

# The Pragmatics of English in African Literature

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*The present study employs the framework of sociolinguistics and social psychology of language use to investigate the pragmatics of English in African literature, that is, the processes by which African creative writers adapt the English language to fit their own political, cultural, and sociolinguistic exigencies. The pragmatics of English is described under the following principal headings: pidgin English, lexis and semantics, morphology and syntax, and the power and the politics of English. It is indicated that the pragmatics of English in African literature provides one of the best theoretical challenges to the kind of linguistic enterprise envisaged in transformational grammar. It is further pointed out that to the extent that the linguistic repertoire and lectal range of English users in the African sociolinguistic milieu vary according to educational attainment and social and economic class, the analysis undertaken in this study would help make the English language relevant to the L2 learner's socio-cultural situation.*

## 1. Introduction

To the extent that African literature is not only primarily concerned with African reality, but its material is also made out of what the writer has observed in African life and society, the language used in African literary works can be judged to be representative of the sociolinguistic and political realities of the African situation. English use in African literature could then be taken as somewhat symptomatic of everyday language use and language variation in the African sociolinguistic continuum.

The pragmatics of English in African literature is thus concerned with how writers in African society have appropriated the English language and turned it to their own cultural and political needs. Many African writers have no choice but to use English, but in using it, they decolonize English and transform it to suit their African socio-cultural and political exigencies. For example, the celebrated Nigerian author, Chinua Achebe, has noted that an African writer using English as a medium of literary creativity has certain restrictions imposed on him or her. The writer often has to describe situations and modes of thought which have no direct equivalent in the English way of life. According to Achebe:

Caught in that situation he can do one of two things. He can try and contain what he has to say within the limits of conventional English or he can try and push back those limits to accommodate his idea. The first method produces competent, uninspired and rather flat work. The second

method will produce something new and valuable to the English language as well as to the material he is trying to put over. (Achebe, 1964: 16)

Consequently, my aim in this essay is to describe some of the strategies African writers adopt to transpose English into a new medium of expression, or as Achebe has put it, how the English language is “altered to suit its new African surroundings” (1975: 62) both sociologically and politically. These strategies will be described under the following headings: Pidgin English, Lexis and Semantics, Morphology and Syntax, and the Power and Politics of English. Examples will be drawn from Ghanaian, Nigerian, Somalian, Kenyan, and Black South African national literatures of Africa.<sup>1</sup> In the conclusion, this writer will investigate the theoretical implications of this kind of research and its relevance for teaching and learning English in the African context.

## 2. Pidgin English

Pidgin English is the result of the contact and convergence between African and English languages and cultures at the most rudimentary level. Pidgin English is very pervasive in West Africa because the first English speakers to reach the West African subcontinent were traders who came to this region from the sixteenth to eighteenth centuries for the infamous traffic in slaves. Consequently, the Africans with whom they dealt learned the language for trade purposes, and within a hundred years had developed a pidginized form of it which was closely related to the trans-Atlantic Creoles. However, pidgin as spoken in anglophone West Africa has no comparable development in East and Southern Africa.

As explained in Edmund Bamiro (1991a: 7-8), three main varieties of English have been identified in countries where English is used as a second

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1 Data for the discussion and analysis are based on Cyprian Ekwensi, *Jagua Nana* (1961); Ayi Kwei Armah, *The Beautiful Ones Are Not Yet Born* (1969); Flora Nwapa, *One is Enough* (1981); J.P. Clark-Bekederemo, *Ozidi* (1991); Nadime Gordimer, *July's People* (1981); Meja Mwangi, *Carcass for Hounds* (1974); Ama Ata Aidoo, *Anowa* (1970); Athol Fugard, “Master Harold”... and the boys (1994); Nuruddin Farah, *From a Corrooked Rib* (1970); and Chinua Achebe, *Things Fall Apart* (1958), *Arrow of God* (1964), and *Anthills of the Savannah* (1987). After excerpts, these texts will be identified as follows: JN, BO, OIE, Ozidi, JP, CH, Anowa, MH, FCR, TFA, AOG, and AS.

language: (1) the higher variety (acrolect), which is the internationally intelligible variety; the intermediate variety (mesolect), which is the intranationally accepted variety; and (3) the lower variety (basilect), which is the “context” variety associated with the illiterate and semi-literate population. Since the core population of regular pidgin speakers in Africa belongs to the lower social strata educationally, occupationally, and economically, pidgin English is generally considered a basilectal form of the English language in terms of its sociolinguistic classification.

African writers often employ pidgin English not only to make penetrating criticisms against the African society, but also to characterize the status of interlocutors in the African social system, to reveal social classes and group identities, and to provide local color (Bamiro, 1991b: 277-284). For example, in Ayi Kwei Armah’s *The Beautiful Ones Are Not Yet Born* (1969), a novel that deals with class conflict and the disillusionment of the masses in post-colonial Ghanaian society, characters who belong to the lowest socio-economic ladder of the society often employ pidgin English to lampoon the moral decadence of their society. In the following examples scrawled as graffiti on the walls of a latrine, pidgin English functions as counter-discourse to the dominant discourse of corruption and moral degeneracy in the Ghanaian society. The standard English equivalents are furnished in parentheses after each example.

1. WHO BORN FOOL  
SOCIALISM CHOP MAKE I CHOP  
CONTREY BROKE...  
YOU BROKE NOT SO?  
PRAY FOR DETENTION  
JAILMAN CHOP FREE (106, original emphasis).  
(WHO BORE A FOOL?)  
SOCIALISM MEANS THAT YOU EAT AND LET OTHERS EAT  
OUR COUNTRY IS BROKE  
YOU ARE BROKE, AREN'T YOU?  
PRAY FOR DETENTION  
A PRISONER EATS FREE FOOD)

Similarly, in Cyprian Ekwensi's *Jagua Nana* (1961), a novel that focuses on African societies undergoing the tremors of transition from colonialism to post-colonialism, the protagonist, Jagua Nana, uses pidgin English to attack the recklessness and macho attitudes of African men and, by contrast, the objectification of African women.

2. At firs' I fear, Freddie. All de young men in Lagos dem talk sweet sweet -- like you doing now, Freddie. But when dem get a gal on de bed, you never see dem again. And if dem give de gal belly, she mu' carry de belly alone, and dem will run and lef' her. Is very bad of de young men. so I use to fear (19). (I was afraid initially, Freddie. All the young men in Lagos are glib talkers -- just like you are talking now, Freddie. But once they have succeeded in making love to a girl, you never see them again. And if they make a girl pregnant, she will be responsible for the pregnancy alone as the young men will abandon her. These young men are bad. So I am always afraid).

In other contexts, members of the dominated classes employ pidgin as a code of in-group solidarity and identity. In the following passage from Flora Nwapa's *One is Enough* (1981), two messengers converse in pidgin to berate not only the predicament of their boss but also a sense of insecurity pervading post-colonial Africa.

3. As soon as he (i.e. Mike, a top official in General Gowon's regime) was out of earshot, the messenger had a good laugh. 'Dis government na wa. Oga no no say they done sack am with immediate effect.' (This government is terrible. Our boss does not know yet that he has been sacked with immediate effect).

'Una dey laugh?' (Are you laughing?) another messenger joined in. 'Why una dey laugh? Una don see government wey sack judge? Make una wait, na kill they go kill una, no bi sack.' (Why are you laughing? Have you seen any government that sacks a judge? Just be patient, they will kill all of you instead of relieving you of your duties) (130).

Especially in social interactions between members of dominant and dominated classes, pidgin English often portrays the social distance and speech

divergence between these two groups. In the social psychology of language use, speech divergence denotes the strategy by which “speakers may wish to accentuate the differences between themselves and others, perhaps because of the others’ outgroup membership, undesirable attitudes, habits, or appearance. [It is] speech shifts away from the interlocutor’s style occurring with whatever intentions...” (Giles and Smith, 1979: 51-2). In the following exchange between Ozidi and his servant-attendant in J.P. Clark-Bekederemo’s *Ozidi* (1991), the servant speaks in pidgin which shows his social class while Ozidi, his master, responds in standard English which reflects his social and communicative distance from his servant.

4. Attendant: Massa, papa kuku leaf shed for market self? (Master, did father leave the shed in the market?)

Ozidi: None that I know of (163).

In the above examples, some characteristic features of pidgin English are clearly recognizable. Note, for example, the absence of the inflected past tense form of the verb, the use of the word chop for ‘eat’, absence of auxiliary and tense markers, subjectless sentences (‘Is very bad...’), reduplication of lexical items (‘sweet sweet’), omission of articles, undifferentiated tag questions (‘not so?’), etc.

### **3. Lexis and Semantics**

In *The Dialogic Imagination*, the Russian theorist, Mikhail Bakhtin, conceives of language as “ideologically saturated”, of always reflecting a worldview (1987: 271). Because languages are situated in particular times and places and are reflective of their social origins Bakhtin (1987: 272), indicates that “there are no ‘neutral’ words and forms words and forms that can belong to ‘no one’”. For Bakhtin (1987: 293):

The word in language is half someone else’s. It becomes “one’s own” only when the speaker populates it with his own intention, his own accent, when he appropriates the word, adapting it to his own semantic and expressive intentions. Prior to this moment of appropriation, the word does not exist in

a neutral and impersonal language... but rather it exists in other people's mouths, in other people's contexts, serving other people's intentions; it is from there that one must take the word, and make it one's own.

Consequently, the pragmatics of lexis and semantics in African literature involves how African writers appropriate English words and adapt them to their own semantic and expressive intention. As Braj Kachru (1990: 28) has noted, lexico-semantic innovations in non-native Englishes are "indicative of acculturation of English in new socio-cultural and linguistic contexts, and reflect its acceptance as a vehicle of non-native social norms and ecological needs."

Although ten categories of lexico-semantic variation have been identified in African English,<sup>2</sup> I will focus here on certain neglected aspects of semantic shift and translation equivalence. For example, pertaining to semantic shifts, kinship terms such as mother, father, brother, sister, wife, and cousin are characterized by semantic widening, that is, as used in Africa, such kinship terms indicate a wider semantic area than in British or American English. For example, in Nuruddin Farah's *From the Crooked Rib*, a character addresses the protagonist as follows:

5. What are you doing here, cousin Ebla?' (1970: 20).

The author himself glosses the semantic implication of the term *cousin* as follows: "Although she wasn't his cousin, in that area people still address each other in those terms -that is their polite form of saying hello even to a stranger" (1970: 20). Consequently, what are called cousins in English are brothers, sisters, and even complete strangers in the Somali context. This shows that the African kinship system is more closely knit than the English system and that the 'extended family' system is an integral part of African society.

Similarly, in the following examples, the various socio-cultural meanings attached to the term *wife* as defined by the African socio-cultural context are also instructive:

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2 See, for example, Bamiro (1994a, 47-60). The ten linguistic categories are loanshift, semantic underdifferentiation, lexico-semantic duplication and redundancy, ellipsis, conversion, acronym, clipping, translation equivalence, analogical creation, and coinage.

6. 'Apart from children which we all want, some men want a woman to cook their meals, some want a woman to help in the farm, others want someone they can beat' (AOG, 63).

7. 'Your wife will bear you nine sons' (AOG, 120).

8. Okonkwo called his three wives and told them to get things together for a great feast (TFA, 116).

9. 'And let our wives bear male children' (AOG, 6).

10. 'When my wife here came to me and said: Our daughter has a child and I want you to come and give her a name, I said to myself: something is amiss... I did not hear of bride-price and you are telling me about naming a child' (AS, 210).

11. Temugedege: She is our wife, she is our wife still. As

The eldest of my family, I may not  
Inherit my brother's wife but she is  
Our wife still... (Ozidi 157).

All the emphasis in the above examples are mine. Based on the implications in these examples, we can chart the semantic features of wife in English and African contexts as follows:<sup>3</sup>

<u>English</u>	<u>African</u>
+ payment (dowry)	+ payment (bride price)
+ communal responsibility	+ communal responsibility

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3 Oluwole Adejare (n.d.), as indicated in Adegbija (1986), uses the same approach to chart the variation in meaning of the term wife in English and Yoruba contexts. However, in this study, his feature, 'conjugal responsibility', is replaced with my communal responsibility and accountability' because the former feature ('conjugal responsibility') does not seem to capture the onerous responsibility expected of a 'wife' in the African socio-cultural context. Also, his feature 'single participant' is replaced with my 'polygamy because the former feature is considered to be too vague. Finally, my analysis introduces two important semantic variables, 'male children' and 'filial inheritance'.

and accountability	and accountability
- polygamy	+ polygamy
+ procreation	+ procreation
+ male children	+ male children
- filial inheritance	+ filial inheritance

For example, as can be gleaned from the features above, while the English wife enjoys exclusive right to the husband who cannot enter into similar relationships with other women, the African husband can, if he so wishes, enter into a similar agreement with other women at the same time. Notice also that in example ten above, the speaker addresses the woman as ‘my wife’ whereas he is not her legal husband; his mode of address would be considered odd and eccentric in British or American contexts, for example. This again corroborates the argument that kinship terms have an extended meaning in the African context, the logic being that of an obligatory communal responsibility and accountability. That admonition in example nine ‘... let our wives bear male children’ is very significant. In most cases, an African wife who does not bear male children that will eventually continue the patrilineal heritage of the family may lose her marital privileges, hence one of the reasons for the prevalence of polygamy in Africa. Example eleven is significant in the sense that despite the advent of modernity and Christianity in Africa, certain parts of the continent still view women as chattels and objects to be inherited by male members of the family.

Translation equivalence in African English inheres in the fact that African bilingual writers of English often relexify their mother tongues by “using English vocabulary but indigenous structures and rhythms” (Todd, 1982: 297-8). Translation equivalence is similar to Braj Kachru’s “transcultural creativity” and “transcreation” in the new literatures in English (Kachru, 1995: 271). Translation equivalence thus underscores the doric style which, according to Michael Halliday, represents natural language “in its commonsense, everyday, spontaneous spoken form” (1995: 142), as it functions “way below the usual level of consciousness” (1995: 143). African writers generally subject the English language to a process of adaptation to meet their African experience

by incorporating into dialogues and narration many art-forms translated from their mother tongues. In this direction, the doric style is concerned with how African writers are able to capture in English language the idiom, the metaphor, the 'hidden' grammars, and the ordinary spoken language -- in their everyday, commonsense contexts -- so typical of the African people. The kind of idiom used by Africans to relate their experience is often constrained by such sociolinguistic variables as participant, topic, setting, and situation. In the following examples, the doric style is furnished as attested in the texts while the English 'grammaticalized' approximation is given in parentheses.

12. May children put their fathers into the earth (AOG 6).  
(... bury their fathers)

13. Akuebue was one of the very few men whose words gained entrance into Ezeulu's ear (AOG 93).  
(... one of the very few men to whom Ezeulu listened)

14. When he took his wife to his hut after the sacrifice, would he find her at home?  
(AOG 118)  
(... would he discover that she is a virgin?)

15. Every girl knew of Ogbanje Omenyi whose husband was said to have sent to her parents for a machet to cut the bush on either side of the highway which she carried between her thighs (AOG 122).  
(... whose husband was embarrassed by her overgrown pubic hair)

16. Somewhere near him someone was talking into his talk (AOG 142).  
(... someone was interrupting him)

17. ...too much palm wine was harmful for a man going in to his wife (AOG 193).  
(...a man about to have sex with his wife)

18. Our people... I ask you for your ears. Please place them on the ground (Ozidi 123).  
(... Please listen attentively)

In the foregoing examples, the doric style is highlighted for emphasis. As I mentioned earlier, the doric style is often constrained by topic, setting, and situation. Obviously, in examples 14, 15, and 18 above, the doric style is used to circumvent bawdy and obscene expressions.

Modes of temporal reference are ethnolinguistic forms that have received little or no attention in the pragmatics of African literature. 'Time' in African languages cannot be dissociated from action considered in its dynamics. For example, Genevieve Calame-Griaule indicates that the preoccupation with envisaging time in its duration is a basic one in traditional societies. According to her:

[the] cyclic concept of time is based on observation of the cosmic rhythm on the one hand (cycle of the stars, the seasons and vegetation) and the rhythm of human life on the other hand (birth, life, death, and the renewing of generations). Man remains the privileged reference system... This 'humanised' aspect of the concept of time in Africa is also found on the level of emphasis on duration. (158-9)

In the following examples, time reference has connotations related to cyclic concept or cosmic rhythms:

19. Tortoise had not eaten a good meal for two moons (TFA 68).  
(i.e. two months)

20. 'Three moons ago... a little band of fugitives came into our town' (TFA 97).

21 ...the fight would not begin until the time of harvest, after three moons more (AOG 191).

22. Within the past four floods, how many have sat on the royal seat of Orua? (Ozidi 114).  
(i.e. four months)

23. He's just two market-tides today (Ozidi 93).  
(two weeks old)

By contrast, the following time references are related to human activities.

24. ...he recovered from his illness only a few days before the Week of Peace began (TFA 21).

(a sacred week when it is sacrilegious to beat somebody)

25. For three markets Ibe could barely rise from his bed (AOG 12).

(three weeks)

26. Obika... staggered home almost at cock-crow (AOG 77).

(dawn)

27. It will be three years next dry season (AOG 169).

(roughly equivalent to summer in Europe and America)

28. 'To travel is to learn, so we somalis say. Then he will come home after 180 milking-instances' (FCR 110)

(this is roughly one calendar year in somalia because in that society a day has two milking-instances, one in the morning and one in the evening; these are the times when the cows are milked).

Translation equivalence is also underscored through the use of proverbs. It is through the use of these devices, that African writers are "able to evoke the cultural milieu in which the action takes place" (Bamiro, 1994b: 70). For example, with particular reference to Chinua Achebe's use of proverbs in his novels, Bernth Lindfors argues that African writers make use of proverbs to provide a "grammar of values" by which the deeds of their protagonists can be measured; to serve as thematic statements reminding us of some of the motifs in the literary works, for example, the importance of status, the value of achievement, and the idea of man as a shaper of his destiny; to add touches of local color; to sound and reiterate the themes; and finally, to comment or to warn against foolish and unworthy actions (1978: 47-65).

I will illustrate the pragmatics of proverbs in African literature with examples from Ama Ata Aidoo's *Anowa* (1970). In this drama, based upon a version of a Ghanaian legend, *Anowa* is a beautiful girl who refuses the suitors of whom her parents approve and marries the man of her choice; however, she finds no joy over the years. During the course of the play, the elders use a series of proverbs

to comment or to warn Anowa of her foolish and willful actions as in the following examples:

29. The sapling breaks with bending that will not grow straight (8).
30. The yam that will burn, shall burn, boiled or roasted (13)
31. The infant which tries its milk teeth on every bone and stone grows up with nothing to eat dried meat with (21).
32. Little babies only cry for food when hungry but do not instruct the elders how to tend a farm (41-2).
33. As the surest yam is better than the sweetest guava, the dumbest man is always better than a woman (41-2).

#### 4. Morphology and Syntax

Morphological and syntactic variation in African English occurs as the African user of English continuously attempts to bend the English language to reflect the structures of African indigenous languages and the preference of many Africans for structurally simplified sentences owing, on the one hand, to the convergence between African languages and the English language and, on the other hand, to the inadequate exposure of many Africans to the English language. Since variations in morphology and syntax exhibit similar characteristics across the West African, East African, and South African Black English varieties, I will draw an example of morphophonemic variation from East African English and examples of syntactic variation from South African Black English (SABE).<sup>4</sup>

Africans often subject English words to the morphophonemic processes of their mother tongues through the insertion of vowels as in the following example:

34. 'Captain,' he [i.e. Captain Kingsley] reminded him.  
Kapteni,' the chief blurted out (CH 28).

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4 For a full discussion of syntactic variation in West African and East African varieties of English, see Bamiro (1995: 189-204), and (1994b: 65-76).

In this example, *Kapteni* is the East African morphophonemic variant of the English word, *Captain*.

The following syntactic variations, prominent in West African and East African Englishes, also occur in SABLE as the following examples will demonstrate.

(a) Undifferentiated tag questions: In English, tag questions are formed by a rule which inserts a pronominal copy of the subject after an appropriate modal auxiliary, for example, 'John broke the glass, didn't he?' However, many Africans, especially those with little or no formal education, often fail to differentiate the tag structures of English sentences as in the following examples:

- 35. Victor he's twenty-one January, isn't it? (JP 10)  
(...isn't he?)
- 36. You are my true friend, isn't it? (JP 31).  
(... aren't you?)

(b) Double Subjects: These constructions involve the subject of the sentence as focus and an anaphoric pronoun as subject, for example:

- 37. Victor he's twenty-one January... (JP 10).
- 38. Gina she's going to like it (JP 10).

(c) Progressive aspect with habitual action: This can be explained as the use of the progressive aspect with stative and action verbs where standard English will employ the unmarked present tense of the verb:

- 39. I'm knowing plenty things (JP 13).
- 40. Every week I am giving her money for milk (MH 1263).  
(... I give her money...)

(d) Subjectless sentences: this is the tendency of African users of English to delete the dummy subject "it" in discourse structure and to use the topicalizer 'is' as focus:

- 41. \_\_\_\_ Is from the goat, this milk we dirnk (JP 10)
- 42. \_\_\_\_ Is no good someone else is driving the car (JP 59)

43. \_\_\_\_ Is the quickstep where the trouble starts (MH 1264)  
44. \_\_\_\_ Is bad. \_\_\_\_ Is all all bad in here now (MH 1294).

(e) Non-inversion of subject and auxiliary in interrogatives: African users of English often employ rising intonation at the end of clauses to indicate interrogation more frequently than do speakers of standard English, who tend to prefer sentence inversion, for example:

45. Why you must get your 'month' but I'm short? (JP 31-2)

(f) Reduplication: The reduplication of items belonging to various word classes "is used for emphasis and to indicate continuation of a process" (Kachru, 1982: 361).

46. You see, your father he make everyone-everyone to be pleased (JP 63)  
47. Small small village. Is quiet there for black people (JP 73).  
48. We are coming now-now (JP 107).  
49. Is all all bad in here now (MH 1294).

(g) Deletion of auxiliary and copula verbs: There is a tendency to dispense with tense markers in the verb where context or where another grammatical feature is adequate:

50. \_\_\_\_ That all? (MH 1282).  
51. Why \_\_\_\_ you shaking your head? (MH 1289).  
52. You \_\_\_\_ right. I think about it and you \_\_\_\_ right. Tonight I \_\_\_\_ find Hilda and say \_\_\_\_ sorry. And \_\_\_\_ make promise I won't beat her no more (MH 1294).

(h) Resumptive references: In this instance, the subject of the resumptive anaphoric pronoun is explicitly stated as a topicalization strategy. Ordinarily, the subject should have been conflated with the pronoun, for example:

53. The milk we drink, I don't know if Gina she's going to like it (JP 10).  
(I don't know if Gina is going to like this milk)

(i) **Pronominal substitution:** In English grammar, the subjective case of the pronoun (e.g. I, we, he, she) is employed to function as the subject of the clause. However, in African English, the distinction between the subjective and objective cases of pronouns is often effaced because most African languages do not depend on word inflections to signal case relationships in the noun phrase as in the following example:

54. If me and Miriam bump into you and Hilda... (MH 1285).  
(If I and Miriam...)

(j) **Tense:** African English differs from standard English in that it is not bound by the sequence of tense agreements which characterize formal, especially written, standard English. In the following examples, no suffixes are added to mark the past tense form of the verb:

55. I am relax (MH 1262)  
56. It's finish between us (MH 1264)  
57. I use to be happy. And is you and Miriam who bring me to Hilda  
(MH 1280).

(k) **Concord:** Since most African languages do not depend on verb inflections to mark person and number, this tendency is sometimes transferred to English usage:

58. You was gliding with style, Boet Sam (MH 1265).  
59. Then how is it you two was always winning? (MH 1275)

Note that the subversion of rules of concord is common in non-standard English up to today. For example, Henry Wyld (1920: 356) observes that “a tendency to extend the use of “is” to sentences in which there was a plural subject is traceable in the sixteenth century and continues among educated people well into the eighteenth century” and that “you was was apparently much more common, and there are indications of a more general tendency to extend the use of was to 3rd person plural also.”

(l) Deletion of ‘-ly’ morpheme in manner adjuncts: Since many African languages form manner adjuncts through reduplication of lexical items, (e.g. ‘Go quickly’ translates in Yoruba language spoken in West Africa as ‘Lo kia-kia’) . African users of English sometimes delete the ‘-ly’ morpheme in manner adjuncts as in the following example:

60. She can’t move them quick enough (MH 1264)

It should be noted that most of the features of SABE syntax are also found in West African Pidgin English which posits that African English is continually undergoing the process of simplification and simplicity owing to the convergence between the various linguistic substrata and sociolects on the one hand and between the English language and the indigenous languages on the other. It should also be noted that most of the syntactic features analyzed in this section occur in the verbal repertoire of July and Willie who are black servants in the households of the Smales and Harolds in “Master Harold”... and the boys and July’s People respectively. Although these features are basilectal, they empower July and Willie to maintain their social and cultural identity in the face of Eurocentric cultural hegemony and assimilation by the dominant white population in south Africa. Thus while features of a variety of English may be non-standard in formal terms, they nevertheless make a very strong case for regarding English as a language with multiple cultural identities and traditions. Consequently, these features of African English are systematic and predictable, giving African English syntax a linguistic status quite distinct from the dominant code of the so-called standard English. African English can then be construed as a dialect made up of its own rules which function regularly to promote communication among various segments of the African population.

## 5. The Power and Politics of English

The power and politics of English is concerned with how the English language is manipulated “as a medium of power, control, authority, and oppression” (Kachru, 1990: 13-14). In this formulation, English is thus conceived as a strategy of control and enters into processes of social and cultural domination.

Although I have broached the subject of the power and politics of English in African literature in my analysis of pidgin English, in this section I want to discuss the politics of English as it relates to the symbolic appropriation of the 'Other' and how the English language functions as a powerful medium for the production and reproduction of colonial and counter-colonial discourses. I will draw my examples from the novel *Carcase for Hounds* (1974) by the Kenyan writer, Meja Nwangi. This novel is set during an important stage in the Mau Mau liberation struggle in Kenya and it thus mirrors the conflict between the Mau Mau movement and the British colonial government. The action of the novel centers mainly on three men: General Haraka, the Mau Mau leader; Captain Kingsley, a former District commissioner; and Chief Simba - a childhood friend and rival of Haraka - who is a British government stooge.

In the following social interaction between Captain Kingsley and Chief Simba, the former accommodates his speech to the latter as a strategy of control:

61. 'Everything is well?' he [Kingsley] enquired.  
Yes, Bwana [i.e. Boss or Master] Kapteni.'  
No trouble from the villagers?'  
Yes, Bwana.'  
No Mau Mau in the village?'  
Yes, Bwana Kapteni,' the chief said, then added quickly: 'But they kill villager, Bwana Kapteni. Today they shoot man in the forest. Shoot four time, Bwana Kapteni. He dead.?...  
The body, where is it?' he demanded.  
He dead, Bwana Kapteni,' the chief said (1974: 28-9).

In the interaction above, Captain Kingsley, an acrolectal speaker of English, moves down the sociolectal scale to use a lower lect (basilectal English) as an 'accommodation' or 'speech convergence' strategy (Giles and Smith, 1979: 46). Captain Kingsley is forced to coopt the code of Chief Simba into his own verbal repertoire and sociolinguistic behavior because chief Simba is crucial as a source of information to the colonial government machinery. Captain Kingsley's verbal strategy and speech convergence involve the use of direct questions ('Everything is well?'), simplified sentences ('No Mau Mau in the

village?’), and a resumptive anaphoric reference (‘The body, where is it?’).

As the language of the colonizer, English functions as a powerful medium for the production and reproduction of colonial and hegemonic discourse, and is often employed as a repressive form of discourse that reflects and reinforces the unequal power relationships between the colonizer and the colonized. The term ‘colonial discourse’ is the name for that system of signifying practices whose work is to produce and naturalize the hierarchical power structures of the imperial enterprise, and to mobilize these power structures in the management of both colonial and neo-colonial cross-cultural relationships (Hulme, 1986: 2). Since social reality is to a large extent linguistically structured and mediated, “words, expressions, propositions, etc., change their meaning according to the positions held by those who use them” (Pecheux, 1982: 111). If, according to Mikhail Bakhtin, language is “ideologically saturated” (1987: 271), and “there are no ‘neutral’ words and forms” (1987: 293), the highlighted linguistic forms in the following examples are meant to portray the Mau Mau fighters pejoratively and to legitimize the use of oppressive force by the imperialists to quell their resistance.

62. ‘Get up there in the mountain and bomb the sick terrorists out’ (CH 10).

63. The council was... enraged by the continued existence of apparent strong terrorist insurgents... And how far had he got towards the annihilation of the murderer Haraka and his band of cut-throats (CH 11).

64. ‘Remember they entrusted the job to you on account of your knowing the bandit well’ (CH 13).

65. ‘Damn the murderers,’ he [Capt. Kingley] cursed (CH 15).

66. ‘What matters is that the killers are safely back in the forest’ (CH 46).

However, Gill Seidel has emphasized that “Discourse is a site of struggle. It is a terrain, a dynamic linguistic and, above all, semantic space in which social meanings are produced or challenged” (1985: 44). As a result, colonized subjects often employ counter-colonial discourse to establish

oppositional and disidentificatory dialectics to the discourse of colonialism and cultural hegemony. The concepts of 'disidentification', used by Michel Pecheux, is useful in theorizing counter-colonial discourse. Pecheux describes 'disidentification' as an effect of working "on and against" prevailing practices of ideological subjection with the effect that the identity and identifications set up in the dominant ideology, though never escaped entirely, are transformed and displaced (1982: 159 and 215). The emphasized linguistic forms in the following examples are instances of counter discursive modes of expression the Mau Mau fighters employ to transform and displace the dominant ideology inherent in colonial discourse, thereby asserting and reclaiming their social identity:

67. It was Kimano who urged him to meet the forest fighters in old Mwanki's hut (CH 19).

68. He was a good fighter though. All that talk about land, freedom fighting and all (CH 19).

69. Deep down from his past, old Mwanki was an anti-oppressionist, a radical revolutionary (CH 59).

70. the general went over the events leading to his hoining the freedom fighters (CH 97).

In the foregoing examples whereas the British imperialists name the Mau Mau fighters as killers, terrorists, bandits, murderers, and killers, the Mau Mau seize the dominant discourse to rename and counter-name their identities as freedom fighters, anti-oppressionists and revolutionaries. This counter-discursive mode of signifying thus polarizes African and colonial discourses. Consequently, if colonial discourse is the enforcer and embodiment of ideology, then it can only be constituted in relation to what it is not: the concept of 'colonizer' can exist only by virtue of what it excludes: the 'colonized'. In the final analysis, the Mau Mau formulate a disruptive counter-discourse to the colonial hegemony which situates them directly in opposition to the dominant ideology. By refusing

the offered subject position, the Mau Mau fighters are in effect 'counter-identifying' with the dominant discourse.

## 6. Conclusion

The pragmatics of English in African literature, among other things, provides one of the best recognized theoretical challenges to the kind of linguistics proposed by Noam Chomsky where the emphasis is on the innate, genetically determined, and unchanging linguistic competence, which is supposed to comprise a complete universal grammar. Although Chomsky accepts that "Sociolinguistics is presumably concerned not with grammars... but rather with concepts of a different sort, among them, perhaps, language', if such a notion can become an object of serious study," and that "questions of language are basically questions of power" (1979: 190-191), he still believes that these are not the sort of questions linguists address because since humans are endowed with a special, species-specific competence for language, their discourse competence is part of linguistic competence. According to Chomsky, "to incorporate nonlinguistic factors into grammar: beliefs, attitudes, etc." would amount "to a rejection of the initial idealization of language as an object of study": it would mean that "language is a chaos that is not worth studying" (1979: 152-3).

However, the Chomskyan 'asocial' stance in linguistics has led to a paradigm shift from 'linguistic competence' to 'communicative competence'. The concept of 'communicative competence' originates in the work of Dell Hymes (1971) who uses the term to refer to what a speaker needs to know in order to be an effectively functioning member of a speech community. Hymes argues that speakers internalize far more than grammatical and phonological rules as they learn to talk (these rules being what Chomsky means by 'linguistic competence'); speakers also internalize social and cultural norms which enable them to use linguistic forms appropriately. Communicative competence thus involves "knowledge of when to speak or be silent; how to speak on each occasion; how to communicate (and interpret) meanings of respect, seriousness, humour, politeness or intimacy" (Milroy, 1980: 85). Speakers also have to acquire an understanding of the social meaning of different linguistic varieties and different

linguistic forms.

Since the ethnography of English usage in Africa is concerned ultimately with communicative competence, the practical implication of a research such as this is that it would enable teachers and planners of English to understand the nature of the learner's sociolinguistic abilities at the mesolectal and basilectal levels of the sociolectal scale in order to provide remedies within pedagogical processes. For example, many African societies are multilingual and the type of language and lectal range used by speakers varies according to educational attainment and social and economic class; many of the features furnished under morphology and syntax in this study belong to basilectal English. In planning for endonormative models for the teaching of English in Africa, the analysis undertaken in this study would thus make it possible to identify the sociolects and linguistic features of African English and this would help make the English language relevant to the L2 learner's socio-cultural situation.

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