The Discursive Mechanisms of Nigerianisms and “Trancultured” Identities in Mary Specht’s Migratory Animals

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**ABSTRACT**

The study of literary texts from the purely formal-sentence linguistics is less helpful because it undermines contextual effects on the use of language in literature. Discourse analysis, unlike formal sentence-level linguistics, is more robust in its analysis of literary texts since it provides insights into how sociocultural and historical factors influence, to a large extent, writers’ use of language. Against this backdrop, we examine Mary Specht’s use of “Nigerianisms” in her novel, Migratory Animals (Migratory), to account for the context-specific ways through which language has been used, and how these articulate transcultural identity. The analysis draws deeply from the theoretical provisions of literary discourse analysis (LDA), a branch of discourse analysis devoted to the analysis of literary texts. From the analysis, three major forms of Nigerianisms which play up specific transcultured identities have been identified: code-switching, semantic shift/extension and Nigerian pidgin (NP) expressions. Code-switching, for example, allows characters in Migratory to switch from one code to another, thereby providing information about their “multiple” selves. By broadening different communicative contexts, semantic extension transforms the characters’ settings, drawing attention to their fragmented identities. Through NP expressions, Specht showcases the different linguistic backgrounds manifest in the English community in the text, which reflects the different the socio-cultural identities in Nigeria. From these, we argue that Specht’s use of “Nigerianisms” in her novel discursively depicts the present reality of existence—people’s “trancultured selves”. Hence, Nigerianisms are exquisite examples of how contextualised uses of language reveal the very polygonal cultural existence of humanity.

**Key words:** Transculturalism, Identity, Nigerianisms, Specht, Literary Discourse Analysis

**INTRODUCTION**

Diverse studies have applied linguistic approaches to the analysis of literary texts. But the majority of these studies have placed emphasis on either formal-sentence linguistics or the grammatical structure of language. This is corroborated by Tolliver, who observes that “investigation into the linguistic structure of discourse, beyond the level of the sentence, has been totally ignored by those proposing to study the structure of literary narrative discourse” (1990, p. 266). This situation is made worse by discourse analysts’ “who consider that ‘true’ discourse analysis must ignore literature, that the study of everyday conversation must be the hard core of their activity” (Maingueneau, 2010, p. 148). The truth of the matter is that sentence-level analysis of literary texts tends to undermine the sociocultural and historical significations that are embedded in the texts. Moreover, discourse analysis cannot be restricted to an aspect of language study. Elaborating literary discourse analysts’ stance, Benneth and Royle avow that language goes beyond “verbal, but may include everything that works as a system of signs, even without words” (2004, p. 31). Embedded in Benneth and Royle’s postulate is the notion that language and literature are inseparable because language articulates or gives expression to literary ideas. In fact, Aboh believes that “A literary work is a composition of linguistic artifacts. Hence it remains an interesting data for linguists who are interested in the social and cultural meaning of language in use” (2015, p. 44). Consequently, any linguistic theory or approach can be applied to the analysis of literature. Supporting this view, Benneth and Royle (2004, p. 266) insightfully note, “Literary texts not only say but do things: they do things with words and words do things to us”. This position does not appear to be different from John Austin’s pragmatic notion that things can be done with words. If readers must focus their attention on the nature of the sentence, their attention to what the text is saying is forcefully foreclosed, and this makes “reading a purely relativist process” (Miall, 2002, p. 324) This highlights the fact that even individual words, examined from...
literary discourse analysis perspective, have the capacity of generating several meanings, such as transcultured identities.

It therefore follows that, in order to understand how transcultural identity is constructed, one needs to understand how language works in context-specific ways. This specificity defines what people actually mean and “do” when they use language. Transculturalism, according to Ongenha (2008, p. 183) is “a process the elements of which are altered and from which a new, composite and complex reality emerges; a reality that is no mechanical mixture of characters, nor mosaic, but instead a new, original phenomenon”. It describes a practice in which the singularity of existence is altered, thereby creating opportunities for the emergence of a complex existence. This conjecture is not too far to seek since transculturalism, in practice, breaks individual, cultural, and national limitations. But perhaps the core of transculturalism is that people or individuals no longer live in a single culture; they embrace multiple cultures. Hence, culture and identity are not static, but are in a constant state of flux, making every individual a mosaic of cultural identities.

The concept of transculturalism in literature has triggered interest in literary criticism (Dagnino, 2013). In fact, such literary scholars as Frank Schulze-Engler, Sissy Helff, Sabrina Brancato, and others initiated the field of Transcultural English Studies in Germany and The Network for Literary Transculturation Studies, drawing on (the Cuban sociologist) Fernando Ortiz’s concept of ‘transculturation’ (Gaylard, 2015, p. 276). Following these schools of thought, many studies have come to explore different manifestations of transcultural identities in literary texts (e.g. Dagnino, 2013, 2015; Gaylard, 2015; Vassilatos, 2016, etc). While these studies focus largely on the study of ‘New Literatures in English’, particularly from literary perspective, the linguistic indices through which different cultures or identities can be transferred have hardly been examined. The focus of this paper, therefore, is to investigate the role language plays in individuals’ articulation of their multifaceted existence. To achieve this aim, two goals have been set; namely, to identify the linguistic patterns of Nigerianisms deployed in Migratory Animals, and to examine how these Nigerianisms generate specific transcultured identities in the text.

METHOD

The study is essentially a descriptive analysis of Migratory Animals (hereafter Migratory) with insights from Maingueneau’s (2010) concept of Literary Discourse Analysis (LDA). The exploration of language use in Migratory, which focuses on both the narrative and conversational units, is anchored on two concepts that drive the literary discourse analysis; namely, the Context of Transculturalism and Nigerianisms. LDA, itself, an approach of analysing literary texts from a discourse analysis perspective, unlike traditional stylistics, deals with literary texts “as part of the discursive practices of a given society” (Maingueneau, 2010, p. 152). It locates the language of literary texts within its context of production. The ideas that inform the writers’ use of language are important indices to be considered by analysts to understand what the text is really saying. Both the text and the context of the text are important to the literary discourse analysts. Maingueneau reasons that “for discourse analysts, there is no inside and outside text. What is ‘inside’ must construct its own ‘interiority’ through interdiscourse” (2010, p. 151). Therefore, it is less helpful to analyse Specht’s Migratory without recourse to the Nigerian sociolinguistic milieu that the novel is partly situated. The novel describes the world as a cornucopia of “transcultured selves”. Through the metaphor of birds or travel imagery, it depicts people’s cultural migration from one part of the world to another. But the emphasis, in this article, is on the migration from America to Nigeria. In corollary, Specht’s novel illustrates the shifting trend of literature in terms of focus and linguistic resourcefulness. The novelist appears to be interested in depicting the significance of contemporary existence, global interaction and the migration of not just individuals, but also their cultures and identities across the globe.

Migratory is strategic in its discussion of identity and transculturalism. However, these subjects are interspersed with other themes which, in some ways, complicate the plot and narrative arrangement of the novel. Consequently, the novel traces the coming of Flannery to Nigeria, her romantic relationship with Kunle – a postgraduate student at University of Ibadan and the complex turn of events. Drawing from the subjects of migration, transnationalism and transculturalism, Specht depicts the fragmented nature of human existence. The novelist presents us with a panorama of American and Nigerian life where her characters engage questions of culture, identities and belonging. This trajectory is profoundly textualised in the character of Flannery. Flannery, whose characterisation schema appropriately details the modern individual’s multi-layered existence, breaks the kernels of her American-ness to take up a Nigerian identity. Essentially, Flannery’s duality as expressed in “migration” dramatises a motivation to locate one’s self in a continuing mutating world. Therefore, it is credible to say that many people strive to attain some cultural plurality.

Specht achieves this sense of cultural dynamism not only through anthropological insights, but through linguistic illumination into Nigeria’s sociocultural realities. Thus, following the views of Benneth and Royle, cited earlier, literature, through strategic calibration of linguistic resources, transverses continental borders. Specht attempts, in her creative initiative, to put an end to racism, cultural bigotry as well as stereotypes through code-mixing/switching techniques, semantic shift/extension and Nigerian Pidgin expressions. She carefully switches codes in areas where she feels her American English cannot help in expressing her thoughts – an exemplification of the need for linguistic complementarity. Although there are instances where other languages, Spanish expressions (No names, giey and Callate, gringo) 201), for example, are used in the novel to actually depict transculturalism, our focus in this paper is to interrogate how Nigerian ways of using English, known as Nigerianisms, articulate “transcultured” identities in Migratory.

Identity or identity construction is a constitutive part of human existence and can manifest in different forms and various human transactions. However, the term has remained
One difficult notion to define. It could be seen as the way an individual wants to be regarded or the way an individual is regarded or constructed by others (Ononye, 2018, p. 85). The multifaceted and fluid nature of identity is perhaps the reason Ahmed (2016, p. 138) argues that “identity can, hence, change, just like the chameleon’s multicolours, to suit different situations and occasions.” Ahmed’s position resonates with the concept of transcultural identity. Although there are factors that articulate as well as construct people’s identity or identities, language is elemental to identity enactment. One’s knowledge and use of language says a lot about one’s experiences in life. Cuccioreta points out that “human experience and existence is due to the contact with the other, who in reality is, oneself” (2002, p. 2001). The title of the novel, Migratory Animals, bears eloquent testimonies of the “transcultured” self as well as redefines the notion of identity. It illuminates how the concept of identity occupies a heterogeneous space where conventional notions of identity are reconsidered. Specht, in her creative resourcefulness, interlaces her narrative with her experiences in Nigeria and it is in this kind of interspacing that the collective narrative of the novel takes shape and its central metaphor of “migratory animals” finds articulation in our “transcultured” or fragmented reality. Through Flannery, Specht delineates what is essentially Nigerian as well as allows Flannery to take up a voluntary identity. Voluntary identity, as conceived by Kavalski, depicts the idea of an independent choice of individual identity accentuated by a more flexible understanding of cultural frontiers; it is an articulation of the conjecture of the past with the social, cultural and economic relations of the present (Kavalski, 2005, p. 3).

Specht’s description of Nigeria’s cultural life through the prism of Flannery’s characterisation is an instantiation of the multi-dimensionality of humankind. This is why Flannery does not consider it an issue to be “Nigerian”. Consequently, her willingness to marry Kunle and ability to find Nigeria habitable implies that Nigeria is her constructed new home. She admits: “it really hadn’t been difficult to adjust to daily life in Nigeria” (p. 137). But Specht’s construction of dual identity relies heavily on her ability to use both American English and Nigerian indigenous expressions. It could be said that her understanding of the frequency of cultural regulation makes her creative process an effective construction of human structures, structures that are amenable to the reality of living in a “transcultured” world. Invariably, her novel births not an entirely new idea, but an amplification of cultural fluidity. Bitsi explains this postulate better as she states that “cultures and identities are dynamic sets, they change over time and adapt to circumstances. They are also complex wholes, encompassing heterogeneous components” (2016, p.3). It is, therefore, difficult to “coagulate” or abridge them in just one level. Bitsi’s observation has epistemological grounding and cultural validation since one can hardly talk about an entirely pure or singular culture. To study language in terms of identity construction implies buttressing the fact that identity is a constantly shifting phenomenon because neither identity nor language is fixed.

Nigerianisms is a technical term that describes the peculiar use of English in Nigeria. In Aremu’s (2015, p. 94) view, “Nigerianisms in Nigerian English are characterised by lexical borrowing, acronyms, first language interference, proverbs, slang, honorifics (polite tokens), code-mixing, code-switching, semantic shift, etc.”. He further says that Nigerianisms are common-place in written Nigerian literature. Specht has also adapted this Nigerian linguistic modality in her novelistic articulation of transculturalism.

Extensive studies (Odumuh, 1984; Adegbija, 1998; Udofot, 2007; Jowitt, 1991; Aboh & Uduk, 2016, among others) have validated the existence of a variety of ‘World Englishes’ known as Nigerian English. It therefore appears superfluous to take up such an argument in this article. These scholars, in their respective studies, have described the dynamic use of English in Nigeria as domestication, nativisation, acculturation and hybridization (Ononye & Ovu, 2013, p. 186). Ojutunde (2013, p. 254), in substantiating the peculiar use of English in Nigeria, observes that “Its [English] interaction with other indigenous languages in Nigeria has given rise to the variety of English which has the colouring of distinct Nigerian indigenous languages at all levels of linguistic analysis; lexis, syntax, semantic, phonology and discourse”. Like a typical Nigerian novel, there are numerous uses of Nigerian English expressions in Migratory. It is from this notion of language use that we discuss Nigerianisms: code-switching, semantic shift/extension and Nigerian Pidgin expressions as linguistic strategies by which Specht, in Migratory, expresses transculturalism.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Three major forms of Nigerianisms which play up specific transcultured identities have been identified in the text; viz. code-switching, semantic shift/extension and Nigerian Pidgin expressions. These will be discussed in succession.

Code-switching

For the Nigerian writer, switching codes is a definition of their bilingual identity. Code-switching is, therefore, a display of the multiple languages and cultures that are available in Nigeria. The English used by the Nigerian writer is often a blend of English and indigenous languages. Okunrinmeta clarifies that “the mutual linguistic influence that English and the Nigerian languages share … demonstrates how Nigerian literary writers have succeeded in effectively capturing, in their work, this mutual influence in Nigeria’s multilingual society” (2013, p. 118). Using a learned language for a bilingual person, therefore, entails translating — both ways — between languages and cultures, or moving like a pendulum back and forth into linguistic and cultural spaces, and concurrently tracking belonging. Although it can be said that Specht is not a bilingual in the Nigerian sociolinguistic epistemology, her novel bears exquisite testimonies of bilinguality in the sense that Migratory demonstrates the simultaneous use of Nigerian and American English expressions.

Code-switching, therefore, is a construct which does not comply with the norms of either English or a native tongue,
The concept of a single, exclusive, and unchanging
ethnic or cultural or other identity is a dangerous piece
of brainwashing. Human mental identities are not like
shoes, of which we can only wear one pair at a time. We
are all multi-dimensional beings (1996, p. 1067).

Hobsbawm persuasively argues that individuals operate
a framework of multiple identities. In fact, even nations that
are thought to be homogenous are, at the background, het-
erogeneous in identity. There are diverse people, in that sup-
posedly homogenous nation, with diverse ways of existence,
of viewing the world. Interestingly, Flannery goes on with
her daily life the way she finds Nigerians do.

No doubt, language constructs identities and gives us be-
longing. In Migratory, Kundle uses “abi?” (p. 15), a Yoruba
expression that means “isn’t it?” or “right?”, when talking on
the phone with Molly, Flannery’s sister. This word is often
borrowed into Nigerian English literature and it functions
as a conversational strategy which discourses participants de-
ploy to “make” listeners agree or confirm what they say. For
Kundle to use the Yoruba word with an American who has
never been to Nigeria should not be conceived as a demon-
stration of arrogance but a deliberate act of identity “trans-
fer”. He presupposes that Molly would understand what it
means. But most importantly, in “fixing” this word in her
characters’ mouth, Specht typifies the fact that one does not
necessarily have to live in a particular community for one to
imbibe the cultural patterns of a people, for language embod-
ies the ways of life of a people. Kundle’s use of “abi” while
talking with Molly is strategic: it means that he has expanded
the linguistic frontiers of English so as to relate unencum-
bered with Molly.

One of the definers of Nigerian English is the pragmatism
that underlays its use. There is, for example, the calculated
use of “wahala” by Flannery when she thinks of Molly.
“Wahala” is a Hausa expression that translates as “trouble”,
“problem” or “controversy”. But the context actually deter-
mines the depth of the meaning. In some cases, it’s meaning
is weightier than mere “trouble” or “problem”. Having lived
in Nigeria, Flannery understands that it can be used to mean
more than “trouble”. This is the reason she deploys “wa-
hala” to tell the degree of the psychological trauma Molly
is undergoing because of Huntington disease – a genetic
disease passed to her from their mother. In displaying her
“transcultured” selves, Flannery, through the discourse strat-
ey of linguistic apposition, tells us what “wahala” means –
“big trouble” (p. 16). In fact, “wahala” better explains what
she thinks of Molly’s situation. It is fascinating to see how
Flannery navigates the seams of existence through the lin-
guistic choices she makes.

Following the trend of the bilingual Nigerian novelist,
Specht adopts indigenous expressions in her creative initia-
tive to explain the conflation of language and the presen-
tation of sociocultural reality. She uses the Nigerian term
“Okada” which describes both a commercial motorbike and
the rider. Ontologically, it describes a town in present day
Edo State, Nigeria. Flannery systematically mediates an
imagine of viewing the world. Interestingly, Flannery goes on with
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from the formal mode of the English language to Yoruba. She switches between language to identify with and accept cultural transportation lends credence to her identity construction goal. This is manifest in her tongue swap. Her linguistic representation echoes Onghe na’s (2008, p. 182) view, “we can safely say that cultures are constantly evolving and that we should consider them dynamic. Moving from the descriptive to the more explanatory nature”. It does not appear to be out of place to mention that Flannery’s use of language indicates her transitive process of navigating two cultures.

Our position in this discourse is that there seems to be a conjunction between the language of literature and the identity that produced it. The deployment of “suya” (p. 154) to capture the culinary habit of many Nigerians is an instantiation of the foregoing conjecture. “Suya” describes strips of beef with oil sprinkles grilled on skewers over open fire. It is a Hausa expression that is commonly used in Nigeria. Knowing this, Flannery buys it for Kunle and they both sit out “devouring” it (p. 154). While Flannery is familiar with grilled meat, it can hardly be said that she is used to “suya”. Even Kunle is marvelling at Flannery’s adaptability. He says, “I’m surprised an oyinbo can take the spice”. Therefore, her eating “suya” despite the fact that it is spicy could be seen as an attempt to calibrate herself into the cultural pattern of Nigerians in terms of food. It is during the scene of “suya” eating that “they talk about their childhood”. The “suya atmosphere” offers a perfect opportunity for them to dig into their respective histories, enabling them to get to know each other better. This is a dynamic transformation, an indexicalisation of our polygonal existence. In the next section of the paper, we focus on the strategic use of semantic shift/extension in Migratory.

**Semantic Shift/Extension**

Another noticeable manifestation of Nigerian languages in Nigerian English usage is the broadening or shifting of the semantic base of English words and expressions. Semantic extension or shift in Nigerian English (NE) “involves old words that are given new meanings. This is perhaps the most productive strategy in Nigerian English” (Bamgbose, 2014, p. 20). Importantly, the expanding or shifting of the semantic base of English resonates with the cultural pattern of Nigerians. Put differently, the cultural epistemology of Nigerians defines the use of English in their physical environment. Some of these expressions, as found in Migratory, are discussed presently. For example, cuisines have cultural variations—they may be obtainable in one culture but not in another. Expressions such as goat stew, pepper soup, Calabar stew and peri-winkle snails are cultural collocations that are well known to many Nigerians.

The expression pepper soup is a special type of consommé made with meat or fish, and pepper but without oil. While
most Nigerians prepare *pepper soup* at home, it is mainly
served at restaurants. As the name suggests, it is usually very
spicy. *Goat stew* (p. 135) is prepared with mutton or the offal
of a goat. *Calabar stew* (p. 136) is a kind of Efik soup known
as *edikang ikong* and is now consumed in almost every part
of Nigeria. *Periwinkle snails* (p. 136) are obtained from some
Nigerian rivers and are used to make soup and other sorts of
food. Interestingly a feature of Nigerian literature, the
meaning of these English words has been shifted or extended
not only for communicative pertinence within the Nigerian
“communicative context,” but “domesticated to reflect the
meanings that their equivalents in the Nigerian languages
express” (Okunrinmola, 2013, p. 123).

By making specific references to Nigeria’s food tech-
nology, Specht takes her readers on an anthropological ex-
cursion into the culinary culture of Nigerians. As she does
so, she allows Flannery to manifest her transcultural iden-
tity. Food is a constitutive aspect of a people’s material cul-
ture. Symbolically, the various references to Nigeria’s food
culture in *Migratory* transform the author’s natural setting,

enabling her to enact not only a Nigerian identity for her
characters, but to also draw attention to people’s fragmented
existence. Using language as the gateway to Nigeria’s eth-
non-linguistic space, Specht succeeds in reproducing a pat-
tern of life that is ontologically Nigerian. For example, the
expression *Calabar stew*, as used in

One of Kunle’s neighbors from Cross River State stuck
her head in to ask if they’d eaten – “Done chop?”’ They
spooned up her *Calabar stew*, sucking the periwinkle
snails from the shells and scooping big chunks of leafy
greens with balls of soft *fufu* made from boiled cassava
(pp. 136-137).

provides cultural information about the food culture of the
Efik ethnic group of southern Cross River State. The
sucking of *periwinkle snails* and swallowing of balls of
*fufu* are telling examples of the eating pattern of the people
described. Yet, that Specht’s central character finds herself
assimilating such a pattern of life is an illumination of her
multiple existences. Specht writes of how “Flannery was liv-
ing in mental possession of two worlds” (p. 224).

In a similar anthropological cum historical excursion, the
NE expression, *Boys Quarters* (BQ), refers to the quarters
where (male) servants are housed. *Boys Quarters* is a vestige
of colonialism that has continued to recur in NE usage. In
Nigeria today, some people build a main house and a special,
small apartment slightly cut off from the main residence and
they call it BQ, a place reserved for the “boys” and possibly
home helps. In other instances, it is reserved for non-
members of the immediate family and visitors. Invariably, many
present-day Nigerian BQs do not have that subservient, dehu-
manising colonial tinge. Flannery tells us what a BQ means:

Kunle’s room was in a BQ, or “Boys Quarters,” a term
for the small building adjacent to a residence that,
during colonial times, had been used to house servants
or “houseboys.” BQs – and his was no different – were
usually a row of three or four rooms connected by a slab
porch, which, since there wasn’t a proper kitchen, was
where inhabitants set up hot plates and buckets of water
(p. 135).

Besides providing architectural information about BQs
and the fact that it is a colonial vestige, it tells us about
some students’ housing life style in some Nigerian univer-
sities, specifically University of Ibadan where Specht was a
Fulbright scholar. Flannery is Kunle’s girlfriend and when
she goes to see him, she is amazed how Kunle lives in a
small apartment with two other postgraduate students. But
perhaps an interesting aspect of such linguistic deployment
is that whenever BQ is mentioned, many a Nigerian can tell
what it means because it describes a familiar housing sys-
tem. But importantly, Specht has consciously unravelled the
historical situation and condition responsible for the creation
of a linguistic expression that can be deemed as typically
Nigerian. As much as Flannery does not belittle where Kunle
lives, she identifies with him: such identification is signifi-
cant in the understanding of transculturalism. Kalpana cor-
robirates this, as he notes, “…identity is stuck within the
nation’s history, for individuals are at a point identified only
if they have a location within the historical moment” (2015,
p. 50). We can then say that Specht’s use of language symp-
tomises how writers use their artworks to give expressive
force to transnational identity.

According to the backdrop provided by Specht’s narra-
tive, it could be argued that *Migratory* is anthropological in
many ways because it insightfully details Nigeria’s culture.
The Nigerian identity reproduced throughout the novel pro-
vides an objective ground for a valid discussion of transcul-
tural identity construction. The expression, *village*, has a
narrowed meaning in Nigeria. It is reduced to a rural, un-
developed area as contrasted with an urban area so that *my
village* means “my rural, undeveloped hometown where my
roots lie”. An important indicator of the use of *my village* is
that it connects a Nigerian to his or her roots. It has every-
thing to do with identity and one’s place of birth. There is
a saying in Nigeria that “everybody comes from a village”,
meaning that, however civilised, sophisticated or educated
one is at present, one’s roots are located in an uncivilised
space called village. It is in *my village* that *kerosene lamp*
(a local lamp made with a reduced metal can with a wick in
the middle that uses kerosene to burn) is used by villagers.
Specht succinctly details village life in:

Kunle’s village was beautiful in its way – a pastoral
answer to the maddening crowds and jammed roads
of the major Nigerian cities. Women carried water on
their heads, to and fro from the wells. Cocks fought and
chased each other while the occasional teenager kicked
up dust on a motorbike, probably going nowhere, killing
time. (p. 159)

For the Nigerian who has lived or been to the village,
these are familiar elements of rustic glamour: women (not men)
carry water on their heads, cocks fight and chase each
other and pastoral. True to Specht’s narrative, it is in the vil-
lage that Kunle’s mother uses a *kerosene lamp* to illuminate
the kitchen and the compound. It is also in the village that
*mango trees* are commonly found. Each of these expressions
provides impressive examples of life in many Nigerian vil-
lages. It is not that village is a Nigerian English word, but its
deployment in the novel calibrates it to reflect the typical-
ality of Nigerian village(s). For Flannery to consider Kunle’s
village beautiful and habitable in its pastoral way means that she has accepted where he comes from, and to accept his origin is to accept him for who he is. This has a mental representation – that people shift in tune with the shifting nature of reality to have a new definition.

The expression *let me land* has semantically been shifted in NE to mean *allow me make my point or let me be through*. Contextually, Kunle reads through Flannery’s data and becomes unhappy because she is elongating her stay only for a mere cloud seeding. On interrupting him on when he finally makes up his mind to discuss her overstay, he says, “let me land” (p. 195). Immediately, Flannery gives him back his conversational turn. Flannery, the American, understands what Kunle means because she had lived in Nigeria and knows what Nigerians mean when they say “let me land”. This, of course, is an acute explication of linguistic transnationalism. The fact is that Specht’s use of language demonstrates the way many Nigerians use English. The Nigerian English expression is often used when a speaker’s conversational turn is grabbed or interrupted. Having drawn attention to the use of some Nigerian English expressions in the construction of transnational identity, we turn my attention to the deployment of Nigerian Pidgin expressions in relation to the enunciation of transcultural identity.

**Nigerian Pidgin Expressions**

Nigerian Pidgin (henceforth NP), being English-based, draws from the vocabulary of the English language and from indigenous languages to form a new language that is only intelligible to a Nigerian. Balogun writes that “The dynamic and generative capacities of Nigerian Pidgin to create from a finite set of lexical items have continued to foster communicative process and interaction among Nigerians. It has also afforded mutual interest and understanding between indigenous citizens and foreigners” (2013, p. 90). NP is mostly used in informal transactions. It is a vehicle for the formulation of friendly relationship among its users. Generally, NP serves consistently as Nigeria’s lingua franca and the commonest to use as a medium of communication among the diverse ethnic groups in Nigeria. Some NP expressions used in *Migratory* are examined presently.

The expression *Body no be firewood*, has several significations. Specht narrates:

There was a saying in Nigerian pidgin: “Body no be firewood,” meaning that a body is not meant to be put through all the searing pains and horrors of this life. But when she’d first heard Kunle use the phrase, she thought he was talking about romantic sparks, the burn of physical attraction. Love turning your body into sticks of firewood. (p. 42)

The context to which the expression, *Body no be firewood*, (literarily means “the body is not a log of wood”) is put determines its meaning. It can be used by someone who has been stressed or strained to mean that his/her body, unlike firewood, is not meant to be subjected to unbearable suffering. But it is commonly used in Nigeria to refer to sexual craving or readiness, suggesting that one is not as sexually insensitive as a log of wood. Flannery thought that Kunle, using such an expression, means his sparkling love—as firewood does when burning—towards her but later realises that his usage aligns with the explanation offered above. She understands this more in the stressful situation she finds herself.

One noticeable feature of NP is that it is “liberal”. Sometimes, its syntactic meaning can be deduced from its subtle, witty and metaphorical combination of the individual words. This can be seen in the transaction between Flannery and Kunle,

“I’m sorry I’m not in a better state. It’s not often I get house calls from Americans. How do you find Nigeria?”

This was a question everyone asked Flannery and two other Americans working with her.

“I like it here. I’m still here”.

“You try small, small. But for how much longer”? he asked. (p. 136)

The expression, *You try small small*, has its cultural embedding: the reduplication, *small small*, is used to commend someone who has been able to perform a given task to an extent so that *small small* means that the commendation is commensurate to the impartial completion of a duty. In the context of Kunle and Flannery, the expression shows a purely commendable progress, cheering Flannery to do more. She is commended for her first time experience in Nigeria as she tries to live up to it. The language – pidgin – that is used is not a language Flannery had originally known. But the time she has spent in Nigeria enables her to understand what Kunle means. An interesting aspect of Kunle’s use of language is his intention to “initiate” Flannery into Nigerian ways of using language.

One inference that can be drawn from Specht’s novel is her cultural tapestry. She taps into the communal life style of Nigerians through her constructive use of NP. It is true that Nigerians live communally. Consequently, it behooves on a member of a community to want to know how other members of the commune are faring. Despite the fact that most Nigerians’ modes of living have given in to western influences, some communal fragments are still noticeable among contemporary Nigerians as inferred from the use of NP.

As pointed out earlier, there are questions asked about one another’s welfare, health status and, in fact, well-being in general. These cultural tenets are backgrounded in NP expressions such as *Done chop*? (p. 136), *How body*? (p. 138) and *Body fine-o* (p. 138). In a sense, while *Done chop*? is a question that ordinarily asks whether one has eaten or not, it implies more than just a question. It usually comes from a caring friend or relative. Specht tells us how, “One of Kunle’s neighbors from Cross River State stuck her head in to ask if they’d eaten – “Done chop?” (p. 136). The question, *Done chop*? (Have you eaten?), exemplifies the communal practice of Nigerians as well as details the charitable things Nigerians do for one another. Through her tactical deployment of the NP expression, Specht portrays the life of living together and sharing possessions and responsibilities.

Corroborating this postulate, Amao opines that “Nigerian pidgin is also acknowledged as a formidable stride in the re-creation of Nigerian and African socio-cultural identity” (2012, p. 45). Specht tells us that Flannery does not only
observe this cultural exigency, but participates fully in the process.

Through the use of this pidgin expression, we can understand a connection between food behaviour and the formulation of a new identity. Perhaps we should not forget that Flannery does not at any time reject any Nigerian food she is offered. Kunle tells his aunt, “Flan loves our food” (p. 223). It is in the eating of the food that she actually comes to know their names. In this way, we understand the efforts she makes to forge a new identity for herself, a formulation that does not destroy her American-ness. Rather, it is an identity that makes her fit snugly into the complex dynamics of human many-sided existence. Accordingly, although food in principle is morally neutral, in practice, it makes moral and political declarations. It is a site, in fact, an advantaged site for the enunciation of identity.

Similarly, How body? with its corresponding response Body fine-o is a question that requests not just the respondent’s physiological well-being (as could be inferred from the linguistic context of the sentence) but his/her total well-being, which includes psychological, social, economic, financial, mental health and, in fact, family relationship, so that the answer Body fine-o could be synonymous with the English version All is well, not just My body is in good condition. This further illustrates the point that the syntax of NP expressions is nearly always built up metaphorically to embrace the cultural definitions of the Nigerian society. Some of these expressions are pure transliterations of indigenous languages. In the novel, the very first words out of Kunle’s mouth when Flannery calls him on the phone are How body? and she responds Body fine-o. From this question-response transaction, Kunle is certain that, all things being equal, Flannery is doing well or does not have some major problem. Being aware of the pragmatics that defines such linguistic axiom, Flannery, though in America, enacts a Nigerian identity.

Every point Specht deploys a Nigerian Pidgin expression seems significant to the discourse of transcultural identity construction. Kunle’s village is a stark contrast to the noisy, busy and crowded Nigerian cities. Back home in Kunle’s village, Flannery will always have Kunle’s mother shake her head much to the indignation of Flannery’s own generation and “waka waka” means “to walk a lot”. The meaning of waka

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