worldview. This worldview presents the culture of the people which includes their history as well as their philosophical value. In this regard, Wali (1963: 20) sees the whole acceptance of foreign languages as the inevitable medium for the writing of African literature is a misdirected mission which has no place of advancing African history and culture. He further argues that until these African writers and their Western midwives accept the fact that any true African literature must be written in African languages, such writers would then be identified as people merely pursuing a dead end which can only lead to sterility, uncreativity and frustration (*ibid.*). What this is seeking to suggest is the fact that the use of foreign languages to express Africa's experience is literarily unacceptable. This is because Africa's stories cannot be told to relent itself to the journey of making sure that the rich cultural philosophy of the people will be harnessed and projected to give credence to African identity and personality through the use of foreign language (see Eyisi & Ezeuko, 2008). To this end, the best way to realise Africa's sense in its written work is to use the language of the people in order to nip a certain social reality out of their own experiences.

Another writer who sees the use of foreign language(s) in expressing African reality as something wrong is Ngũgi wa Thiong'o (1986). According to him, seeing Africa's experience to be expressed in foreign language(s) is entirely incongruous and further seen as a gradual process of decolonialising the minds of the people in order to make them mentally dehydrated into the



colonised world of their masters (*ibid.*). The basis of Ngũgi's argument is that African writers own it as a duty and a responsibility of making use of their respective local languages so that their target audiences and readers, who are the obvious members of their communities, could feel the impact and relate to things around them so easily without a problem. Here, Ngũgi is just trying to underscore the key role of an advocacy that seeks to suggest that Africans are able to relate so well in their personal welfare better when they interact in their own indigenous dialects and languages. This is because the indigenous dialects and languages define the people and make them unique in their own way. It also makes the people to be accustomed to their own beliefs, traditions and the sterling spiritualism of 'we-feeling', communalism and patriotism (see Gyekye, 1998; Sarpong, 1974). Therefore, writing in a particular local language makes the people and the entirety of African community feel comfortable, feel at ease, feel at home and see the writer(s) as one of their own and further allow them to come to a closer contact with some of the issues expressed in the text. Now, the real argument is to remind all African writers to begin writing in their native languages in order to get rid of foreign languages which are often used to express an African experience to its people. By this, any literature written by Africans in a colonial language is not to be considered as an African literature; rather, it should be seen as an 'Afro-European literature' which is meant to be used as literature for the elite class of Africans since the large majority of Africans cannot necessarily speak or read in any of these European languages (Behrent (2008) as cited in Udofia (2011: 91-92)).

Again, Nkosi (1981) does not see the need for Africans to share their experiences in foreign languages. He sees such development as unfortunate, utterly hopeless and also shows that the writer concerned is culturally 'incomplete' in thought. He believes that the development of such an attitude gives a clear indication that those writers involved have learnt to culturally adore, and perhaps overestimate the value of a foreign tongue in their writings to the detriment of their own mother tongue which serves as the pivot of their cultural identity (Bamgbose, 1995: 78). Nkosi (1981: 19) further maintains that those writers have a certain insurmountable obstacle placed in the way towards the full expression of an African experience and this is something that falls short of their true ideal as Africans. By this, there seems to be a common belief that people who write in foreign languages are only trying to falsify Africa's rich stories out of a real situation to a disillusionive world of idealism. In this case, the reality of the African world is not felt and expressed properly in the writers' figurative work. This, therefore, means that the focus of the African

literature is panelled to resonant with its colonial masters and will not be able to form “a formidable drawback to Africa’s literary creativity” (Mutiti 2011: 147) since most of the African ideas may have been carried out “in an alien linguistic mode of expression” (ibid.). This then paves the way for an African reader to be drawn into the economy of disbelief and social disillusionment.

Kunene (1992) also supports this view and believes that any of the languages in Africa should be used to trace out African’s way of life in whichever forms of genres (i.e., drama, prose fiction and poetry) that the individual writer desires to explore within. Kunene further maintains that the language of the people shows who they are, how they do their things and their socio-cultural philosophy that underpin their existence as people in a society (ibid.). Therefore, such philosophical values in writing through the use of their own indigenous language are completely non-negotiable at all. As a result, African writers who write in foreign language are already part of foreign institutions and they have, therefore, adopted foreign values and philosophical attitudes, which obviously seek to make them members of that culture (ibid.: 32). As such, these writers cannot be said to be African cultural representatives who write in another language; because in spirit, at least, they speak from the perspective provided for them through the effective apparatus of mental control exercised by their former colonial masters (ibid.). These writers who are much more engrossed in this practice can be described as ‘lost friends’ (Peters, 1964), since they cannot use words from their own mother tongue to express the value of African’s rich cultural experience to the world; but rather becoming the sole apostles to the most adopted foreign values and philosophical attitudes which only seek to make them ‘Africanly’ acculturated. This situation only creates a culture of ‘disownership’ and lack of respect in the development of Africa’s values; and further goes to suggest that Africa’s identity is made possible under the quarry and control of foreign language as the sole medium for telling its story.

### 3.1.2 Universalists’ Approach

The Universalists’ view is in a great anathema to the opposing views of the Relativists, even though the core target of these views is to look at the best form of language that can be used to express African’s way of life in its entirety. What appears to have been forgotten in the light of the Relativists’ views is the fact that those people who were once colonised by the foreigners have now acquired the languages of such people (foreigners or colonists), redesigned it, remade it and domesticated it to suit the philosophical sense and purpose of their culture (Rushdie, 2010). With

this account, the Universalists believe that using a foreign language to communicate African's worldview should not be seen as an intellectual crime is justified, since a foreign language does not make an individual writer lose his/her sense of Africanism. Rather, it is the surest way of presenting Africa's world to the wider social communities in a manner that will project and help regain its lost identity as a continent perceived to be "dark" (Innes & Lindfors, 1978: 3), 'primitive' and "infantile minds" (Amouzou, 2007: 331). This therefore stands to believe that in using a foreign language in African written literature, every aspect of African's life and philosophy is shared and explained vividly to enhance the unique identity of an African personality. This view became valid model that is championed by the likes of Achebe (1975a), Wiwa (1992), Mphahlele (1997), Adejunmobi (1999) and others (see Ukam, 2018; Nwabunze, 2016; Adeseke, 2016; Ndede, 2016).

In matters of language in the development of African literature, the common underlying matrix is based on the kind of information that is presented to the target audience. And so, how a particular language is used and harnessed in a literary writing by an individual writer to carry out a specific function is obviously too pedestrian to the cultural needs of an African written literature. This is what Achebe (1975a: 62) tries to advocate and comes to terms with the fact that African writers can write in a foreign tongue and abandon their mother tongue if he or she so wishes. He believes that this can never be a bad idea at all. This is to admonish the fact that African writers do not have any obvious choice to use their own local languages in their literary writings; because many of these local languages do not have orthographic forms (Alex, 2022; Eme & Mbagwu, 2011; Heine & Nurse, 2000) which can therefore be used as a solid platform to share and explain to the external societies around the world on the practical nature of Africa's worldview, the philosophical culture of its people and their real life experiences (see Gyekye, 1998; Sarpong, 1974). As a result, using foreign languages then becomes the best way to contextualise the nexus of Africa's reality. By this argument, Achebe is seeking to suggest that foreign languages have been with Africa since its colonial days; and as such, those languages have come to stay and to live with the people of Africa forever (see Morris, 1998; Widdowson, 1994; Kachru, 1986). So, irrespective of the nature of the literary forms in focus, the foreign languages can be used to carry the weight of an African experience and its worldview in a way that will be in a full communion with its new African surroundings (Achebe, 1975a: 62) in order to enhance the development of Africa's literary tradition.

Wiwa (1992: 155) also presents a view point on the use of foreign language in writing African literature. To him, Africans have “a common colour or certain common beliefs or a common history of slavery and exploitation” (ibid.), yet they are found to have several divergent linguistic backgrounds (see Nwabunze, 2016). These divergent backgrounds often make it possible for intra-community interaction and not for inter-community engagement purposes (ibid.). However, since Africans have common colonial experiences, it becomes a bit easier for African writers to express their literary thoughts in a language being introduced by their colonial masters so that their writings could receive wider audiences or readers. This does not in any way reflect the fact that the African sense and its humanistic ethos are going to be out of place in literary discussions. He maintains further that as far as he lives, he is going to “remain a convinced practitioner and consumer of Africa literature” (Wiwa, 1992: 157) written in a foreign language because it is the grammar and the semantics of this foreign language that has made him appreciate the perspective of African society better in the sense that enables him to project the core values of African philosophy genuinely without any dint of equivocation (ibid.). This is to say that Wiwa is well engrossed in the use of a foreign language and that he does not see anything wrong with any writer who chooses to write in another language apart from his or her own. To this end, such a person is working in the spirit of Africa’s agenda and its tradition.

Adejunmobi (1999: 589), who whirls his wings into this debate, argues that using a local language in writing Africa’s stories will only reflect the parochial concerns within the writers’ own immediate community and will not, however, help in providing the much-needed mallet to fight back the western world and their oppressive motives during the days of colonialism. He maintains that the best way of letting the imperialists feel the danger in colonialism in the land of Africa is to write back in their own language which can therefore serve as a common political and culturally neutral background to provide a sterling debate that projects and presents the focus of Africa state in reference to the period before, during and after colonialism. To him, African literature written in European languages represents the best form of art par excellence. And this is done to promote the most self-conscious state of Africanism (ibid.: 592) since African society has an alarming rate of people who cannot read and write in their own indigenous languages (Adeseke, 2016: 56). In this case, Adejunmobi is just trying to advance an argument that using any of the European languages to express Africa’s experience is not anything that is entirely wrong in its own right. Rather, it becomes the most viable weapon in advancing the course of Africa’s lost history and

integrity. The core development of the entire idea in this regard centres on the fact that every single European language has no specific contextual form and practice. It can only be used is, however, found to be in a sound conformity to an emerging issue of every community. And so, its use to contextualise African emerging social issues and worldview cannot be identified as a problem as well.

Mphahlele (1997) also adds his voice to the ever-growing discussion on the type of language to be used in order to communicate Africa's experience. Mphahlele, just like other Universalists, sees nothing wrong with the use of foreign languages to explain and share Africa's cultural life and living experience to the external world in a way that will project the image of Africa. He also debunks the claims by Wali (1963) and wa Thiong'o (1986) which seek to suggest that writers in Africa should wait until a particular language of African ancestral origin is developed before they could write to share the experiences of Africa's life to the international world as an unrealistic business. To him, such a claim will mean that no one could write on Africa's experience until a centralised language is developed, written and spoken in the entire continent. It appears also that Wali and Ngũgi still conceive that Africa is a continent with just a single community as its representative body. They (Wali (1963) and wa Thiong'o (1968)) have forgotten again that Africa is made up of fifty-four member states with various forms of cultural and colonial experiences. As a result, the development of a centralised language is essentially unachievable in this context. So, an African writer can write in English, Portuguese, French and other foreign languages, which he or she knows and has mastered over a period so that Africa's voice could be heard (ibid.:338). As such, the prize of using foreign languages must be adhered to in order to submit to many people, especially those outside Africa, the nature of Africa, its people and their cultural heritage which have been eclectically fashioned out to carry a particular experience of Africa's identity in a very effective manner.

#### **4 My Standpoints**

Since the development of African written literature is coming from the people, talks about the people and from the people with a certain form of meaning-oriented intentions (Ndede, 2016: 3), the debate on the kind of language to be used is seen as a 'brain teaser' which only seeks to propagate unrealistic agenda. This is so because the totality of African written literature is based on content, form and setting for its development and presentation (ibid.). And so hammering on a

specific language of expression will amount to a distortion of this critical areas in terms of determining the true direction (Irele, 1981: 44) of African written literature which places a premium on the Africa's traditions, models, norms (Amouzou, 2007: 330) and the colonial relic which reminds Africans on the harrowing experiences of colonialism (Nwabunze, 2016: 76).

Also, this debate is regarded as a non-serious literary agenda to be considered at all within the remit of any literary discussion since every language has the capability of expressing different aspects of human experiences in the world (see Nwabunze, 2016; Whorf, 2012). As such, it does not really become a matter of concern to any African writer who chooses to write in a particular language (i.e. foreign language or the indigenous language), as long as what the person chooses to write in is good (Achebe, 1975b: 31), can provide power and influence in the society (Eyisi & Ezeuko, 2008: 199) and also has the tendency of expressing an African experience (Obiechina, 1990: 53). So, there appears to be no linguistic basis "in fighting a language" (Achebe, 1975b: 31) when it comes to its use in the development of any written literature in Africa. In this regard, individual African writers should be allowed to have a particular language choice to express the sense of Africa's experience since the prize of every language is meant to be accessible to different uses in all human situations and conditions in order to benefit mankind.

Again, one sees the above arguments in the light of language debate as a needless exercise since it becomes clearly inappropriate for an individual or a set of individuals to customise a particular language to be more important than the other. Such a development is entirely an act of 'linguagism' or 'linguicism' (thus, an unfair treatment to someone because he or she uses a particular language) (Skutnabb-Kangas, 1988) and further goes against some traits of linguistic justifications that suggest that every language is used to perform different human experiences and activities (see Nwabunze, 2016; Whorf, 2012). The sense of these arguments, however, generates a literary defect on the part of African writers as an attempt to promote and defend their ideological inclinations could lead to an unjustifiable travesty within the scope of African written literature. By this, an African writer should be allowed to choose the medium (i.e., whether indigenous language or foreign language) which suits his or her art best (Emenyonu, 1986: 35). Any of these languages which will be in use, must therefore, be made to serve as a patriotic weapon to position African society from the abyss of a colonial bondage and imperialism (Dathorne, 1975: 219) to its shared experience of dignity, respect and a unifying bond of Africanity (Karen (1991) as cited in

Onwuwere & Egbulonu, 2014: 156) in order to reflect the context of Africa's core values and socio-cultural realities of the people (Achebe, 1975a: 61).

## **5 Conclusion**

Ideally, the study has taken a cursory review on the development of African written literature and the ideological dichotomy relative to its language use to express Africa's sense of identity and cultural reality. The debate thus far made on the type of language to be used is a good exercise for the mind and to also broaden intellectual capability for a pure academic attention to be drawn, but it does not proffer any sense of conclusive argument to the entire conversation. In essence, African written literature has to be supported, accepted and institutionalised as a literary tradition that is meant to project Africa's rich cultural values and colonial experiences irrespective of the type of language in place that could be used to access such intricacies in African society. And this can make African written literature startlingly successful in its course when it is shielded on particular evidence to resolve and provide reasonable circumstances, being present or past, which are meant to serve the interest of the appetising audience in Africa. This, therefore, should be the central course for African written literature to strive on.

## REFERENCES

- Achebe, Chinua. 1975a. The African writer and English language. In Achebe, C. (Ed.), *Morning yet on creation day*, (pp.55–62). London: Heinemann.
- Achebe, Chinua. 1975b. Where angels fear to tread. In Achebe, C. (Ed.), *Morning yet on creation day*, (pp.46–48). London: Heinemann.
- Adejunmobi, Moradewun. 1999. Routes: Language and the identity of African literature. *The Journal of Arts and Humanities*, 12(1), 4581–4596.
- Adeseke, Adefolaju E. 2016. African literature (Drama) and the language issue. *Social Science Review*, 2(1), 49–59.
- Agyekum, Kofi. 2013. *Introduction to literature*. (3<sup>rd</sup> ed.). Accra: Adwinsa Publications Limited.
- Alex, Patrick C. 2022. Linguistic revitalisation and the drama in African indigenous languages. *UC Journal: ELT, Linguistics and Literature Journal*, 3(2), 156–172.
- Amase, Emmanuel, Kaan, Aondover & Nwadike, Christopher. 2013. African literature in English language: A political literary discourse. *International Journal of Humanities and Social Science Invention*, 2(3), 63–68.
- Amouzou, Akoété. 2007. African literature and cultural imperialism. *Revue du CAMES – Nouvelle Série B*, 8(1), 329–335.
- Anaso, George & Eziafa, Christopher N. 2014. Culture, language and evolution of African



- literature. *Journal of Humanities and Social Science*, 19(4), 81–85.
- Angmor, Charles. 2001. *Contemporary literature in Ghana 1911-1978. A critical evaluation*. Accra: Royal Associates.
- Bamgbose, Ayo. 1995. English in the Nigerian environment. In Bamgbo, A. and Thomas, A. (Eds.) *New Englishes: A West African Perspective* (pp.9–26). Ibadan: Moosaro Publishers & Booksellers.
- Boyejo, Bisola J. 2011. *Language use and style as a depiction of African literature: An example of Wole Soyinka's Death and the King's Horseman*. Published B.A. Project. Nigeria: University of Ilorin, Ilorin.
- Dethrone, Oscar R. 1975. *African literature in the twentieth century*. London: Heinemann Educational Books.
- Djebar, Assia. 2007. Anamesis in the language of writing. In Olumiyan, T. and Onyason, A. (Eds.) *African Literature: An Anthology of Criticism and Theory* (pp.307–314). Boston: Blackwell Publishing.
- Eme, Cecilia A. & Mbagwu, Davidson U. 2011. African languages and literature. *UJAH: Unizik Journal of Arts and Humanities*, 12(1), 115–127.
- Emenyonu, Ernest. 1986. *The rise of the Igbo novel*. Enugu: Fourth Dimension Press.
- Emenyonu, Ernest. 1995. Literature in a second language. Use of English in Nigerian fiction. In Bamgbose A., Ayo, B. and Thomas, A. (Eds.) *New Englishes: A West African Perspective* (pp.325–333). Ibadan: Moosaro Publishers and Booksellers.
- Eyisi, Joy & Ezeuko, Romanuns. 2008. The English language in our multilingual Nigeria. In Eyisi, J., Ekpunobi, D. C. and Okoye, C. (Eds.). *Awka Journal of English Language and Literary Studies (AJELS)* (pp.194–207). Nsukka: Global Publishers.
- Gikandi, Simon. 2003. *Encyclopaedia of Africa literature*. New York: Routledge.
- Gyekye, Kwame. 1998. *African cultural values: An introduction for senior secondary schools*.

Accra: Sankofa Publishing Company Limited.

Heine, Bernd & Nurse, Derek. 2000. *African linguistics: An introduction*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

Heywood, Christopher. 1968. *Perspectives on African literature*. London: Heinemann.

Innes, Catherine L. & Lindfors, Bernth. (1978). *Critical perspective on Chinua Achebe*. London: Heinemann.

Irele, Abiola. 1981. *The African experience in literature and ideology*. London: Heinemann Educational Books Limited.

Kachru, Braj B. 1989. *The alchemy of English: The spread, functions, and models of non-native Englishes*. USA: Illini Books.

Kunene, Mazisi. 1992. Problems in African literature. *Research in Africa Literature*, 23(1), 27–44.

Lillis, Kevin M. 1986. Africanizing the school literature curriculum in Kenya: A case-study in curriculum dependency. *Journal of Curriculum Studies*, 18(1), 63–84.

Lucy, John A. 1997. Linguistic relativity. *Annual Review of Anthropology*, 26, 291–312.

Lyon, John. 2002. *Language and linguistics: An introduction*. (15<sup>th</sup> ed.). Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

Mazrui, Alamin. 1992. Relativism, universalism, and the language of African literature. *Research African Literatures*, 23(1), 65–72.

Morris, L. (1998). The function of English in contemporary Ghanaian society: Africa diaspora. *ISPs Paper 52*. [http://digitalcollections.sit.edu/african\\_diaspora\\_isp/52](http://digitalcollections.sit.edu/african_diaspora_isp/52).

- Mphahlele, Ezekiel. 1997. Polemics: The dead-end of African literature. *Transition*, 11, 335–341.
- Mutiti, Yakobo J. K. 2011. The medium of language in African literature: Is there alienation in the adoption of foreign languages in the so-called African literatures?'. *UNAD Studies in Language and Literature*, 4(1), 127–142.
- Ndede, Lencer A. 2016. African literature: Place, language or experience. *International Journal of Educational Investigations*, 3(3), 1–10.
- Nkosi, Lewis. 1981. *Tasks and masks. Themes and style in African literature*. Harlow, Essex: Longman.
- Nnolin, Charles E. 1988. *Ridentem Dicere Verum: Literature and the common welfare*. An inaugural lecture delivered at the University of Port Harcourt. Nigeria: University of Port Harcourt.
- Nwabunze, Donatus C. 2016. Literature and language: Identity in African literature through new Englishes. *International Journal of Language, Literature and Gender Studies (LALIGENS)*, 5(2), 71–84.
- Obiechina, Emmanuel N. 1990. *Language and theme: Essays on African literature*. Washington, DC: Howard University Press.
- Okpewho, Isidore. 1992. *African oral literature: Backgrounds, character, and community*. USA: Indiana UP.
- Okune, Sunday T. 2011. Themes of idealism and nostalgia in negritude poetry. *LWATI: A Journal of Contemporary Research*, 8(2), 127–139.
- Onwuwere, Alexander O. & Egbulonu, Florence. 2014. The influence of negritude movement on

- modern Africa literature and writers. A study of Chinua Achebe's *Things Fall Apart* and Elechi Amadi's *the Concubine*. *Okike: An African Journal of New Writing*, 51, 148–167.
- Owomoyela, Oyekan. 1992. Language, identity and social construction in African literature. *Research in African Literature*, 23(1), 83–94.
- Palmer, Eustace. 1981. Negritude rediscovered: A reading of the recent novels of Armah, Ngugi, and Soyinka. *The International Fiction Review*, 8(1) 1–11.
- Peters, Lenrie. 1964. *Poems*. Ibadan: Mbari Publications.
- Rushdie, Salman. 2010. *Imaginary homeland: Essays and criticism 1981–1991*. London: Vintage Books.
- Sapir, Edward. 1963. The status of linguistics as a science. In Mandelbaun , D. G. (Ed.), *Edward Sapir: Selected writings in language, culture and personality*, (pp. 207–214). Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press.
- Sarpong, Peter. 1974. *Ghana in retrospect: Some aspects of Ghanaian culture*. Tema: Ghana Publishing Corporation.
- Saro-Wiwa, Ken. 1992. The language of African literature: A writer's testimony. *Research in African Literatures*, 23(1), 153–157.
- Sherzer, Joel. 1987. A discourse-centred approach to language and culture. *American Anthropologist New Series*, 89(2), 295–309.
- Skutnabb-Kangas, Tove. 1988. *Multilingualism and the education of minority children*. Helsinki: Gaudeamus.
- Udofia, Julia. 2011. The language of African literature in English. *International Journal of*

*Research in Arts and Social Sciences*, 3, 90–97.

Ukam, Edadi I. 2018. The choice of language for African creative writers. *English Linguistics Research*, 7(2), 46–53.

wa Thiong'o, Ngũgi. 2007. The language of African literature. In Olumiyani, T. and Onyason, A. (eds.) *African Literature: An Anthology of Criticism and Theory* (pp.285–306). Boston: Blackwell Publishing.

wa Thiong'o, Ngũgi. 1986. *Decolonising the mind: The politics of language in African literature*. Nairobi: James Currey.

Wali, Obiajunwa. 1963. The dead end of African literature. *Transition* 10: 13–15.

Whorf, Benjamin L. 2012. Linguistics as an exact science. In Carroll, J. B. (Ed.), *Language, Thought and Reality: Selected Writings of Benjamin Lee Whorf*, (pp.281–298). Cambridge: The MIT Press.

Widdowson, Henry G. 1994. The ownership of English. *TESOL Quarterly*, 28(2), 377–389.

Yakubu, Mohammed A. 2014. Language and theme of Charles Dickens's *Oliver Twist* and Chinua Achebe's *Arrow of God*. *International Journal of English Language and Literature Studies*, 3(1), 1–11.