

Socio-Cultural Patterns in Henri Lopes' *Le Pleurer-Rire* and Uwemedimo Atakpo's *Edisua*

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Abstract

*The innovative deployment of any language by a creative writer, and in this case, African writers, creates a distinct style through which s/he reaches out to his/her audience. This issue of language deployment for creative productions can refer to the wider question of choice of linguistic codes for African literature in the light of colonial heritage, hence, the critical questions; first, in what language should socio-cultural productions be expressed—the bequeathed code of the colonial masters or each writer's indigenous African language? Second, what happens to the linguistic non-conformity in these texts if they are to be translated into another language for pedagogical use? Third, will the radical shift from the known linguistic conventions be a barrier for the translator to maintain the cultural import in them? Style, therefore, becomes an important aspect in the literary analysis of a text, irrespective of the genre of literature the literary text is picked from. A socio-cultural analysis of Henri Lopes' *Le Pleurer-rire* and Uwemedimo Atakpo's *Edisua* demonstrate to the reader how the writers deploy and manipulate language in an attempt to achieve different levels of language use and the effect(s) of such manipulations. Lexico-syntactic patterns and morphological features are stylistically analyzed using the approach that describes style as the linguistic choice of a writer. This study finds out that each of the linguistic choices has an identifiable function it performs in the text. These linguistic elements contribute meaningfully to the understanding of the writers' world-view and the central message of the texts.*

Keywords: Edisua and Le Pleurer-rire, Innovative, Linguistic, Language import, Socio-Cultural patterns.

Introduction

Every language has a set of linguistic codes which govern its usage in the construction of literary texts. A shift from these codes is most times considered as language corruption rather

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than language aesthetics because that shift challenges and foregrounds the linguistic norms of the language. Although Miriam Inegbe (2011) maintains that “such manipulation, rather than rendering the writer’s work unacceptable, stylistically confers a certain uniqueness to it” (178). The language of modern African literature in recent times has manifested a considerable measure of its own peculiarities and defining characteristics. Many African writers have consciously deviated from European linguistic deployments as introduced to the continent through colonialism, trade or religion. Such creative writers migrate to newer forms of the same language coloured with changes in the social lifestyle of the people. Another literary migration that is noticed is the continual incursions of identifiable indigenous traces into the prescriptive linguistic codes governing the language usage, hence, the creation of a linguistically and culturally hybridized text. Today, many writers of African literary works in foreign languages such as English and French have redefined the functional role of art as they use potentials of language to create meanings in their literary writings, so that the languages reflect their roots in order to “express sensitive ideas or issues in an attempt to emphasize the real Africanness in what they portray” (Miriam Inegbe, 2011, 177) of their linguistic communities while still remaining intelligible nationally and internationally. Such literary adventurism or engagement finds justification in Ngugi wa Thiong’O’s (1986) assertion that “we African writers are bound by our calling to do for our languages what Spencer, Milton and Shakespeare did for English; what Pushkin and Tolstoy did for Russia; indeed what all writers in world history have done for their languages by meeting the challenge of creating a literature in them” (29) Language, therefore, plays a key role in moulding the cultural heritage of any given linguistic community. It is a medium through which cultural thoughts, ideas, and myths of any linguistic community are expressed and transmitted from one generation to the next. It is an essential part of culture that educates and informs the indigenes on how to participate actively in the re-enactment of their socio-cultural arts and beliefs in their linguistic community. Language, therefore, may be

described as the sensory motor drive that defines who we are as a people. Josaphat Kubayanda (1990) affirms this as he avers that “literary texts are interwoven into historical phenomena” (5). Jesse Gray (1970) confirms this assertion as he explains that “every work belongs to its age, to its nation and to its environment, and depends upon particular historical and other ideas and aims. For this reason, art scholarship further requires a vast wealth of historical information of a very special kind” (38). And Miriam Inegbe (2013) supports this assertion by maintaining that literary works bear “the imprint of the environment, culture and local languages of these geographies” (276). To this end, identifiable traces of indigenous words, phrases and culturally bound items and occurrences are encouraged in literary creations to authenticate the given stories. Since the indigenous expressions which are deployed are associated with real life settings of the portrayed linguistic community, they certainly will compel belief, hence, Taiwo Oloruntoba-oju’s (1999) explanation that creative language style is “almost synonymous with variety” (56). It is important to submit that the way in which indigenous terms are introduced and subsequently referred to in literary texts varies from writer to writer, and even within the texts. Language style may also be viewed in terms of sociolinguistic identity that produces different variations according to individual style, place, age, and time. To Frantz Fanon (1952), language is one of the factors in the process of alienation that takes place in the colonized subject, hence his assertion; “parler une langue, c’est assumer un mode, une culture” (28) which means “speaking a language, is to assume a way of life and, a culture” (my translation). Since the language situation in most of the African society is plurilingual in nature, this study adopts Noumssi and Fosso’s (2001) language term, “polyglossia” (84) for its purpose. The functional differentiation between languages should involve a third language which will act as an indigenous lingua franca, and which assumes a position somewhere between the official language and the indigenous language in the linguistic hierarchy as reflected in actual language use. Although, the revered nature and function of the European language is undisputed in many

African states, there are notable exceptions to this generalization. Language finds its credence in a social group and thus, the cord between language and culture remains inseparable. This argument is also in line with the assertion of Ashcroft et al (2002) that “post-colonial writing defines itself by seizing the language of the centre and replacing it in a discourse fully adapted to the colonized place” (37). This process is generally viewed as comprising two essential elements: abrogation and appropriation. The word, “Abrogation”, is defined as a refusal of the categories of the imperial culture, to yield its aesthetic, its illusory standard of normative or ‘correct’ usage, and its assumption of a traditional and fixed meaning ‘inscribed’ in the words while “Appropriation” is defined as “the process by which the language is taken and made to ‘bear the burden’ of one’s own cultural experience”. Lopes’ *Le Pleurer-rire* and Atakpo’s *Edisua* are chosen for this study. They will be read and appreciated from the perspectives of identifying various linguistic peculiarities and defining linguistic characteristics which represent both a refusal of the literary and linguistic conventions associated with European languages, English and French, and experimentation with ways of manipulating linguistic conventions to permit true self-expression as an African writer. *Edisua* is an African play, set in the Ibibio culture of Nigeria if we are to go by the remark of Ekuriku, one of the characters, on page 33 of the text while *Le Pleurer-rire* is an African novel set in the Congo, although captured in the text as “Pays” on page 13 of the text.

Language Theory

To convey meaning, assorted words and sounds of language are selected and arranged according to what kind of information or message the writer or speaker is conveying or asking for. Language is used in social relations among persons, and such relations according to Ruqaiya Hassan in Fabb, et al (1987) can be “created/ altered/ maintained through language” (19). Katie Wales (1989) explains the role of language as “concerned with the relations between addresser and addressee in the discourse situation or the speech event” (256). Citing Halliday,

Helen Leckie-Tarry (1995) explains that the major goal of language is to establish “relationships between meanings and forms, or more specifically, language functions... and language structures” (72) However, underlying the relationship between language functions and language structure is the notion of choice. Hence, Halliday sees the use of language as a selection from a pool of linguistic resources, such options are appropriate for a particular purpose and medium of communication. Walter Koch, in de Groot, et al (1963) puts it more clearly that “a particular linguistic entity is held against what else could have been said or what should have been said” (414). And Miriam Inegbe (2024) emphasized that “language is employed in diverse ways to suit specific contexts and environment” (221). Thus, the functional demands made on language are reflected in the linguistic choices and in the outlook of the text’s structure. The writer’s linguistic choice, in other words, is his style of writing. Paul Simpson (2004) opines that “to do stylistics is to explore language, and, more specifically, to explore creativity in language use” (2). Stylistics helps in studying the defamiliarization of everyday language use. Simpson states further that doing stylistics enriches our ways of thinking about language. For instance, the exploration of language offers a substantial insight into our understanding of texts. Onwukwe Ekwutosi (2009) defines stylistics as “a branch of linguistics that studies the features of the distinctive uses of varieties of language in different situations. It tries to establish principles capable of accounting for the particular choices made by individuals and social groups in their use of language” (9-10) Raymond Chapman (1973) considers stylistics as “a part of sociolinguistics-language studied in relation to society” (11). Similarly, Geoffrey Hutchings (1973) points out that “any text, literary or otherwise, is a social event taking place within a cultural tradition” (94). John Firth (1957) holds that “as we know so little about mind and as our study is essentially social, I shall ... be satisfied with the whole man, thinking and acting as a whole, in association with his fellows” (19) Stylistics, therefore, is applied at all levels of language analysis: phonology, graphology, grammar and semantics.

All these features of stylistic analysis will be germane in our analysis and description of the texts, *Edisua* and *Le Pleurer-rire*. However, only two of the features, that is, lexico-syntactic patterns and morphological features, will be deployed as stylistics instruments in my analysis of both texts. My examination of socio-cultural patterns whose objects of study are literary texts in relationship to given societies, with their social, cultural and political issues, will take insights from socio-linguistic framework.

Lexico-Syntactic Features

Many African literary texts in French and English are constructed in the language of another culture. Therefore, interconnectedness of language and “bi-culture—the western and their native cultures” (Miriam Inegbe, 2011, 178) play a vital role in syntactic variation. Michael Toolan (1996) is of the opinion that a “particular syntactic variation in general or on a particular occasion, will necessarily convey an identical import to all readers” (128), hence variations in syntax can, and do convey meanings. The relationship between syntax and meaning is, to a large extent, established by cultural convention. In this regard, Toolan submits that “syntax, like lexis, is part of a necessarily public enterprise, language, necessarily sustained by means of habitual and conventional imports for its syntax, lexis, and so on” (128). The above citations present individuals as being rooted in culture and therefore, the relationship between syntax and lexis and meaning should be analysed culturally. Lexico-syntactic feature is a combination of two features of language—lexis and syntax. Lexis is the total vocabulary that makes up a language while syntax is a set of rules that govern the structure of a sentence. Lexico-syntactic patterns may, therefore, be obtained through various means which include unusual or inverted word order, omission of words and repetition.

All the levels of stylistic analysis which are highlighted above are evident in Henri Lopes’ *Le Pleurer-rire* and Uwemedimo Atakpo’s *Edisua*. Lopes is a well-known Congolese novelist, playwright and poet while Atakpo writes from Nigeria as a dramatist and media practitioner.

Lopes' *Le Pleurer-rire* is simply the story of power drunkenness by an ex-freedom-fighter turned dictator. It presents the character of Tonton Bwakamabé Na Sakkadé, a former freedom-fighter who became a political leader following a coup d'état. As soon as he got hold of power, his interest in public affairs and the affairs of his people started to wane. On the other hand, Atakpo's *Edisua* presents a battle between modernity and change as captured in the event that confronts Christianity and traditional religion in the world of the play.

Literally, *Le Pleurer-rire* means "the crying-laughing" In literary discourse the expression is a figure of speech known as an oxymoron, and it conveys the picture of a satire for the novel. *Le Pleurer-rire* is a text which incorporates a wide range of voices into the narrative. The most striking style is seen in the passages narrated by the "Jeune Compatriote". These passages are set apart from other narrative sequences in the novel using a smaller type face. This style is also found in the speech of Tonton, the dictator, as cited below:

C'est que les mercenaires ont prêté main-forte aux niveaux maîtres, dé.
 –Les messeigneurs?
 –Je te dis, mon frère.
 _C'est pas possible (...)
 –Mais les messeigneurs-là, ce sont des Blancs, non?
 –Comment alors on les a pas reconnus tout de suite? La différence de leur peau avec celle des Noirs, c'est trop nombreux, même.
 –Des mercenaires noirs.
 –Eh! Eh! Des messeigneurs noirs? (36)

Personal translation:

It's that the mercenaries lent their support at the master levels, dude.
 –The lords?
 –I'm telling you, brother.
 –That's not possible (...)
 –But those lords-there, they're White, right?
 – How come we didn't recognize them right away? The difference in their skin compared to that of the Black people is too noticeable, even.
 –Black mercenaries.
 –Hey! Hey! Black lords?

In the above extracts from the text, the interlocuteurs' low level of competence in the French language results in a misunderstanding, transforming their conversation from one about the role played by 'les mercenaires' to one about 'messeigneurs'. Similar mispronunciation is

found in the speeches of Tonton. These include—“chimpanzee”, which he pronounces “singe panzé” (214), “vous oubliez” and “vous êtes” which he pronounces as “zoubliez” and “zêtes” respectively (64) and “alors que”, which he pronounces as “orque”(84,169). These mispronunciations highlight Tonton’s lack of education and contribute to the ironic reading of subsequent comments by the French authorities concerning the level of his French and the benefits of colonialism:

Discours de remerciement et de joie (...), dans sa réponse Tonton s’appliqua encore plus qu’à l’accoutumée à différencier les é et les è d’une part, les o et les au d’autre part, les i et les u enfin. Aux hochements de tête des autorités françaises, on sentait leur satisfaction de goûter la correction de l’accent. Ils avaient de quoi être fiers de leur éducation. Le colonialisme, contrairement aux propos à la mode, n’avait pas que des crimes sur la conscience. (262-263).

Personal translation

A speech of thanks and joy... in his response, Tonton took even greater care than usual to differentiate between é and è, o and au, and I and u. From the nods of the French authorities, one could sense their satisfaction in hearing the accent. They had reason to be proud of their education. Colonialism, contrary to popular opinion, was not solely responsible for crimes.

Lexico-syntactic features are also seen in the speeches of Tonton, his sister, Za Hélène, and Maître, the narrator as well as in some other less prominent characters in the novel. In the direct speech attributed to Za Hélène, for instance, there are examples of repetition of a word for the purpose of emphasis: “Ils ont dévalisé la maison, tout, tout, tout, tout”(125); the defining of family relations through the term “même-père- même-père” (125) and the emphatic “pour + pronoun” construction—“nous dormions pour nous” and “Ils vont partir pour eux” (125). Another striking characteristic of the register used by Za Hélène is the repetition of the swear word expression “le vagin de leur mère” (125). In addition, Za Hélène’s diatribe also contains examples of lexico-syntactic features that belong more broadly to the register of colloquial French. These include the omission of the subject “faut nous venger” (125), and the substitution of “ça” for “cela” as seen in this expression; “si ça continue comme ça” (126).

In Edisua, Uwemedimo Atakpo creates a hybrid of language particularly through the incursion of traceable Ibibio language patterns. There are two importantly recognizable linguistic styles in the play and they are language as a mode of expression and language as a means of code-mixing. The language of expression in Atakpo's Edisua is English and English Language is one of the official national languages in Nigeria. It is also the language of instruction, understood by many Nigerians whether lettered or not. The other language type recognized in the text is code-mixing and linguistic codes that carry peculiarly Ibibio cultural imports. Through these linguistic phenomena, Atakpo attempts successfully to domesticate the English language to a large extent in order to accommodate his thoughts and ideas in Ibibio. An instance could be seen in the speeches below:

Asi:I am even suspecting that it is one of the people of my husband that is worrying me and my children.... When rain is just starting, the rain-maker does not spit to stop it. (p. 4)

Mesembe: ... What is it that you are worrying about? Is it not children? Yet some people are eating theirs. (p. 7)

Asambi: ... May bad things be far from us. (p.8)

Ekpat: It has never happened. How can a cow give birth to two calves?(p.9)

Nya Ita: Tomorrow is the day he has to deny himself before Atabrinyang... (p. 28)

Anwaofiong: ... I don't have to talk, what has the climbing stick got to do in the cocoyam farm. (p. 36)

Ebono: (...) Of course I will swear. What can happen to me? The white ant never eats the bottle. (p.36)

In the above extracts, Atakpo subverts English in registers that will convey the characters' experiences, thoughts and ideas and make them conform to the worldview of his audience. This he remarkably achieves through a transliterated deployment of Ibibio language with English by 'Englishizing' Ibibio expressions, proverbs and parables; this I choose to call Ibibionglish. The syntaxes of the above extracts are essentially those of Ibibio language, and the lexicons in here more indigenous items. Atakpo's indigenized language pattern has largely shaped the language reality to suit his society's ideology. The playwright's refusal to conform to the linguistic rules governing the standard English grammar and lexis can be seen as one of the key aspects in the decolonization of Ibibio literature, language and culture.

Although written in English, Atakpo's language in *Edisua* reflects the situation of polyglossia and code-mixing. The text displays a variety of communicative styles and varied language registers just like those of Henri Lopes. Atakpo incorporates a visible trace of mixing English and *Ibibio*. More illustrations are seen in the extracts below from *Edisua*;

Mesembe: ... Asambi nwan ima mmi, it is not our fault that we cannot have male children. (p. 2)

Anwaofiong: Ye Devil from Ito and Ukwa, come from left and right... (p. 12)

Yara Yuk: ...I am innocent, I will swear by Mbiam mbubiam of Atabrinyang (p.33).

Okposi: ... I shall strengthen for you the charm of Ekpebrenkang. (p. 41)

Okposi: ... The Ekpenoi that has claimed the best of men in Ubani must cease to exist tonight. (PP.41-42)

In *Le Pleurer-rire*, Lopes employs what might be termed pseudo visible traces of *Kikongo* in the way and manner he incorporates words and expressions. He italicizes words in order to highlight the fact that the person speaking has switched to French at this point, while the rest of what is being said is actually in a different language, although, in the text, all of the words are given in French. An example of this device is given below:

Elle continuait dans un chuchotement en Kibotama. Au lieu d'aller au palais, tu me suis... (240)

Personal translation

She continued in a whisper in Kibotama. Instead of going to the palace, you follow me...

Another direct translation of *Lingala/Kikongo* expression found in *Le Pleurer-rire* is given in the extract below:

Le jeune compatriote directeur de cabinet fermait son visage, comme on dirait en traduisant mot à mot du Kibotama. (*Le Pleurer-rire*, 221)

Personal translation

The young compatriot cabinet director closed his face, as one would say in a word for word translation from Kibotama.

The phrase, 'fermait son visage'(closing his face) is a direct translation from the writer's indigenous language. It is, therefore, distinct from the others cited above, which incorporate calqued expressions without any commentary. This phrase is used to emphasize the intensity of the expression.

It is also pertinent to add that apart from both authors' remarkable use of language as a product of culture and their valuable reflection of African language traits, philosophies and values, there is a prominent audience-insensitivity in both works. In Henri Lopes' novel, those visible indigenous traces are italicized while subsequent ones are reproduced in standard font. However, he gives no explanations of those indigenous words and expressions, thus making a reader without any knowledge of Lingala, Kikongo or Swahili where such words or expressions are understood, to be at a loss in the course of following the development of the story. In the same vein, Atakpo adopts a didactic strategy by treating borrowed words or expressions as if they are English words and expressions, presenting them in normal font and letting them stand on their own without any explanations for the understanding of his non-Ibibio audience. In certain parts of *Edisua*, Atakpo signals the foreignness of a word on the occasion of its first usage by highlighting it in italics; even at that, explanations of the borrowed words, expressions and terms are not provided. For instance, Asi, (one of the characters in the play) addresses Mesembe (another character and an elder) as "Ete nnyin" before her speech on page 6 but when the term is used again on page 7, 'Ete nnyin' is fully integrated into the body of the speech without italics and without explanations; it becomes a part of the literary flow. The integration of such terms into the European language certainly accounts for the shifting of linguistic boundaries between Ibibio and English.

The typographical conventions used for recognizable traces of indigenous terms in both Henri Lopes and Uwemedimo Atakpo vary from page to page. This language style would have been pardonable if there was a glossary of words section at the end of each text to explain all employed indigenous words and expressions considering the fact that both writers do not write for regional but universal audiences. However, it can also be argued that the deliberate employment of indigenous names and a refusal to translate indigenous words, expressions and

games by both writers should be considered as decolonizing in intention as well as their individual style and aesthetic sense.

Morphological Features

Morphology has to do with word formation processes in language. Aronoff Mark and Fudeman Kirsten (2005) define morphology as “the mental system involved in word formation” or “the branch of linguistics that deals with words, their internal structure, and how they are formed” (2). Morphological devices in stylistic analysis include compounding, affixes (prefix and suffix) coinages and so on. This level of language analysis represents the convenient bits of language activities and succinctly provides a good background against which we can locate the views and arguments in this study. This feature plays an important role in the speech of Tonton and others in *Le Pleurer-rire* in the use of the suffix “-là”. Examples of its usage in the text are:

Non, dans tout ça, ce qui me plaît, c’est Mao. In-Cro-Yable! Un genie!
 Faut voir comme il dirige la revolution culturelle-là. (15)

Elengui-là, toi tu ne veux pas comprendre. (17)

Et il nous expliquant encore quoi-quoi-quoi-là, si c’est
 quoi-quoi-quoi-là, avec des mots en isme et en iste en
 pagaille, qui s’entre choquaient et sonnaient bon à l’oreille (184)

Personal translation

No, in all this, the thing I like, is Mao. In –Cre-Dible!
 A genius! See how he’e leading this cultural revolution.

You’re just being stubborn, you don’t want to understand.

And he’s still explaining this and that to us, whatever this
 and that is, with a bunch of words ending in -ism and –site
 that clash and sound good to the ear.

These abstractions show that, in contrast with the standard French usage which would permit the addition of the suffix only in combination with a demonstrative pronoun, it is used in the first illustration above in combination with the definite noun phrase, ‘la revolution culturelle’; as proper name used in vocative ‘Elengui’ in the second illustration, and, perhaps most striking

of all, with the repeated indefinite pronoun ‘quoi’ indicating the speaker’s reluctance and perhaps inability to comprehend the subject to which he is referring, in the third.

There is also the combination of adverbial expressions to form a noun as evident in the illustrations below:

La radio continuait de faire grand bruit autour des audiences et autres activités de Bwakamabé, (...) du carnet mondain des en haut et de leurs familles (290)

Un en haut de en haut a, par nature, tendance à penser qu’un autre en haut de en haut est incapable de concevoir un crime ou même de trahir (292)

Personal translation

The radio continued to make a big fuss about the hearings and other activities of Bwakamabé ... the high society gossip about the elite and their families.

A high ranking individual inherently tends to think that another high ranking individual is incapable of committing a crime or even betraying them.

The expression, ‘un en haut de en haut’ in the second illustration is used innovatively to refer to those holding positions of power or the privileged in society. In the text, the writer also plays on French expressions, corrupting them in the process in order to create and give them an African flavour. An example is seen in this French expression; “laisser macérer quelqu’un dans son jus” as shown in the extract below;

Faut pas fuir les oncles. Quand nous les chassons, en fait nous les fuyons, pour mieux macérer dans le jus de nos babouches (219)

Personal translation

We must not flee from uncles. When we chase them away, in fact we are running away from them to better steep in the juice of our slippers.

The “pour mieux macérer dans le jus de nos babouches” meaning ‘to better steep in the juice of our slippers’ is very colourful and figurative expression that means to be left alone with one’s problems, or to stew in one’s own misery. Chantal Zabus (1991) describes this peculiar creative

aesthetic taste as a technique of “relexification”, which is “the making of a new register ... out of an alien lexicon” that “ seeks to subvert the linguistically codified, to decolonize the language of early, colonial literature” (107).

Conclusion

Through indigenization, Henri Lopes and Uwemedimo Atakpo could be seen as moving away from the veneration accorded the imposed colonial language to a more africanized one. They allow for a free flow and transmission of cultural motifs, images, myths and lexical codes from their own linguistic heritage into their creative works in such a manner that these borrowings may have constituted a barrier to a non-indigenous reader’s understanding and enjoyment of their texts. The writers, rather than subjugate their cultures and societies to the European languages, (English and French in this instance), mould these languages to suit their indigenous realities and beliefs. By so doing, they condition and force these European languages to conform and change to the realities of the African environment in order to portray the African identity and its world-view without conformity to known linguistic conventions. The writers’ manner of exploring sociolinguistic materials from their ethnic backgrounds constitutes the most vibrant socio-cultural solidarity with their linguistic community. Apart from the desire of these writers to decolonize African indigenous languages and to express solidarity with their linguistic communities as a social group, they have also successfully established national literatures capable of enhancing their vision of preserving and documenting their indigenous languages and cultures. Also, the literary texts, *Edisua* and *Le Pleurer-rire*, will make very good pedagogical tools for different levels of language learning.

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