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*A Linguistic Analysis
of the Strategies of Appropriation
in Selected Postcolonial Novels*

A dissertation
submitted in fulfillment of
the requirements for a
PhD Degree

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Preface

I feel that the English language will be able to carry the weight of my African experience. But it will have to be a new English, still in full communion with its ancestral home but altered to suit new African surroundings.

This oft cited statement of Chinua Achebe's seems not only to summarize the position most postcolonial writers find themselves in, but also the main argument of this interdisciplinary study, entitled *A Linguistic Analysis of the Strategies of Appropriation in Selected Postcolonial Novels*.

When I started out working on this research, my contention was uni-dimensionally limited to the claim that postcolonial writers adopt a number of linguistic strategies to reformulate English into more culture-specific varieties of englishes. Four years of (critical) reading and analysis have expanded my contention into a *multi-dimensional* perception of these works. It is not only the local culture which these writers encode in their texts, but also ideology, power-struggles, and the dialectics of the post/neo-colonial state of affairs which formulate the deep structure of all of these texts.

The term *strategies of appropriation* is adopted from the seminal work *The Empire Writes Back* (1989) Ashcroft, Griffith and Tiffin.

Appropriation is defined as "the process by which the language is taken and made to 'bear the burden' of one's own cultural experience" (38). The strategies identified by Ashcroft et al are five main categories: glossing, untranslated words, Interlanguage, syntactic fusion, as well as code-switching and vernacular transcription. In their concluding remarks, Ashcroft et al point out that

Strategies of appropriation, then, seize the language, re-place it in a specific cultural location, and yet maintain the integrity of that Otherness, which historically has been employed to keep the post-colonial at the margins of power, of 'authenticity', and even of reality itself.

(77)

Since these strategies of text production have greatly impacted on developing strategies of reading, it seems to be essential to resort to CDA as a constituent of those strategies of reading.

Interdisciplinary in approach, the study adopted Norman Fairclough's three-dimensional framework of Critical Discourse Analysis for an alternative examination of postcolonial texts. Though CDA is a relatively new discipline, it is rapidly establishing itself as a very strong tool for studying language as discourse, in relation to sociocultural as well as political communicative events. It is founded on the idea that there is unequal access to linguistic and social resources which are institutionally controlled. In this sense, the very process of *discursive formation* becomes a privilege for those who are.

"in control". Discursive formations refer to the practices of exclusion, in the light of which "although the same language may be spoken throughout a country ..., there is a sense in which access to those frameworks which circulate in society is not equally available to all." (Mills 14).

Thus CDA itself is an interdisciplinary approach, which seeks

to map three separate forms of analysis onto one another: analysis of (spoken or written) language texts, analysis of discourse practice (processes of text production, distribution and consumption) and analysis of discursive events as instances of sociocultural practice"

(Fairclough 1995:2)

The major contribution of CDA, here, is the inclusion of a discursive component in the sociological definition of discourse, not limiting it to a purely linguistic approach. In other words,

The method of discourse analysis includes linguistic *description* of the language text, *interpretation* of the relationship between the (productive and interpretative) discursive processes and the text, and *explanation* of the relationship between the discursive processes and the social processes.

(Fairclough 1995: 97)

It is necessary here to state what is meant by the term "discourse". The basic definition of discourse, within the field of linguistic studies, as Hoey states, is "any stretch of spoken or written language that is felt as complete in itself" (1983: 15), where

"communication is an interlocking social, cognitive, and linguistic enterprise." (Hatch1992: 1).

In the field of social sciences, *The Labor Law Talk Dictionary* defines a discourse as "an institutionalized way of thinking, a social boundary defining what can be said about a specific topic". Thus discourse is the verbal formulation of the experience of the world, and a particular representation of reality. In this sense, the term discourse "is generally used to designate the forms of representation, codes, conventions and habits of language that produce specific fields of culturally and historically located meanings." (Brooker 1999: 1).

Hence, discourse – both as a communicative act, and in the broader sense of a socio-cultural formulation of the world – is a site in which meaning is constructed and negotiated in accordance with the dominant ideology, with the intention of maintaining the established power structures through the preservation of the dominance of one discourse/discursive formation over other formations.

Critical discourse analysts, in general, consider the larger discourse context that lies beyond the grammatical structure, since it is one of the tenets of CDA that "language connects with the social through being the primary domain of ideology, and through being both a site of, and a stake in, struggles for power" (Fairclough 1989: 15). In other words, through its analysis of texts, CDA attempts to

“denaturalize” the ideological foundations of discourse which have over time become naturalized, internalized and accepted as common truths. It has, therefore, gained much ground in a number of fields such as gender studies, media studies, the study of New Capitalism, etc. Hence, it is only logical to choose this approach in relation to the study of postcolonial texts.

The present study seeks to analyze the discursive formations of postcolonial texts, and the manifestation of ideological and sociocultural aspects through the language employed in these texts.

The application of Fairclough’s model on selected postcolonial texts in this study is based on my personal reading of the model. It is my belief that the model functions dialectically, i.e. it represents both the *production* of texts and their *consumption*, stemming from sociocultural practices, to be structured into discourse practices, resulting in a text. The process is then reversed for purposes of analysis.

This three-dimensional framework is studiously applied to the four texts selected. There were a number of significant criteria for the selection which may be summarized in terms of geography, history and theme.

Geographically, the selected texts cover the main areas of the British Empire and, hence, the later Anglophone Commonwealth,

including Nigeria, Kenya, India and Egypt. This geographical expanse allowed for a comparative reflection of the production of texts in a postcolonial/neocolonial context.

Historically, the texts span five decades of the twentieth century, beginning with the 1950s, during which the founding works of the postcolonial canon came into being. The novelist selected for this period is *Chinua Achebe*, known as the Father of the postcolonial novel. The 1960s witnessed the height of nationalist movements, heralding the “postcolonial condition”. *Ngugi wa Thiong’o* – one of the most prominent novelists of Kenya, and the representative writer for the decade – describes that period in the following words:

This was the sixties when the centre of the universe was moving from Europe or, to put it in another way, when many countries particularly in Asia and Africa were demanding and asserting their right to define themselves and their relationship to the universe from their own centres in Africa and Asia.

(Ngugi 1993: 2)

The sixties are followed by the 1980s, which saw the publication of by-now well-established “postcolonial” texts that started to cast a critical eye on the post-com-neocolonial state of affairs. This decade also witnessed the introduction of postmodernist features of writing, the most significant example of which is Salman Rushdie.

In the texts of the 1990s, language and the postcolonial themselves become themes. According to Ngugi,