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Language in Modern African Drama

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Abstract: In his paper "Language in Modern African Drama" Isaiah Ilo proposes alternative criteria for language choice in modern African drama. The two most influential constructs on the language question are Fanon's essentialism that rejects Western languages as instruments of subjugation and Achebe's hybrid approach which entails subversion of the foreign languages by infusing them with African verbal characteristics. The constructs, which emphasise indigenised language and content, stem from the idea that consciousness of the colonial experience should determine language choice and usage in post-colonial African literary creativity. In building a case for a post-indiginist aesthetic, Ilo argues that present reality rather than past experience should influence decision about language choice for modern African drama. The ideal criteria should consist of practical consideration for audience needs, rather than a romantic fixation with the colonial experience that requires from writers rare or inaccessible skills in the use of mother tongue or usage of local lore to indigenise a foreign tongue. In sum, Ilo proposes that, for reasons of communicative exigency and in the spirit of post-modern diversity, every language in use on the continent should be a medium of African playwriting.

Isaiah ILO

Language in Modern African Drama

Linguo-aesthetics is the term by which I wish to identify the subject known as the language issue in African literature. The concept has now been a field of scholarly discourse since the 1960s. Over this period there has materialized a body of prescriptive and descriptive literature on language aesthetics in African literature, and literary creativity in the continent now follows two prominent constructs whose leading proponents and practitioners are Ngugi wa Thiong'o and Chinua Achebe. Other theorists in the field include Frantz Fanon, Obiajunwa Wali, Chinweizu, and others. Besides the ideas espoused by these scholars that now inspire practices in the choice and use of language in African literature, there are studies describing language usage in individual works by African writers. The relationship between language and literature is so central in African writing that it constitutes the main aesthetic and critical standard. Considering the growing body of knowledge on the subject, it may be inappropriate to continue to recognize this field merely as "the language question," "the language problem," "the language factor," or "the language debate." In this essay, therefore, contrary to the well-known trend, I have not conceptualized the subject as a debate in which to take an "either/or" stand. I have rather recognized the subject as a continuum in which the major constructs on the issue are acknowledged as different theories that have influenced present practice of playwriting in Africa. The essay reviews the two dominant constructs identified here as Nativist or Indiginist essentialist and hybrid schools, and builds a case for a post-Indiginist aesthetic to fill a gap left by the two.

I begin with a brief overview of the above mentioned schools of thought, focusing on the thinking behind them and some practices they have inspired. The father of the Indiginist Essentialism school is Frantz Fanon whose anti-colonial polemics introduced the language question. Fanon's background prepared him to write a most influential analysis of the impact of colonisation on the black psyche in his 1952 book *Black Skin White Masks*. Fanon was born in the Carribbean island of Martinique (a French colony) to a mixed parentage of African slaves, Tamil indentured servants, and a white man, and was educated in France. The disorientation he felt after experiencing racism as a black in an inhospitable white world motivated his discourse on the psychological consequences of colonial subjugation. For Fanon the subjugation ensures that the black man is mentally enslaved to universalised western norm at the expense of his own consciousness, the consequence of which is his disorientation or alienation. The worst assault on a people's consciousness is its linguistic colonisation. Fanon noted that the issue of language is important because speaking a colonizer's language means existing absolutely for the colonizer: "To speak means to be in a position to use a certain syntax, to grasp the morphology of this or that language, but also to assume a culture, to support the weight of a civilisation ... Every colonised people -- in order words, every people in whose soul an inferiority complex has been created by the death and burial of its local cultural originality -- finds itself face to face with the language of the civilizing nation: that is, with the culture of the mother country. The colonised is elevated above the jungle status in proportion to his adoption of the mother country's cultural standards" (17-18). Thus, Fanon rejects the colonizer-colonized relationship and advocates total rejection of the standards of the colonizing culture including its language. His reason is that a person who has taken up the language of the colonizer has accepted the world of the colonizer and therefore the standards of the colonizer. This view of language on which the essentialist school stands is known as the expressive theory of language and implies that particular languages embody distinctive ways of experiencing the world, of defining what we are. That is, we not only speak in particular languages, but more fundamentally become the person we become because of the particular language community in which we grew up ... language, above all else, shapes our distinctive ways of being in the world. Language, then, is the carrier of a people's identity, the vehicle of a certain way of seeing things, experiencing and feeling, determinant of particular outlooks on life (see Bell 158-59). A Marxist, Fanon also said that true revolution in Africa could only come from the peasants or rural underclass. He considered as inadequate the type of nationalism espoused by the comprador bourgeoisie and urban proletariat

in new African nations. Such classes enjoy profit from the economic structures of imperialism and use power for selfish ends once it is obtained.

Echoing Fanon, Wali stated in his 1963 article "The Dead End of African Literature?" that the adoption of English and French as media of literary creation by African writers was an aberration, which could not advance African literature and culture. Wali affirmed that African literature in European languages was only a minor appendage of European literature and that an authentic African literature could not be created in non-African languages. Wali also said that African literature could only be written in African languages because these were the languages of the peasantry and working class "most suitable for triggering the necessary and inevitable revolution against neo-colonialism" (Wali qtd. in Menang 1). Ngugi wa Thiong'o agrees with Wali: African languages are the languages of the people the writers want to address; they provide direct access to the rich traditions of African peoples and, by using them, writers participate in the struggle against domination by foreign languages and against wider imperialist domination (see his *Writers in Politics*). In his collection of essays, *Decolonising the Mind: The Politics of Language in African Literature*, Ngugi points out specific ways that the language of African literature manifests the dominance of the colonizers. He argues for African writers to write in traditional languages of Africa rather than in the European languages. Writing in the language of the colonizer, he claims, means that many of one's own people are not able to read one's original work. Ngugi observes that the greatest weakness of African literature in European language is its audience -- the petty-bourgeoisie readership automatically assumed by the very choice of language (22). He submits that literature written in a European language cannot claim to be African literature; therefore he classifies the works by Wole Soyinka, Achebe, and Gabriel Okara as Afro-European literature. Ngugi's thesis is that "language occupies a significant position in the entire hierarchy of the organization of wealth, power, and values in a society" ("Europhonism, Universities, and the Magic Fountain" 6). In his view language was the most important vehicle through which the colonial power captivated and held the colonized soul prisoner: "The bullet was the means of the physical subjugation. Language was the means of the spiritual subjugation" ("Europhonism, Universities, and the Magic Fountain" 7). For Ngugi, therefore, Africa is in need of healing from the longstanding injuries that colonialism has wrought on the indigenous languages and cultures, and this healing can only come through cultural autonomy and self-determination. So writing in African languages is a crucial step toward cultural identity and independence from continuing neo-colonial exploitation. But writing in African languages alone will not bring about the renaissance if that literature does not communicate the message of revolutionary unity and hope and embody the content of the people's anti-imperialist struggles for socio-political and economic liberation.

Ngugi had not always held a radical view about language. He began his career and attained fame as a novelist in the English language, but his venture into a community theatre project was what brought the change. His first play *The Black Hermit* was produced in Kampala in 1962. His second play, *The Trial of Dedan Kimathi*, written with Micere Mugo, was performed at the Kenya National Theatre, a Western-style indoor theatre where a British-based company produced mostly Western plays in English for the educated elite. But in 1977 villagers in Kamiriithu invited Ngugi, then resident in their community as a lecturer in the nearby University of Nairobi, to work with the local theatre group on literacy projects. The well-known writer had written his two earlier plays in English, but now he decided to write and produce a play in his own native language, Gikuyu. The experiment resulted in a very popular play, *Ngaahika Ndeenda* (*I Will Marry When I Want*). The play critiqued the existing neo-colonial order in Kenya by recalling the revolutionary spirit of the Mau Mau rebellion that forced the British to give up direct control of the country. It drew from the experiences of participants and was produced in a less formal open-air theatre that approximated the traditional space of indigenous African theatre. But a few weeks after the performances began the government withdrew the permission to use the centre and arrested Ngugi and incarcerated him in a maximum-security prison for a year without trial. In prison Ngugi reflected on his strategies as a committed writer and arrived at the decision to discard English for Gikuyu, his mother tongue, for all his future writings. He believed that his theatre work attracted the cruel censorship particularly because of its use of the local language, and its capability to sway a larger number of

people to political action than the restricted readership of his English novels. From then on Ngugi set his mind on working in the linguistic medium by which he could reach his people and maximize his impact. Ngugi personally related the role of his experiment with community theatre in his decision to write in his mother tongue as follows: "Working with the community (in the play *Ngaahika Ndenda* (*I Will Marry When I Want*) is what forced me to start writing in Gikuyu, after years of intellectual dithering. My work in the village sent me to a Maximum Security Prison for a year, without trial. And while in the maximum, I thought a great deal about the relationship between English, as the imperial language, and now the language of power in a postcolonial state, and African languages, and I took the irrevocable position never to write my fiction and drama in English again" (Ngugi qtd. in Pozo 1 <http://facpub.stjohns.edu/~ganterg/sjureview/vol2-2/05Pozo-Thiong.htm>)

It is pertinent to note that Ngugi's decision in favour of local language literature arose out of an experience in community theatre practice. The community theatre, whose medium is usually the local language, is an approach to development communication by means of participatory drama involving rural dwellers. The practice shares in common with the essentialist school the ideal of reaching poor rural dwellers with transformational political education. Community theatre enables city-dwelling, western educated Africans from ivory towers to touch base with the grassroots, the largely illiterate rural dwellers, who in sum constitute the majority of African population but happen to be left behind in socio-economic development. While the essentialist school is a justification of community theatre's procedure in the indigenous languages, the practice can learn from Ngugi's literary use of Gikuyu to extend activities to literary development of indigenous languages as additional means of community empowerment. The budding literary theatre in Creole language in Mauritius that is being conducted in the spirit of the essentialist school is an example of what a literary approach can do to Africa's marginalized mother tongues. Mauritius is a former French and British colony where English enjoys an official status, and French a semi-official status. Creole, the most widely spoken language and the mother tongue of 75% of the population cutting across various ethnic groups, is officially unacknowledged and unstandardised. The public is reluctant to read texts in Creole and publishing in the language is unattractive. Yet theatre has developed in Creole through the plays of Dev Virahsawmy, Azize Asgarally and Henri Farori. Virahswasmy, the first playwright to publish in Creole and who is credited with most successful plays in the language is the figurehead of the movement. He has translated *Macbeth*, *Much Ado about Nothing,* and *Julius Caesar*. The translations allow the playwright to work simultaneously on promoting the status of the language as well as its linguistic features. By proving that it can be a medium of dramatic creativity the playwrights seek to put it on equal footing with the two colonial languages. The choice of Creole represents the interest of the majority and defies those who refuse to acknowledge it as a language in its own right. The playwrights believe that Creole is the only language that can translate the experiences and cultures of Mauritius for the stage. Using the language is also a political struggle against the class system since the language is identified with the exploited proletariat. Theatre thus is shown to be an important and influential area where the official status of languages, or lack of it, can be confronted by concrete practice. Reviving a language and its culture through drama gives voice to the silenced and threatened communities (see Mooneeram 25-35).

The objective of modern African literature in colonial languages is to express an African content in the medium of a European language such as English or French. The pamphlet of the 1977 FESTAC: Festival of Black & African Arts and Culture suggests that African content in literature consists of the following five elements: "1) The writer must be African, and must use 2) Traditional themes from oral literature, 3) African symbols, 4) Linguistic expression taken from African languages, and 5) Local imagery, that is, images from immediate environment" (Amoda 201). The resources of traditional African oral literature, such as myths, legends, folk tales, poetry, proverbs, and other forms of African languages, constitute the background of African writers whose imprint they must impose on the colonial language. African literary criticism therefore recognizes skilfully applied content of indigenised substance and language as canon of modern African literature. Many African critics, such as Chinweizu, Abiola Irele, and Kwaku Asante-Darko

(<http://docs.lib.purdue.edu/clcweb/vol2/iss1/2/>), hail the linguistic, thematic, and aesthetic hybridism of this style as Africa's literary identity and unique contribution to world literature. In his "The African Writer and the English Language" Achebe argues that although English was imposed by colonialism, it is now an asset to Africa for helping to foster continental and national unity. What is more, it offers Africans the opportunity to speak of their experience in a world language. Achebe says an African does not need to use the language like a native speaker: "The African writer should aim to use English in a way that brings out his message best without altering the language to the extent that its value as a medium of international exchange will be lost. He should aim at fashioning out an English, which is at once universal and able to carry his peculiar experience" (55-62). Achebe's use of English in *Things Fall Apart* is widely accepted as a standard for other African writers. In a review in 1959, Ben Obumselu said the African writer "is not merely to use but to expand the resources of English" and that "the verbal peculiarities of the novel suggest Achebe's approach is to attempt literal fidelity, to translate wherever possible the actual words which might have been used in his own language and thereby preserve the local flavour of his situations" (38). G. Adali Mortty, a Ghanaian critic, in another review in 1959 said Achebe knows and uses English with consummate skill, and "his language has the ring and rhythm of poetry. At the background of the words can be heard the thrumming syncopation of the sound of Africa -- the gongs, the drums, the castanets and the horns" (49). Achebe himself describes his style as that of adapting English language "to carry the weight of my African experience ... a new English still in full communion with its ancestral home but altered to suit its new African surrounding" (62).

Irele has also acclaimed language usage in the writings of J.P. Clark-Bekederemo. Irele observes that the Nigerian poet-playwright recognises that in the African context, the task that faces a creative writer in English is more than that of adapting the foreign language to the reality of the African environment; it involves rather a total appropriation in order to bring African expression into a living relationship with the tradition of literature in English. The critic notes that in this respect Bekederemos's attitude toward the use of English goes further in its implications than that of Achebe who speaks of making the imposed language "carry the burden" of his African experience. Clark-Bekederemo, he submits, stakes out a more extensive claim to the resources offered by the English language and its literary tradition (175). Soyinka's special contribution to homegrown content of African literature is his reinterpretation of Yoruba myths to give a local philosophical depth to his drama. His poetics is embodied in "The Fourth Stage," which explores the philosophical implications of precolonial cultures for modern African arts; "Idanre," his poetic celebration of Ogun's mythical tragedy; and *Myth, Literature, and the African World*, an appropriation of Yoruba rituals for a theory of tragedy. In Soyinka's poetics, the duty of a serious African literature is to impose the cosmic overview that organizes traditional performances (see Adeleke 14-20) and Soyinka equally subscribes to the method of indigenising the colonial language in African literature. He remarked that "When we borrow an alien language to sculpt or paint in, we must begin by co-opting the entire properties of that language as correspondences to properties in our matrix of thought and expression. We must stress such a language, stretch it, impact and compact it, fragment and reassemble it with no apology, as required to bear the burden of experiencing and experiences, be they formulated or not in the conceptual idioms of the language" (107). This attitude to language, as consisting of neutral properties capable of manipulation in rendering African authenticity is based on the Chomskian conception of language and how it bears on ideology. Noam Chomsky theorized that there is a genetically determined language faculty innate in the mind, and that language is reducible to a certain universal element that finds replication in particular languages. According to Chomsky, what is ordinarily taken as "the commonsense notion of languages" is defective because it possesses "a crucial sociopolitical dimension," the view that language is "a dialect with an army and a navy" (Chomsky qtd. in Botha 81). In its place, he prefers what he sees as being truly commonsensical about language: when a person knows a language, he is taken to know "what makes a sound and meaning relate to one another in a specific way, what makes them 'hang together'" (Chomsky qtd. in Botha 172). This structural notion regards language as consisting of sentences and words, including grammatical forms and syntactic constructions. Thus grammaticality expresses the essential property of language, whereas the ideology language embodies

is only incidental and does not constitute its property. Every language therefore is a harvest of grammaticality, which makes it a tool in the hands of users who can mould it to suit their purpose. In a study describing Soyinka's use of English in his collected plays, Timothy T. Ajani observes that as someone greatly influenced by the Yoruba language and culture and traditional beliefs, the playwright makes the English language to express his cultural, religious and emotional experiences. He notes that Soyinka's strategies include neologisms, extension of, or change in meaning, colourful idiomatic expressions, word for word translations and loan words from the background language into English. The study goes further to give examples of the lexico-semantic and syntactic devices in a few of the plays, including direct borrowing, cultural and religious loans and customs, and indigenous norms. At the syntactic level some of the strategies are repetition, the translation of Yoruba proverbs into English, reduplication, and direct translation of Yoruba into English. Other examples are code switching and code mixing, as well as transfer of Yoruba language communicative strategies, such as indirectness, punning, riddles and proverbs (see Ajani 1-23).

In a summary, different logics underlie the two schools I described above and these are noticeable in their divergent conceptions of language, audience, and purpose of literature and in the assumptions they embody. These differences are presented as follows: The essentialist school's premises are that language is so loaded culturally and ideologically that its imposition by colonialism implies mental control of the colonized and its use by the colonized practically the same as propagating the worldview of the colonizers, that the audience of literature is the underclass users of a local language, and the purpose is to mobilize them for revolution against neo-colonialism, the assumption is that in the spirit of cultural essentialism, writers should reject every linguistic influence of colonialism in favour of pre-colonial African languages, and thus they propose African culture as purveyed in the traditional languages as antithesis to hegemonic western cultural universalism. In contrast, the hybrid school's premise is that language consists of neutral grammatical properties that may be harnessed for cultural and ideological communication in favour of either domination or resistance: if the white man has used English for domination, Africans can return it for resistance through literature, that the audience of literature is foreign and local elite readership, and its purpose is nationalism, while their assumption is that owing to post-colonial hybrid reality, writers should utilize the linguistic influence of colonialism blended with pre-colonial African oral traditions, and they propose African culture as purveyed in the blend with foreign languages as antithesis to hegemonic western cultural universalism. In answering the question: "What should decide the choice of language for African literature?" both the essentialist and hybrid schools agree that the decider should be consciousness of the colonial experience, but disagree about the stratagem. While essentialists say that what should decide the choice of language for African literature is consciousness of the colonial experience for which African writers should reject the dominant colonial languages in preference for the subjugated local tongues, the hybridists agree that consciousness of the colonial experience should preoccupy African writers in the use of language, but believe the right strategy is not to reject but to subvert the dominant colonial languages in difference to the subjugated local tongues.

Argue that the changing context of African literature demands corresponding alteration in critical and literary aesthetic practices with respect to application of critical standards, language choice, ideology of literary identity, response to the philosophy of Western universalism and use of literary style. An alterative paradigm is desirable because it is unsuitable to continue to apply the literary criteria adopted in the context of anti-colonial literature to writings in a different situation. The famous 1962 *Conference of African Writers of English Literature* at Makerere University, Uganda, was originally convened to have the writers review the achievements and strategies of African literature in English. African literature was to be piloted away from the dominant anticolonial subjects that were believed to have been overtaken by events, since by that year, virtually all of the British colonies in Africa were either independent or on the verge of self-rule. The writers felt that colonialism was passing away, that new African societies were emerging, and that a corresponding cultural agenda must be formulated (see Adeleke 1-2). Nevertheless, the conference ended up not addressing that objective because an acrimonious debate ensured at the start in an attempt to define African literature. As Odun Balogun noted, there will never be a final resolution

of African aesthetic since taste always changes with time, and though the change may take several years, it is enough to warrant a continuous process of re-evaluation (17). There has now arisen a new generation of African writers whose cultural orientation was entirely formed in present-day post-independence, multi-cultural urban milieu. Can this younger generation apply the same literary aesthetics as the older generation that had closer contact with the African linguistic and oral traditions and faced an obligation to tackle colonialism? Current African aesthetic standard for literature accords so much importance to a content of indigenous oral traditions, to the point of defining African literary identity in terms of their application in creative works. If this rule continues to apply to the canon of African literature, how will the new generation of writers that are unpractised in the oral traditions fair in the judgment? Might a standard that tends to limit writers' choices in matters of cultural values and language not have an incapacitating effect on the literary productivity of prospective new generation writers? Proponents of the two schools of thought have mostly defended their positions in a manner suggesting that language choice for African literature must be mutually exclusive between the colonial language and a writer's mother tongue. My view is that the arguments on both sides for colonial and African languages are right. The resolution is that both languages should be used for African literature. And if a writer cannot use his mother tongue, nor can colour his work with oral tradition, there is no need to feel inadequate. There should be a third way – another African language, an unembellished English language, Pidgin, Creole, the English of secondary school leavers, campus slang, the English of university graduates, official English. He can write with the language he knows best, provided it is appropriate for his content and context, and that work will still bear the weight of his experience as an African. In this light, all of Africa's languages are potential vehicles of African literature and identity. A bilingual education policy will ensure that individuals acquire proficiency in the literary use of at least two languages: an African language, which may be the user's mother tongue or any other language of his/her choice, and at least one European language. Such an option will enable Africans to preserve, develop and use not only one or a few of the numerous indigenous languages but all of them.

The oral tradition of proverbs, riddles, ballads, and stories from which modern African literature draws is often spoken of as though such tradition is an exclusive patent of Africa. It seems easily forgotten that other societies had similar traditions in their pre-literate era, which came to feature in their written literature. The ancient Greek plays for instance drew from the myths, legends and stories of an oral tradition. Just as western societies have come through the pre-literate, pre-modern and modern phases, and each phase has had its characteristic artistic imprint, African society and literature are similarly evolving. It is natural therefore if in the phase of transiting from a pre-literate oral tradition, emergent African literature is marked by a content of oral tradition. But such content, which is now hailed as the unique identity of African literature, is only a passing phase, because the further a society moves from its pre-literate past and oral traditions, the less such background exacts an influence on its contemporary literature. The uniqueness of African literature is rather to be traced to the bilingual background of the writers that sees their works in a second language influenced naturally by the resources of their mother tongue. But as writers emerge from a growing number of Africans who no longer have an African language as a mother tongue, that influence will be further eroded. Nevertheless the marker of African identity in literature will continue to consist of the individual writer's cultural experience as an African and the influence of that experience on the writer's language usage. Western universalism which African writers sought so passionately to counter by deliberately projecting an Afro-centric worldview through creative writing is today a fading ideology and this should motivate a reassessment of a subsisting critical and aesthetic standard that is almost wholly based on cultural nationalism. Imperialism, the moving spirit of colonialism was founded on an ideology of cultural absolutism and assumed that there was only one western culture which was universal and permanent, and which all other people had to imbibe through a mission of colonization. But anthropology has undermined cultural imperialism by bringing other cultures to light and showing that western culture is just another culture and questioning the belief that the civilization it was spreading was potentially universal. Culture is no longer defined as universal but as diverse: A culture is a set of denotations,

principles and practices of a specific group of people. All peoples have their own cultures. Going by this view there is no reality that is universally valid and applicable to peoples in all periods of history and in all societies across the world. In today's hermeneutics as applied to literature there is a shift from the preeminence of the writer of a text towards that of the reader. According to Hans-George Gadamer every interpreter of a situation or a text comes to it with a pre-understanding or tradition, a preliminary idea or anticipation of its meaning, within which he or she encounters the text and engages it in conversation. This leads to a fusion of two elements, the text and the reader's tradition, making a new creation. This new horizon is a different perspective from the original perspective of the interpreter and that of the writer of the text. The original meaning of any writer can never really be discovered, because the cultural and historical distance involved is too great for the reader to cross. So the purpose in reading is not to discover the author's intended meaning, but to find an understanding that is practically relevant to the reader (see also Cheesman 26-27).

In view of the decline of Eurocentric colonist ideology, alternative aesthetic criteria for contemporary African literature will not include the colonial experience as a factor in choice of language. This is because the colonial past is remote from the present that the literature should address, and reaching for the past is a hard task for a new generation writer who is unable to use the mother tongue or traditional orature. Therefore the criteria of another aesthetic paradigm will not be backward looking and romantic but contemporary and realistic. The decider of language for literature should be communicative exigency, including practical consideration for target audience and character realism. In his analysis of Greek tragedy in *Poetics* Aristotle commented on language usage in drama. He noted that language, which is in the form of speech in plays, is made up of the following parts: letter, syllable, connecting word, noun, verb, inflection or case, sentence or phrase. Every word is either current, or strange, or metaphorical, or ornamental, or newly coined, or lengthened, or contracted, or altered. A dramatist distinguishes himself by his word usage (diction, style). A good style is clear and lofty and transcends the use of abstruse idiom. The clearest style uses only current or appropriate words and substitutes a strange (or rare) word, metaphor, or any similar mode of expression, with contemporary idiom in order to make its meaning apparent. According to Aristotle, six elements determine the quality of a play -- namely plot, character, thought, diction, song and spectacle. Diction -- the expression of meaning in words -- is a medium for dramatic representation that serves the important purpose of communicating the impact of a play's events, personalities and ideas (see chapters 4, 9). For Aristotle, therefore, the hallmark of good dramatic language is the use of suitable present-day words in characters' speeches -- language that enhances the realism of a play and makes its story, characters and logic plausible and hence affective to its audience. J.O.J. Nwachukwu-Agbada has remarked appropriately that there is an incongruity observable in a play in which an African elder or peasant speaks a very refined English (19). Some characters in African plays in English are given English speeches, although the appropriate characterisation is to have them speak in their native tongue. To avoid such incongruity foreign language plays ought to present only western educated subjects, just as plays featuring uneducated subjects is best rendered in the appropriate local language as Ngugi did in the Kamiriithu experiment. But whether a play is rendered in a foreign or local language, its diction should suit its characterization and target audience; current expressions should be used in place of outmoded ones, unless it is a historical play. Since language choice implies audience choice, a play's target audience should normally influence the playwright's word usage. Consequently, the aptness of a playwright's diction ought to be assessed on the basis of the play's intended audience.

To sum up, the properties of a new aesthetic paradigm for contemporary African literature may include the following: 1) Premise: Language as a medium of subjective communication bears the tint of a user's experience, 2) The audience of literature may be local or international, and the purpose can be any matter, 3) Assumption: In an environment of cultural diversity, a writer may use any language on the basis of competence and communicative criteria, and 4) Does not propose African culture since multi- and inter-cultural reality overtakes hegemonic Western cultural universalism. Already there are tendencies in the new direction in thematic and stylistic treatment in some contemporary African plays whose content and purpose are no longer cultural and nation-

alist. For instance the radical political plays of the likes of Femi Osofisan target a local national audience and advocate social change. Some plays on the theme of gender politics provide the perspectives of African female playwrights such as Tess Onwueme. Other plays like those of Harry Hagher address contemporary social problems in a non-indiginist linguistic style. Also some playwrights are experimenting alternative use of language, such as Creole (e.g., Dev Virahsawmy, Azize Asgarally, Henri Farori), Pidgin (Tunde Fatunde) and bilingualism (S.O.O. Amali). Nevertheless, there is now a need for deliberate shift from self-conscious indiginist aesthetics by African writers and critics.

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