Nigerian Translingualism: Negotiation and Desirability of Language in Nigerian Literature

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Abstract

The power to communicate effectively and the politics of language were over the years intertwined, compelling writers used foreign languages to reach a wider audience, make sense of our world, describe different worlds, and create other experiences. Translingualism is also like a bridge for readers who cannot speak an author’s native language. The adoption of literary translingualism is a knotted discourse, but the texts of Wole Soyinka, Amos Tutuola, Chinua Achebe, Ben Okri, and Chimamanda Adichie reviewed to examine this loosely defined term. This essay dissects the essence of literary translingualism in inspecting individual attempts to adhere to linguistic differences, reviewing how selected writers have shown the necessity for translingualism in their work.

Introduction

In writing, the concept of translingualism is a loosely related set of ideas still in search of its concrete, universal meaning — expressed in separate articles by scholars discussing how to negotiate linguistic differences. Scholars of translingual writing have sought agreement on how they contribute to the meaning, language patterns, and systems. The ideas, concepts, and sentiments of translingual writing are works in progress.

Translingual writers postulate some significant and standard features. According to Paul Matsuda, translingualism shows how “English monolingualism is prevalent and problematic. The presence of language differences is
normal and desirable. Languages are neither discrete nor stable; they are dynamic and negotiated. Practicing translingual writing involves the negotiation of language differences.”¹ These assumptions made by Matsuda and other ideas related to translingual writing are not new. Those who are multilingual — or familiar with studies of language used by multilingual individuals — generally believe that language is extremely dynamic. This perspective is foundational for descriptive linguistics, and more recently, for literary writers. Such writers take on the responsibilities of storytellers and sociolinguists, interrogating and finding a nexus between language and meaning through their texts, which reflect how languages interact and change over time at the societal level.

Translingual writing has attracted the attention of language and literature scholars over time, especially those interested in rhetoric and composition writing. Upcoming trends and tenets surrounding translingualism as a flourishing concept fascinate many linguists and language theorists while periods and cultures have significantly affected translingual writers. Corroborating this, Kellman believes that “it is probably true that every translingual writer is translingual in her or his way. And that translingualism resonates differently in every era and culture.”² Over the years, imperialism and colonialism are two influences that have made many writers translingual.

The historical circumstances surrounding writers cannot be separated from their work. James Ngugi writes:

The novelist is haunted by a sense of the past. His work is often an attempt to come to terms with a thing that has been; has struggled to register his encounter sensitively with history. The novelist at his best must feel himself the heir of continuous tradition. He must feel himself, as I think Tolstoy did in War and Peace, swimming, struggling, and defining himself in the mainstream of his people’s historical drama. At the same time, he must be able to stand aside and contemplate the current.³

The Yorùbá people believe that the circumstances of a person’s birth influence their journey on earth. In the case of most translingual writers, imperialism and colonialism influenced their decision to become translingual, as imperialist invasion and domination compelled many cultures to interact willingly or otherwise. In cases where interactions are driven by force,

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¹ Paul Matsuda, “The Lute of Translingual Writing,” PMLA 129, no. 3 (2014): 478-83.
² Steven Kellman, “Literary Translingualism: What and Why?” Polylinguality and Transcultural Practices 16, no.3(2019), 110.
³ James Ngugi, “The African Writer and His Past,” Perspectives on African Literature, ed. Christopher Heywood (Ile-Ife: University of Ife Press, 1977), 12-17.
translingualism existed as part of a society marked by greedy foreigners intruding into every sphere of their lives.

As a historian who has addressed many assumptions related to the Yorùbá language and its desirability, it is exciting to see the enthusiasm attached to other major languages reflected in writing, appreciating how they are uniquely patterned to suit their variations on the English language. This essay will explore the English language’s evolution and distinctive qualities as speakers of the major languages in Nigeria — Hausa, Igbo, and Yorùbá — adopt it as a literary medium. These changes have affected the texts produced in different eras of Nigerian literature, eventually contributing to the scholarship on translingualism in Nigeria.

Emergent Nigerian writers in different eras have redefined and reconstructed native languages to suit their form of English, and the appropriateness of these variant approaches has differed across generations. By scrutinizing the lives and experiences of such writers alongside their works, one can evaluate the writers’ perception of language and its eventual contribution to literature in Nigeria.

In addition, this essay will examine new dimensions in Nigerian literature, drawing inferences and validating arguments from the close reading and analysis of different texts by Amos Tutuola, Chinua Achebe, Wole Soyinka, Buchi Emecheta, Ben Okri, Chimamanda Adichie, Helen Oyeyemi, and others in different periods. It will confine itself to close analyses of the nexus between language and meaning for selected primary texts by these writers. Discussions will consider the various trends and tenets of translingual writings. Nigerian literature has flourished and contributed largely to bourgeoning literary discourses over the years, receiving an extensive depth of scholarly attention and critique. This essay is informed by the need to explore and evaluate radical changes emerging in English and natal languages, examining how differences in language make it desirable, approachable, and readable for international and Nigerian audiences.

The qualitative approach of this essay will use various literary texts from Nigerian writers as its primary source of data. These works are pertinent and critical to discussions anchored on Nigerian translingualism and translingual writing, as they incorporate a unique language identity into their works. The selected writers have written within the ambit of multilingual Nigerian writers, and their works studied as representations of realities of translingual writing; these authors write in a language other than their primary languages. Close attention paid to different genres, historical periods, and linguistic combinations in the texts to consider how they affect meaning.

Translingualism is not a casual concept; writers are either monolingual or translingual. Using Ngũgĩ waThiong’o as an example, he was monolingual
when he wrote in Kikuyu but evolved to become translingual when he started to write in English, which was a foreign language for him. Two theories support the approaches observed for translingualism in literary works. One theory demonstrates the relations between languages, differences, and boundaries. The other concerns the ideological imperative of translingualism’s effort to counter the cultural assumption of monolingualism.

Translingual approaches should relate language theory and ideology. Jonathan Hall, quoting Horner et al., explains that “the original statement of a translingual approach succinctly summarizes the underlying language theory: A translingual approach takes the variety, fluidity, intermingling, and change-ability of languages as statistically demonstrable norms around the globe.” This approach is similar to earlier consideration given to “trans.” Going beyond this shows the decimation of paradigmatic adherence to linguistic singularity.

A literary translingual approach breaks free from the confinement within the scope of a single language. It appreciates each writer’s subjectivity and agency, writing in preferred languages that are unconstrained by linguistic barriers. Such an approach is not an attempt to overturn a community’s linguistic standards. Hall further postulates:

> It is not a “matter of choosing whether to follow or to defy the rules of a standardized language, but rather of finding strategies for situating oneself as a writer, within the already shifting and already malleable repetitions and deviations that constitute the network of differences that form what we call language(s) or dialect(s) or varieties—or subsets such as registers or disciplines.  

Translingualism allows a writer to select the context in which they are found. Monolingualism restricts, while translingualism liberates. Translingualism gives translingual an avenue to be translingual in their ways and manners.

**Translingualism in Nigerian Literature: Different Eras, Different Qualities**

Translingualism in postcolonial literature admits to the influence of foreign languages. The influence of English and French languages on African writers cannot be stressed enough. The presence of European languages in

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4 Jonathan Hall, “The Translingual Challenge: Boundary Work in Rhetoric & Composition, Second Language Writing, and WAC/WID,” *Across the Disciplines: A Journal of Language, Learning and Academic Writing* 15, no.3 (2018): 30.
5 Hall, “The Translingual Challenge,” 30.
6 Hall, “The Translingual Challenge,” 31.
African communities influenced the thought processes of Africans. They were influenced by these imperial languages because “different languages orient us differently toward space and time, and a language that lacks a past tense embodies a very different sense of history than one with a complicated preterite system of simple past, past perfect, past progressive, past perfect progressive, and habitual past.”

In the African context, literary translingualism began from contact with foreign cultures. In some instances, African literary translingualism is the idea to accept foreign languages with open arms. In this case, not accepted as a strange entity but nativized in an African sense. Critics have described this as the nativization of the English language. This reiterates the notion that “historically, African literature has been described as an emergent (post) colonial response to European imperialism.”

Literary translingualism is a response to the politics of language inherited through colonialism. “Postcolonial literature, by authors such as Chinua Achebe, Raja Rao, and Léopold Sédar Senghor, is generally written in the language of the European metropolis rather than the local tongue.” Postcolonial writing demonstrates writers’ position on colonialism, making them believe that they have a role to play. For many postcolonial writers, translingualism is a sort of performative social struggle. According to Bala Garba:

In the postcolonial context of African writing, the role of the writer is closely related to politics and similar questions of power and representation. Indeed, it is a distinctive characteristic of postcolonial Nigerian writing that it critically explores questions of political hegemony and democratization. As Quayson argues, African writers see themselves as the essential part of a larger social struggle.

In the Nigerian context, literary translingualism is a postcolonial response to years of linguistic imperialism. The African literary translingualism analyzed so far misconstrued to mean that writers like Achebe, Ngugi, and Tuutuola contributed to England’s literature. Instead, they wrote in English to

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7 Kellman, “Literary Translingualism.”
8 Aderemi Raji-Oyelade, “Bondages of Bonding: The Challenge of Literary Criticism in the New Age,” The Postcolonial Lamp: Essays in Honour of Dan Izevbaye, eds. Raji-Oyelade A & Okunoye O. (Ibadan: Bookcraft, 1995), 64.
9 Steven Kellman, “Does Literary Translingualism Matter? Reflections on the Translingual and Isolinguistic Text,” Literary Multilingualism, no. 7 (2019), 110.
10 Garba I. Baba, “The Lost Language of Enlightenment: Return to Algadez and the New Writing,” The Post-Colonial Lamp: Essays in Honour of Dan Izevbaye, eds. Raji-Oyelade A. & Okunoye O. (Ibadan: Bookcraft, 1995), 375.
propagate translingualism in Nigeria. Literary translingualism is a product of eras and influences, discussed by examining the works of specific writers in different waves, opening up how they systematically took up different variations of literary translingualism.

First Wave Writers and Situating Native Language in World Languages

Translingualism is a decision to switch from one’s native language to a preferred language, suggesting that cultural and linguistic relations are essential to literary translingualism. Cultures interact in space and time, making it pertinent to study Nigerian literary translingualism parallel to historical progression. Amos Tutuola is one of the early literary translingual to come out of Nigeria, and his (possibly unconscious) translingual efforts made the English language create a sort of Tutuola’s standard of English. In fact, “the language of Tutuola has been the source of what may be regarded as lively literary politics”\(^{11}\) to the point where his English is often characterized as “Yoruba - English.”\(^{12}\)

The translingual approach of Amos Tutuola merges Yoruba and English languages, and Tutuola’s choices make it easy to differentiate between the two. A brilliant interaction between two polarized cultures demonstrates their underlying similarities. As Tutuola writes in *The Palm-Wine Drinkard* and other novels, there was no mere bastardization of the English language. In this sense, literary translingualism allowed Tutuola to blaze a new trail for writing.

One might argue that Tutuola belonged to the last class of translingual, based solely on their technical choice of language. Tutuola may have lacked an agenda or motive for writing in “broken English.” The “Yorùbá English” label, applied to Tutuola’s translingual approach, brings to mind a recent issue that generated a lot of debate: the Academy of Motion Picture Arts and Sciences declined to consider a Nigerian movie for an Oscar award because it did not adhere to the rules for nomination. The film, *Lionheart*, declared ineligible to receive an award for best international feature film because such films were required to have predominantly non-English dialogue. However, the film’s supporters explained that it used Standard Nigerian English, reflecting how Nigerians have fashioned the English language to capture their cultural experiences and expressions.

A staunch defender of Tutuola’s translingual approach may respond to critics by explaining that Tutuola’s use of language captures the reality of the

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11 Afolayan Adeshina, “Language and Sources of Amos Tutuola,” in *Perspectives on African Literature*, ed. Christopher Heywood (Ile-Ife: University of Ife Press, 1977), 49.
12 Adeshina, “Language and Sources of Amos Tutuola.”
Yoruba people, no matter how its English is constructed. Literary translingualism in the works of Tutuola goes beyond a monolingual ideology. Staunch critics have argued that Tutuola plagiarized the Yorùbá novelist, D. O. Fagunwa, but it is reasonable to state that this notion is an overly harsh criticism of Tutuola. Fagunwa stuck with a monolingual framework while Tutuola experimented with the English language. This experimentation helped capture the complexities of understanding Yoruba cultural experiences in a European language.

Tutuola’s work illustrates folklore with his unique method and style, telling the forgotten tales to readers and re-introducing them to remain fresh in the mind of his audience. He illustrates the richness of African folklore material without quaint intentions — he harbors the rarest intention of telling a wonderful tale that is not only didactic but also has Universalist tendencies. The narrative style that characterizes folklore is bound to be imperfect, and its language should not conform to standards, which Tutuola’s writing technique espouses. The folklore motifs found in African novels and Tutuola’s works involve the profuse application of African images, local customs, practices, proverbs, magic, songs, and social habits. Early African writers used these folkloric examples to explain African cultures to foreign readers, allowing them to understand Africa’s worldview.

Based on their time of publication, Amos Tutuola and Chinua Achebe are of the same era. Chinua Achebe was more than a literary writer; he doubled as a critic and holistically contributed to the discussion by analyzing translingual African literary thoughts. He worked on the subject as a writer, critic, and literary theorist. One of the many statements showing the literary translingualism in Achebe’s works is his declaration: “Let no one is fooled by the fact that we may write in English, for we intend to do unheard-of things with it.”\(^{13}\) Achebe furthered Tutuola’s translingual approach by believing that “he and other colonial subjects have appropriated and transformed the European language and made it their own, an African English.”\(^{14}\) Achebe believes that:

To help create a unique and authentic African literary tradition would mean that some of us would decide to use the colonizer’s tools: his language, altered sufficiently to bear the weight of an African creative aesthetic, infused with elements of the African literary tradition. I borrowed proverbs from our culture and history, colloquialisms and African expressive language

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13 Chinua Achebe, *Morning Yet on Creation Day* (New York: Anchor Books, 1976), 9.
14 Kellman, “Literary Translingualism: What and Why?” 341.
from the ancient griots, the worldviews, perspectives, and customs from my Igbo tradition and cosmology, and the sensibilities of everyday people.\textsuperscript{15}

Achebe’s translingualism has an underlying motive. In his works, translingualism is creative and set to pioneer a new wave of writing, allowing Igbo culture to situate itself among other world languages — Achebe’s literary translingualism helps present the traditional Igbo system to the world. He claims that “African people did not hear of culture for the first time from Europeans; that their societies were not mindless but frequently has a philosophy of great beauty, that they had poetry and above all, their dignity,”\textsuperscript{16} Achebe directly confronts monolingual expectations of English in his works. The success of his celebrated work, \textit{Things Fall Apart}, discussed by Peters:

Its insight into the culture of the Igbo seen from the point of view of an “inside outsider” (a role he had as an Igbo whose missionary upbringing prevented his participation in traditional rituals), a thorough understanding of narrative organization and style, and keen observation of and absorption with day-to-day happenings, not through the lenses of the anthropologist, but through the clear sight of one who was involved with and felt at one with his culture while at the same time inculcating Western ideas.\textsuperscript{17}

In Achebe’s \textit{Arrow of God}, he analyzes the Igbo thought system’s elevation of the sense of community with the English language that is rooted in colloquial linguistic individualism. He writes:

If this was so then Ulu had chosen a dangerous time to uphold that truth, for in destroying his priest he had brought upon himself, like the Lizard in the fable who ruined his mother’s funeral by his hand. For a deity who chose a moment such as this to chastise his priest or abandon him before his enemies were inciting people to take liberties and Umuaro was just ripe to do so.\textsuperscript{18}

The transculturality of the Igbo culture adopting the English language has helped Achebe discuss the operation of community and individuality. The

\textsuperscript{15} Chinua Achebe, “Developing An African Voice: The Role of the Writer in Africa,” \textit{The Root}, November 27, 2012, https://www.theroot.com/developing-an-african-voice-chinua-achebe-1790894278.

\textsuperscript{16} Achebe, \textit{Morning Yet on Creation Day} (New York: Anchor Books, 1976).

\textsuperscript{17} Jonathan Peters, “English Language Fiction in West Africa,” in \textit{A History of Twentieth Century African Literatures}, ed., O. Owomoyela (Nebraska: University of Nebraska Press, 1993), 9.

\textsuperscript{18} Chinua Achebe, \textit{Arrow of God} (London: Heinemann, 1964), 555.
idea of community is traditional amongst the Igbo, but the new world order (as in the case of the priest) shows that belief systems will be individually justified rather than validated through a group decision. Translingualism — the ability to relate the past with the present to project a future, accomplished by retaining the particularities of one’s native culture amidst a changing world and refusing to adhere to monolingual limitations — has played many roles in Achebe’s work. The use of Igbo proverbs, chants, and traditions in Achebe’s novels allows readers to infer that his approach to literary translingualism holds that “we cannot anglicize without integrating local traditions, lore and cultural values available in the universe of particular local contexts, hence the diverse variants of literary and linguistic elements that have been introduced into the Anglophone text.”

Achebe’s *Things Fall Apart* celebrated because it allows the world to grasp Igbo cultural beliefs by presenting them in an accessible language. *Things Fall Apart* reformulates imperial English to capture colonial encounters and African experiences. Achebe’s work encourages several translations because translators present the Igbo belief system in other languages and understand that despite cultural disparities, the central message of the work will survive. Notable translations are *Ighesi Aye Okonkwo* by Wale Ogunyemi and *Le LocusteBianche* by Giuliana da Carlo. Achebe has also inspired many Igbo writers, including Chimamanda Adiche, seen as the new generation of African literary translinguals.

In linguistic terms, Iyasere states that Achebe “uses proverbs both to infuse the English language with traditional African wisdom and perceptions and—with Soyinka, Oladipo, and Christiana Aidoo—to provide a ‘grammar of values’ of the world within the novel.” The concept of a bride price is also arguably an old tradition that is an essential practice in contemporary African society. Akueke’s ceremony in *Things Fall Apart* is an example:

> We had not thought to go below thirty. But as the dog said, ‘If I fall for you and you fall for me, it is played’. Marriage should be a play and not a fight, so we are falling again.” He then added ten sticks to the fifteen and gave the bundle to Ukegbu. In this way, Akueke’s bride price was finally settled.

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19 Andindilile Michael, *The Anglophone Literary-Linguistic Continuum: English and Indigenous Languages in African Literary Discourse* (South Africa: NISC (Pty) Ltd, 2018), 123.

20 Abiola Irele, “Homage to Chinua Achebe,” *Research in African Literatures* 32, no.3 (2001), 1–2.

21 Solomon Iyasere, “Oral Tradition in the Criticism of African Literature,” *The Journal of Modern African Studies* 13, no.1 (1975), 114.
at twenty bags of cowries. It was already dusk when the two parties came to this agreement.\textsuperscript{22}

Achebe also includes translated and non-translated songs in his novel. They combine traditions with imagery to enrich the story and give the work a more African feel.

\textbf{Second Wave Writers: Deconstruction of Language and Polysemy of Meanings}

Translingual writing from this era allows the deconstruction of meaning from the texts produced. These writers play with words in ways linked to the postulations of post-structuralism as a linguistic theory—one of the significant post-structuralism assumptions is that there is no such thing as a stable center. Post-structuralists challenge the structuralist assumption that every structure has a center that stands as a fixed point of truth and stability. Although structuralists believe that language not only shapes what we see but also how we see it, post-structuralists are highly skeptical about this language function.\textsuperscript{23} This skepticism arises from the arbitrariness of the signified and the signifier, which leads to a polysemy of meanings.

Structuralists adopt the Saussurean belief in the unity between a “signifier or signified”, but Derrida argues that there is no such thing because the signifier always floats free from the signified.\textsuperscript{24} This disconnects causes ‘the signifier and signified’ to frequently break away from each other and rejoin in new combinations.\textsuperscript{25} One signifier cannot give an exact meaning because meaning is continually in motion across a chain of signifiers and cannot be tied to a single sign.\textsuperscript{26} This implies that contrary to Saussure’s argument that the center of a linguistic structure regulates internal relationships while remaining immune to this interplay,\textsuperscript{27} The center is contradictory, incoherent, and unstable. Post-structuralists find it impossible to have any fixed points of meaning or truth because the center is “de-centered;” there is no center, only irreconcilable inconsistencies.

\textsuperscript{22} Chinua Achebe, Things Fall Apart (London: Heinemann, 1981).
\textsuperscript{23} Peter Barry, \textit{Beginning Theory: An Introduction to Literary and Cultural Theory}. 2nd ed. (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2002), 49.
\textsuperscript{24} Jacques Derrida, “\textit{Differance},” in \textit{Margins of Philosophy}, translated by Alan Bass (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1982).
\textsuperscript{25} Sarup Madan, \textit{An Introductory Guide to Post-Structuralism and Post-Modernism}, 2nd ed. (Hertfordshire: Harvester Wheatsheaf, 1993), 24.
\textsuperscript{26} Madan, \textit{An Introductory Guide to Post-Structuralism and Post-Modernism}.
\textsuperscript{27} Abrams M. Howard, \textit{A Glossary of Literary Terms} (Chicago: Heinle and Heinle, 1999).
To illustrate the idea of meaning constantly postponed across various signifiers, Derrida coined the terms “dissemination” and “trace.” Dissemination is the dispersal and scattering of meaning. The plurality of meaning can never be under control and tied or narrowed to a fixed-term because meaning continually moves along a chain of signifiers. Dissemination refers to the spilling or diffusion of meaning seen in the surplus or excess of meaning that is inherent in the use of all language. Trace suggests that there is no sense of reality that signifiers represent, either presently or absentely. According to Derrida, every single word in a chain of signification contains the trace of other words that differ from itself. In his words: “the signified concept is never present in and of itself, in a sufficient presence that would refer only to itself. Essentially and lawfully, every concept is inscribed in the chain or in a system within which it refers to the other concept.”28 This implies that no sign is complete, as one sign indefinitely leads to another via the trace. Meaning does not occur without the relationship between a sign and the other signs that precede or follow it.

“Erasure” is another important concept in deconstruction. This concept derived from the French expression, “sous rature,” which means, “put under erasure.” This concept refers to crossing out a word but allowing the canceled word to remain in a sentence. Although the crossed word is inaccurate, it remains in the sentence because it is necessary. This device, which Derrida often uses in his works, is derived from Martin Heidegger, who often crossed out the word “Being” and would allow the deletion of the word to stand, presenting it like this: Being. Heidegger used this device to foreground the inadequacy and necessity of the word, holding that “Being cannot be contained by, is before, indeed transcends, signification. Being is the final signified to which all signifiers refer, ‘the transcendental signified.’”29

Post-structuralists also challenge the structuralist concept of binary differences. They argue that binary oppositions cannot be extracted from a text because such action suggests that a structure has fixed points or absolutes. Instead of binary oppositions, there are conflicting and contradictory meanings in a text: paradoxes, conflicts, and contradictions. While structuralists examine binary oppositions to foreground the unity of the text, post-structuralists foreground the different ways through which text is at war with itself.30 Pamela Caughie, quoting Barbara Johnson, says, “The deconstruction of a text does not proceed by random doubt or arbitrary subversion, but by the careful

28 Derrida, “Differance.”
29 Madan, An Introductory Guide to Post-Structuralism and Post-Modernism, 33.
30 Barry, Beginning Theory, 55.
teasing out of warring forces of signification within the text itself.” In the same vein, Sarup (1993) states:

For Derrida, the metaphysics of binary oppositions include; signifier/signified, sensible/intelligible, speech/writing, speech (parole)/language (langue), diachrony/synchrony, space/time, passivity/activity. One of his criticisms of the structuralists… is that they have not brought these terms under ‘erasure’, that they have not put these binary oppositions into question.

Buchi Emecheta and Wole Soyinka are translingual writers who believe that language resources, whether borrowed or indigenous, are maximally exploited in literature to give total expression to a feeling or an idea. They embrace the aesthetic possibilities of language and the freedom to explore them, which Soyinka espouses in most of his poems. In his writing, he explores his native language’s folklore, proverbs, and metaphors to reveal deep structures that govern the concept of meaning. A deconstructive reading of Wole Soyinka’s *Alapata Apata* uncovers many conflicting meanings and paradoxes that track the humorous-yet-straightforward dramatization of a butcher’s decision to retire and live a life of leisure, which he does by sitting on a rock close to his house all day. The action of the dramatic text, the problematic term, and the expression is the word “Alapata,” throughout support many interpretations. Wole Soyinka skillfully employs a multiplicity of meanings; the concept of binary oppositions and the metaphysics of presence to ultimately push the boundaries of language, differences, and unreliability in meaning. Revealing the contamination of words makes us recognize the significance and transitioning of Wole Soyinka as a translingual writer by focusing on meaning in language, and language in meaning.

Wole Soyinka is a child of two civilizations: the African civilization into which he was born and the Western civilization that he experienced through language and culture. Soyinka considered compound translingual, like Achebe. From an early age, compound translingual writers had to balance two or more linguistic systems in a single environment. Soyinka grew up as the son of a school headmaster and a devout Christian mother. During the period, the adoption of the European education system and the English language were two effects of colonialism. They were not merely effects alone; they became the new reality for Nigerians, especially among the Yoruba. This historical influence

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31 Caughie Pamela, “The Example of Barbara Johnson,” *A Journal of Feminist Cultural Studies* 17, no. 3 (2006): 177-194.
32 Madan, *An Introductory Guide to Post-Structuralism and Post-Modernism*, 38.
and the adoption of English allowed Soyinka to traverse the African literary translingualism agenda. He has used this to proclaim his love for Ogun, the Yorùbá god. In *You Must Set Forth at Dawn*, Soyinka sings Ogun’s praises. He narrates:

It was good fortune that I could return home—where the gods were still only in a state of hibernation… I penetrated east, north, and south at will and toured the entire West African coast on the trail of festivals and performing companies, keeping in touch with gods and goddesses everywhere and celebrating their seasons…Like the many faces of Ogun, god of the road, the road was also a violent host. The road and I thus became partners in the quest for an extended self-discovery. I stared into the many faces of death, but most often death just taking its leave, its back indifferently turned on heartbreak and destruction… Ogun had other plans for me, however.33

The critical understanding of translingualism is that language will retain its essence and significance, regardless of the language used to describe one’s culture. Soyinka’s model of literary translingualism makes the English language obscure and difficult to read. Critics have called his style difficult, accusing him of not communicating. Although Soyinka’s translation of D.O. Fagunwa’s *Ogboju Ode Ninu Igbo Irunmale* into *Forest of a Thousand Daemons* is a text that exemplifies translingualism, critics have claimed that English lacks the linguistic structure to retain the essence of Fagunwa’s original work. Such critics do not consider that any translation from a work done in Yoruba to English would demand modulations to the setting of the work’s reality.

Translingualism goes beyond or breaks free of monolingual linguistic structure, which makes it relevant to consider a translingual such as Buchi Emecheta. Gender affects linguistic structures; thus, Emecheta’s writing aims to deconstruct the parochial nature of linguistic tools by presenting a female point of view that captures the sociological and psychological relations of women and men. Many of her books imprint this notion on the minds of their readers. However, the chapter “A Man is Never Ugly,” from her book *The Joys of Motherhood*, encapsulates the reason for her switching of language. Although she hates the tag “feminist,” believing it to be Western, her works emphasize the plight of women, a postmodernist move that helps to deconstruct the way women are subjugated. The Igbo language, which is native to Emecheta, is very patriarchal. By switching languages, she can give women their freedom. The English language is gender-biased, but it is more liberating

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33 Wole Soyinka, *You Must Set Forth At Dawn* (New York: Random House, 2006).
than Igbo. Emecheta has handled African literary translingualism as a tool to write about women and restore their voices.

**Third Wave Writers: Masking Meaning Through Content and Style**

Contemporary writers in the Nigerian literary space are unique. They are heavily involved in a relentless, intense feature of stylistic elements foregrounded and domiciled in their texts; they are torchbearers for translingual culture. Their work realized by how meaning is analyzed by the different levels of stylistic elements inherent in their art. Such writers include Chimamanda Adichie, Ben Okri, and Helen Oyeyemi. Their language has attracted many readers because of its simplicity and obscurantism. They are creative, coming up with new meanings for many words to make their work interesting and easily relatable for readers. Their language elements are open-ended, permitting the generation of new meanings and new forms such as metaphorical meanings and neologisms.

For this new crop of writers, the literariness of literature derived from the metaphoric and connotative use of language, evoking subtle meanings at ordinary levels of interpretation. Language is the raw material for literary expression, and these writers use the word as a sign denoting other things. For them, the signs of language center on the meaning that culture gives to each sign. They believe that each word, which is a sign, contributes to the meaning as a whole described within its context. Critical analysis of the translingual nature of this crop of writers gives priority to an emphasis on codes, icons, indexes, and symbols.

Adichie’s writing is a regeneration of the translingual nature of Achebe. Most texts by Adichie include signifiers and patterns that she follows. Her work shows how a writer is the product of a culture and society, employing and molding the English language to show its inherent flexibility and dynamism and demonstrating its ability to grow to her satisfaction and taste. Most of her novels use language as a vehicle to make sense of the Igbo world and the Nigerian space, coupled with the technique of borrowing from other languages, and interacting with her form of language to ensure mutual assimilation. Distinct sociolinguistic codes and identities derived through Adichie’s language pattern. She employs code mixing and code switching, coupled with metaphors, symbols, neologisms, colloquialisms, and deliberate spellings.

These stylistic elements found in Adichie’s novel, *Americanah*, which gives vivid examples of her stylistically deliberate spellings. Is intentionally done, breaking the spelling rules of the English language to suit her agenda and meaning. The word “Africa” spelled as “Afrique” for the graphological
show, and the word “sir” spelled “sah” to show the linguistic competence of the character and the emotion placed behind the word. Acronyms, which involve abbreviations commonly used in informal situations, are rampant in her work. It appears in the text as DVD-Digital Versatile Disc and TV-Television amongst others. Adichie also uses colloquialisms, which are words or phrases employed in an informal conversation or a piece of writing mostly avoided in formal writing or speech.

This third generation of writers yokes related things together, from oral to written, leading traditional and post-modern ideas to present a sort of hybridity seen in the texts of Helen Oyeyemi and Ben Okri. In *The Icarus Girl* by Oyeyemi and *The Famished Road* by Okri, they present hybridity and multiplicity in language and methods, such as magical realism, to show two different worldviews presented with each of the languages inherent in both cultures. Oyeyemi presents two other different interspaces. The signs attributed to each of the interspaces have a sort of Universalist tendency: aesthetics, linguistics, religious belief, and medicine interspaces, showing that the novel is a world without borders or demarcation reached even with differences in language.

Okri’s use of language also combines various images to achieve magical realism in *The Famished Road*. When Azaro is looking for his mother, he says, “And then, with the moon’s light inside me, filling the wide wide-open spaces, I felt myself being lifted by the darkness, pushed on by invisible hands. And the voices followed me, voices without bodies.”

The novel also addresses societal change and the gradual loss of traditional values found in the discussion between Azaro and his father concerning his grandfather, the Priest of Roads:

> He is blind now and he wears dark glasses and wanders through the village and the world without any walking stick or any help. Our old people are very powerful in spirit. They have all kinds of powers…We are forgetting these powers. Now, all the power that people have is selfishness, money, and politics.

The blind man who can move about without help presents the wisdom and power of the older generation, ancient customs, and traditions by extension. Demonstrated through Azaro’s father, Okri highlights the gradual loss of traditional values, replaced by greed and the quest for political power in a post-independent society. *The Famished Road* is an allegory for post-independent Nigeria, which is foregrounded when Ade, in the throes of a prophetic trance, says, “Our country is an abiku country. Like the spirit-child, it keeps coming

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34 Ben Okri, *The Famished Road* (London: Vintage Books Ltd., 1991), 167.
35 Okri, *The Famished Road*, 70.
and going. One day it will decide to remain.”

The description of Nigeria as an àbíkù ends on a hopeful note, showing that Ben Okri expresses hope for a better Nigeria. Ben Okri is a translingual writer who blurs the ties between the real and unreal, subverting the state of things to present the world as disorderly to examine change in society.

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36 Ibid., 478.
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