

DECOLONIZING POETRY: FORM, CONTENT AND LINGUISTIC IMPLICATIONS OF NIGERIAN PIDGIN POETRY

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ABSTRACT

The Nigerian soil over the years has proven to be a fertile ground for poetic overflow. This is evident in the outburst of poems that have emanated from the country and now grace the African and world literature at large. Poetry, a genre of literature which some scholars believe to be of Western origin is not alien to Africa. Africans have their own poetry laced in oral tradition and cultural artefacts of the people prior to colonialism. Poetry in Africa in the course of its evolution has undergone several changes. Some schools of thought have emerged in the defence and promotion of the gains of poetry and the form it ought to take. We have the likes of Wole Soyinka and Okigbo who believe in the obscurity of poetry. Also in contention are the likes of Niyi Osundare and Tanure Ojaide who believe in the simplicity of poetry if it must meet the criteria of being a weapon of criticism. They are called the 'Alter- native' poets. In this rank also is Ezenwa Ohaeto, Peter Onwudinjo, and Akachi Adimora -Ezeigbo who have resorted even to the level of using the Pidgin English as the language of some of their poems. This paper selected the poetry of Ezenwa Ohaeto and Peter Onwudinjo and studied the use of pidgin in their poetry. The paper examined the form, content of these pidgin poems and above all the effect and implication of this usage on poetry and society at large. It concludes that the pidgin poetry is of great appeal to many lovers of poetry and has come to serve as the bridge and a link towards the task of decolonizing the African poetry of all western influences.

KEYWORDS: Greek practices, Historically

INTRODUCTION

As one of the genres of literature, poetry has antecedents in the early Greek practices whereby they sought to project their worldview and understand themselves better. Historically, poetry originated among the early Greek classical writers. It originated from two major trajectories, one being man's love for imitation, the other from man's love for music and harmony. Though aware of this view, many African critics project the view that African poetry is of African origin and not necessary a colonial invention. Africans had poetry of great depth and beauty prior to the coming of the White man. This poetry was in the hands of the groits, praise singers, court poets, and women folks among the veritable resource poets of African poetry. They had their oral poetry of great depth and values with rhythm and musical rhyme that soothe and satisfy their tastes at all occasion. Poetry was used for the invocation of the gods and to celebrate heroism. Poetry was used for traditional festivals, dances and rituals.

They had poetry that enlivened marriage ceremonies, title- takings, new yam festivals, child- naming ceremonies, manual labour, and moonlight plays etc. During funerals, Africans had many emotion-laden poems that convey the exact feeling of sadness, disappointment, grievance but total submission to the inevitable power of death.

This poetry is laced in the beauty of African imageries, words of high linguistics importance and value in the African world view. To ensure their survival, they were transmitted orally from generation to generation. This type of poetry continued to serve the religious, social and political purposes of the pre-literate society prior to the coming of the White man. The advent of the White man dealt a drastic blow to the oral tradition of Africans and poetry was not left out of it. The early Europeans critics tried to deny the presence of anything poetry in the matrix of the African society prior to the colonial era. They argued that poetry that has no rhyme, no meter, nothing to soothe and interest the mind, cannot be poetry. Suffice it to say that many critics and researchers took it upon themselves, the laboring but rewarding task of bringing the oral African poetry to lime-light. Prominent among them are Ruth Finnegan, Isidore Okpewho amongst others. Terhemba Shija emphasis that:

It is necessary to explain the vital point that African already had a rich reservoir of its poetry before the emergence of written poetry in early twentieth century. Traditional oral poetry as composed and performed by recognized artists in all the diverse ethnic groups in African before the arrival of the European drew its themes from common human experience and the environment. Okot P' Bitek makes this point clear when he responds to Taban Liyong's complaints of a literary desert in African that Liyong was suffering from "acute literary deafness ... to the songs and stories of the vast majority of our people in the country side (26).

Poetry as a genre of literature has laboured and has done enough in fulfilling the goals of literature in society. Poetry delights the mind and also serves the purpose of instructing and educating society. It does this by assembling together some conspicuous human vices and follies and ridicule them with the sole aim of correcting them. This is the point where poetry becomes a weapon of satire, to bring into lime-light, human follies and vices as it projects the truth about human existence through which it ushers in change and reformation.

THE EURO-MODERNIST MOVEMENT OF AFRICAN POETRY - THE IBADAN-NSUKKA POETS AND THE POETRY OF OBSCURITY

The second generation of African poets among others include prominent poets like: Wole Soyinka, Gabriel Okara, J. P Clark, Christopher Okigbo, Dennis Brutus, Okot P'Bitek, Kwesi Brew, Kofi Awoonor, Lenrie Peters all from the Anglophone African. Also are poets like Leopold Sedar Senghor, T Chicaya U'Tansi, Birago Diop, David Diop representing the Franophone Africa. The Lusophone countries have poets like Agostinho Neto, Antonio Jacinto, Vasco Cabral and Noemiade Gousa while the Arabic speaking African countries boasted of the likes of Salah Abdel Sabi, Ahmad, Hijazi and Mohammed Al Faituri. These poets Terhemba recognizes are critical of colonialism and express their uneasiness at the cultural crossroads as well as deploy political satire to criticize corruption in government. These poets did much to continue with the pattern of poetry that exudes the aura of *africaness* but within this class of poets Chinweizu *et al* referred to as the Ibadan-Nsukka poets; we witness a complete departure from the traditional African Poetry pattern to a wholesome submission to the whims and caprices of the Europeans poets. Chinweizu *et al* capture these feelings in these poets and narrate it thus:

Within the European culture of African schools, the notion reigned that poetry was something written, which had meter, rhyme and stanzaic form. Such a notion contributes to a disregard and abandonment of the Africa poetic tradition by promoting the view that Africa had no poetry. Since there was no immediately visible African equivalents of such European poetry as is written in such forms as the sonnet, rhyme royal, sestina, ballade, villanelle or rondeau,

Africa had no poetry (151).

Such was the views and feelings of these poets that African pattern of poetry making was relegated to the background. Some of the Nigerian poets of the second generation demonstrated a complete loss of their cultural heritage and exerted to a very high degree the influence of western literary impulse in them. They wrote poetry that has lost sight with African lore and spoke in a language which Chinweizu et al describe as: old, fashioned craggy, unmusical language, obscure and inaccessible diction; a plethora of imported imagery; a divorce from African oral poetic traditions, tempered only by lifeless attempts at revivalism. Their language is archaic.

They seem to pattern their language after 19th century or even 16th century British writers. For example, J. P Clark's "Ivbie" is replete with such clichés and Shakespeareanisms as "thereby hangs a tale", "bade us hold our tongue/Bade us note," in "Heavensgate" Christopher Okigbo writes: a singeth Jadum the minstrel ... singeth Jadum from Rockland ... The poem is dotted with Latinisms ... Michael Echeruo's "Mortality" bristles with 'corpus Christi formulas' ... qui tollis peccata mundi ... according to the order of melchisedech. Wole Soyinka's syntax and verbal structure is Shakespearean (165).

These group poets, they believe represented the Ibadan-Nsukka school of Nigerian poetry and thus serve as an excellent representation of the Euro-modernist tendency in Anglophone African poetry, a tendency prominent in Nigeria during its year of emergence there in 1957-67. The poetry of these poets represented by the likes of Wole Soyinka, J. P Clark, Michael Echeruo, and early Christopher Okigbo were modeled to suit the European taste and flavor. These Ibadan-Nsukka poets partly as a result of this addiction to archaism, created poetry that was craggy, lumpy, full of obstructions and were unnecessarily and artificially difficult. Many of their poems were so superfluous in outlook and these poets held and cherished them with such a superfluous and narcissistic feeling which many African critics frowned deeply at. Simple ideas were often deliberately clothed in esoteric idioms. These poets compound the problem of meaning by insisting on importing imagery from alien environments and lore. Chinweizu *et al* pointed out the problems of these Ibadan-Nsukka poets, that:

The Ibadan-Nsukka poets are the most part ineffectual imitators. When they imitate the European tradition, they too often botch it, and when they consciously attempt to write in the African manner, they also botch it The idols in the poetic pantheon of Nigeria's euro modernists are the leavisite modernist trinity- Ezra pound, T. S Eliot and Gerard Manley Hopkins. Since their university days Nigeria euro-modernist poets and critics have been apprenticed to the works of these idols and trained to consider them the epitome of modernist poetic culture in English language The only thing these disciples appear to have learned from their models are their well-known faults. Prominent among the characteristics of Nigerian euro-modernist poetry are Hopkinsian syntactic jugglery, Poundian allusiveness and sprinkling of foreign phrases, and Eliotesque suppression of narrative and other logical links of the sort that creates obscurity but if one combines the individual faults of Pound, Eliot and Hopkins, one obtains the hall mark of Nigeria's euro-modernist poetry (172).

This is the Hopkin's disease they suffered, for these poets, as result of addiction to Hopkinsian and Eliotesque mannerisms when they attempt to write in traditional African modes, their Hopkinsian techniques get in their way, and they botch their traditionalist efforts. Thus, they ended up creating obscure poetry that could not easily be understood and appreciated by African readers, even some of their fellow elite group. Chinweizu *et al* maintain that Soyinka regards

the employment in African poetry of elements from Africa's Flora and Fauna, and devices from traditional African imaging devices as "Neo-tarzanist". He does not welcome the appearance of elephants, beggars, calabashes, serpents, pumpkins, baskets, town criers, iron bells, slit drums, iron masks, hares, squirrels, iron band etc. in contemporary African poetry. He would rather have Africa poetry deal preferentially with precision machinery, oil rigs, hydro-electricity, type writers, railway trains, machine guns and other European imports (236).

Donatus Nwoga and few others defended the level of obscurity in these poems claiming that no writing of great value should yield its beauty so easily to a reader. But the troikas maintain that difficult and craggy syntax does not make good poetry. Neither simplicity nor complexity by itself is a sufficient condition for excellence. In the end they called for the decolonization of African literature, by removing in them all the nuances of cultural imperialism and European influences, and our poets should embrace Africa and her true *Africaness* in their writings. Just like the proverbial saying of using the firewood in the farmland to cook for the people that cultivate the farm' so should Africans writers and poets strive to feed the imaginative domains of the Africans with ideas and imageries easily appreciated and understood by them. Some emerging modern poets like Markwei Matei, even Christopher Okigbo later in his career before his untimely death embraced this call for true *Africaness* and beauty in poetry. In "Path of Thunder" Okigbo demonstrated the use of oral lore in poetry. No doubt what he would have achieved as the poet's poet. Chinweizu et al could not help but describe him as a candidate for greatness, a prodigal that came home, while they wait for the return of Soyinka and others, in their seminar paper entitled "Prodigal Come Home".

From the foregoing it was obvious that a new era of poetry is at hand, something beautiful, so passionate, alluring and pleasurable to the minds of the African readers for whom the poetry are written for and that was the "Alter-native" movement in African poetry.

THE BACKGROUND TO ALTER-NATIVITY IN AFRICAN POETRY

Alter-native poetry is a reactionary movement in African poetry against the background and conventions of Euro-modernist tradition in Africa; poetry as practices by the Europeans and propagated by the likes of Wole Soyinka, J. P. Clark, Christopher Okigbo, among others. Poetry to them belongs to the African people and ought not to have any influence whatsoever of the Europeans and their so- called Euro-modernist tradition.

In the words of Terhemba, a few modern poets anxious to showcase their culture background and rich heritage have used ideas and techniques from oral tradition in their writings. These poets occupy the rank of the third generation poets. The more notable ones are, Niyi Osundare, Femi Fatoba, Tanure Ojaide, Osmand Enekwe, Obiora Udechukwu, Odi Ofeimun, Harry Garuba, Funso Aiyejina, Ada Ugah, Catherine Acholonu, Chinweizu, Ezenwa-Ohaeto, Tess Onwueme, Kemi Alanda-Ilori, E. B Asibong, Silas Obidiah, Idi Bukar, Deanja Abdullahi, Uduma Kalu, Olu Obafemi, Nnimmo Bassey, Akachi Adimora Eziegbo, J. O. J. Nwachukwu Agbada among others. Funsho Aiyejina described these poets as "Alter-native" poets. They fall within the school of committed poets whose objective is to communicate directly with the common people. They strive to use language that is plain but definitely not simplistic. They made abundant use of local settings and their subjects are down to earth. Tijan Sallah describes these poets thus:

These poets have assumed the task of art for social advocacy in the hope of quickening the possibility of attainment of a better world. Without sacrificing the artistic integrity, they have emphasized their art of engineering purposeful social change. They are social god flies, poets with drums, poems with spears, poets with guns,

poets with bows and arrows. They are poets who have learned to employ the magical potency of language in order to radically alter the landscape of complacent minds and inspire them to fashion a more human future (16).

These alternative poets took it upon themselves to create poetry that could be accomplished with drums and other local musical instruments. In their poetry we hear chants and ululations of masquerades and griots alike. We pluck in the lines of poetry, ripe fruit of proverbs, riddles, folktales, incantations and praise names of deities and heroes alike which once prided the costal fringes of Africa prior to the coming of the Europeans. The philosophy of the Alternative poets aligns with that of William Wordsworth who puts it succinctly that poetry is man talking to men (30). Dennis Brutus earlier projected the view of the Alter-native poets in an interview with Bernth Lindfors. When charged with the simplicity of *Letters to Martha*, Dennis Brutus believes that we ought to write poetry that will speak to the common man:

You ought to write for the ordinary person, for the man who drives the bus, or the man who carries the baggage at the airport, and the woman who clears the ashtrays in the restaurant. If you can write poetry, which makes sense to those people, then there is some justification for writing poetry. Otherwise, you have no business writing poetry. And therefore, there should be no ornament because ornament gets in the way (Lindfors, 26).

Terhemba posits that we cannot afford to take Brutus conviction lightly. For one thing, poetry uses a language that copes well with emotions of pain, hardship and anguish which Brutus and Ojaide share with their various communities cannot be conveyed in obscurity. Neither obscurity nor elevated languages are fit methods of eliciting sympathy and understanding of a common predicament. Again, it would appear that when danger comes largely over an artist's head his language become less dense. This is the stand of alter-native poets and the language they chose to use to communicate their thoughts. Oswald Mtshali, the South African poet conceded:

The English we use in our poetry is not the Queen's language as written by say Wordsworth and Coleridge. It is the language of urgency which we use because we have got an urgent message to deliver to anyone who cares to listen to it. We have not got the time to embellish this urgent message with unnecessary and cumbersome ornaments like rhyme, iambic pentameter, abstract figures of speech, and an ornate and lofty style. We will indulge in these luxuries which we can ill-afford at the moment when we are free people. Not the harsh realities that in part and parcel of the black man's life (35).

This is the foundation of the alternative poets, to create poetry that will achieve purposeful social changes; poetry gleaned from the day to day experiences of the African people; poetry that speaks to the common man and advocate his freedom and betterment in the oppressed world of wickedness, cultural imperialism, political instability, social decay, cultural dislocation and economic quagmire.

DECOLONIZING POETRY – THE PIDGIN LANGUAGE AND POETRY IN A CROSSROAD OF VISIONS

The concept of decolonization as used in this paper is predicated on the idea of decolonising the African literature from many if not all colonial and western influences so that our literature will speak our voice and reflect our worldview, culture, belief and peculiar perception of life. Decolonization is the process of a colony or colonies becoming independent. African continent is once a continent under the oppressive colonial rule from the Europeans. Just the way our patriots strove to achieve independence for many African states so several critics believe we have to continually struggle to free our

literature from the grasps of the Europeans that once colonized us and brought literacy to us. This is the task before any African writer as Chinweizu et al opine:

In addition to capturing in the African the narrative devices of African languages, there is the task of appropriately employing the various types of English that are spoken by Africans e.g., pidgin, Creole, the English of secondary school leavers... the task of capturing the flavour of African life in the African life in the African would be sadly incomplete if these were left out and if the King's and Queen's English were insisted upon in all contexts (263). It is in line with this call that some African critics clamour for the decolonization of several western influences in the poetry of African poets, thus informing the background of our study.

As language journeys through lands and climes, it acquires new features, new tendencies and as a matter of inevitability accepts some linguistic and cultural influences which the boundaries of other lands will impose on it. This is a fact about the English language. Due to the diversity and existence of many ethnic groups in Nigeria, English language became the official language for general communication, the accepted lingua Franca. For years, the Nigerian people struggled to learn the English language – The official language of communication. Both literates and non-literates alike have an urgent need to learn and master the lingua Franca of the country if they must be relevant in communication all time. This is the situation that gave rise to the Pidgin English, a different and somehow irrational version of the cherished and glorified English language. In the words of Ezenwa Ohaeto:

The origin of Nigerian pidgin has been stated in a pioneering study as “essentially a product of the process of urbanization, while its origins lie historically in the early contacts between Africans and Europeans. The rapidly growing towns of Nigeria have increasingly become the melting pots of the many tribes and races which constitute Nigeria, and pidgin seems to be today a very widely spoken lingua Franca, many town and city dwellers being at least bilingual in Pidgin and an indigenous language. Similarly, a later study which examines the origins of Nigerian pidgin confirms that it “arose from the urgent communication needs of the contact between the visiting Europeans... (23).

This is one of the factors that influenced the rise of Pidgin English in Africa. Other factors include the social cultural milieu of the African people. One of these other factors was the fact that pidgin was associated with a low social status and this aided the social stratification or division of the people who use it. As Peter Onwudinjo posits:

Pidgin is the language of West African urban cities where millions of Nigerians from various linguistic backgrounds dwell and eke out a marginal living. Pidgin is the highway to the Nigerian urban poor audiences most of whom do not read and write. Pidgin poetry yields its meaning without undue tasking of the intellectual resources of the reader. Just as the rendition of folktale captures the attention of an audience in the hands of an experienced raconteur, so does a creative performer of pidgin poetry capture the attention of the listening audience in the motor park, market place ... Because pidgin is so powerful, and reaches a wider local audience... (vii).

Pidgin language has today become one of the accepted conventions of writing poetry. It has been accepted as a viable language capable of sustaining works of literature. Ohaeto remarks that “*it is clearly this capability of pidgin to sustain works of literature – since it is a language that bridges orality, a language that absorbs several cultural elements as it communicates- which has made it yield creative possibilities for the Nigeria poet* (25). African poets have longed endured the pain and endless search to find the equivalent of their imageries, cultural artefacts and native ideas in the English. Peter Onwudinjo laments that:

Perhaps nothing blunts the edge of the expression of the African consciousness like writing in a foreign language. At best, the product can only be a muffled cry-finger whose sensitivity has diminished by the layers of rubber gloves. A foreign language suppresses the poetic force and makes it fall between the legs, like the urine of an old man. Many African languages are full of vigour and imagery, the Igbo language for instance, is highly figurative, and uses landscapes of imagery to define as well as reflect the Igbo worldview. The enthralling power of this language turns languid, tepid, watered down as it crosses the cultural/linguistic border, as a poet crawls around a jumble of words... to approximate to the meaning in the original language. At the end, a poem emerges, that tastes flat like under salted dish, or dull, like soup castrated by lack of pepper (iv).

Many ideas and words in many African languages are simply untranslatable and have no English equivalents. Peter Onwudinjo captures this feeling and situation well and expresses that: After dealing with ideas that can be taken across the cultural/linguistic boarder, the African poet comes face to face with an array of imageries, metaphors, idioms, proverbs, witticisms, parallelisms, idiophones, symbols similes, lyrics and innumerable expressions and nuances that are so delicately and deeply rooted in a particular culture that their meanings disintegrate in foreign expression. Such ideas are so delicately native and fragile that they crumble between the fingers, like the winds of a butterfly.

They stubbornly refuse to yield their meaning to a foreign language, as they are simply untranslatable... The alternative to this problem is to write in the mother tongue, capture a scanty local audience, but become irrelevant to world audience, or to continue to write in English and assent to the gradual death of African languages deprived of the revitalizing power of literature especially poetry... one finds it more workable to settle in the half way house of pidgin English, a pragmatic language that employs a peculiar version of the English language while at the same time retaining the idioms, grammar and syntax of the original African language and culture from where the work draws its life blood (vi).

With the use of the Pidgin language, our poets create poetry very familiar to the woman in the market, a palm-wine tapper on a tree, a fisherman in a boat and a weary tout smoking under the mango tree on a hot dizzy day. The Pidgin language speaks to their people and speaks for them too, since poet write for the people and their conditions. As Onwudinjo avers:

Pidgin springs from the template of the grammar, syntax, idioms and semantics of African languages, especially West African. As such, it is naturally suited to nourish and express the African thought patterns without adulteration. It is best suited to retain the open-mouthed laughter, the throbbing drums, the alluring dances, the proverbs, the ancestral spirits, the folktales, the smells of the urban poor, the boulevards of the urban rich, their fast cars, the rolling plains. Indeed all the natural and social forces that enabled Africa to survive the pressures under which some races crumbled and disappeared (vii).

In tandem with the idea and call to decolonize the Africa poetry from many Western influences and euro-modernist modes and conventions of poetry making; in the quest to address a wider audience other than the Nigerian environment yet retaining the local imageries, ideas and worldviews peculiar to the Nigerian people but alien to the Western world; and in the task of finding the equivalent of thoughts and replacement of native ideas in the African environment without losing their beauties and sense of originality, the Pidgin poetry has come to serve as the bridge between these two great divides, creating poetry in the beauty of the native language and still appealing and making sense to non-native of the language.

Another reason could be glaring in the fact that pidgin sounds somehow biting to the ear, too scathing and rather comical or annoying as the case may be. It is often used to mock and express bitter anger in the terrain of the lower class people that have settled to the use of the pidgin. The poets may use the pidgin for this same purpose, to bite the ears of dictators, irritate the minds of the oppressors, annoy the spirits of the exploiters, and how ever comical or degree of discomfort the language might cause a hearer, is the purpose of the Pidgin language. However way, the fact remains that the pidgin has become as accepted language of communication and it has found its poetic excellence in the poetry of many African poets, even to this day.

Dennis Osadebay is one of the pioneer poets caught in the act of using pidgin in the lines of his poetry entitled “*Black Man Trouble*”. Gladys Casely Hayford, a famous Ghanaian poet published a small volume of poetry entitled ‘*Take Um So*’ in 1948. Today many of our contemporary poets resort to the use of the pidgin language in their poetry for effectiveness of communication. They include: Tanure Ojaide, Frank Aig-Imoukhuede, Mamman Vasta, Ken Saro Wiwa, Tunde Fatunde, Ezenwa Ohaeto, Peter Onwudinjo, Akachi Adimora Ezigbo, Pita Okute, Ajakaiye, A. Ogunkwo, Erap, Udenwa, Osita Ike, among others. Pidgin poetry thus, provides a way forward to articulate the problems of the African continent while retaining the rich cultural heritage of the people and still communication to foreign audience.

THE PIDGIN LANGUAGE, FORM AND CONTENT IN EZENWA OHAETO’S *I WAN BI PRESIDENT*

In Ezenwa Ohaeto’s collection we witness a mixture of several poems in the Pidgin English which bother on the several realities of human life. The poems though in pidgin all share the form and aesthetics of poetry. Poetry delights with music and harmony; it soothes the mind and provides a great degree of comfort and relaxation. In the end it teaches and leaves a message that stays in the heart of the reader for long. Imagery is the beauty of poetry and the poet is always in a continual search to equate the level of image in his mind’s eyes in his poems. All these properties of poetry are well fulfilled and demonstrated in the pidgin poetry as adopted by Ezenwa Ohaeto. The poems in the collection touch the core of our many problems in our quest to survive and make more meaningful assessment and understanding of our environment which is both a friend and a foe to man. Ezenwa Ohaeto has two volumes of poetry in Nigeria Pidgin English entitled *If to Say I Bi Soja* and *I Wan Bi President*. In “*I Wan Bi President*”, a title in the collection *I Wan Be President*, he captures the traumatic, pathetic and hunger-ridden situation of the people that triggered the urge in him to be president. In the first stanza, he talks about the dream, the dream to be president:

- *E get one dream /wey dey worry me/ I don dream am tire*
- *If I sleep small/ Na him de dream go come/If I close eye small*
- *Na him de dream go come/ If I siddeon for chair/ Say make I rest small*
- *Na him de dream go come/ I think say na malaria dey come*
- *For night when I lie for bed/When hunger dey blow me/When I never see food chop*
- *When I never see water drink/ Na him de dream go come/...de dream bi say*
- *I wan bi president (57).*

The reason for such a high quest is simply on these glaring facts:

- *I never see president hungry/ I never see president thirsty*
- *President no go worry for road/ Police no go stop am for checking*
- *President no go worry for house/ Na government cook dey prepare food*
- *Na government dry cleaner dey wash cloth/ Na government driver dey drive motor*
- *Na him make I wan bi president (57).*

In this poem he exposes the tyrannical and selfish nature of our leaders. He exposes the weaknesses, carefree and insensitive nature of our presidents who are power drunk. He satirizes their inhuman treatment of their citizens:

- *President dey go where e like/ President dey do wetin e like*
- *If president wan travel/ Na siren dey clear road*
- *Dem dey param param piroo piroo/ Every car go run comot for road too*
- *Na president dey pass for road (58).*

Ohaeto has never seen a president walk ten miles. They are very free from all social travails and sufferings. The presidents' servants are well to do; their wives are very happy and their children are accorded with preferential treatment. All these luxuries and high degree of comfort triggered his quest to be president. He satirizes the electioneering processes that usher these presidents into power:

- *President dey different different/ Some presidents dem dey*
- *Wey no dey win election/ Some presidents dem dey*
- *Wey no dey use election/ Some presidents dey dey*
- *Wey dey rule forever/ Some presidenst dem dey wey dey make ideology*
- *Dey look like person wey no see food chop/ Some president dem dey*
- *Wey dey worry make them country better/ You go see suffer for dem face*
- *Some presidents den dey/ If you say you no see food chop*
- *Na bullet you go see chop one time ... (59).*

Thus, the inhumane and dictatorial nature of some presidents witnessed, especially, during the military era in politics; their brutal and blood-thirsty nature saw to the death of many beloved citizens. It saw the death of our beloved poet, Ken Saro-Wiwa of the Niger Delta and other eight Ogoni activists. The poem exposes the inhumane nature of some Nigerian presidents who have no concern for the plight of the ordinary citizen. He touches also the very core of ethnicity and nepotism, the very cankerworms that have eaten deep in the fabrics of our great nation. The poet went on to expose thus:

- *I wan bi president/ Make my people enjoy too*
- *Wetin be federal character /Federal character na for person wey no get brother (60).*

He expresses many reasons for the urge to be president. The reason is to enjoy like the president, receive all the praises in the world, rename all the universities in the country, silence all the newspapers and magazine companies, make people stand everywhere he goes, take all the titles and be commander-in-chief, even Field Marshal and Admiral, then the lion of the Niger. In the end he will be Grand- Commander of the Nation and will be addressed as the 'snake that owns the forest'. In the lines of the pidgin poetry, we see the ugly and gruesome nature of our military leaders rooted in bloodshed, inhumanity, tyranny, brutality, victimization, self aggrandizement among all other hydra-headed human vices. Thus, these selfish and materialistic desires are all part of what ironically triggered the poet's desire to also become a president.

In the title "Catch Naira for Me" the poet with the use of humour, mocks our Nigerian naira and at the same time satirizes our craze to possess it which has turned many into beasts and robbed them of several human qualities. The love of naira has turned our youths into a thing of mockery. The poet quizzes:

- *If you see naira/make you ask am one question*
- *if na him make dat boy robber/make you ask naira say*
- *if na him make dat girl harlot (41).*

The poet mocks our Nigerian currency and its falling value thus:

- *Naira you no dey strong pass dollar*
- *Naira you no defeat pound sterling/Naira you never wrestle with francbut na him you dey beat us daily (41).*

The poet went on to make a list of the ruins and social disorder made possible by the pursuit of naira and ends thus:

- *If you see naira my brother/ask am wetin we do am*
- *If e no gree answer quick/a beg catch naira for me (41).*

Quite funny the poem may seem, but the seriousness of the message ought to be given series of thoughts. Other poems exist in the pidgin language with which the poet hopes to bring poetry close to the people and pass his message across without fear of losing the equivalent of his original ideas in the English language.

A SURVEY OF THE POETICS OF THE PIDGIN LANGUAGE IN PETER ONWUDINJO'S *DE WAHALA FOR WAZOBIA*

The collection of poetry entitled *De Wahala for Wazobia* is a collection of poetry in the pidgin language. It is a rich collection that draws on the palatable and pitiable state of affairs in his country Nigeria. The collection bothers on social historical realities of the country which obviously constitute the problems witness in the socio-economic, political and religious, systems of the nation. The collection examines the issue of amalgamation of Nigeria in 1914 by Lord Lugard which made possible a coagulation of people from various ethnic, social, languages,

cultural and religious groups. It is the Yoruba, Hausa and Igbo, the three major tribes whose words for “come” in their various languages made up the coinage “Wazobia”. The collection also went on an array of other issues and problems, problems of ethnicity, religious violence, corruption, election malpractices, neocolonial imperialism, and insecurity among other forms of vices that have eaten deep into the fabrics of the nation and continue to militate against the autochthonous development of the country. The collection could equate Chinua Achebe’s *The Trouble with Nigeria* where he postulated several problems that pose great threats to his nation and what ought to be done. The pidgin title ‘De Wahala with Wazobia’ in the Standard English reads “The Trouble with Nigeria” and the poems in the collection like those of the words of Achebe addressed these arrays of problems in Nigeria. The poet expresses that:

De Wahala for Wazobia is a sustained evocation of the landscape of dilemma in the socio-economic condition of the Nigerian nation. De Wahala sails close to facts, closely hugging the reefs of reality in Nigerian society. Woven in pidgin, the work evokes the toils and troubles of the youth caught in the web of dilemmas in social institutions, corrupted, convoluted, and degraded by the myriad or vices of statism, ethnicity marginalization, exploitation, nepotism, greed, violence, and lack of moral strength ... (blurb).

The poetry collection is in the pidgin form and the choice of the use of pidgin was intentional and deliberate in order to bring home and closer the points and arrays of issues in the poems and to demonstrate the idea that the pidgin language has the capacity to render the thoughts of a poet in his local manner and yet retaining the powers of being appreciated in the foreign language. The quest to use the pidgin language stems in the fact and urgency of the message of the poet and the need to be understood by the peasants, the downtrodden and the lower class which could trigger and elicit some positive and revolutionary actions towards a change from them. The poet defends the choice of pidgin language in the title “I Go De Sing my Song for Pidgin”. The poet narrated how he had sang to his people in the English language but none could understand him. He laments thus:

*... But wen I come yarn finish/one woman wey dey my front there
whisper to her neighbour say/Nwoke ahu oshi ini?/ Wetin de man talk?
Na dat one clear my eye well well say/Oyibo gramatika no de work
for hungry wazobia/na im I ask myself say
abi dis na leg wey tortoise go take/reach umuahia today?
De wretched of wazobia/no de hear oyibo gramatika
because de hand wey de rule wazobia no care
wether wazobia children go school/or no go school,
na im make ignorance full everywhere,/ na im make poverty full everywhere,
na im make hunger full everywhere ... (14).*

Thus, the poet, in cognizance of the level of poverty, want and deprivation; in acknowledgment of the insensitive nature of our leaders and in congruence with the ambivalent nature of the masses, resolves to sing in pidgin for his people to understand:

*Na im make I come swear say/I no go blow oyibo gramatika again,
from now de go/I go begin de slaughter my ram/for de other side of im throat where my dagger no go jam
bone/for dis time de go,
I go de sing my song for pidgin (15).*

Armed with this resolve, the poet went on to x-ray several problems in his country with the pidgin language. The poet in the title “Turn Water no De Full Pot” demonstrates clearly that the African mentality and European mind set cannot be one and so is their languages and manner of expressions. He sings thus:

*... make I tell you/ de two no dey gree at all at all,
Afrikaman mind and oyibo mind dey/different, different,
dem no dey rhyme at all; I dey way wey Afrikanman de see im world
as e make sense make meaning to am/no be so for Oyibo man- o
de two no dey rhyme ... (2)
... so you see, pidgin na we flesh and blood/she be our ara na oma,
she been grow up here/she be one of us/she understand our ways
na im make e no de make mistake/wen she dey speak our tongue;
e no surprise me sef/how daughter no go fit speak/im mother tongue?
If she no fit na who go? (3)
Na only pidgin be de lingo wey de fit/carry Afrikanman thought reach Nglisi stand chim chim no shaking/like
concrete column,
na im make I de sing my song/for pidgin/make my song no spill throw away like water wey craze man dem
carry for head/de run ... (4).*

The poet went on in the section *Things Wey Get K-Leg* to use his pidgin poem to x-ray and unveil several vices and problems that bedevil our society. First was the issue of census which the poet argues was manipulated for selfish ethnic and political desires. He laments thus:

*head count na to get ogwonga subsidy/ for rogue politicians to share
na im make dem count sand sand/ we dey Sahel, count cassava stick, count
even water hyacinth wey de float for water/say all na man and woman
wey de wazo ... (18).*

The poet concern is not on the figure as he heartily expressed but on prudent management of resources. He warns the leaders and ends up with a prophetic note on the calamity that awaits them thus:

As for corrupt politicians/and de greedy wazobians wey de urge them on,

*don't worry/when time reach/person wey take hunger swallow razor
go pay with a bloody nyash (19).*

On the exponential rise in unemployment curve in Nigeria, the poet ascribes it to the level of nepotism and favoritism in the country. He expresses this in the title "As Man Know Man":

*As man know man/na im de kill wazobia/to get job, na as man know man;
to get promotion/na as man know man/ to pass jamb/na as man know man
even to get chance for interview, if you no get person wey know person
we go put your name for list, my broda, who side e go take back waka go? Everything na as man know man
for wazo (20).*

The system hardly encourage merit and the poet laments that such practices can never be allowed to germinate in a society that have potential visions and plans for a more befitting tomorrow. Also in education, ethnicity rears its ugly face and the poet wonders who will bell the cat tomorrow. In the title "Dem sow Corruption like Mellon seeds." *the* poet decries the degeneration of our academic system against the background it used to be. The poet remembers with special fondness when academic still had some prestige and students were yearning to read and learn, but such era in the view of the poet is long gone. The students of today are no more willing to read and academics is fast losing its taste. The poet jeremiahs:

*... buy book na lie/borrow book for library, who sai
library books wey don grow wing/fly cannot since many year,
since echetram years ago/de few books wey remain at all
na de grandpapa books wey Lord Lugard/
and Lander Brothers been read for school/
na just to come class come de mope
de plan to do wayo for exam when time to write am reach
na im some guys and babes sabi ... (48).*

Even in students' politics, the poet made us to see the level of corruption as student leaders are selected by the management of their institutions; denying the students their franchise and in such an unethical manner it goes even to the level of national politics. The poet went on a number of issues which may not be contained in this single paper and the least we could hope for is a change of attitude which must begins with all of us and transcend to our leaders. In all, we see how the pidgin language has brought the message of the poets closer to the court of the reader to such a level that any class of individual can understand and make a gainful assessment and interpretation of the various viewpoints of the poets in the collections.

CONCLUDING REMARKS: LINGUISTIC IMPLICATIONS

This paper sets out to study the pidgin poetry form, content and obvious linguistic implications.

They study concentrated on two selected poetry collection of two Nigerian poets, Ezenwa Ohaeto and Peter Onwudinjo. The idea of decolonization of the Africa poetry as used in the title of this paper stems from the clamour and view points of the troikas, Chinweizu, Jamie and Madubuike that African literature should be decolonized all many if not all Western influences in the making of their literature. This paper traced the movements and journey of African poetry in the hands of the early Euro-modernist poets and the movement that saw to the emergence of the alter-native poets who believe poetry should speak and address the needs of a common man in the most simplest term it could, while retaining its beauty, aura and quality as poem. These made up the various schools of thought in the annuals of African poetry.

But in all these, even in the poems of the alter-native poets, one still witnesses some difficulties, a clog of imageries and ideas that may be expressing a thought or idea entirely different from the poet's original intention. Many times we witness how the English language comes in the way of understanding the poems of our African poets even when they labour endeavour fully to express themselves in the most nearest term to the original native language. We see the dilemma of the African poet in the task of rendering the obvious thoughts and imageries in his mind in the second language and the result in many cases is what Onwudinjo had best described as 'a poem that tastes flat, like under-salted dish, or dull, like soup castrated by lack of pepper'. Many of our native languages and imageries are simply untranslatable and often refuse to yield their meaning in the English language.

The African poet to retain the beauty of his local and native ideas can best communicate in his local language but stands a chance of losing a wider audience, and he could accept the choice of the English language but in the long run he may have help to facilitate the burial of his own language. The pidgin language which is the Africans' own creation and an amalgam of the English language becomes a readymade language for the expression of these thoughts and ideas. The pidgin language has come to serve as a bridge between the native languages and the foreign language and poet finds the easiness, free flow of thoughts and expressions in the pidgin language.

The obvious implications are inherent in the fact that the African poet can now address a wider audience in a language they understand and still be able to transpose the equivalents of his thoughts and make his poem more easily understood with the Pidgin English. The implication of pidgin in the poetry in English in other words could be said to be both literary and linguistic. Its linguistic implication could be felt in the sense that every language has a code, a structure and pattern that must be studied and mastered. As Yankson Kofi posits:

Language- any language- is a code: a set of rules for generating what generative transformational grammarians call "well-formed" sentences. A breach of the code could, therefore, result in an "ill-formed" sentence. One such rule is that every lexical item in the English language belongs to a particular grammatical category: noun, verb, adjective, adverb, etc. however, creative artists are noted for breaching the language code, for stylistic effect.

The normal code and set of rules of any language is the background of the language. A violation or deviation from the normal code is the foregrounding of the language. The pidgin poetry is a violation of such rules of Standard English but an achievement in the branch of language study, stylistics. These poems in the Pidgin language may have violated several rules like category rule violation, selectional-restriction rules, semantically deviant words, but in the end has achieved a style of writing that yields the beauty of poetry to a reader which ought to be the goal of a writer and the task of any literary artist. The paper has demonstrated that the pidgin language has the capacity of expressing the equivalent of several linguistic repertoires of the English language, like the idioms, proverbs, metaphors, idiophones, parallelism and witticism,

without betrayal of some sort and can make a poem appealing irrespective of geographical and cultural borders it journeys its way.

The pidgin poetry gives African poets identity as Africans and as well as helps the poets express the pride in culture, local custom and heritage. The pidgin poetry has breached the gap of the evaporation of the spices, density, beauty and conjuring powers of our imageries and native ideas often lost during the rendition of poetry in the Queen's English. The pidgin poetry in all may have violated all the codes of the English language but carries a great deal of meaning and manifestation as it yields the message of poetry to any class of reader and the African poets who manage the resources of pidgin to create lasting poems with meaningful and gainful ideas of society have succeeded in decolonizing the African poetry and clothing it will voice, aura and identity that is truly native and African.

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