

IN SEARCH OF ANOTHER LANGUAGE FOR LITERARY AND CULTURAL INTERPRETATIONS

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This lecture examines the role of language in literary criticism and cultural interpretation in a multilingual society. It also analyses the interaction of three languages (French, English and Yoruba) in the Ijio community of Oyo State, Nigeria. The paper demonstrates how beneficially the linguistic contact and interaction have been to the business of interpretation of the culture and literature (oral and written) of the people of the postcolonial Ijio in particular, and Nigeria/Africa in general. The specific nature of the language of the Europhone African literatures is interrogated and re-appraised through the analysis of works of selected second and third generations of African writers such as Wole Soyinka, Chinua Achebe, Camara Laye, Sembène Ousmane, Sony Labou Tansi, Calixthe Beyala, Adelaide Fassinou, Lola Shoneyin, E. E. Sule, and Abimbola Adunni Adedokun. Since literature and culture work together, the depiction of human interaction has come to the front burner in the lecture. Feminism and gender issues are treated with appropriate literary illustration. The second part of the lecture examines the role of French and English in the interpretation of the Yoruba cosmos, especially the *Ìjìó-Gẹ̀lẹ̀dẹ̀*. The manipulation and subversion of the French and English Languages in the expression and interpretation of *Gẹ̀lẹ̀dẹ̀* activities are examined by the lecture. This linguistic subversion/manipulation has helped to reflect the ‘Africanness’ of the Europhone African literatures.

Arising from the above analysis, the lecture advocates a new National Language Policy for Nigeria: a language policy that will protect the already endangered national languages such as Yoruba, Hausa and Igbo in the multilingual post-colonial Nigeria. The language Policy should also accord the French language a priority status because of its strategic position in Nigeria and especially, West Africa. French language should be taught as compulsory subject in primary and secondary school levels. It should also be made a compulsory General Studies course in the Nigerian tertiary institutions, the way the University of Ibadan has amply demonstrated by introducing into its curriculum GES 108: Introduction French.