

agency. In effect the standard is a construct based on what linguistic tradition has deemed to be worth codifying, which is then carried over and assumed to be valid in subsequent linguistic descriptions. The public recognition of this validity is then assured by publication in what are conveniently called standard works of reference. And so a convenient construct becomes an established convention.

Do you agree with Widdowson that standard English is a fiction, or do you think it has a solid basis in fact?

- Mugglestone (2003: 42) argues that 'Prescriptive ideology ... in spite of its professed egalitarianism, instead merely reinforces notions of the cultural hegemony of one social group above others'. She describes as "fictions of 'empowerment'" the attempts of eighteenth-century elocutionists such as Thomas Sheridan and John Walker to encourage the disadvantaged to "emulate their 'betters'" on the grounds that use of the standard would be a social leveller. Do you agree with Mugglestone that the 'language is power' argument actually works against rather than for the disadvantaged in society, and that equality can only result from acknowledging all language varieties as equal (the descriptive position)? Do you think either the prescriptive or descriptive position is achievable in practice?
- Milroy mentions speech/writing differences. In your view, do her arguments hold good for both, or are they more appropriate to one or other channel? (You might like to refer back to the section on speech and writing in C3).
- Prepare a questionnaire that will enable you to compare the attitudes of older and younger English speakers in your own country towards specific 'incorrect' usages (use either your own examples or those provided above by Milroy, Bloodworth and Lee), and to the present-day grammatical competence in general of native speakers of English. After you have administered your questionnaire to a sufficient number of respondents (I suggest a minimum of six for each of the two groups), look for patterns relating to the age of the respondents. Do you think you would obtain different responses if you asked these questions in an L1 English-speaking country if yours is an L2 English-speaking one, or vice versa? Why might this be?

FROM LANGUAGE TO LITERATURE

Although this section focuses on literature rather than language, many of the issues are the same. Underlying the extracts from the late Chinua Achebe, who died in March 2013, and Ngũgĩ wa Thiong'o is the fundamental and unresolved question of whether the English language is able to (re)present the experience of speakers from other backgrounds, as well as the extent to which the language can or should be modified in the process. As you read through these two extracts, note the main points of disagreement between Achebe and Ngũgĩ on these issues.

The African writer and the English language

Chinua Achebe

Chinua Achebe (reprinted from *Morning Yet On Creation Day*, New York: Anchor, 1975)

I have indicated somewhat off-handedly that the national literature of Nigeria and of many other countries of Africa is, or will be, written in English. This may sound like a controversial statement, but it isn't. All I have done has been to look at the reality of present-day Africa. This "reality" may change as a result of deliberate, e.g. political, action. If it does an entirely new situation will arise, and there will be plenty of time to examine it. At present it may be more profitable to look at the scene as it is.

What are the factors which have conspired to place English in the position of national language in many parts of Africa? Quite simply the reason is that these nations were created in the first place by the intervention of the British which, I hasten to add, is not saying that the peoples comprising these nations were invented by the British.

[...]

Of course there are areas of Africa where colonialism divided up a single ethnic group among two or even three powers. But on the whole it did bring together many peoples that had hitherto gone their several ways. And it gave them a language with which to talk to one another. If it failed to give them a song, it at least gave them a tongue, for sighing. There are not many countries in Africa today where you could abolish the language of the erstwhile colonial powers and still retain the facility for mutual communication. Therefore those African writers who have chosen to write in English or French are not unpatriotic smart alecs with an eye on the main chance – outside their own countries. They are by-products of the same process that made the new nation states of Africa.

You can take this argument a stage further to include other countries of Africa. The only reason why we can even talk about African unity is that when we get together we can have a manageable number of languages to talk in – English, French, Arabic.

The other day I had a visit from Joseph Kariuki of Kenya. Although I had read some of his poems and he had read my novels we had not met before. But it didn't seem to matter. In fact I had met him through his poems, especially through his love poem, "Come Away My Love" in which he captures in so few words the trial and tensions of an African in love with a white girl in Britain.

Come away my love, from streets
Where unkind eyes divide
And shop windows reflect our difference.

By contrast, when in 1960 I was travelling in East Africa and went to the home of the late Shabaan Robert, the Swahili poet of Tanganyika, things had been different. We spent some time talking about writing, but there was no real contact. I knew from all accounts that I was talking to an important writer, but of the nature of his work I had no idea. He gave me two books of his poems which I treasure but cannot read – until I have learnt Swahili.

Chinua Achebe

And there are scores of languages I would want to learn if it were possible. Where am I to find the time to learn the half-a-dozen or so Nigerian languages each of which can sustain a literature? I am afraid it cannot be done. These languages will just have to develop as tributaries to feed the one central language enjoying nation-wide currency. Today, for good or ill, that language is English. Tomorrow it may be something else, although I very much doubt it.

Those of use who have inherited the English language may not be in a position to appreciate the value of the inheritance. Or we may go on resenting it because it came as part of a package deal which included many other items of doubtful value and the positive atrocity of racial arrogance and prejudice which may yet set the world on fire. But let us not in rejecting the evil throw out the good with it.

[...]

I think I have said enough to give an indication of my thinking on the importance of the world language which history has forced down our throat. Now let us look at some of the most serious handicaps. And let me say straight away that one of the most serious handicaps is *not* the one people talk about most often, namely, that it is impossible for anyone ever to use a second language as effectively as his first. This assertion is compounded of half-truth and half bogus mystique. Of course, it is true that the vast majority of people are happier with their first language than with any other. But then the majority of people are not writers. We do have enough examples of writers who have performed the feat of writing effectively in a second language. And I am not thinking of the obvious names like Conrad. It would be more germane to our subject to choose African examples.

The first name that comes to my mind is Olaudah Equiano, better known as Gustavus Vassa, the African. Equiano was an Ibo, I believe from the village of Iseke in the Orlu division of Eastern Nigeria. He was sold as a slave at a very early age and transported to America. Later he bought his freedom and lived in England. In 1789 he published his life story, a beautifully written document which, among other things, set down for the Europe of his time something of the life and habit of his people in Africa in an attempt to counteract the lies and slander invented by some Europeans to justify the slave trade.

[...]

It is when we come to what is commonly called creative literature that most doubt seems to arise. Obi Wali [...] has this to say:

Until these writers and their Western midwives accept the fact that any true African literature must be written in African languages, they would be merely pursuing a dead end, which can only lead to sterility, uncreativity and frustration.

But far from leading to sterility the work of many new African writers is full of the most exciting possibilities.

[...]

[T]ake the poem "Night Rain" in which J. P. Clark captures so well the fear and wonder felt by a child as rain clamours on the thatch-roof at night and his mother walking about in the dark, moves her simple belongings

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Out of the run of water
That like ants filing out of the wood
Will scatter and gain possession
Of the floor . . .

I think that the picture of water spreading on the floor "like ants filing out of the wood" is beautiful. Of course if you have never made fire with faggots you may miss it. But Clark's inspiration derives from the same source which gave birth to the saying that a man who brings home antridden faggots must be ready for the visit of lizards.

I do not see any signs of sterility anywhere here. What I do see is a new voice coming out of Africa, speaking of African experience in a world-wide language. So my answer to the question: *Can an African ever learn English well enough to be able to use it effectively in creative writing?* is certainly yes. If on the other hand you ask: *Can he ever learn to use it like a native speaker?* I should say, I hope not. It is neither necessary nor desirable for him to be able to do so. The price a world language must be prepared to pay is submission to many different kinds of use. 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.

[...]

Allow me to quote a small example from *Arrow of God* which may give some idea of how I approach the use of English. The Chief Priest in the story is telling one of his sons why it is necessary to send him to church:

I want one of my sons to join these people and be my eyes there. If there is nothing in it you will come back. But if there is something there you will bring home my share. The world is like a Mask, dancing. If you want to see it well you do not stand in one place. My spirit tells me that those who do not befriend the white man today will be saying *had we known* tomorrow.

Now supposing I had put it another way, Like this for instance:

I am sending you as my representative among these people – just to be on the safe side in case the new religion develops. One has to move with the times or else one is left behind. I have a hunch that those who fail to come to terms with the white man may well regret their lack of foresight.

The material is the same. But the form of the one is *in character* and the other is not. It is largely a matter of instinct, but judgment comes into it too.

[...]

One final point remains for me to make. The real question is not whether Africans could write in English but whether they *ought to*. Is it right that a man should abandon his mother-tongue for someone else's? It looks like a dreadful betrayal and produces a guilty feeling.

But for me there is no other choice. I have been given this language and I intend to use it. I hope, though, that there will always be men, like the late Chief Fagunwa,

Chinua Achebe

who will choose to write in their native tongue and ensure that our ethnic literature will flourish side-by-side with the national ones. For those of us who opt for English there is much work ahead and much excitement.

Writing in the *London Observer* recently, James Baldwin said:

My quarrel with English language has been that the language reflected none of my experience. But now I began to see the matter another way . . . Perhaps the language was not my own because I had never attempted to use it, had only learned to imitate it. If this were so, then it might be made to bear the burden of my experience if I could find the stamina to challenge it, and me, to such a test.

I recognise, of course, that Baldwin's problem is not exactly mine, but I feel that the English language will be able to carry the weight of my African experience. But it will have to be a new English, still in full communion with its ancestral home but altered to suit its new African surroundings.

Ngũgĩ wa Thiong'o

The language of African literature

Ngũgĩ wa Thiong'o, (*Decolonising the Mind: The Politics of Language in African Literature*, London: James Currey, 1986)

It was after the declaration of a state of emergency over Kenya in 1952 that all the schools run by patriotic nationalists were taken over by the colonial regime and were placed under District Education Boards chaired by Englishmen. English then became the language of my formal education. In Kenya, English became more than a language: it was *the* language, and all the others had to bow before it in deference.

Thus one of the most humiliating experiences was to be caught speaking Gikũyũ in the vicinity of the school. The culprit was given corporal punishment – three to five strokes of the cane on bare buttocks – or was made to carry a metal plate around the neck with inscriptions such as I AM STUPID or I AM A DONKEY. Sometimes the culprits were fined money they could hardly afford. And how did the teachers catch the culprits? A button was initially given to one pupil who was supposed to hand it over to whoever was caught speaking his mother tongue. Whoever had the button at the end of the day would sing who had given it to him and the ensuing process would bring out all the culprits of the day. Thus children were turned into witch-hunters and in the process were being taught the lucrative value of being traitor to one's immediate community.

The attitude to English was the exact opposite: any achievement in spoken or written English was highly rewarded; prizes, prestige, applause; the ticket to higher realms. English became the measure of intelligence and ability in the arts, the sciences, and all the other branches of learning. English became the main determinant of a child's progress up the ladder of formal education.

As you may know, the colonial system of education in addition to its apartheid racial demarcation had the structure of a pyramid: a broad primary base, a narrowing secondary middle, and an even narrower university apex. Selections from primary into secondary were through an examination, in my time called Kenya African Preliminary

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Examination, in which one had to pass six subjects ranging from Maths to Nature Study and Kiswahili. All the papers were written in English. Nobody could pass the exam who failed the English language paper no matter how brilliantly he had done in the other subjects. I remember one boy in my class of 1954 who had distinctions in all subjects except English, which he had failed. He was made to fail the entire exam. He went on to become a turn boy in a bus company. I who had only passes but a credit in English got a place at the Alliance High School, one of the most elitist institutions for Africans in colonial Kenya. The requirements for a place at the University, Makerere University College, were broadly the same: nobody could go on to wear the undergraduate red gown, no matter how brilliantly they had performed in all the other subjects unless they had a credit – not even a simple pass! – in English. Thus the most coveted place in the pyramid and in the system was only available to the holder of an English language credit card. English was the official vehicle and the magic formula to colonial elitedom.

Literary education was now determined by the dominant language while also reinforcing that dominance. Orature (oral literature) in Kenyan languages stopped. In primary school I now read simplified Dickens and Stevenson alongside Rider Haggard. Jim Hawkins, Oliver Twist, Tom Brown – not Hare, Leopard and Lion – were now my daily companions in the world of imagination. In secondary school, Scott and G.B. Shaw vied with more Rider Haggard, John Buchan, Alan Paton, Captain W.E. Johns. At Makerere I read English: from Chaucer to T.S. Eliot with a touch of Graham Greene.

Thus language and literature were taking us further and further from ourselves to other selves, from our world to other worlds.

What was the colonial system doing to us Kenyan children? What were the consequences of, on the one hand, this systematic suppression of our languages and the literature they carried, and on the other the elevation of English and the literature it carried? To answer those questions, let me first examine the relationship of language to human experience, human culture and the human perception of reality.

Language, any language, has a dual character: it is both a means of communication and a carrier of culture. Take English. It is spoken in Britain and in Sweden and Denmark. But for Swedish and Danish people English is only a means of communication with non-Scandinavians. It is not a carrier of their culture. For the British, and particularly the English, it is additionally, and inseparably from its use as a tool of communication, a carrier of their culture and history. Or take Swahili in East and Central Africa. It is widely used as a means of communication across many nationalities. But it is not the carrier of a culture and history of many of these nationalities. However in parts of Kenya and Tanzania, and particularly in Zanzibar, Swahili is inseparably both a means of communication and a carrier of the culture of those people to whom it is a mother-tongue.

[. . .]

But there is more to it: communication between human beings is also the basis and process of evolving culture. In doing similar kinds of things and actions over and over again under similar circumstances, similar even in their mutability, certain patterns, moves, rhythms, habits, attitudes, experiences and knowledge emerge. Those experiences are handed over to the next generation and become the inherited basis for their further actions on nature and on themselves. There is a gradual accumulation

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of values which in time become almost self-evident truths governing their conception of what is right and wrong, good and bad, beautiful and ugly, courageous and cowardly, generous and mean in their internal and external relations. Over a time this becomes a way of life distinguishable from other ways of life. They develop a distinctive culture and history. Culture embodies those moral, ethical and aesthetic values, the set of spiritual eyeglasses, through which they come to view themselves and their place in the universe. Values are the basis of a people's identity, their sense of particularity as members of the human race. All this is carried by language. Language as culture is the collective memory bank of a people's experience in history. Culture is almost indistinguishable from the language that makes possible its genesis, growth, banking, articulation and indeed its transmission from one generation to the next.

Language as culture [...] has three important aspects. Culture is a product of the history which it in turn reflects. Culture in other words is a product and a reflection of human beings communicating with one another in the very struggle to create wealth and to control it. But culture does not merely reflect that history, or rather it does so by actually forming images or pictures of the world of nature and nurture. Thus the second aspect of language as culture is as an image-forming agent in the mind of the child. Our whole conception of ourselves as a people, individually and collectively, is based on those pictures and images which may or may not correctly correspond to the actual reality of the struggles with nature and nurture which produced them in the first place. But our capacity to confront the world creatively is dependent on how those images correspond or not to that reality, how they distort or clarify the reality of our struggles. Language as culture is thus mediating between me and my own self; between my own self and other selves; between me and nature. Language is mediating in my very being. And this brings us to the third aspect of language as culture. Culture transmits or imparts those images of the world and reality through the spoken and written language, that is through a specific language. [...] Written literature and orature are the main means by which a particular language transmits the images of the world contained in the culture it carries.

Language as communication and as culture are then products of each other. Communication creates culture: culture is a means of communication. Language carries culture, and culture carries, particularly through orature and literature, the entire body of values by which we come to perceive ourselves and our place in the world. How people perceive themselves affects how they look at their culture, at their politics and at the social production of wealth, at their entire relationship to nature and to other beings. Language is thus inseparable from ourselves as a community of human beings with a specific form and character, a specific history, a specific relationship to the world.

So what was the colonialist imposition of a foreign language doing to us children?

The real aim of colonialism was to control the people's wealth [...]. But its most important area of domination was the mental universe of the colonised: the control, through culture, of how people perceived themselves and their relationship to the world. Economic and political control can never be complete or effective without mental control. To control a people's culture is to control their tools of self-definition in relations to others.

For colonialism this involved two aspects of the same process: the destruction or the deliberate undervaluing of a people's culture, their art, dances, religions, history,

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geography, education, orature and literature, and the conscious elevation of the language of the coloniser. The domination of a people's language by the languages of the colonising nations was crucial to the domination of the mental universe of the colonised.

Take language as communication. [...] Since the new language, as a means of communication was a product of and was reflecting the 'real language of life' elsewhere, it could never as spoken or written properly reflect or imitate the real life of that community. This may in part explain why technology always appears to us as slightly external, *their* product and not *ours*. The word 'missile' used to hold an alien far-away sound until I recently learnt its equivalent in Gikũyũ, *ngurukuhi*, and it made me apprehend it differently. Learning, for a colonial child, became a cerebral activity and not an emotionally felt experience.

But since the new, imposed languages could never completely break the native languages as spoken, their most effective area of domination was [...] the written. The language of an African child's formal education was foreign. The language of the books he read was foreign. Thought, in him, took the visible form of a foreign language. So the written language of a child's upbringing in the school (even his spoken language within the school compound) became divorced from his spoken language at home. There was often not the slightest relationship between the child's written world, which was also the language of his schooling, and the world of his immediate environment in the family and the community. [...] This resulted in the disassociation of the sensibility of that child from his natural and social environment, what we might call colonial alienation. The alienation became reinforced in the teaching of history, geography, music, where bourgeois Europe was always the centre of the universe.

This disassociation, divorce, or alienation from the immediate environment becomes clearer when you look at colonial language as a carrier of culture.

[...]

Since culture does not just reflect the world in images but actually, through those very images, conditions a child to see that world in a certain way, the colonial child was made to see the world and where he stands in it as seen and defined by or reflected in the culture of the language of imposition.

And since those images are mostly passed on through orature and literature it meant the child would now only see the world as seen in the literature of his language of adoption. From the point of view of alienation, that is of seeing oneself from outside oneself as if one was another self, it does not matter that the imported literature carried the great humanist tradition of the best in Shakespeare, Balzac, Tolstoy, Gorky, Brecht, Sholokhov, Dickens. The location of this great mirror of imagination was necessarily Europe and its history and culture and the rest of the universe was seen from that centre.

But obviously it was worse when the colonial child was exposed to images of his world as mirrored in the written languages of his coloniser. Where his own native languages were associated in his impressionable mind with low status, humiliation, corporal punishment, slow-footed intelligence and ability or downright stupidity, non-intelligibility and barbarism, this was reinforced by the world he met in the works of such geniuses of racism as a Rider Haggard or a Nicholas Monsarrat; not to mention the pronouncement of some of the giants of western intellectual and political

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establishment, such as Hume ('... the negro is naturally inferior to the whites...'), Thomas Jefferson ('... the blacks... are inferior to the whites on the endowments of both body and mind...'), for Hegel with his Africa comparable to a land of childhood still enveloped in the dark mantle of the night as far as the development of self-conscious history was concerned. Hegel's statement that there was nothing harmonious with humanity to be found in the African character is representative of the racist images of Africans and Africa such a colonial child was bound to encounter in the literature of the colonial languages. The results could be disastrous.

[...]

In history books and popular commentaries on Africa, too much has been made of the supposed differences in the policies of the various colonial powers, the British indirect rule (or the pragmatism of the British in their lack of a cultural programme!) and the French and Portuguese conscious programme of cultural assimilation. These are a matter of detail and emphasis. The final effect was the same: [...] Chinua Achebe's gratitude in 1964 to English – 'those of us who have inherited the English language may not be in a position to appreciate the value of the inheritance'. The assumptions behind the practice of those of us who have abandoned our mother-tongues are not different either. [...] It is the final triumph of a system of domination when the dominated start singing its virtues.

Issues to consider

- In his book *Decolonising the Mind* Ngũgĩ (1986: xiv) declares: "This book, *Decolonising the Mind*, is my farewell to English as a vehicle for any of my writings. From now on it is Gikũyũ and Kiswahili all the way. However, I hope that through the age-old medium of translation I shall be able to continue dialogue with all". Achebe, on the other hand, argues eloquently in favour of writing in English, but one adapted to its postcolonial users: what kinds of arguments could be made for and against either position, and with which of the two are you in greater sympathy?
- Ngũgĩ has indeed written his later works in his mother tongue Gikũyũ in the first instance and then translated them into English for a wider readership. For example, his 2006 book, *Wizard of the Crow*, is a translation of his Gikũyũ novel *Murogi wa Kagogo*. In a review of *Wizard of the Crow*, Phillipson (2007) applauds Ngũgĩ's decision, arguing that "[i]nvesting in other languages, which Ngũgĩ is doing in a pioneering way, represents the creation of linguistic and cultural capital that can challenge English linguistic hegemony". Do you agree with Phillipson that it is important to challenge the "hegemony" of English by actions such as writing literature in the mother tongue? Why?/Why not?
- Achebe argues in the extract from *Morning Yet on Creation Day* that "the price a world language must be prepared to pay is submission to many different kinds of use". How far do you agree with him in terms of both literary and non-literary use? It might help you as regards non-literary use to refer back to the earlier sections of strand 4, especially B4.

THE STATUS OF PIDGIN LANGUAGES IN EDUCATION

In the previous two editions of the book, the reading text for this strand was a 1998 article by Charles Alobwede d'Épie entitled 'Banning Pidgin English in Cameroon'. Alobwede's article focused on negative attitudes towards Cameroon Pidgin amid fears that it was causing a decline in English language standards, and lamented attempts to ban it particularly in education, given that it was spoken by around 70 per cent of the population. Thirteen years on, Atechi explores the issues anew. He finds that the situation has become more complex, with Cameroon Pidgin still being stigmatised even by its own users, but also very much in use alongside Cameroon English, even on university campuses. However, it appears that the nature of Cameroon Pidgin is changing as increasing numbers of its younger users also have exposure to more standard forms of English.

'Is Cameroon Pidgin flourishing or dying? An attempt to reconcile conflicting reports on the functions and status of Cameroon pidgin English'

Samuel Atechi

Samuel Atechi (*English Today* 27(3), 2011: 30–34)

Introduction

Cameroon Pidgin English (abbreviated to CamP) is one of the languages of wider communication in Cameroon, a country second only to Papua New Guinea in terms of its multiplicity of languages for a relatively small population. CamP is used alongside other languages like English and French (official languages), Fulfulde, Arab Choa, Ewondo and Duala (lingua francas), and over 250 indigenous languages. What is, however, peculiar about CamP is that it is not restricted to a particular class of people or to people from a particular region. A language which arose as a result of the desperate need for a link language between people who spoke mutually unintelligible languages has now established itself as a major force to reckon with in the linguistic landscape of the country. One of the main preoccupations among researchers on CamP has been its relationship with Cameroon English (CamE), which has higher status. While CamE is an official language in the country's constitution, CamP enjoys covert prestige bestowed on it by Cameroonians as a language of wider communication, social interaction, intimacy, etc. However, Cameroonians have been given to understand that the coexistence of CamP and CamE is responsible for the falling standard of English in the country, as a result of which CamP should be eradicated at all costs. This attitude has led to the stigmatisation and intimidation of CamP speakers as educational authorities all over the country attempt to ban the language, and refer to it in such pejorative terms as bad English, poor English, bush English, join join English etc. Such hostility has tended to drive the language underground so that speakers rarely express their liking for the language overtly. They are suspicious of language authorities and thus have developed an ambivalent attitude towards anything that has to do with CamP. Thus if those speakers who use CamP daily as the main medium of communication were to be asked what they think about its status, functions and prospects, the results would be largely negative (Schröder, 2003), not because they do not