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## **Caliban's Meaning: The Culture of Language**

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### **Abstract**

Drawing largely on Aidoo's (1970) play, *Anowa*, as well as lived experiences, I argue on the philosophical flaws of Ashcroft's (2009) claim that there is no inherent link between language and culture. This paper subsequently explores the implication of my argument on some transformational domains of English in particular, though it has obvious applicability to the role of colonial languages in general. As one of the foremost postcolonial theorists, Ashcroft's seeming departure from the postcolonial agenda he has pursued in his academic practice is striking to read. I consider his claim in *Caliban's Voice* as philosophically frail that language has no intrinsic connections to the way of life of its speakers. Consequently, I find his succeeding position on the transformational value of English, in the postcolonial context, as equally requiring reassessment.

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## 1. Introduction

Ashcroft (2009) argues in *Caliban's Voice* that people of former British colonies can transform the English language to suit their contemporary peculiar purposes. He believes it is possible for a people to adopt a foreign language and adapt it to effectively communicate their worldviews. In making this argument, he identifies the assumed innate association people in the postcolony make between speech and culture to be responsible for the rejection of colonial tongues with all of its (potential) benefits. He claims this situation has further resulted in erroneous assessment of the value of English. He describes resistance to English as based on "recalcitrant myths" (p. 2) about the inseparability of group life and language. For this reason in talking about one's language in terms of "*our* language and *us*" (p. 1) makes a mistaken conclusion that *our* language is organically related to the notion of *us*—what identifies a people, culture. He agrees that language provides the words by which realities of the world may be known. But, the realities expressed are social constructions which do not have any inherent relationship with culture. Ashcroft believes that language is the signifier of a signified reality and the connection between the two is arbitrarily constructed. On this basis, one cannot talk of an undetachable bond existing between a tongue and the customary composition of its native speakers.

Using his own theory to explain the transformative role of English in a postcolonial context, Ashcroft further argues that since language is a way of communicating through arbitrary codes, the language of the colonizer can be used for resistance. To stretch his argument a little further, I would say that it can be adopted and transformed—adapted—to express the realities of any geographical fragmentation of the world. Understanding the relationship between language and culture from this perspective, Ashcroft proclaims,

shall resolve the "confusion between language as a communicative tool and language as a cultural symbol" leading to the end of "battles fought over language in post-colonial theory" (p. 2). He explains further that what people might think or feel about a language might be mistaken for the language itself. He identifies this confusion as the main reason for the postcolonial tension in language. To him, this is a misapplication of intellectual energy because the perception that colonial languages function to dominate other people is only true if one is to consider the role of those languages in the process of colonization. In a way the point Ashcroft is trying to make is that whatever role, negative or positive, colonial languages may have played in the domination of other people, they were assigned by the colonists. It will therefore be wrong to assume that domination and colonial languages are inherently related. One can therefore say that what the languages were *made to do* should be separated from what they *are*. The function of a language can therefore be transformed if it is understood that colonial languages, for example, can equally be used in a way which privileges local cultures. Referring to an instance in Shakespeare's *The Tempest* in which Caliban says to Prospero: "...you taught me language, and my profit on't is, I know how to curse" (p. 2), he acknowledges that language can be used to curse but hastens to add that it can do more than that: it can also be used to bless. This concludes Ashcroft's argument that the use of a colonial language does not automatically result in domination of local cultures.

## 2. Postcolonial Language Debate

This view is not entirely new. Ashcroft shares this intellectual position with scholars like Crystal (2003) and Achebe (1994). The former agrees with Ashcroft that the role of colonial languages, emphasis on English, in the postcolonial context should not only be assessed on its tendency to subdue the linguistic and cultural life of the colonies. This

position is a direct response to Phillipson (1992) and scholars like him, who criticize the spread of English as a form of linguistic imperialism. He argues that the presence of English results in a form of cultural inequality which is then “used to legitimate, effectuate, and reproduce an unequal division of power and resources” (p. 47). But Crystal describes such an assertion as anachronistic (p. 23). He believes the prudent way to look at the situation is to understand that, as a global language, English is benefiting worldwide communication by the various “special roles” (p. 3) it has been assigned globally. By describing as anachronistic the point that English spreads with an imperial effect, Crystal suggests that it will be foolhardy not to take advantage of the vast opportunities presented by English as a global language.

Achebe's utilitarian assessment of the role of colonial languages in African literature lends a second line of support to Ashcroft. Going along with Crystal, he credits English for the attainment of statehood by offering itself as the language of wider communication in Nigeria. He points out that English in Nigeria “did bring together many people who had hitherto gone several ways. And it gave them language with which to talk to one another” (p. 430). Since indigenous Nigerian languages were moving in “several directions”, English became a tool for holding the ethnic diversity together under the harmony of a single political unit. This becomes the basis for Achebe's claim that the use of European languages “will be able to carry the weight of...African experience” (p. 434). And even “if it failed to give them [African people] a song, it at least...gave them a tongue, for sighing” (p. 430). Achebe therefore cautions that “in rejecting the evil [of colonialism]”, care must be taken not to “throw out the good of it” (p. 431).

It is significant to note that neither Achebe nor Crystal goes to the extent of claiming that there is no inherent relationship between

language and culture. Rather, they place much emphasis on the (potential) benefits of adopting English due to its status as a global language. In fact, when Achebe states that “the real question is not whether Africans could write in English but whether they *ought to*” (p. 434), he is commenting on the situation of ambivalence, as a citizen of the nation-state of Nigeria, he will have to contend. A common language of communication is needed if Nigeria's huge linguistic diversity is to be held harmoniously together under one nation. One of the strongest opposing voices on this has come from Prah (2009) who thinks colonial languages are yet to bring peace to Nigeria, Sierra Leone, Liberia, the Congo, etc. Such dissenting positions notwithstanding, Achebe asserts that colonialism bequeathed to Nigeria a national language which luckily happens to have evolved into a global language. At the same time, a crucial question arises: so are our own languages any useful? Continuous attachment to the indigenous languages of Nigeria is implied when Achebe suggests that he is forced to use English in his creative works, though he would have wished to write in his mother tongue, because of the need to communicate with a broader, national and international, community. This wider communicative advantage of English meant that Africans could sing about their experiences to a broader audience. Or, at the very least English offered a tongue for sighing, an outward gesture of internally suppressed feelings (of anger, sorrow, emotional breakdown, disappointment, etc.). I grant that sighing may also suggest something positive as in showing internal happiness from being in a state of relief but that will not apply to the condition Achebe is attempting to describe. His claim is that assuming Africans fail to draw a global audience to their songs of experience, at least English offers a language in which they could present their feelings to the world even if the world chooses not to listen. Here, we observe a parallel with Ashcroft's position that a language should be

assessed by what it is and can do, not by what it has done.

Had Ashcroft based his argument on transforming English purely on the grounds of utility, just as Crystal and Achebe do, this paper perhaps may not have been necessary since there are works that present significant alternative views. I have assessed my intervention in this debate to be essential in critiquing Ashcroft on his assertion that language and culture are not inherently linked. Here too I must state, before proceeding with my argument, that scholars like Ngugi have laid solid intellectual foundation upon which I situate my position in this paper. Ngugi's (1986) unyielding assertion that language is linked to culture is famously known in the postcolonial language debate. Eloquently, he puts forward his argument:

Culture does not just reflect the world in images but actually, through those very images, conditions a child to see that world in a certain way, the colonial child was made to see the world and where he stands in it as seen and defined by or reflected in the culture of the language of imposition. And since those images are mostly passed on through orature and Literature it meant the child would now only see the world as seen in the literature of his language of adoption (p. 17).

Consequently, he adds, "since the new [colonial] language as a means of communication was a product of and was reflecting the 'real language of life' elsewhere, it could never [whether] as spoken or written [...] properly reflect or imitate the real life of... [the colonized] community" (Ngugi, 1986, p. 16). Simply put, language reflects the culture of its native environment. Thus, though a language may travel beyond its ancestral home, it cannot fully represent the realities of its new home. Ashcroft's point that a language can be adopted and transformed to equally carry the experiences of a foreign locale is

being contested here. In agreeing with Ngugi, I still believe some additional philosophical development is required in order to adequately test the validity of Ashcroft's claim. It is in this direction that this paper draws its originality and relevance to the postcolonial language debate.

### 3. Culture and Language

I think a distinction between voice and meaning is important in understanding the link, or the lack thereof, between language and culture. I shall begin this philosophical presentation by first explaining that a word is useless if it fails to present a trace through which it may be understood. A trace, as Derrida (1967/1997) explains, is the mental script (based on experience) from which a word attains its presence, meaning. Ashcroft argues, and rightly so, that the link between a signifier and the signified is arbitrary. He is by this implying that they can exist as separate entities. We must additionally understand that both the signifier and the signified are also arbitrarily constructed, not just the link between them. It should again be clear that voice (phonic or graphic) is the domain of the signifier. But signifying what? If the signified is argued to exist separately from the signifier, then the answer to the rhetorical question is: Nothing! If, on the other hand, the two are inherently connected, as is my argument, then the voice would represent the signifier while the meaning of the voice will be represented by the signified. In simple terms, this is what language is. One can only talk about the communicative function of a language only after the voice is assigned meaning. By assigned, I am referring to the process of ascribing meaning to a word based on a collective cultural experience, i.e., the trace. Indeed, to understand a word, i.e., the entity it refers to, "The trace must be thought before the entity" (Derrida, 1967/1997, p. 47). Without the trace no word can exist in a language because it is worthless to coin a word to name an absent experience.

In other words, the presence of a word only becomes meaningful if it occurs in tandem with a present experience. To be clear, voice exists because there is a meaning (an experience) to be described whilst meaning exists because there is a voice for it. This relationship, I dare to say, is sacred: separate them and language ceases to exist! Ashcroft's assertion is like saying that there is no inherent relationship between body and blood. This is a valid claim in the sense that these two entities could be separated. But there is the presence of life in the bond between blood and body which shall cease the moment the two entities are separated. As individual entities, neither blood nor body could carry on with any functional existence. I am not oblivious of the fact that blood transfusion attests to the capacity of blood to still hold on to its life even if separated from a body. My assertion is that the retained life can only become functional again if it is reintroduced into a biologically compatible body.

This establishes a difference between, what I have opted to call, inherent existence and inherent relationship. Blood and body could be separated because they both form individualized units in (blooded) living organisms. To this extent, they are in inherent existence. But where the concurrent presence of entities in inherent existence is required for a thing to be present, or for a thought, emotion, etc., to be expressed, then those unities in concomitant association must be in an inherent relationship to be functional. Going back to my example, blood and body operate within the paradigm of inherent relationship to produce a third thing—life. For this third entity to continue to exist, the relationship between body and blood should be inseparable, organic. As may have come out at this point in this paper, I find a similar relationship of functional inherence between language and culture.

I find it necessary to, at this point, put a hold on my philosophical propositions and provide some exemplar situations to prove the organic,

inherent, relationship I claim to find between language and culture. In the book *Translating Lives*, a number of non-native speakers of English discuss their frustrations with the use of English because they are detached from the Anglo-culture. For example, Wierzbicka (2007), a Pole living in Australia, narrates an experience in which she received a CD from a friend as a gift. After listening to the songs on it, she decided to email her friend to thank her. This seemingly essay task proved to be difficult for her as the Polish thoughts she wanted to convey in the email were obstructed by the language in which she had to communicate, English. The thoughts she formed in Polish to begin her email translates into English as “I was moved...” However, she knew that, in English “to be moved” is a momentary emotional reaction to something. It hence did not fit what she was thinking in Polish. She was looking for an English expression which will communicate the idea of being moved but in an extended, and not momentary time. The closest expression she could find was “I listened with emotion...” but then she felt that it was too archaic and literary for an informal email. She decided to use “I really enjoyed listening...” even though she felt that the element of fun implied was not natural to the way she would describe her emotion. To find a way out of this dilemma, she concluded that what she was originally seeking to say was “inconsistent with the Anglo cultural script” (Wierzbicka, 2007, p. 97) of emotional expression—it was only possible in Polish.

The situation Wierzbicka's found herself in is comparable to linguistic destitution as English could not provide her with the tools to communicate the exact thoughts she had formed in Polish. The cause of her difficult experience was simply based on the fact that Polish exists in Polish culture as English exists in an English culture. Language and culture are so inherently connected that one is sure to face difficulties, similar to Wierzbicka's, if one decided to express an experience or reality



through a language foreign to the cultural domain of the experience he/she wishes to express. What Wierzbicka was attempting to do was to use an English-signifier voice to express a Polish-signified meaning. But English did not have the cultural script, trace, for the meaning Wierzbicka was seeking to communicate. Therefore, it rightly did not have a voice for Wierzbicka to use.

We see from Wierzbicka's example that language has a psycho-emotional dimension which is not just a feeling as Ashcroft suggests. It is about communicating one's total self. There is a meaning located within the inner and outer being of a native speaker of a language which is not transferrable to any other language because of the difference in cultural contexts. It is important to note, in the experience of Wierzbicka, that there were English equivalences available to her, but she insisted, among other reasons, that they were not *natural* to the way she would describe her emotions. I am one of those who think that language is not natural. It is only a product of an innate predisposition. I will consequently consider Wierzbicka's relationship with Polish as a case of naturalization, a process of becoming natural, as opposed to a fixed condition. It seems to me that by promoting the transformation of English in postcolonial contexts, Ashcroft is suggesting that the postcolonial world could adopt English to harness the global benefits of the language while at the same time transforming it into a new English capable of communicating everything in the native languages. On the point that I have argued for the existence of a naturalizing relationship between language and culture; and the latter is dynamic, then, language can indeed be transformed. But since culture is a shared way of life—a marker of group identity—the process of language transformation starts with the need to express a new communal experience. Secondly, the transformation should have naturalizing potential. By this I mean when it is said that a language has been adapted, into a new

environment, it presupposes that it has received widely shared acceptability which gives it semblance of a new linguistic home with unique attributes. English is fast-undergoing this process across the globe, especially in the former British colonies. This has remained the subject of inquiry for practitioners in the relatively new academic field known variously as World Englishes, Global English(es), New Englishes, etc. Ashcroft, and other like-minded scholars, would cite this phenomenon of English in second language environments as a vindication of his argument which seeks to debunk the notion that language and culture are inherently connected. I am of the opinion that Global Englishes rather challenge this assertion. The individual distinctiveness (syntactically, semantically, phonetically, phonologically, etc.) that New Englishes display in opposition to native English is the result of the interaction English has with the cultures, including languages, of its new home.

#### **4. Language, Culture, Literature, and Translation**

Let me hereby illustrate this phenomenon in the context of Ghana, my homeland. To do this, I have elected to use examples from, *Anowa*, a play by Ama Ata Aidoo. My justification for selecting this work is that the play is, first of all, a form of translated work from Ghanaian folktale into English (Aguiar, 1999). Secondly, it is from the domain of Fante, a subgroup of the Akan people of Ghana, a culture in which I was raised. When I first read this play, I wondered, and I still do, whether a reader without any knowledge of Akan (especially Fante) would adequately comprehend the story. This is notwithstanding the fact that it is written in the English language. Let us consider this dialogue which followed Osam's suggestion to his wife, Badua, that they should let their daughter, Anowa, be trained to become a traditional priestess.

Badua: [*She removes her fingers from her ears.*] I have said it and I will say it again and again and again! I am not going to turn my only daughter into a dancer priestess.

Osam: What is wrong with priestesses?

Badua: [*Reflectively*] O yes. I respect them, I honour them...I fear them. Yes, my husband, I fear them. But my only daughter shall not be a priestess.

Osam: They have so much glory and dignity...

Badua: But in the end, they are not people. They become too much like the gods they interpret. [*As she enumerates the attributes of priesthood, her voice grows hysterical and her face terror-stricken. Osam removes his pipe, and stares at her, his mouth open with amazement.*]

They counsel with spirits;  
 They read into other men's souls;  
**They swallow dogs' eyes**  
 Jump fires  
 Drink goats' blood  
 Sheep milk  
 Without flinching  
 Or vomiting  
 They do not feel  
 As you or I,  
 They have no shame (p. 11-12).

Given the context within which it occurs, the non-Akan reader, will understand what Badua says about priestesses that they "swallow dogs' eyes" to mean the horrific act of removing a dog's eyes and swallowing them. But that is not quite it. It is a translation of an idiomatic expression, *woa min otwia ne enyiwa*, which literally translates as "to swallow a dog's eye." In trying to make this semantically accessible to a non-Akan audience, the playwright is faced with a task so difficult to execute. She explains the idiom

as the lack of shame which understandably is the closest English translation she would ever find. Yet, Aidoo knows that there is more to shame which is not translatable. The meaning exists in the medial position between shame and extraordinary (perhaps superhuman) conduct. Badua's reason for refusing to allow Anowa to become a priestess is because, she claims, "they are not people." This loss of common humanity could manifest in a deviant conduct which will draw the meaning closer to shame. On the other hand, it may be displayed in the form of extraordinary behaviors/capabilities such as reading into other people's souls, jumping fires, or drinking blood, all of which cannot be described as shameful. The meaning of this idiom, in its un mutilated form, is only available in Fante. The expression is incapable of playing its communicative function in translation because of the strange English culture within which translation forces it to function.

In the following conversation, we shall observe a striking difference in the conceptualization of kinship terms. It occurs after Anowa returns home with news that she had found a man to whom she wants to get married. This infuriates her mother, Badua, who thinks they, the parents, should have been consulted about the choice. While Badua makes known her disapproval to Anowa, Osam surprises Badua by his show of indifference to the issue.

Badua: And you, Kobina Sam, will you not say anything?

Osam: Abena Badua, leave me out of this. You know that if I...whisper anything to do with Anowa, you and your brothers and your uncles will tell me to go and straighten out the lives of my nieces. This is your family drum; beat it, my wife (p. 15).

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 Osam: My wife, do remember I am a man, the son of a woman who also has five

sisters. It is a long time since I gave up trying to understand the human female. Besides, If you think well of it, I am not the one to decide finally whom Anowa can marry. Her uncle, your brother is there, is he not? You'd better consult him. Because I know your family: they will say I deliberately married Anowa to a fool to spite them (p. 16).

A non-Akan reader will not understand when Osam says, "This is your family drum; beat it, my wife." Does it mean he does not count himself as part of the family? Precisely so! As a matrilineal society, Akans consider children as the "properties" of the wife. Fathers are therefore under no obligation to take care of their children; after all they belong to the wife's family lineage. And since women typically do not work for personal profit, in the traditional context I mean, the wife's brothers would have to bear full financial responsibilities as related to the raising of her children. The benefit, if you like, of this financial liability on the wife's brothers is that they have greater legitimacy over every aspect of the children's lives. This includes deciding on marriage partners. Osam invokes this cultural code when he directs Badua to consult her brother regarding Anowa's marriage. He recognizes his limited role as an Akan father in any conversation pertaining to Anowa's marriage plans. He would rather defer that responsibility, rightly, to Anowa's "uncle" while he takes charge of straightening up the children of his five sisters.

In English, father suggests someone who is biologically responsible for the conception of his kind and takes total charge of raising his offspring. From this aspect of cultural difference displayed in Osam's attitude, Akan conceptualization of father is shown to be markedly incompatible with the English version. We do know that "uncle" in English refers to the brothers of both of a child's parents. This is not the case in Akan where it is restricted to the mother's male siblings only.

So, while an Akan child needs to differentiate between the brothers of his mother from those of his father in order to be culturally correct in respect of his use of the term "uncle", a native speaker of English would not have to worry about making any such distinction since it will have no material effect on the meaning of the word. We are also aware that, in English cultural settings, an "uncle" is not expected to bear any financial weight toward the upkeep of his nieces and nephews. The reality common to native users of English is that of individual responsibility and freedom. The manifesting substance of this is that child-bearing is seen as an individual's freewill decision. Thus, one should be responsible for the decisions he/she takes. Consequently, an uncle cannot expect his opinion regarding the marriage plans of nephews/nieces to hold legitimacy over and above their father's judgment. Considering the disparity in the representation of the notion of "uncle", an individual cannot rightly claim that *wofa*, the Akan word for "uncle", is translatable into English.

If we were to excuse cultural (mis)translations of similar kind on the grounds that, as a global language, the cost to English is its "submission to many kinds of use" (Achebe 433), then what will, and indeed has, emerged is a transformed, hybrid, English language which is distinctive to Ghana. This new language, however, does not always prove useful to both internal and external communication, as claimed by Ashcroft, Achebe, and scholars of such intellectual persuasion. In Ghana for example less than 30% of the population has access to this new English (Dako, 2012). In effect, it has become a medium through which the educated elite exclude the masses from national communication (Bamgbose, 2000) and economic resources (Chiatoh, 2011). However, while the ruling class find pride in their knowledge of English, the kind of English they use is sometimes marginalized in external communication. Ngugi imagines this in his question: "After all the literary gymnastics of preying on other languages,



would the result be accepted as good English or French?" (Ngugi, 1993, p. 436). Put differently, "Will the owner of the language criticize our usage?" (Ngugi, 1993, p. 436). I will answer yes to the second question. In proceeding to explain my response, I shall introduce a concept I describe as the syndrome of awkwardization. Speakers of new Englishes frequently encounter the syndrome of awkwardization: the moment of native-speaker arrogance which undervalues a new English based merely on the suspicion of error. For example, if a student wrote in an essay: "I guess, **my mouth on the dung heap**, that you could easily be struck by lightning", to a teacher who is a native speaker of English, he/she is most likely to read it a few times trying to detect what might be wrong with the structure. If he/she is unable to point to any grammatical error, the next step will be to underline the sentence as being awkward because the meaning cannot be accessed. But, an Akan will comprehend the following extract from *Anowa*:

Kofi Ako: Do you compare yourself to me?  
See how big I am. [*He bares his chest and spreads out his arms.*]

Anowa: [*Pretending to be shocked*] Ahhh!  
And this is why we should fear more for you. You are so tall and so broad. You really look like a huge something. There is too much of you. [*Touching different parts of him*] Anything can get any part of you... a branch from a falling tree... a broken splinter, and ow, **my mouth is at the dung heap**, even lightning... But I am so little, I can escape things.

The full semantic essence of the expression "my mouth is at the dung heap" cannot be appreciated without reference to Akan culture. It is a transliteration of "*me ano da sumuna so*" which is used to precede a statement considered to potentially have disastrous consequence to the addressee. We observe in the conversation above that the statement is

necessary in the sentence because Anowa suggests the catastrophic possibility of Kofi Ako being struck dead by lightning. Some close correlations available in English will include "excuse me to say", "excuse my language", "sorry to say", "I do not wish this for you", etc. But all of them function on the grounds of seeking pardon or forgiveness from the addressee for the unpleasant suggestion the addresser is about to say. This is quite different in the Akan understanding. They believe that there is a spiritual component to language. I surmise this must be a worldwide accepted idea considering that all religions claim to communicate with the supernatural through language—manifesting in prayers, ritual incantations, etc. But while some only acknowledge the spiritual significance of language when they are involved in a religious event, Akans make this recognition in daily life activities. They believe that spirits pick up what humans say, good or bad, in ordinary conversation and work with them. Consequently, by preceding an unpleasant utterance with "*me ano da sumuna so*", one is contaminating (since dung is associated with filth) his/her own language in order that it will be received in the spiritual realm as a trivial statement. In this regard, the speaker is not appealing to the addressee per se for pardon. Rather, he/she is engaging in a separate conversation with the spirits: pleading with them not to take his/her speech serious. This cultural background is lost in the English translation, "my mouth is at the dung heap." And since it is impossible to make meaning out of this without knowledge of Akan way of life, it will suffer the syndrome of awkwardization.

Indeed, the syndrome of awkwardization is not only present at the level of the written text. It also occurs in speech. It is not uncommon to hear, at least in America where I have personally experienced, a native speaker of English saying to a new English speaker: "You have an accent." The first time, someone described my speech in that manner, I wondered if it is ever possible for one to speak

any language without an accent? But in the course of time I did come to understand that such comments express the idea that the phonetic and phonological qualities of new Englishes are “aberrations from canonical correct forms of [the] language” (Dabghi & Parvaresh, 2013, p. 75). Global Englishes are alternatively referred to as English as a Second Language precisely for the fact that they result from an interaction with already existing local languages. The resulting effect of this interaction is the transformation of English at various levels including its phonetic and phonological properties to produce a distinctive speech style, accent. In conversations, new English accents are not always favorably received by native speakers of English. They are sometimes marginalized as difficult to comprehend. To me such situations arise because native speakers consider other accents as audibly awkward. In fact some accents are ridiculed because of a perceived trace of speech defect, not in the medical sense but on the note of a marked *abnormality* in speech pattern.

### **5. Culture and Language: Implications for Language Transformation and Policy**

I am not for one moment attempting to argue that English is of no value in the second language context. In assigning it a special role, English is elevated relative to languages that are playing, if you may, ordinary roles in their ancestral homes. In as much as the *ordinary* relates to what is *common* to a people (knowledge, experience, practice, etc.), the cultural essence of languages in their original environments is indirectly reinforced even by the function assigned to English. It is not disputable that at this stage of global integration, a nation cannot expect to engage only with that which is *common* to its way of life. It is impossible to restrict the influx of what is foreign (which will usually arrive through the English language). On this basis, English remains important to global flows. But its adaptation should not replace the roles

played by indigenous languages. It is a self-defeating approach as it suggests that such a nation has nothing to contribute to the global flows. Instead, both languages should be carefully assessed on the roles they are each best suited to play as well as possible challenges to those functions. Generally this project should be informed by the expected value of language choice.

For example, in the African postcolonial situation, a major expected value of official languages is to facilitate external communication. But considering the fact that communications with an external audience are not always successful because of the syndrome of awkwardization, relations with English should be reevaluated. This reassessment should begin from abandoning the fruitless exercise of attempting to have an exact copy of English as it is written or spoken in a native domain. As a candidate in the West African Senior Secondary High School Examination, in the year 2003, I still remember the murmuring that went on during the English examination when we had to listen to a recorded conversation and answer questions based on it. The problem was that the interlocutors spoke in a style which imitated Received Pronunciation (RP) and we could not fully follow the dialogue. After the examination I kept on thinking why the voices on the tape chose not to speak the Ghanaian version of English? Not surprisingly, close to half of the students failed in English. I am sure the number of failed candidates would have been drastically reduced had the teaching of English changed focus from the impossible task of producing RP speakers to transforming the language to, as much as possible, fit into the socio-cultural matrix of Ghana.

We do know though that English, however transformed, will fail in two areas: accurate representation of the realities (because of the inherent link to culture) of the new home and accessibility to the broad mass of the population. Accordingly, attention should be paid to developing a local tongue as a national,

if not official, language along with English. Here, I am guided by the expected value of enhanced, non-conflictual, interaction between leadership and citizenry. I say non-conflictual because it shall be organized on common grounds as the rest of the population shall be equally competent in the language of the discourse. I must clarify that the national language I am proposing is not the kind that is legislated simply to satisfy local content in language policy. Neither am I simply advocating socio-linguistic justice (Johnson & Ricento, 2013). My call is for the recognition of the inherent value of indigenous languages manifesting in corpus/language planning and intellectualization.

Any language which stays out of the course of intellectualization—the production of knowledge—has no place in modernity (Prah, 2009). It is important therefore that postcolonial countries use a national language to promote knowledge production in their local languages. But before academic books, for example, may be written in a language, it ought to have successfully undergone corpus planning. The engineering of language which is the preoccupation of corpus planning ultimately aims for literacy development and expansion in the domain within which a language could be used. In doing so, it shall inure to the advantage of indigenous languages if the mission is to answer the question: “How can we prey on the rich humanistic and democratic heritage in the struggles of other peoples in other times and other places to enrich our own?” (Ngugi, 1993, p. 435). For instance, in borrowing from other languages, it must be ascertained that the borrowed expression(s) is introducing an idea which cultural differences have made impossible to convey in the local languages. The value of this approach is that one preserves and builds on existing culturally defined knowledge (Okrah, 2003) contained in indigenous languages rather than replacing them with what eludes full comprehension (Woodson, 1990). Consequently, intellectualization will

be adding to endogenous knowledge and not start an entirely new effort in search of (colonially) received knowledge (Prah, 2009).

## 6. Concluding Remarks

The connection between language and culture is not more of social and less of a natural(izing) relationship. It is a fact that there can be no society without a method through which its members would communicate with one another. In as much as language allows one to express him/herself, it also restricts what can be said in the sense that it offers voice (signifier) to only things (signified) that are known to the culture of its speakers. If we were to agree, for a short moment, that the meaning communicated through language is socially constructed, it is not constructed out of a cultural void. Rather, it gives a name to shared tangible and intangible experiences of its speakers. The language may travel abroad but the experiences will *recalcitrantly* remain with the homestead. If we were to base our linguistic relations on this crucial feature, the language dilemma facing many postcolonies, emphasis on Africa, will cease. An ethnographic approach (Johnson and Ricento, 2013) to language planning and policy will make certain that the transformation of English (or any colonial language) meets a semantic demand which local languages are not able to supply. In this age of global connection, one may be drawn at one point or another into a discourse whose domain is of foreign origin. The dominance of Anglo-culture has made English the common medium through which the foreign arrives at the shores of the native. English is therefore necessary for understanding the new, however much cultural differences might inhibit the process of comprehension.

While doing this, we must understand that English is not best suited for every kind of role. Before English arrived in any geographic space, the inhabitants must have organized their societies successfully with their

indigenous languages. Many Anglophone (same with other colonial languages) African countries seem to be pursuing a language policy of adoption without adaptation. This is why the use of the colonial tongue is emphasized for national discourse despite the fact that it is inaccessible to the majority of people who will eventually be affected any consensus reached in those dialogues. In an instance like this, local languages could be used. The fact that English has official language status does not mean it should necessarily be the language of communication in all aspects of national life. A similar situation persists in the educational system where primacy of Anglo-derived knowledge is strictly observed. This is what has resulted in the minimal role local languages play in the education of African children and the consequent near loss of all the sophisticated indigenous knowledge systems (Taylor & Okrah, 2004) stored in eloquent speech.

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