

Language, Inequality and Subordination in Postcolonial Discourses: A Study of Chirikure Chirikure and Mathew Takwi's Selected Poems

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Abstract

Postcolonial societies have perpetually been decrying their inferiority to the colonialist. The difficulty to stride to the Centre with ease remains worrisome because of the derogatory language used to describe native culture as opposed to the colonialist culture. This paper aims at highlighting the inferiority complex of postcolonial societies as stemming from the dehumanising language used when referring to the formerly colonized. The paper blends a literary theory (Postcolonial Theory) and a linguistic theory (the Appraisal Systems by Martin, 2000). Language contributes to degrade the identity of the postcolonial people in such a way that the latter think nothing good can come from their end. The derogatory use of language has equally created a kind of mindset that maintains postcolonial countries dependent and underdeveloped. Thus, this type of language used towards postcolonial subjects has given room for an inferiority complex, which has significantly impacted the sociocultural, economic and political lives of postcolonial societies.

Keywords: Language, inferiority, subordination, appraisal, postcolonial society

1. Introduction

As vehicle of power and culture, language has the capacity to influence the collective imagination of a people. Ngugi (1986, p. 16) purports that “Language carries culture” and as such there is a link between both. In the intricate relationship between the colonizers and the postcolonial subjects, language has long served as a tool of subjugation and to construct an imagination of inferiority in the postcolonial subjects in such a way that the latter tend to normalise and uncritically accept white hegemony. This attitude is often reflected in the way the colonised apprehend themselves and anything that comes from their end. They reject their own identities, embracing white ideologies, languages and cultures at the expense of theirs. Language can ultimately be seen as a tool of subordination with the subalterns internalising an inferiority complex perpetuated by Western linguistic and cultural dominance which dates back to the precolonial era. Language thus becomes both a tool of subjugation and a means to carry the white ideology.

This paper examines the linguistic approaches adopted by Chirikure and Takwi in describing the white dominance on postcolonial subjects. The paper equally exposes the scars left by an inappropriate use of language as portrayed on the attitude of postcolonial subjects. This has resulted in an alteration of postcolonial subjects’ identities, low self-esteem and often self-negation. On the contrary, the colonisers used language to reinforce the white’s illusion of superiority over the postcolonial subjects. The paper takes an interdisciplinary approach, combining literary and linguistic theories to analyse Chirikure and Takwi’s language use, which includes pejorative terms, dehumanising metaphors, and racist ideologies. We ultimately argue that postcolonial subjects have faced significant turmoil both individually and collectively. Therefore, language should be used to foster positive memories and promote genuine and respectful cooperation between the postcolonial societies and the Western world.

2. Literature Review

Drawing on Postcolonial Theory and the Appraisal Systems, this study analyses how both native and colonial languages shape attitudes in selected poems by Chirikure and Takwi, offering insights into the perspectives of emerging nations. Most of the poems analysed in this study reveal a strong desire for political and socio-economic progress, as well as a rejection of colonial attitudes that continue to shape discourse. The authors criticise colonialism and postcolonial upheavals in the context of postcolonial societies while their poetry remains an invitation of the present generation to revise errors of the past so that the future does not report deleterious colonial marks.

Like would endorse Ngugi (2022), African writers should consider writing in their natives languages and let translators render the works in other languages. Chirikure’s selected poetry is first written in Shona before being translated into English, indicating the poet’s deep-rootedness to his origin and a reassertion of identity. Rukuvhute (*The Umbilical Cord*), *Hakurarwi (We Shall not Sleep)* and *Chamupupuri (Whirlwind)* and Takwi’s *People Be Not Fooled* reveal inequality in postcolonial or independent Zimbabwe and Cameroon. The poems demonstrate that the inhumane conditions decried under White minority rule have worsened with fellow Black rule. This situation, according to the present work, is the impact

of the kind of language introduced with colonisation and perpetuated after independence.

Similarly, Madongonda and Gudhlanga (2019) investigate the link between language, land ownership and rootedness and identity in Chirikure's Rukuvhute through the lens of Afrocentricity, African womanism and post-cartesian theories. To Madongonda and Gudhlanga, language is a symbol of nativeness and home. This enables the assertion of identity in a society in which the language of postcolonial societies is marginalized. Although the work shares similarities with the present paper on the significance of language to identity assertion, there are a number of divergences. Primarily, the woman is valorized as a symbol of home and rootedness while the present paper dwindle from the focus on the condition of the woman. Moreover, the theories differ as Madongonda and Gudhlanga make use of three theories - Afrocentricity, African womanism and post-cartesian theories while the present paper explores the themes in the light of Postcolonial Theory and the appraisal systems.

Ngeh, Mbuh and Chopnkeng (2015) examine Takwi's *Messing Manners*, Doh's *Wading the Tide* and Besong's *Just Above Cameroon* in a bid to depict the struggle for assertion and political liberation of Anglophone Cameroonian Poetry. The theory used to examine the above works and demonstrate that poetry is a veritable weapon for independence is Marxist literary theory. The present work however shows that Takwi's *People Be Not Fooled* uses expressions that depict the precolonial strength, the colonial influence and the postcolonial realities of Cameroon. There is therefore some similarity in the use of language to affirm identity and independence. On the other hand, Nana (2023) demonstrates that language either constructs or destroys the societies socio-economically and politically. The author sees and terms the disparity in language as 'languagequake'. However, the present study would look at the quake as affecting the attitude and the lives of the formerly colonized.

While the present paper examines Chirikure's use of language as a repercussion of existing political and socio-economic realities, Tembo and Gijimah (2012) expose and question Chirikure's depiction of autochthony as they examine the latter's social vision. To Tembo and Gijimah, Chirikure's view is divided into positive and negative images of Africa. This paper considers these image presentations as the effect of a language symbolic to the attitude of both the colonised and the coloniser. Chirikure's attachment to culture urges him to deconstruct Eurocentric conception and perceptions of Africa, which have for long maimed the latter. Likewise, Tembo and Gijimah think that it is necessary to struggle against the non-glorious image presented of Africa. Reforging a plausible image of Africa would enable its political liberation and even socio-economic growth. Increasingly, the present work looks at Chirikure's selected poems from an angle that demonstrates the effects of colonial language on the attitude of the postcolonial society. However, while Gijimah and Tembo adopt a pessimistic view and see language as affected by autochthony, the present paper looks at the repercussions of verbal and non-verbal language of the colonialist that has shaped the attitudes of postcolonial subjects.

While building on previous works, this paper offers a distinct theoretical and methodological approach. The paper suggests that the attitude of the postcolonial societies characterised by low self-esteem is the product of colonial experience.

3. Methods

This paper bridges the gap between literary and linguistic methodologies, bringing together two disciplines that often diverge. However, it drew exclusively on literary texts as source of data collection. It relies on the textual analysis of two literary productions. The first from Chirikure Chirikure (1989, 1998 and 1994) consists of three poetry collections (*Hakurarwi*, *Chamupupuri* and *Rukuvhute*) taken from three different sources, namely the author, Google and YouTube while the second is from Mathew Takwi (2004), entitled *People Be Not fooled*. Essentially, qualitative content analysis was applied to describe the linguistic oscillations that prevailed and shaped the socio-political, cultural and economic identities in Africa before, during and after colonisation. This method also helps to understand how the linguistic choices adopted by the coloniser shaped the attitudes of Africans towards themselves and the colonisers as well.

The study relies on the Postcolonial Theory from the perspectives of Achebe (1972, 1988, 1997); Bhabha (1994); Spivak (1995); Said (1978) and Ngugi (1972, 1986, 1993, 2022, 2025) who all agree to the fact that colonisation has a significant impact on the political and socio-economic lives of the postcolonial society. This theory is supported by the *Appraisal Systems* by Martin (2000) which consist of three overlapping dimensions manifested in two forms: positive and negative. The first is *affect* and is used to construe emotional responses such as ‘happiness’, ‘sadness’, and ‘fear’. The second is *judgement* and is used to express “moral evaluation of behaviour”, that is whether someone is brave, deceptive, or ethical. The last is *appreciation* and is related to the aesthetic quality of things, processes or natural phenomena. It is deployed through words such as ‘remarkable’, ‘elegant’, ‘harmonious’, and ‘innovative’. The last system, which is of further importance to this study, is subdivided into three variables, namely *reaction*, *composition*, and *valuation*. *Reaction* refers to the way processes or natural phenomena capture our attention and impact us emotionally while *composition* deals with how proportionality and details are perceived within a text. As for *valuation*, it has to do with the assessment of the social significance of texts or processes. The appraisal systems are applicable in the present study in many ways. Firstly, they will guide us into the description and understanding of the atmosphere that prevailed in the pre-colonial period. Secondly, they will help in describing and understanding colonialism and the discrepant judgement colonial subjects have of themselves and the colonisers. Finally, through the lens of *appreciation*, the *Appraisal Systems* would reveal the emotional trauma experienced by postcolonial subjects who feel uprooted in their homeland and constantly seek to find a better place where they can be valued.

4. Discussion

The Discussion section takes a thematic approach, examining the impact of language on postcolonial societies’ attitudes across four main periods: before, during, and after colonisation, as well as an envisioned ideal language and attitude in independent nations. The work is framed by the intersection of two distinct approaches: Postcolonial Theory, a literary framework and the Appraisal Systems, a linguistic theory. This work is therefore a hybridised and unique piece from a conceptual approach.

4.1 Language and Empowerment in the Precolonial Society

The identity of postcolonial societies has to a larger extent, been shaped by the quality of language used in the said societies. Language being a salient agent of culture, contributes to the cultural, socio-economic and political identities of a society. Berryman, Rameka and Mauria (2022) allude to ‘languaculture’ as the link between language, identity and culture. Thus, the language used goes beyond mere utterances, as it controls the attitudes that these utterances convey.

The language in the precolonial society depicted a degree of peace, calmness and harmony in the society. Chirikure’s poem, “To you, children of Africa” demonstrates the peaceful nature of native language and life via songs, dances and cultural events. The poem presents children and elders who manifest gladness. Adulations are therefore characteristic of the precolonial socio-cultural atmosphere. Such merry-making attitudes lead the natives to contemplate every occurrence in nature. Chirikure (1994), stanza 1, lines 2-7, p.20 demonstrates the attitude of contentment in the precolonial societies:

Children singing and dancing
To celebrate and welcome thunder and lightning
Racing each other in the downpour
Stampeding and messing themselves up in the mud
While their elders smile and congratulate themselves
At their bumper rice and groundnut crop –

The language used in the poem generally reflects a remote environment, but at the same time, peace and harmony felt by the natives are embedded in the dictions and tone. Singing and dancing as well as celebrating events like the advent of the rainy season is a demonstration of the peaceful condition of the precolonial environment. The season is welcomed by children who see in it suitable playing conditions. Equally, the adults represented here by the elders are pleased with the season, which to them is the advent of productivity and contentment. The poem indicates that the ‘elders smile and congratulate themselves/ At their bumper rice and groundnut crop’. The words ‘singing’, ‘dancing’, ‘celebrate’, ‘welcome’, ‘smile’ and ‘congratulate’ depict the value of positiveness attributed to precolonial life. As McLeod (2000, p. 18) explains, “Language ... is more than simply a means of communication”; it is also the expression of the attitudes, feelings and culture of a people. The peace expressed is extreme such that a word like ‘messing’, which could carry a negative connotation, becomes plausible. The language referring to mud, is rather pleasant than nauseating. Although Takwi’s collection is a satire against a corrupt society, there is an implicit depiction of calmness prior to any form of colonial contact. In presenting the loss incurred by the persona after an external contact, the speaker in “Reception”, stanza 1, lines 1-2, p. 52, describes the persona’s attitude as being ‘gentle’ – “After a gentle insertion/Of the divine seed,”. The mention of the gentle attitude in the first stanza of the poem is denotative of peace and calmness of life before colonisation. This attitude is emphasized with the description of the seed as being

divine which reflects or symbolises the perfection of offsprings in precolonial societies. Takwi's "A Passer-by" describes this peaceful attitude in stanza 1, line 2, p. 54 as a "Bilateral chat" between two parties. There is a similar use of language denoting tranquillity in the precolonial society in Chirikure's (1994) "We are here (at Porta Farm)", stanza 1 lines 1-4, p. 17:

Waking up, in the morning, it's simply, "Daybreak"

No one bothers to ask, "Did you sleep well?"

We all know who snored loudest, who sneezed or who fought,

The walls of our hovels are just very thin paper.

The diction in the above quote expresses peace, transparency and harmony in the precolonial society. The rhetorical questions emphasize the quality of language used by the natives. The emphasis is reflected through the contrast between the salutations prior to colonisation and the salutations which came with the colonial contact. The natives confirmed events without resorting to questioning which denotes assurance and certainty, while questions like 'Did you sleep well?' denote doubt and restlessness. The description of the 'hovels' depicts the fact that the habitat of the natives was simple but enabled a lifestyle that accounted for peace and transparency among the people, whether young or old. Achebe (1988) describes the Igbo world and its art as "...an arena for the interplay of forces" (p. 435). This is highlighted in the implication and consideration of all natives no matter their age and level.

The language of the natives reveals the serene atmosphere that existed prior to colonialism and corroborates with the conviction enunciated by Petra (2004) on quality language being a feature of a significant culture to which the tribes obey. In Martin's (2000) appraisal perspective, feelings and emotions can be popularly construed in two main forms, namely positive and negative feelings. Positive feelings are manifested in the pre-colonial society not only through the poet's use of positive attitude markers such as "celebrate" and "congratulate" but equally through lexical metaphors such as "Africa" which symbolises home and belonging, and "stampeding and messing themselves up in the mud" to imply the abundance of joy that characterise the precolonial era. There is also the use of extended metaphors of security such as "See you tomorrow" (Chirikure, 1994, stanza 1, line1) and "thin paper" (stanza 2, line 4) which convey certainty and assurance. These positive affects describe happiness, satisfaction, and security that prevailed in the precolonial culture. However, these graded feelings (Martin, 2000, p. 151) will soon be transformed to a state of disillusion, unhappiness and insecurity as a reaction to a 'specific external agency' (p. 150) which is certainly understood here as the process of colonisation.

4.2 Colonial Language and Subordination of Natives

Colonial languages progressively replaced native languages in the colonies as the colonialist annihilated the language of the colonized. The repercussion was not only the replacement of language but the effect on the attitude of the natives as they perceive self differently from the colonialist *other*. This change was negative as it brought along fear, insecurity and instability

in the lives of the natives. A new culture integrating fear emerged and this reflects Ngugi's (1986, p. 16) argument that "Language carries culture and culture, carries, particularly through the orature and literature, the entire body of values by which we come to perceive ourselves". This aligns with the language, that is, the dictions and expressions used to illustrate colonial experiences by the writers. The instability, insecurity and loss of identity are highlighted in Chirikure's "To you, children of Africa", "We are here (At porta farm)", "Isaac and Abraham"; and Takwi's "Reception", "A Passer-by", "Cherished Devil" and "The Vacuum".

Chirikure's "To you, children of Africa" explicates through stanza 1, line 8, p. 20 that the peace and tranquillity experienced in the precolonial period is terminated -'is just fairy tales now.' There is therefore a feeling of disappointment similar to the aftermath of the persona's experience in Takwi's "Reception". The persona whose gentleness is noted in the first two lines undergoes instability in stanza 1, lines 3-4, p. 52, from the moment he leaves for 'Hitler's land'. The instability is overemphasized in stanza 6, lines 1-6:

And as they pierced through
The last checkpoint, he crashed
Into them like a sea diver
Into the ocean to grab the
Harvest that only screamed
Screamed and screamed.

The passage from one location to another is described with the use of such word as 'pierced' whose image reflects a sharp and painful opening. Moreover, the persona 'crashed', denoting a painful descend. The aim of the tumultuous experience is the struggle to regain his 'Harvest' that unfortunately 'screamed', thereby depicting an obnoxious experience. Takwi's "A Passer-by" likewise illustrates an intimate relationship that started with a 'Bilateral chat' between two parties but one of the parties felt entangled in a 'cell'. The word 'cell' highlights the irregularities of the relationship that eventually had "To fade out shortly after". This demonstrates a shift from what Chirikure's "To you, children of Africa" characterizes as being fairy tales. This change emanates from the fact that the language of peace and productivity depicted in stanza 1 through a 'Bilateral chat', has been changed to unhappy events. Chirikure's "We are here (At porta farm)", in stanza 2, lines 1-5, p. 20, is an unraveling of the language suggestive of a deficiency enlightened by the metaphor 'whirlwind':

Till—maybe a big benevolent whirlwind will come
And lift us all up, up – our shacks, dogs and all –
Up, up and up into the sky like Elijah in his chariot of fire,
BUT I don't see us landing in the presence of

The Almighty in Heaven: We are sinners!

The above quote begins with the preposition ‘Till’ which denotes a conversation between two people before the present moment. The situation described in the stanza is a contrast to the reality presented in the first stanza. Stanza 1 of the poem highlights an existing assurance in the precolonial societies, which continued ‘Till’ the present uncertain and tumultuous experience. The oxymoron ‘benevolent whirlwind’ is an image that symbolizes the cunning feature of colonialism and as well announces a doom. The instability is illustrated in the use of the adverb ‘up’, repeatedly. This repetition shows the homelessness caused by colonial contact as the speaker says he does not see themselves (the natives) ‘landing in the presence of/The Almighty in Heaven’. The language used by the speaker represents an identity loss with which the poem ends as the speaker considers that they ‘are sinners’. In the same vein, Takwi’s “Cherished Devil”, stanzas 2-3, lines 8-15, p. 18, depicts the division orchestrated by the contact between a colonially oppressed and its oppressor:

With the land carpeted
With red human fuel;
His enemy brother rushed in
Brandishing a barreled placard.
Now!
With this fire eyed chaser around
And icy silenced sensed;
He drained cash lakes.

Colonial intrusion influenced the language of the natives negatively. The horror that was experienced changed their expressions to that of terror-filled images like ‘red human fuel’ to symbolize bloodshed, ‘enemy brother’ for someone you should normally be at peace with but who represents a menace. Expressions like ‘fire eyed chaser’, ‘icy silenced’ and ‘drained cash lakes’ reflect the image of the unpleasant condition of the colonized natives. Similar to Chirikure’s “To you, children of Africa”, violence, gunshot and bloodshed have become the culture of the colonized in a way that their language expresses anguish. Ngugi (1993, p. 31) recalls the effect of colonialism on language in purporting that the repercussion colonialism had was that, “The culture and the history carried by these languages were thereby thrown onto the rubbish heap and left there to perish.” The domineering and terrorizing attitude of the oppressor constitutes the means through which a feeling of inferiority and the subsequent poverty and underdevelopment penetrated the colonized society.

Similarly, “Isaac and Abraham” by Chirikure (1989), stanza 1, lines 1-4, p.20, is an attempt to divide the family that had existed prior to colonial contact. The diction and tone, especially in the dichotomy ‘son’ and ‘father’ is symbolic to a communication between the colonized and the colonialist, respectively:

Father, I don't understand –

You knock on my door at this ungodly hour

To tell me: “Tie up your sandals and let's go, right now.

Tie them up firmly, the journey is very, very long.

The poem opens in a conversational tone with a speaker who seems to express misunderstanding and fear. Inferiority and superiority complexes are exhibited here by the language of the son and father, respectively. The language used by the speaker depicts unpreparedness on the part of the natives to be ruled – ‘You knock on my door at this ungodly hour’. The colonialist represented here by the father holds a domineering stance when he orders the speaker in the direct speech ‘Tie up your sandals and let's go, right now’. The colonialist therefore intruded and without the native consent and understanding of terms, oppressed and imposed rule. Tyson (1999, p. 366) expatiates on the oppressive nature of colonialism on the natives' language and culture as he reveals that the colonialist possesses and exhibits a “superiority, which contrasted with the alleged inferiority of native (indigenous) peoples, the original inhabitants of the homelands they invaded”. The oppression maimed the language of the colonized natives in a way to inculcate silence that Spivak (1995) exposes when she paints the image of the subaltern who is denied rights of opinion – ‘Can the subaltern Speak?’ This is a rhetorical question, which depicts the subjugation of the postcolonial society, not only of the woman but of the language.

The language of peace in precolonial societies changes to that of violence, division and filth in the colonies. This is therefore evident that the language of the colonized is influenced by the negative experience during colonialism. Colonisation was effective as it hindered the development of the natives through the dictions expatiated in the poems. Instability, division and filthiness replaced the order that existed prior to colonisation. The decadence mentioned above is exposed in the language of the speakers. Said's (1978) view on language as “an instrument of power ...” (p. 42) would thus endorse the powerful influence that colonialism had on the natives. Western idea about the colonies is one that has convinced even the colonized of their state as inferior and thus encouraged colonialism.

Martin's (2000) appraisal system is applied to the colonial discourse as examined above in many respects. This second system concerns judgement which can be divided into two groups namely, ‘social esteem and social sanction’ (p.156). It can be seen that before the colonial masters invaded colonies, they had already passed on some sort of judgment on colonial subjects, especially the judgement of social esteem. This type of judgement can unfold in three meta-elements of superiority and hegemony such as *normality*, *capacity* and *tenacity*. In other words, the colonial masters knew they were fortunate and lucky (*normality*), powerful and clever (*capacity*) and brave, heroic and dependable (*tenacity*). With this planned resoluteness, they could therefore easily subjugate the colonies which they considered (judged) as inferior. They used negative attitude markers and metaphors such as ‘sinners’(Chirikure, “We Are Here (At Porta Farm, Stanza 3, line 6, p. 20)”; ‘wretched ’ (Takwi, “The Vacuum”, stanza 1, line 4, p.24); “devil” (Takwi, 2004, “Cherished Devil”,p.18)

and ‘wrinkled-faced’ (Takwi, 2004, “Redress”, stanza 4, line 4, p. 4) to dehumanize the colonial societies in order to justify the fact that the latter are uncivilized and need salvation. The judgement of social sanction was also applied by colonial powers to assert their domination on colonial subjects. According to Martin (2000, p. 157), this has to do with *veracity* (how truthful or honest someone can be) and *propriety* or the ethical values someone is likely to possess. In Martin’s taxonomy, words related to veracity include positive dictions such as ‘authentic’, ‘honest’, ‘credible’, and ‘genuine’ which are equally the words used in colonial and postcolonial discourses to refer to what comes from the western world as opposed to negative terms like ‘dishonest’, ‘deceitful’, ‘fake’ and ‘ungodly’ which generally characterize emanation from the colonies. This dichotomy and discrepancy in the use of language did not end after independence, it continued to the postcolonial societies and is mostly reflected in the way postcolonial subjects apprehend and appreciate themselves as well as the colonial *other*.

4.3 Independence and Inferiority Complex in Postcolonial Societies

The subjugation of the colonies led to a resistance and subsequent independence, which did not however change the plight of the natives. The subjugation that followed colonisation mutilated the language in the nations even after independence. This explains Fonlon’s (1969) view that language influences culture:

I have been led to believe that culture is to a country what a soul is to a man, that is, the principle of life, of unity and continuity; and, therefore, that a nation is not just merely so many millions of people living on the same land or stemming from the same ancestral origin, but that a nation, thanks to its culture, is, essentially a unit of thought and feeling and will and action. (p. 25)

In other words, language reflects the culture of a people and the specific culture of the independent nations is affected by colonialism. This is the reason why even with the advent of independence, the natives still made use of a language that depicts loss and subjugation. This is illustrated through Chirikure’s “Sacred caves”, “Impossible”, “Isaac and Abraham”, “We fought the war” and Takwi’s “The Vacuum” and “Nothing-man”. Even though Chirikure reinforces independence with the Shona language in writing his poems, some of them are translated in order for the culture and message to be transmitted with greater ease. This corroborates Achebe’s (1988) view that writing in the English language does not constitute a weakness but a medium to fight back colonial prejudices. Despite the use of Shona to write the poems, the dictions used still diverge from the quietude of the precolonial period. The dictions rather expose the trauma of the natives even after independence. Chirikure’s “The sacred caves” (p. 2) is a portrayal of the loss incurred by the contact even though the atmosphere seems to allude to a playful one:

An old man stands still as a stump in his yard, looking
at the hill to the west of his home. He can hear
the sound of children’s voices playing on the

hill, probably in the caves once considered sacred
and used to store grain and the silver and gold
treasures of our ancestors.

Should he chase the children away? Or should he
Just leave them alone?

The quote above presents an old man who feels weird by the loss of values represented here by ‘sacred caves’. The language is symbolic of anguish and trauma as the man shows no sign of progress – ‘still as a stump in his yard’. The position from which the man looks at the hill which stands for the colonialist – ‘west’, shows he is in a valley, thus under the very dictate of the colonialist whether directly or indirectly. The children play with what could be considered as values of the natives. This represents the younger generation who have been acculturated. The confusion that reigns in the independent nations is highlighted by the old man, who like the son, in Chirikure’s “Isaac and Abraham”, doesn’t know what to do about the instructions that the father gives him. The confusion, fear and inferiority complex is illustrated through the rhetorical question ‘Should he chase the children away? Or should he/ just leave them alone?’

Likewise, Takwi’s “The Vacuum” is an expression of a loss as the language is dense with dictions of an independence that did not guarantee stability and development especially in a society like that of Cameroon with a combined inheritance:

Gone! They are to a strange land
Now, their bodies are cemented with aches
Pains of fortune, pains of segregation
Pains of the cheated, pains of the wretched.

Takwi (2004), stanza 1, lines 1-4, p. 24, begins with an undertone of disappointment and frustration – ‘Gone!’ The language of despair and homelessness is engaged with the departure ‘to a strange land’. The result of the departure is a loss and pain. The language of frustration is depicted with the words ‘strange’, ‘aches’, the repeated use of ‘pains’, ‘segregation’, ‘cheated’ and ‘wretched’, just to mention a few. The fifth and last stanza of Takwi’s “The Vacuum” shows the failure of every effort to gain independence:

So, cunny curve must be straighten
For them all to stand tall
In peacock coloured feathers,
Like newly ringed pair.
Failure; they must forever say: Adieu!

The poem shows the vain effort to attain genuine independence by the new nations. The

speaker admits that the post-independence experience of the natives is ‘cunny’ and needs to be straightened in order for development, stability and progress to be achieved – ‘For them all to stand’ in dignity reflected here by the image of the peacock’s feathers that are colourful. Unfortunately, and in a language of disappointment there is no point neither for unity nor stability among the natives.

Chirikure’s “We fought the war” presents each group who assisted in the struggle of independence, in the Shona language – *Inzwai, Aiwa, Kwete, Bodo, Nyangwe and mujibbas* and *chimbwidos*, rendered in English as overseas students, the combatants, freedom fighters, parents and messengers respectively. However, the collective struggle neither yielded the awaited fruit of unity nor progress. It was a disappointment on the part of the natives as well as a frustration. The inferiority posture expressed through the language of disappointment and frustration is a result of what Chirikure’s “Impossible” highlights as if it were impossible to attain independence. This failure or impossible results from the dispersion brought about by varying colonial intrusions:

...

You pick up this,

and you pick up that;

you drop this,

and you drop that,

You build here, and build there,

You pull down this, you pull down that

The natives have lost the knowledge of what they need and the poem above demonstrates the rambling and dispersion with which the society is managed. There is neither order nor organization. The result is an impossible independence and an ineffective solution to underdevelopment. Takwi’s “Nothing-man”, stanza 1, lines 1-5, p. 33, like Chirikure’s above-mentioned poem, depicts through a language of unconsciousness, the superficiality of independence and socio-professional life. The control over language influences the socio-economic and political life of the natives like Ascroft, Griffiths, and Tiffin (1995, p. 283) explain:

The control over language by the imperial centre whether achieved by displacing native languages, by installing itself as “standard” against other variants which are constituted as “impunities” or by planting the language of empire in a new place remains the most potent instrument of cultural control.

The influence on language in the new nations affects the management and decisions of the entire nation. Thus, its education and professionalism remain void of native content. The emptiness is felt in the ignorance of the personae. The personae is described as sitting in an office with satirical gestures of one who misuses office manners:

Poised over glittering half-moon office desk

Left hand fidgets with simple documents

Shiny smoke-laden enamel

Incessantly grind cork of plastic pen

Raised to mouth by right hand in limit;

The poem describes the adopted lifestyle of the colonialist still practised in the societies even after independence. The speaker decries the demonstration of ignorance by those who sit in office and manage the lives of fellow citizens. The ignorance is highlighted in stanza 2, lines 6-8, p. 33 when the speaker describes the officer: ‘Nice suits he can wear/ Filled personal file he surely has/ But little assignment beats him’. The irony depicts an inferiority that is engraved in the life of the post independent society as well as the pretentious lifestyle of the natives who are required to lead the masses towards development and independence.

As can be inferred, colonisation had severe effects on the natives as it affected their language. The contact with the West other shifted the language of natives and their attitude to that of frustration, fear and disappointment, manifested in their speech even after independence. Chirikure’s “We fought the war”, “Isaac and Abraham” and “The sacred cave” and Takwi’s “Nothing-man” and “The vacuum” demonstrate that the natives perpetually exhibit inferiority that emanated from colonial control. Ismail (2002) explains that “... educating the natives in English not only served the civilizing mission but also – and more importantly perhaps – the imperial mission of exerting better control over them...” (p. 7). The control constituted an indelible spot in the culture and language of the natives whose independence has remained abstract.

The way postcolonial subjects appreciate or evaluate their relationship with the neocolonial powers is also a cause for concern. Postcolonial subjects in majority tend to see western countries as Eldorado whereas they regard their own societies with despair and anguish. This gives room for a new form of colonialism even after independence. This salient contrast is manifested in Chirikure’s poetry but in an ironical way when he uses the image “slushy muddy earth bed” which contrasts with “benevolent whirlwind” and “Almighty Heaven” to critique this illusory state. This contrast shows the domineering nature of colonial powers and postcolonial subjects’ desire to self-determination, that is, to regain the Centre, but how do they achieve this ideal?

4.4 Towards Regaining the Centre

Chirikure and Takwi’s poems equally illustrate the language that could be suitable for a stable and progressing society. These poems are characterised by the expectations and the struggle towards a genuine language in the post independent society. The poems showcase the significance of justice among people. Rather than using writing to resist the colonialist in the guise of regaining the centre, Helmi (as cited in Ismail (2002), holds that “what’s important is to tell your story with as much truth and honesty as you can and if you can have people outside of your community who can appreciate your works, then that is a bonus” (p. 11).

Thus, the writings should not be marred by abuses and disappointment as a means to expose the obnoxious tendency of colonialism. By consistently pointing at colonialism abhorrent, the demonstration would rather highlight a misfit of the post independent states. However, like Ngugi (1972) puts it, “during the anti-colonial struggle new song-poems were created to express defiance and people’s collective aspirations” (p. 68). The language of applause and appreciation as well as that of collective aggrandizement is necessary to encourage the new states towards development as illustrated through Chirikure’s “We Are Here (At Porta Farm)”, “Stand up”, “if things get tough”, and Takwi’s “Redress”, “Writing” and “Art After Them”.

Chirikure’s “We Are Here (At Porta Farm)”, remains an excellent piece in terms of the transference of the native language into the English language. The rendition of the intonation and structure of the poem reflects the attitude of the natives and the identity exerted. More of such writings are necessary to assert identity and expose the cultural values of independent states to the external world. The description of how the natives greet recalls the cultural values and repossesses the natives with an attitude of courage and optimism. For instance, the native would say ‘See you tomorrow’ rather than ‘Sleep well’; ‘Daybreak’ instead of ‘Did you sleep well?’ The speaker describes this way as the result of transparency and simplicity as well as equity between the natives, no matter their age, gender and positions. Chirikure’s “Stand up” just like the healing of the paralysis in the Bible, is a call against inferiority complex. The speaker recalls in stanza 1, p. 10, that ‘From childhood... you have taken things lying down. You have made yourself belief that/you were born to be ruled, born to be oppressed’. The speaker cautions the natives in the post colonies to rise from the maimed and inferior position. There is the introduction of justice that emanates from the language in the poem. This is a similar justice suggested in Takwi’s “Writing”, stanza 1, lines 1-7, p. 1:

Like drops of spittle in dry mouth
New scribblers sprout on Arts vibrant farm
To spin the heart-piercing wheel of change
Through mind piercing lines
In a tiny bid to metamorphose
This spicy planet of black and white
To a better stop over shady groove

The speaker in the poem sees the debasing and inferior position of the independent state as a global failure. As such he summons the writings, in other words, the language of both the oppressed and oppressor to reflect justice described as ‘a better stop’. The speaker believes through the expressions ‘mind piercing’ and ‘heart-piercing’ that justice and equality are necessary for a sound world. “Art After Them” by Takwi on a similar note, mentions the word ‘drops’ and the image ‘wheel of change’ to allude to the need for a different way of using language for a better cause globally. The speaker clearly states that the language should be positive – ‘Positively inspiring lines,/In muscle flexing attempt/To transform this planet,/To a quieter reassuring/ Relaxation place,’ The language, if suitable, would be

reassuring even in tumultuous situations evoked in the last line as ‘the wide-eyed staring unknown’. The boldness and justice recommended through the lines above are resonant in Chirikure’s “If things get tough” stanzas 2-3, lines 5-8, p. 30 where the speaker encourages optimism:

When things get tough
We will tighten our belts
If things get tougher –
We will pull out belts even tighter

The speaker in the above stanzas visibly encourages post independent societies to wake from their slumber and strengthen themselves. The language used is that of encouragement at all levels of hardship and challenging experiences demonstrated by the ascending order of the toughness. However, the speaker does not mean to counter-attack in vain. To the speaker, the aim of resistance is a solution to a better life which stanza 4, lines 9-13, p. 30 presents thus:

But if they get tougher still
something will break
Alternative solutions – whatever they may be
(the implication is ominous)
Will have to be found

The speaker is resolute that the struggle is not a futile one in that if situations are the more perilous, sustainable solutions should be sought. This is a counter against any form of discouragement, oppression and inferiority on the part of post independent societies. The language in Chirikure’s “The way” has got a similar concern as it expatiates on equality in the treatment of every individual in the post independent society. The speaker states for instance that whatever politicians deny the people, the people equally have to deny the politicians. In a nutshell, ‘Deny whoever doesn’t follow the right way’. Takwi’s “Redress” demonstrates a similar audacity in the face of injustice and inequality. The language of justice is inherent in the repetition of the first line of the first seven stanzas – ‘If I were to meet the President’. The speaker goes on according to the specific situation of injustice to describe what he would tell the president. The speaker demonstrates an attitude of self-assurance in the face of hierarchy as well as challenges.

5. Conclusion

Eventually, it results that the unbalanced relationship and cooperation between postcolonial subjects and the Western world has much to do with the quality and nature of language used which does not valorise postcolonial societies. In this contribution, language has been looked at both as a system of linguistic choices or diction and as the overall system of communication which in this case is the English Language. With regard to linguistic choices, it can be seen that language was used in the precolonial society to depict positive African

values of cosmic harmony, happiness, peace and a greater sense of togetherness. These values were manifested in the texts through the employment of explicit positive attitude markers. As a result, pre-colonial subjects had a positive attitude towards one another and an esteemed judgement of life and experiences in general. However, these positive energies were jeopardised with the arrival of the colonial masters who still used linguistic resources to frustrate the colonies by painting their environment as gloomy, filthy and nauseating. In contrast, colonial powers and postcolonial subjects alike often portray the West with glowing terms, thereby inadvertently reinforcing the former's dominance. This judgement on the colonies left open scars that have survived long after the end of colonialism. Postcolonial subjects continue to carry the stigmas of their victimisation and subordination till today. This explains why they scramble for western countries in search of what, according to them, is the 'best' possible place on earth. Language therefore holds the power to forge, but also to undo the course of human lives. Therefore, it should be used judiciously.

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