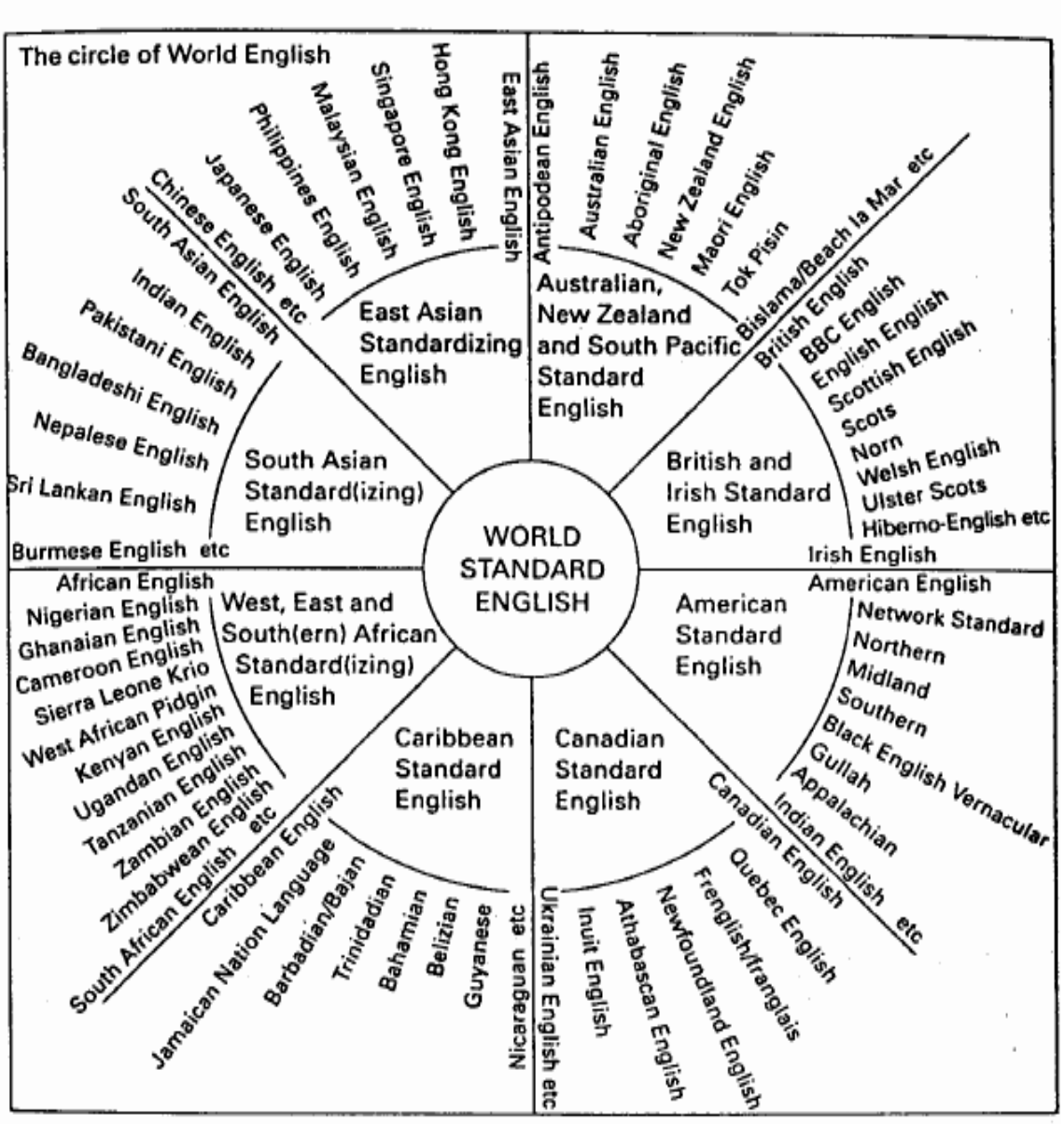
Language in Poetry from South-West Asia and East and West Africa



Lingua Inglese 3

Elizabeth Sainsbury

Autumn term

1. India and Pakistan

Poems

Nissim Ezekiel, **'The Patriot'**, *The Bloodaxe Book of Contemporary Indian Poetry*, ed. by Jeet Thayil, (Bloodaxe Books Ltd., 2008) pp 31,32

A.K.Ramanujan, **'The Opposable Thumb'**, The Striders, (Oxford University Press, 1966)

Sujata Bhatt, *from* **'Search For My Tongue'**, *Brunizem*, (Carcanet Press, 1998) pp.63-66

Arun Kolatkar, *from* **'Pi-dog'**, *The Bloodaxe Book of Contemporary Indian Poetry*, ed. by Jeet Thayil, (Bloodaxe Books Ltd., 2008) pp 400-406

Imtiaz Dharker, **'Blessing'**, **'The Right Word'**, **'At The Lahore Karhai'**, *A Terrorist at My Table*, (Bloodaxe Books Ltd. 2006)

Essays, Criticism and Language Notes

Robert McCrum, Robert Mc Neill and William Cran 'The New Englishes', *The Story of English*, (Penguin, 2002) pp.323-335

Tom McArthur, *The Oxford Companion to the English Language*, (Oxford University Press, 1992) pp. 504-507

T.N. Shankaranarayana, S.A. Krishnaia, from 'Interview with Prof. A.K. Ramanujan', *Indian English Poetry: Critical Perspectives*, Jaydipsinh K.Dodiya, (Sarup &Sons 2000)

Arvind Krishna Mehtotra, 'What Is an Indian Poem?', *The Bloodaxe Book of Contemporary Indian Poetry*, ed. by Jeet Thayil, (Bloodaxe books Ltd., 2008) pp 397-99

2. Africa

Poems

Taban Lo Liyong, **'Excavation Sites'**, **'The Best Poets'**

Okot p'Bitek, *from* **'Song of Lawino I, 2'** , *Song of Lawino & Song of Ocol* (Heinemann, 1984)

Niyi Osundare, **'Not My Business'**, *Songs of The Seasons* (Heinemann Educational Books, 1990)

Ben Okri, **'A New Dream of Politics'**, The Guardian, 2015

Essays, Criticism and Language Notes

G.A. Heron, *from* 'Introduction', *Song of Lawino & Song of Ocol* (Heinemann, 1984)

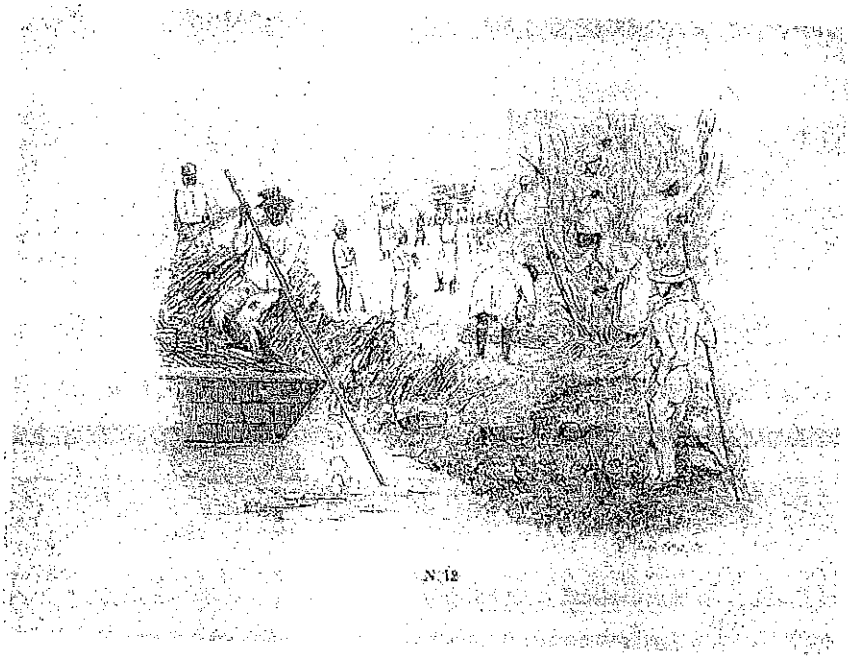
Ngugi wa Thiong'o, *from Decolonising the Mind:The Politics of Language in African Literature* (James Curey, 1986)

Chinua Achebe, *from Morning Yet On Creation Day* (Anchor 1975)

S. Gramley and K.Patzold, 'English in Africa', *A Survey of Modern English*, 2nd. Edition, (Routledge 1992)pp 316-324

'Oral Poetry, Group Poetry, The Griot', *my notes based on Oral Poetry: Its Nature, Sinificance and Social context*, Ruth Finnegan, (Cambridge University Press, 1977)

1 INDIA



N. 12

POEMS

NISSIM EZEKIEL

2: The Patriot

I am standing for peace and non-violence.
Why world is fighting fighting,
Why all people of world
Are not following Mahatma Gandhi
I am simply not understanding.
Ancient Indian Wisdom is 100% correct.
I should say even 200% correct.
But Modern generation is neglecting –
Too much going for fashion and foreign thing.

Other day I'm reading in newspaper
(Every day I'm reading Times of India
To improve my English Language)
How one goonda fellow
Throw stone at Indirabehn.
Must be student unrest fellow, I am thinking.
Friends, Romans, Countrymen, I am saying
(to myself)
Lend me the ears.
Everything is coming –
Regeneration, Remuneration, Contraception.
Be patiently, brothers and sisters.

You want one glass lassi?
Very good for digestion.
With little salt lovely drink,
Better than wine;
Not that I am ever tasting the wine.
I'm the total teetotaller, completely total.
But I say
Wine is for the drunkards only.

What you think of prospects of world peace?
Pakistan behaving like this,
China behaving like that,
It is making me very sad, I am telling you.
Really, most harassing me.
All men are brothers, no?
In India also
Gujaraties, Maharashtrians, Hindiwallahs
All brothers –
Though some are having funny habits.
Still, you tolerate me,
I tolerate you,
One day Ram Rajya is surely coming.

You are going?
But you will visit again
Any time, any day,
I am not believing in ceremony.
Always I am enjoying your company.

13 goonda: rogue.

14 Indirabehn: Indira Gandhi, literally 'Sister Indira'.

The Opposable Thumb

'One two three four five
five fingers to a hand'
said the blind boy counting
but he found a sixth one
waiting like a cousin for a coin;
a budlike node complete with nail,
phalanx, and mole
under the usual casual opposable thumb.

'One two three four five
five fingerspans for a woman's blouse',
said the muslin-weaver spanning
but he found his span shorter by a thumb:
a puckered stump, sewn like a sausage head
by a barber, without a nail
phalanx or rice-grain line,
instead of the usual casual opposable thumb.

Said my granny, rolling her elephant leg
like a log in a ruined mill:
'One two three four five
five princes in a forest
each one different like the fingers on a hand',
and we always looked to find on her paw
just one finger left of five: a real thumb,
no longer usual, casual, or opposable after her husband's
knifing temper one sunday morning half a century ago.

*Search For My Tongue**

Days my tongue slips away.
I can't hold on to my tongue.
It's slippery like the lizard's tail
I try to grasp
but the lizard darts away.

મારી જીભ સરકી જાય છે
(mari jeebh sarki jai chay)
I can't speak. I speak nothing.
Nothing.

કાં ઈ નહિ, હું નથી બોલી શકતી
(kai nahi, hoo nathi boli shakti)
I search for my tongue.

પરંતુ ક્યાં શોધું ? ક્યાં ?
(parantu kya shodhu? Kya?)

હું દોડતી દોડતી જાઉં છું.
(hoo dhodti dhodti jaoo choo)
But where should I start? Where?
I go running, running,

નદી કિનારે પહોચી છું, નદી કિનારે.
(nadi keenayray pohchee choo, nadi keenayray)
reach the river's edge.
Silence

એકદમ શાં ત.
(akedum shant)

નીચે પાણી નહિ, ઉપર પક્ષી નહિ.
(neechay pani nahi, oopur pakshi nahi)
Below, the riverbed is dry. Above,
the sky is empty: no clouds, no birds.
If there were leaves, or even grass
they would not stir today,
for there is no breeze.
If there were clouds
then, it might rain.

જો વાદળ હોત તો કદાચ વરસાદ આવે,
(jo vadla hoat toh kadach varsad aavay)

જો વરસાદ પડે તો નદી પાછી આવે,
(jo varsad puday toh nadi pachee aavay)

જો નદી હોય, જો પાણી હોય, તો કાંઇક લીલું લીલું દેખાય.
(jo nadi hoy, jo pani hoy, toh kaeek leelu leelu daykhai)
If the rains fell
then the river might return,
if the water rose again I might see something green
at first, then trees enough to fill a forest.
If there were some clouds that is.

જો વાદળા હોત તો.
(jo vadla hoat toh)
Since I have lost my tongue
I can only imagine
there is something crawling
beneath the rocks, now burrowing down
into the earth when I lift the rock.

જ્યારે પથ્થર ઉપાડું .
(jyaray patther oopadu)
The rock is in my hand, and the dry
moss stuck on the rock
prickles my palm.
I let it drop
for I must find my tongue.
I know it can't be here
in this dry riverbed.
My tongue can only be
where there is water.

પાણી, પાણી,
(pani, pani)

હજુ યાદ છે પેલી છોકરી.
(hujoo yad chay paylee chokri)

"ઠંડા પાણી, મીઠા પાણી," બોલતી બોલતી આવતી.
("thunda pani, meetha pani, bolti bolti aavti)

માથે કાળું માટલું , હાથમાં પીત્તળનો પ્યાલો.
(mathay kallu matlu, hathma pittulno pyalo)

ઉભેલી ગાડી બાજુ આવતી.
(oobhaylee gaadi baju aavti)

બારી તરફ હાથ લંબાવીને પાણી આપતી.
(bari taraf hath lumbaveenay pani aapti)

અને હું , અતિશય તરસી,
(unay hoo, ateeshay tarsi)

મોટા મોટા ઘૂંટડા લેતી પી જતી.
(mota mota ghuntada layti pee jati)

હજુ યાદ છે પેલી છોકરી.
(hujoo yad chay paylee chokri)
Even water is scarce.
There was a little girl
who carried a black clay pitcher on her head,
who sold water at the train station.
She filled her brass cup with water,
stretched out her arm to me,
reached up to the window, up
to me leaning out the window from the train,
but I can't think of her in English.

II

You ask me what I mean
by saying I have lost my tongue.
I ask you, what would you do
if you had two tongues in your mouth,
and lost the first one, the mother tongue,
and could not really know the other,
the foreign tongue.
You could not use them both together
even if you thought that way.
And if you lived in a place you had to
speak a foreign tongue,
your mother tongue would rot,
rot and die in your mouth
until you had to spit it out.
I thought I spit it out
but overnight while I dream,
મને હતું કે આખ્ખી જીભ આખ્ખી ભાષા,
(munay hutoo kay aakhee jeebh aakhee bhasha)
મેં થૂંકી નાખી છે.
(may thoonky nakhi chay)
પરંતુ રાત્રે સ્વપ્નામાં મારી ભાષા પાછી આવે છે.
(parantoo rattray svupnama mari bhasha pachi aavay chay)
ફૂલની જેમ મારી ભાષા મારી જીભ
(foolnee jaim mari bhasha mari jeebh)
મોઢામાં ખીલે છે.
(modhama kheelay chay)
ફળની જેમ મારી ભાષા મારી જીભ
(fullnee jaim mari bhasha mari jeebh)
મોઢામાં પાકે છે.
(modhama pakay chay)
it grows back, a stump of a shoot
grows longer, grows moist, grows strong veins,
it ties the other tongue in knots,
the bud opens, the bud opens in my mouth,
it pushes the other tongue aside.
Everytime I think I've forgotten,
I think I've lost the mother tongue,
it blossoms out of my mouth.

*The Gujerati is translated into English within the poem itself.

ARUN KOLATKAR

(1932-2004)

Born in Kolhapur, Arun Kolatkar was educated there and at the J.J. School of Art in Bombay. He wrote prolifically, in both Marathi and English, but his poetry appeared at decades-long intervals. His first book of poems, *Jejuri*, was published in 1976 when he was 44, making it possibly the oldest debut in Indian poetry in English. His first Marathi publication was a year later. There was no further publication in English until 2004, the year of his death, with the simultaneous appearance of two books, *Sarpa Satra* and *Kala Ghoda Poems*, from where the poems in this selection have been taken. *Jejuri* has gone into several reprints and continues to be bought and read by new generations of readers. A possible reason for its popularity may be the Kolatkarean voice: unhurried, lit with whimsy, unpretentious even when making learned literary or mythological allusions. And whatever the poet's eye alights on – particularly the odd, the misshapen, and the famished – receives the gift of close attention. He died in Bombay.

from Pi-Dog

1

This is the time of day I like best,
and this the hour
when I can call this city my own;

when I like nothing better
than to lie down here, at the exact centre
of this traffic island

(or trisland as I call it for short,
and also to suggest
a triangular island with rounded corners)

that doubles as a parking lot
on working days,
a corral for more than fifty cars,

when it's deserted early in the morning,
and I'm the only sign
of intelligent life on the planet;

the concrete surface hard, flat and cool
against my belly,
my lower jaw at rest on crossed forepaws;

just about where the equestrian statue
of what's-his-name
must've stood once, or so I imagine.

2

I look a bit like
a seventeenth-century map of Bombay
with its seven islands

not joined yet,
shown in solid black
on a body the colour of old parchment;

with Old Woman's Island
on my forehead,
Mahim on my croup,

and the others distributed
casually among
brisket, withers, saddle and loin

– with a pirate's
rather than a cartographer's regard
for accuracy.

3

I like to trace my descent
– no proof of course,
just a strong family tradition –

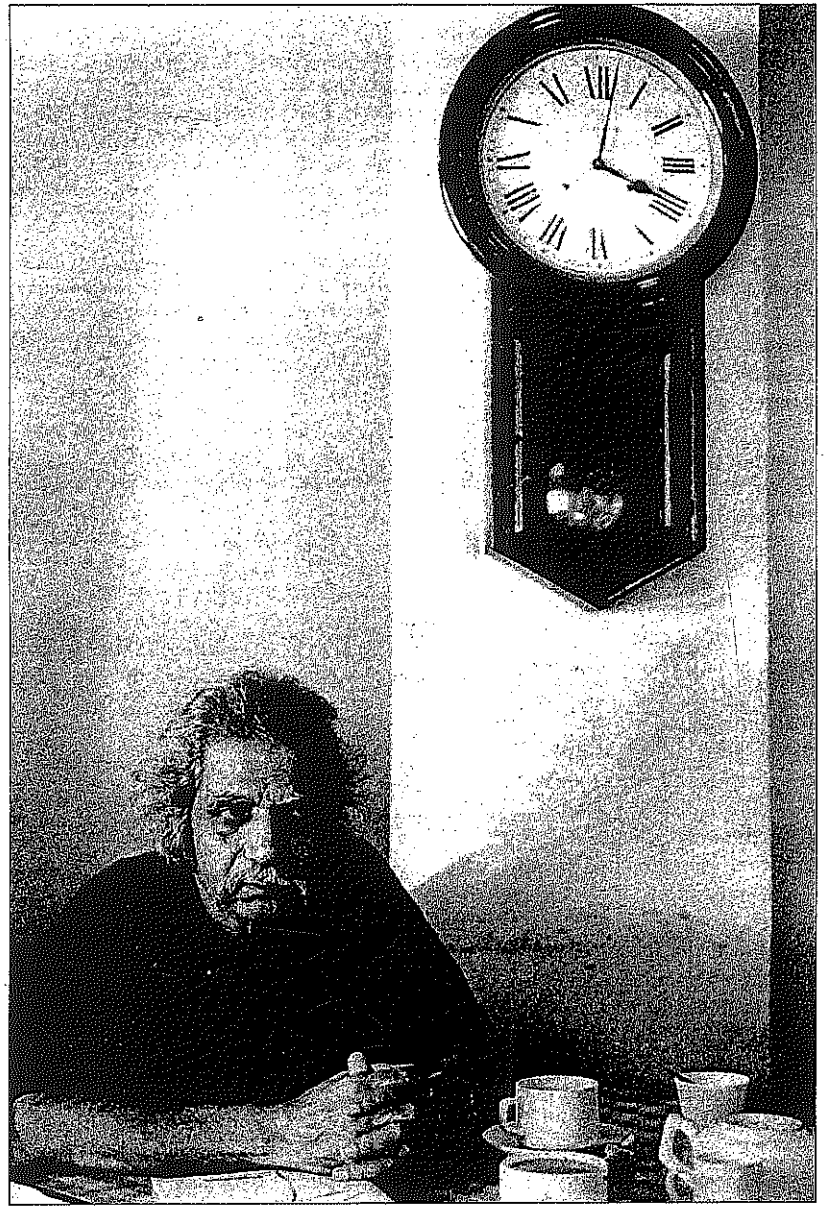
matrilineally,
to the only bitch that proved
tough enough to have survived,

first, the long voyage,
and then the wretched weather here
– a combination

that killed the rest of the pack
of thirty foxhounds,
imported all the way from England

by Sir Bartle Frere
in eighteen hundred and sixty-four,
with the crazy idea

of introducing fox-hunting to Bombay.
Just the sort of thing
he felt the city badly needed.



Arun Kolatkar, Wayside Inn, Kala Ghoda, Bombay, 1995

4

On my father's side
the line goes back to the dog that followed
Yudhishthira

on his last journey,
and stayed with him till the very end;
long after all the others

– Draupadi first, then Sahadeva,
then Nakul, followed by Arjuna and,
last of all, Bhima –

had fallen by the wayside.
Dog in tow, Yudhishthira alone plodded on.
Until he too,

frostbitten and blinded with snow,
dizzy with hunger and gasping for air,
was about to collapse

in the icy wastes of the Himalayas;
when help came
in the shape of a flying chariot

to airlift him to heaven.
Yudhishthira, that noble prince, refused
to get on board unless dogs were allowed.

And my ancestor became the only dog
to have made it to heaven
in recorded history.

5

To find a more moving instance
of man's devotion to dog,
we have to leave the realm of history,

skip a few thousand years
and pick up a work of science fantasy
– Harlan Ellison's 'A Boy and his Dog',

a cultbook among pi-dogs everywhere –
in which the 'Boy' of the title
sacrifices his love,

and serves up his girlfriend
as dogfood to save the life of his
starving canine master.

6

I answer to the name of Ugh.
No,
not the exclamation of disgust;

but the U pronounced as in Upanishad,
and gh not silent,
but as in ghost, ghoul or gherkin.

It's short for Ughekalikadu,
Siddharamayya's
famous dog that I was named after,

the guru of Kallidevayya's dog
who could recite
the four Vedas backwards.

My own knowledge of the scriptures
begins
and ends, I'm afraid,

with just one mantra, or verse;
the tenth,
from the sixty-second hymn

in the third mandala of the Rig
(and to think
that the Rig alone contains ten thousand

five hundred and fifty-two verses).
It's composed in the Gayatri metre,
and it goes:

Om tat savitur varenyam
bhargo devasya dhimahi
dhiyo yonah prachodayat.

Twenty-four syllables, exactly,
if you count the initial Om.
Please don't ask me what it means, though.

All I know
is that it's addressed to the sun-god
– hence it's called Savitri –

and it seems appropriate enough
to recite it
as I sit here waiting for the sun

to rise.
May the sun-god amplify
the powers of my mind.

7

What I like about this time and place
- as I lie here hugging the ground,
my jaw at rest on crossed forepaws,

my eyes level with the welltempered
but gaptoothed keyboard
of the black-and-white concrete blocks

that form the border of this trisland
and give me my primary horizon -
is that I am left completely undisturbed

to work in peace on my magnum opus:
a triple sonata for a circumpiano
based on three distinct themes -

one suggested by a magpie robin,
another by the wail of an ambulance,
and the third by a rockdrill:

a piebald pianist, caressing and tickling
the concrete keys with his eyes,
undeterred by digital deprivation. 7

8

As I play,
the city slowly reconstructs itself,
stone by numbered stone.

Every stone
seeks out his brothers
and is joined by his neighbours.

Every single crack
returns to its flagstone
and all is forgiven.

Trees arrive at themselves,
each one ready
to give an account of its leaves.

The mahogany drops
a casket bursting with winged seeds
by the wayside,

like an inexperienced thief
drops stolen jewels
at the sight of a cop.

St Andrew's church tiptoes back to its place,
shoes in hand,
like a husband after late-night revels.

The university,
you'll be glad to know,
can never get lost

because, although forgetful,
it always carries
its address in its pocket.

9

My nose quivers.
A many-coloured smell
of innocence and lavender,

mildly acidic perspiration
and nail polish,
rosewood and rosin

travels like a lighted fuse
up my nose
and explodes in my brain.

It's not the leggy young girl
taking a short cut
through this island as usual,

violin case in hand,
and late again for her music class
at the Max Muller Bhavan,

so much as a warning to me
that my idyll
will soon be over,

that the time has come for me
to surrender the city
to its so-called masters.

Blessing

The skin cracks like a pod.
There never is enough water.

Imagine the drip of it,
the small splash, echo
in a tin mug,
the voice of a kindly god.

Sometimes, the sudden rush
of fortune. The municipal pipe bursts,
silver crashes to the ground
and the flow has found
a roar of tongues. From the huts,
a congregation: every man woman
child for streets around
butts in, with pots,
brass, copper, aluminium,
plastic buckets,
frantic hands,

and naked children
screaming in the liquid sun,
their highlights polished to perfection,
flashing light,
as the blessing sings
over their small bones.

Imtiaz Dharker

The Right Word

Imtiaz Dharker

Outside the door,
lurking in the shadows,
is a terrorist.

Is that the wrong description?
Outside that door,
taking shelter in the shadows,
is a freedom-fighter.

I haven't got this right.
Outside, waiting in the shadows
is a hostile militant.

Are words no more
than waving, wavering flags?
Outside your door,
watchful in the shadows,
is a guerrilla warrior.

God help me.
Outside, defying every shadow,
stands a martyr.
I saw his face.

No words can help me now.
Just outside the door,
lost in shadows,
is a child who looks like mine.

One word for you.
Outside my door,
his hand too steady,
his eyes too hard
is a boy who looks like your son, too.

I open the door.
Come in, I say.
Come in and eat with us.

The child steps in
and carefully, at my door,
takes off his shoes.

At the Lahore Karhai

It's a great day, Sunday,
when we pile into the car
and set off with a purpose –
a pilgrimage across the city,
to Wembley, the Lahore Karhai.
Lunch service has begun –
'No beer, we're Muslim' –
but the morning sun
squeezed into juice,
and 'Yaad na jaye'
on the two-in-one.

On the Grand Trunk Road
thundering across Punjab to Amritsar,
this would be a dhaba
where the truck-drivers pull in,
swearing and sweating,
full of lust for real food,
just like home.

Hauling our overloaded lives
the extra mile,
we're truckers of another kind,
looking hopefully (years away
from Sialkot and Chandigarh)
for the taste of our mothers'
hand in the cooking.

So we've arrived at this table:
the Lahore runaway;
the Sindhi refugee
with his beautiful wife
who prays each day to Krishna,
keeper of her kitchen and her life;
the Englishman too young
to be flavoured by the Raj;
the girls with silky hair,
wearing the confident air
of Bombay.

This winter we have learnt
to wear our past
like summer clothes.
Yes, a great day.
A feast! We swoop
on a whole family of dishes.
The tarka dal is Auntie Hameeda
the karhai ghosht is Khala Ameena
the gajjar halva is Appa Rasheeda.

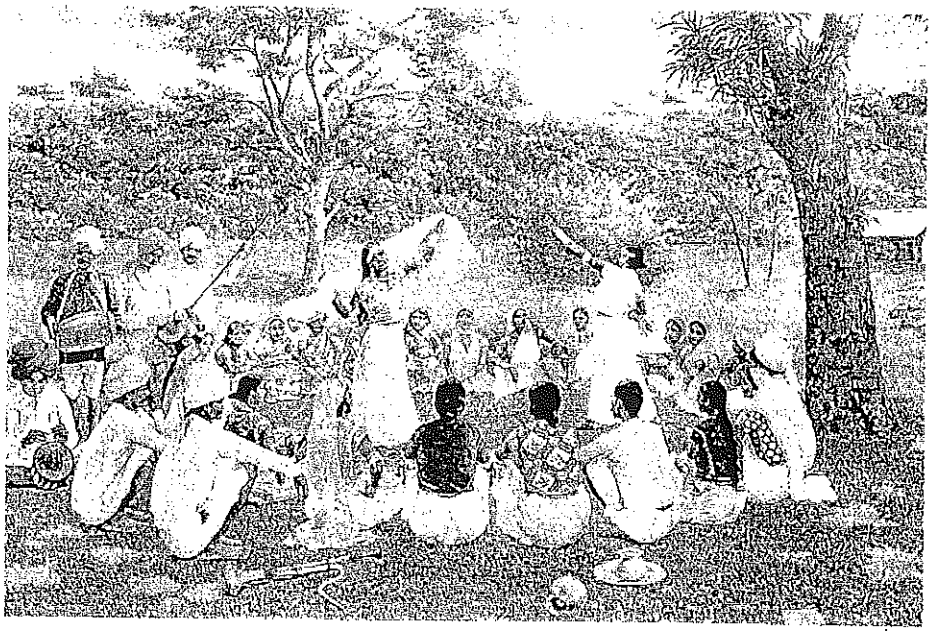
The warm naan is you.

My hand stops half-way to my mouth.
The Sunday light has locked
on all of us:
the owner's smiling son,
the cook at the hot kebabs,
Kartar, Rohini, Robert,
Ayesha, Sangam, I,
bound together by the bread we break,
sharing out our continent.

These
are ways of remembering.
Other days, we may prefer
Chinese.

Imtiaz Dharker

ESSAYS AND LANGUAGE NOTES



Notes and maps from ‘Indian English’ a seminar by Robert Fuchs (Bed seminar 2015)

from 1600’s

• The English (later British) one of several foreign powers
• Traded at the pleasure of the local rulers
• Founded trade settlements (“factories“) in Calcutta, Bombay, and Madras
• Major local power: The Mughals • Muslims, spoke Persian
• Persian used as an official language (e.g. in courts), Hindi in the North by the local population, Urdu (Persianised Hindi) by the military and Muslim Indians
• Still today many Arabic and Persian loanwords in Indian languages (e.g. ‘kitab‘ – book, ‘qalam‘ - pen)

• **East India Company** slowly grew richer and extended its influence
• Set up their own military, mostly composed of Indian soldiers (’sepoys’) with British officers; also some British regiments
• Slow disintegration of Mughal Empire • East India Company takes over Bengal and adjacent provinces
• Heyday of exploitation of Indians (English word 'loot' is from Hindi) reputation for India as a get-rich-quick place established, but soon famines in Bengal)
• Rapid (relative) increase in the number of British-born residents 1831 became part of the British Empire
• Rule through proxies: ”a class of persons, Indian in blood and colour, but English in taste, in morals, and in intellect” Macaulay 1835
• Establishment of English-medium schools
• Downward filtration theory

Independence

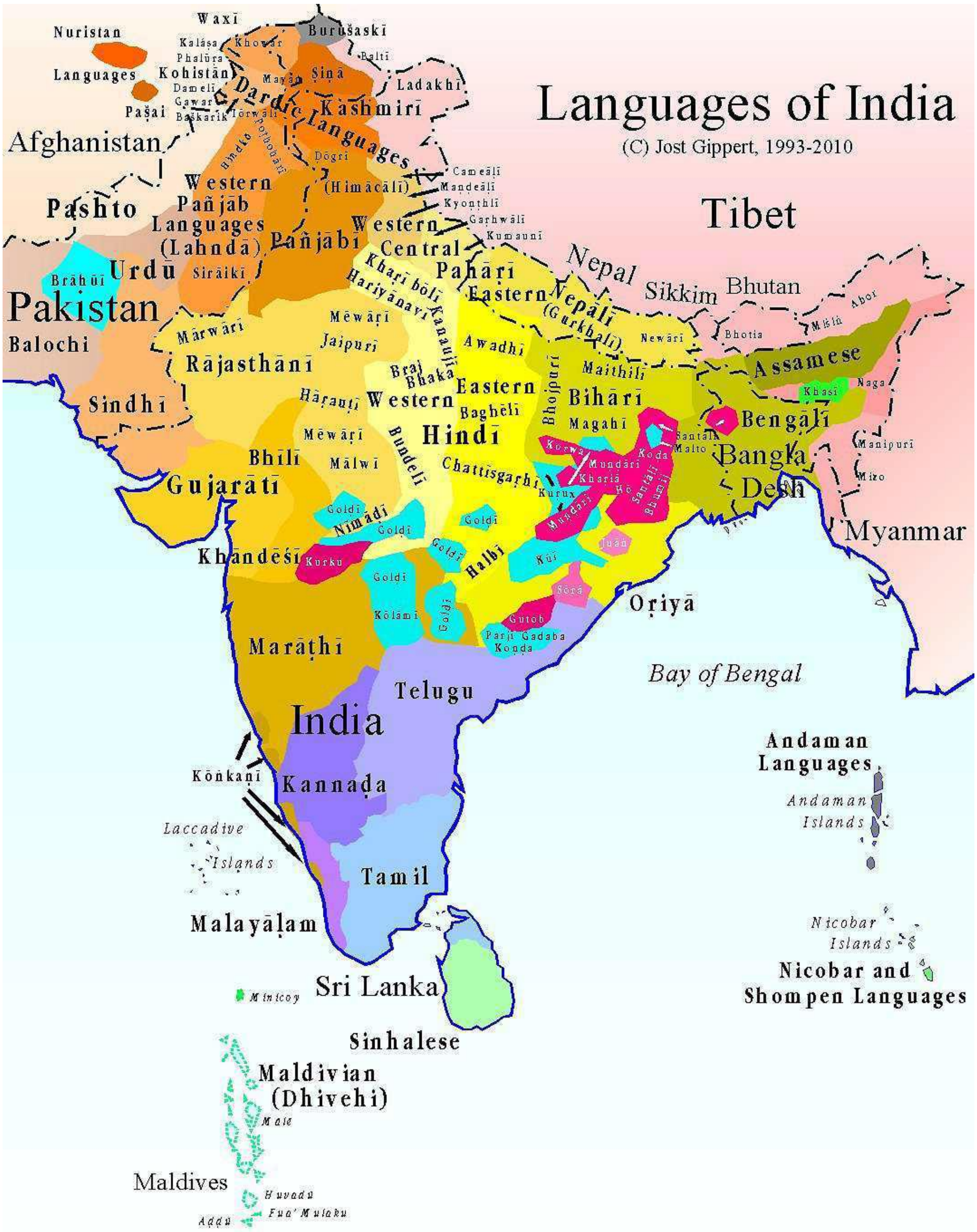
Independence 1947: Hindi as official, English as co-official language, to be phased out after 20 years

Partition – Pakistan and Bangladesh became separate counties

• Language riots culminating in 1965 in Southern India
• Counter-movement against Hindi as sole national language
• Result: Status quo maintained
• 1968 Three-language formula: Hindi, English plus another Indian language
• English was the colonisers‘ language but it is a regionally “neutral“ language
• Use of Indian languages important as markers of local identity
• Even today, only 3% of the Indian population are fluent in English, and 23% have at least basic knowledge (Desai et al. 2010)
• number of English speakers was even lower in 1947
. Educated Indians are outraged when their English is called Indian, but speaking with a British or American accent is considered pretentious
• No dictionary or comprehensive reference grammar of Indian English, but ‘Indianisms‘ (in syntax, lexis, and phonology) very much established and accepted


INDIA
The external boundaries of India on this map have not been authenticated and may not be correct.
TAJIKISTAN
AFGHANISTAN
Great Himalaya Range
Leh
CHINA
Shimla
Chandigarh
PAKISTAN
Delhi
NEPAL
BHUTAN
Jaisalmer
Agra
Darjeeling
Jaipur
Udaipur
Varanasi
BANGLADESH
Khajuraho
Gandhinagar
Kolkata (Calcutta)
Bhopal
Kanha National Park
Mumbai (Bombay)
MYANMAR (BURMA)
ARABIAN SEA
Hyderabad
BAY OF BENGAL
Goa
Vijayawada
Panaji
Bangalore
Chennai (Madras)
Andaman Islands
0 300 km
0 180 miles
Mysore
Kochi (Cochin)
Kerala
Nicobar Islands
SRI LANKA
INDIAN OCEAN


Jammu
&
Kashmir
Himachal Pradesh
Punjab
Chandigarh
Haryana
Uttaranchal
Delhi
Uttar Pradesh
Rajasthan
Sikkim
Arunachal
Pradesh
Assam
Nagaland
Meghalaya
Bihar
Manipur
Jharkhand
Tripura
Mizoram
West
Bengal
Gujarat
Madhya Pradesh
Chattisgarh
Daman & Diu
Maharashtra
Oriasa
Dadra &
Nagar Haveli
Andhra Pradesh
Goa
Karnataka
Pondicherry
Tamil Nadu
Kerala
Lakshadweep
Andaman
&
Nicobar Islands


Languages of India
(C) Jost Gippert, 1993-2010
Tibet
Nepal
Sikkim
Bhutan
Afghanistan
Pakistan
Myanmar
Bangla Desh
India
Sri Lanka
Maldives
Bay of Bengal
Nuristan Languages
Waxī
Burušaskī
Balti
Ladakhī
Kohistān
Pašai
Dardic Languages
Kashmiri
Sina
Dōgri
Pashto
Western Pañjāb Languages (Lahnda)
Pañjābī
Sirāikī
Brāhūī
Urdu
Balochi
Western Pahārī
(Himācālī)
Central Pahārī
Eastern Pahārī
Nepālī (Gurkhālī)
Newārī
Bhotia
Abor
Assamese
Khasi
Naga
Manipuri
Mizo
Bengālī
Khaṛī bōlī
Hariyānavī
Kanaujī
Mēwārī
Jaipurī
Mārwārī
Rājasthānī
Sindhī
Braj Bhakā
Western Hindi
Eastern Hindi
Awadhī
Baghēlī
Bhojpurī
Maithilī
Bihārī
Magahī
Hārautī
Mēwārī
Mālwī
Bhīlī
Bundēlī
Chattisgaṛhī
Gujarātī
Nimādī
Goldi
Khāndēšī
Kurku
Kōlāmī
Halbī
Kūī
Sōrā
Gutob
Parji Gadaba
Konda
Kurux
Mundārī
Kharia
Hō
Santālī
Bhumij
Koda
Malto
Juān
Oṛiyā
Marāṭhī
Telugu
Kōṅkaṇī
Kannaḍa
Tamil
Malayāḷam
Laccadive Islands
Minicoy
Sinhalese
Maldivian (Dhivehi)
Male
Huvadū
Fua' Mulaku
Addu
Andaman Languages
Andaman Islands
Nicobar Islands
Nicobar and Shompen Languages

DAVID CRYSTAL 'THE CAMBRIDGE ENCYCLOPEDIA OF THE ENGLISH LANGUAGE

INFLUENTIAL VIEW

Thomas Macaulay (1800–59) began a four-year period of service on the Supreme Council of India in 1834. His famous Minute presented the case for a new English subculture in the region:

I think it is clear...that we ought to employ them [our funds] in teaching what is best worth knowing; that English is better worth knowing than Sanscrit or Arabic; that the natives are desirous to be taught English, and are not desirous to be taught Sanscrit or Arabic;...that it is possible to make natives of this country thoroughly good English scholars; and that to this end our efforts ought to be directed.

The climate of opinion which led to this Minute had been much influenced by the views of the religious and social reformer Ram Mohan Roy (1772–1833). In the 1820s he had proposed the introduction of a Western educational curriculum, arguing that instruction in English was essential if Indians were to have access to European scientific knowledge.

Though this view became official policy, Macaulay's Minute was highly controversial at the time, and laid the foundation of the linguistic disputes which were to become increasingly bitter after independence.

THE STATUS OF ENGLISH

In India, English is now recognized as an 'associate' official language, with Hindi the official language. It is also recognized as the official language of four states (Manipur, Meghalaya, Nagaland, Tripura) and eight Union territories. In Pakistan, it is an associated official language. It has no official status in the other countries of South Asia, but throughout the region it is universally used as the medium of international communication.

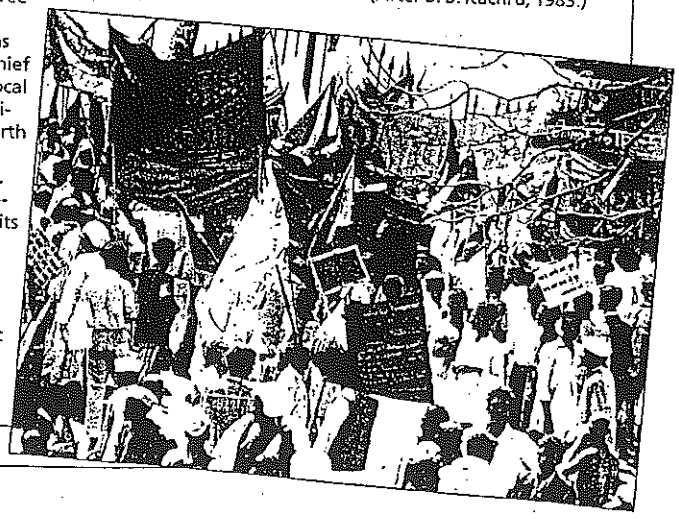
In India, the bitter conflict between the supporters of English, Hindi, and regional languages led in the 1960s to the 'three language formula', in which English was introduced as the chief alternative to the local state language (typically Hindi in the north and a regional language in the south). English has, as a consequence, retained its standing within Indian society, continuing to be used within the legal system, government administration, secondary and higher education, the armed forces, the media, business, and tourism. In the Dravidian-speaking areas of the south, it is widely preferred to Hindi as a lingua franca.

Since the 1960s, much attention has focused on what has been called the ongoing 'Indianization' of English. The novelist R. K. Narayan (1906–) is one who has addressed the issue:

The English language, through sheer resilience and mobility, is now undergoing a process of Indianization in the same manner as it adopted US citizenship over a century ago, with the difference that it is the major language there but here one of the fifteen listed in the Indian Constitution.

And the critic K. R. S. Iyengar (1908–) has remarked:

Indian writing in English is but one of the voices in which India speaks. It is a new voice, no doubt, but it is as much Indian as others. The point is controversial, and is reflected in controversies in other parts of the world, where the growth of the English language is perceived as a threat as well as a blessing (p. 114). There is no doubt, however, about the emerging structural identity of Indian English, or about the growth of a recognized body of Indian English literature (p. 360). (After B. B. Kachru, 1983.)



TOM MC ARTHUR 'THE OXFORD COMAANION TO THE ENGLISH LANGUAGE'

INDIAN ENGLISH[1], short forms *IndE*, *IE*. Formerly also **Indo-English**. The English language as used in India. The term is widely used but is a subject of controversy; some scholars argue that it labels an established variety with an incipient or actual standard, others that the kinds of English used in India are too varied, both socially and geographically, and often too deviant or too limited, to be lumped together as one variety.

Variation. There are three major variables for IndE: proficiency in terms of acquisition; regional or mother tongue; and ethnic background. In IndE there is a cline from educated IndE (the acrolect) to pidginized varieties (basilects) known by such names as *Boxwalla(h) English*, *Butler English*, *Bearer English* or *kitchen English*, and *Babu English*. The regional and mother-tongue varieties are often defined with reference to the first language of the speaker (*Bengali English*, *Gujarati English*, *Tamil English*, etc.) or in terms of a larger language family (*Indo-Aryan English*, *Dravidian English*). In this sense, there are as many Indian Englishes as there are languages in India. There are, however, shared characteristics which identify IndE speakers across language-specific varieties.

Pronunciation. (1) IndE is rhotic, /r/ being pronounced in all positions. (2) It tends to be syllable-timed, weak vowels being pronounced as full vowels in such words as *photography* and *student*. Word stress is used primarily for emphasis and suffixes are stressed, as in *readiness*. Distinctive stress patterns occur in different areas: *available* is often stressed in the north on the antepenultimate, in the south on the first syllable. (3) The alveolar consonants /t, d/ are retroflex. (4) The fricatives /θ, ð/ are aspirated /tʰ, dʰ/, so that *three of those* sounds like 'tʰree of dʰoʂe'; /f/ is often pronounced as aspirated /pʰ/, as in 'pʰood' for *food*. (5) In such words as *old*, *low* the vowel is generally /o/. (6) Among northern (Indo-Aryan) speakers, consonant clusters such as /sk, sl, sp/ do not occur in initial position, but have an epenthetic vowel, as in 'iskool' for *school* in the Punjab and 'səkool' in Kashmir. (7) The distinction between /v/ and /w/ is generally neutralized to /w/: 'wine' for both *wine* and *vine*. (8) Among southern (Dravidian) speakers, non-low initial vowels are preceded by the glides /j/ (as in 'yell, yem, yen' for the names of the letters *l*, *m*, *n*) and /w/ (as in 'wold' for *old* and 'wopen' for *open*). (9) South Indians tend to geminate voiceless intervocalic obstruents, as in 'Americ-ca'. Because gemination is common in Dravidian languages, double consonants in written English are often geminated: 'sum-mer' for *summer* and 'sil-lee' for *silly*. (10) Distinct kinds of pronunciation serve as shibboleths of different kinds of IndE: Bengalis using /b/ for /v/, making *bowel* and *vowel* homophones; Gujaratis using /dʒ/ for /z/, so that *zed* and *zero* become 'jed' and 'jero'; speakers of Malayalam making *temple* and *tumble* near-homophones.

A large number of IndE speakers, sometimes referred to as speakers of *General Indian English* (*GIE*), have a 17-vowel system (11 monophthongs and 6 diphthongs): /iː/ as in *bead*, /i/ as in *this*, /eː/ as in *game*, /ɛ/ as in *send*, /æ/ as in *mat*, /ɑː/ as in *charge*, /ɒ/ as in *shot*, /oː/ as in *no*, /u/ as in *book*, /uː/ as in *tool*, and /ə/ as in *bus*; /ai/ as in *five*, /ɔi/ as in *boy*, /aʊ/ as in *cow*, /ɪə/ as in *here*, /eə/ as in *there*, and /ʊə/ as in *poor*. See Bansal (1990, below).

Grammar. There is great variety in syntax, from native-speaker fluency (the acrolect) to a weak command of many constructions (the basilect). The following represents a widespread middle level (the mesolect): (1) Interrogative constructions without subject/auxiliary inversion: *What you would like to buy?* (2) Definite article often used as if the conventions have been reversed: *It is the nature's way*; *Office is closed today*. (3) *One* used rather than the indefinite article: *He gave me one book*. (4) Stative verbs given progressive forms: *Lila is having two books*; *You must be knowing my cousin-brother Mohan*. (5) Reduplication used for emphasis and to indicate a distributive meaning: *I bought some small small things*; *Why you don't give them one one piece of cake?* (6) *Yes* and *no* as question tags: *He is coming, yes?*; *She was helping you, no?* (7) *Isn't it?* as a generalized question tag: *They are coming tomorrow, isn't it?* (8) Reflexive pronouns and *only* used for emphasis: *It was God's order itself* It was God's own order, *They live like that only* That is how they live. (9) Present perfect rather than simple past: *I have bought the book yesterday*.

Vocabulary: loans. Loanwords and loan translations from other languages have been common since the 17c, often moving into the language outside India: (1) Words from Portuguese (*almirah*, *ayah*, *caste*, *peon*) and from local languages through Portuguese (*bamboo*, *betel*, *coir*, *copra*, *curry*, *mango*). (2) Words from indigenous languages, such as Hindi and Bengali. Some are earlier and more Anglicized in their spelling: *anna*, *bungalow*, *cheetah*, *chintz*, *chit/chitty*, *dacoit*, *dak bungalow*, *jodhpurs*, *juggernaut*, *mulligatawny*, *pice*, *pukka*, *pundit*, *rupee*, *sahib*, *tussore*. Some are later and less orthographically Anglicized: *achcha* all right (used in agreement and often repeated: *Achcha achcha, I will go*), *basmati* a kind of rice, *chapatti* a flat, pancake-like piece of unleavened bread, *crore* a unit of 10m or 100 lakhs (*crores of rupees*), *goonda* a ruffian, petty criminal, *jawan* a soldier in the present-day Indian Army, *lakh* a unit of 100,000 (*lakhs of rupees*), *lathi* a lead-weighted stick carried by policemen, *masala* spices, *paisa* a coin, 100th of a rupee, *panchayat* a village council, *samo(o)sa* an envelope of fried dough filled with vegetables or meat, *Sri/Shri/Shree* Mr, *Srimati/Shrimati/Shreemati* Mrs. (3) Words from Arabic and Persian through north Indian languages, used especially during the British Raj: *dewan* chief minister of a princely state, *durbar* court of a prince or governor, *mogul* a Muslim prince (and in the general language an important person, as in *movie mogul*), *sepoy* a soldier in the British Indian Army, *shroff* a banker, money-changer, *vakeel/vakil* a lawyer, *zamindar* a landlord. (4) Words taken directly from Sanskrit, usually with religious and philosophical associations, some well known, some restricted to such contexts as yoga: *ahimsa* nonviolence, *ananda* spiritual bliss, *chakra* a mystical centre of energy in the body, *guru* a (spiritual) teacher (and in the general language a quasi-revered guide, as in *management guru*), *nirvana* release from the wheel of rebirth, *rajas* a state of passion, *samadhi* spiritual integration and enlightenment, *sattwa/sattva* a state of purity, *tamas* a state of heaviness and ignorance, *yoga* a system of self-development, *yogi* one who engages in yoga. (5) Calques from local languages: *dining-leaf* a banana leaf used to serve food, *cousin brother* a male cousin, *cousin sister* a female cousin, *co-brother-in-law* one who is also a brother-in-law.

Vocabulary: hybrids, adaptations, and idioms. The great variety of mixed and adapted usages exists both as part of English and as a consequence of widespread code-mixing between English and especially Hindi: (1) Hybrid usages, one component from English, one from a local language, often Hindi: *brahminhood* the condition of being a brahmin, *coconut paysam* a dish made of coconut, *goonda ordinance* an ordinance against goondas, *grameen bank* a village bank,

MC ARTHUR p 2

kaccha road a dirt road, *lathi charge* (noun) a charge using lathis, *lathicharge* (verb) to charge with lathis, *pan/paan shop* a shop that sells betel nut and lime for chewing, wrapped in a pepper leaf, *policewala* a policeman, *swadeshi cloth* home-made cloth, *tiffin box* a lunch-box. (2) Local senses and developments of general English words: *batch-mate* a classmate or fellow student, *body-bath* an ordinary bath, *by-two coffee* (in the south) a restaurant order by two customers asking for half a cup of coffee each, *communal* used with reference to Hindus and Muslims (as in *communal riots*), *condole* to offer condolences to someone, *England-returned* used of one who has been to England, for educational purposes, a been-to, *Eve-teasing* teasing or harassing young women, *Foreign-returned* used of someone who has been abroad for educational purposes, *four-twenty* a cheat or swindler (from the number of a section of the Indian Penal Code), *head-bath* washing one's hair, *interdine* to eat with a member of another religion or caste, *intermarriage* a marriage involving persons from different religions or castes, *issueless* childless, *military hotel* (in the south) a restaurant where non-vegetarian food is served, *out of station* not in (one's) town or place of work, *outstation* (*cheque*) a cheque issued by a non-local bank, *prepone* the opposite of postpone, *ration shop* a shop where rationed items are available, *undertrial* a person being tried in a court of law. (3) Words more or less archaic in BrE and AmE, but used in IndE, such as *dicky* (the boot/trunk of a car), *needful* ('Please do the needful, Sri Patel'), *stepney* a spare wheel or tyre, and *thrice* ('I was seeing him thrice last week'). (4) The many idiomatic expressions include: *to sit on someone's neck* to watch that person carefully, and *to stand on someone's head* to supervise that person carefully; *Do one thing, Sri Gupta* There is one thing you could do, Mr Gupta; *He was doing this thing that thing, wasting my time* He was doing all sorts of things, wasting my time.

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PAKISTANI ENGLISH, short forms *PakE*, *PE*. The English language as used in Pakistan, a variety of South Asian English close to that of northern India. English has had co-official status with Urdu since independence in 1947, but the constitution of 1959 and the amendments of 1968, 1972, and 1985 recognize Urdu as preeminent and restrict the use of English, the aim being its eventual replacement. Both are minority languages. In 1981, the president appointed a study whose report recommended that 'Urdu should continue to be the only medium of instruction at the school level, with no exception' (1982), but that English and Arabic be introduced as additional languages from class six (sixth grade: age 11); a federal agency should ensure that the policy is implemented. English is an important medium in a number of leading educational institutions. It is the main language of technology, international business, and communication among a national élite, and a major element in the media. The constitution and the laws of the land are codified in English, and the *Pakistan Academy of Letters* recognizes works in English for its literature award. It also has a considerable influence on the vernacular languages; S. Hands notes that in personal interaction, 'the use of an English word is believed to add a note of refinement and elegance to conversation in the "lower" languages' (*Pakistan: A Country Study*, 4th edition, The American University, Washington, DC, 1983).

Pronunciation and grammar. (1) PakE is rhotic, tends to be syllable-timed, and shares many features with northern Indian English. (2) Some pronunciation features are typical of speakers of regional languages: for example, speakers of Panjabi have difficulty with such initial consonant clusters as /sk, sp/ (saying 'sɔport' and 'sakool' for *sport* and *school*); Urdu speakers also have difficulty with initial consonant clusters (saying 'isport' and 'iskool' for *sport* and *school*); Pashto-speakers have no such difficulty, but use /p/ for /f/ ('pood' for *food*). (3) Distinctive grammatical features relate to uses of the verb, article, relative clause, preposition, and adjective and verb complementation, all shared with IndE. Features of the indigenous languages influence use of English and code-mixing and code-switching are common, including among the highly educated.

Vocabulary. (1) Borrowings from Urdu and the regional languages: *atta* flour, *tehsil* district, *ziarat* religious place. (2) Loan translations from these languages: *cousin-brother*. (3) Terms shared with Indian English: *crore* ten million, *lakh* one hundred thousand, *-wallah* a word element denoting 'one who does something as an occupation', as with *policewallah*. (4) Hybrids of English and local languages: *biradarism* favouring one's clan or family, *gheraoed* surrounded by protesters in an office or similar place and unable to leave, *goondaism* hooliganism, thuggish behaviour. (5) English words, especially compounds, adapted for local use: *age-barred* over the age for (particular work), *load-shedding* intermittently shutting off a supply of electricity, *time-barred* referring to loss of validity after a specific period.

Media and literature. Pakistan has a strong English-language press. Most major cities have daily and weekly newspapers; in all, there are 20 dailies, 35 weeklies, 33 fortnightlies, 152 monthlies, and 111 quarterlies. They include *The Muslim*, *Daily News*, *Dawn*, *Morning News*, *Star*, *Pakistan Times* and *Khyber Mail*. Pakistani literature in English is developing in various genres and several writers have acquired national and international recognition, such as Ahmad Ali, Bapsi Sidhwa, Zulfikar Ghose, A. Hashmi, and Hanif Kureishi. The educated variety used by Pakistan radio and television serves as the model for teaching and learning English throughout the country. The British connection has with the passage of time become fragile, as in other parts of South Asia; RP and other exonormative standards are used only for academic reference.

Interview with Prof. A.K. Ramanujan

*—T.N. Shankaranarayana**
*—S.A. Krishnaiah***

1. INS: Professor, You are an established linguist, scholar in literature and creative writer. How is it you developed interest in folkloristies?

AKR: First of all, you know, I did not begin as a linguist. My first degree was in English. My interests were in South Indian Languages, Kannada and Tamil. I don't have degrees in them. I have studied Kannada all along. While I was doing English, I was doing Kannada and Tamil. I very quickly began to see that you have to cultivate even your mother tongue as deeply as you would cultivate, with as much trouble, with as much labour as you would cultivate a foreign language. Without it one does not really reach any full expression nor any insight into either one's own culture or any other culture, in my opinion, because the mother tongue reaches deep into one's childhood on the one hand and it is also reaches into all strata of society. Whereas, if you stayed with English you stop with one percent. It is like Sanskrit, In fact this worse than Sanskrit, because at least Sanskrit gives you insight into your own past, pertaining to religion and various technical treatises and Indian science and all the rest. Whereas English, on the one hand is international and we need it on the other? It will make us superficial with regard to our own culture. I felt the need to cultivate both Kannada and Tamil. I was thinking and in doing that, somewhere along the line, I became aware that for an Indian there is not only the culture of the book, the culture of what I call the father tongues like Sanskrit and English at this point but also the culture of the mother's tongue. The culture of mother tongues contain not only what you call the literature but also folk materials. In fact, in a recent paper I wrote that the house in which we lived in Mysore had several storeys. We spoke Tamil at downstairs with my mother, grandmother, cooks and so on. And on the upstairs, my father, who was a mathematician, and we spoke English and he had Sanskrit. And then there was a higher one which was open to the sky, from where you could see the palace, which was all lit up or you could also see the *Gollageri* down there. If there was any big quarrel there, anything like that, we even go down all the way and watch it. So the house seemed like a symbol of multiple culture. It is not special to me, it is true of all of us, of all educated people. And some where along the line, it became important to me to take the whole range of our culture somehow to learn as much as possible. I use to hear a lot of folktales, particularly in Tamil, from my cooks and my mother, aunt and my grandmother. So, I began that from my childhood. Somewhere around my 20th year I read the works of Verder Elyin and I very much wanted to give up literature and become an anthropologist. I wrote him letters, he didn't even reply to me because I said I will come and work with you. As I was very much taken by him, because I had read his *Folktales of Mahakoushal* and *Folksongs of Chattisgarh* and things like that. And that was almost the beginning of that. Then I began to collect and went to Belgaum, there by that time, I had collected lot of Proverbs. I was interested in the proverbs of the world. I had translated about four or five thousand proverbs from different languages, of course, through English.

Extracts from an article in 'The Guardian' 2005 by David Crystal

Three generations after independence, Indian English is still having trouble distancing itself from the weight of its British English past. Many people still think of Indian English as inferior and see British English as the only "proper" English. It is an impression still fostered by the language examining boards that dominate teachers' mindsets. At the same time a fresh confidence is plainly emerging among young people, and it is only a matter of time before attitudes change.....

What status will this rapidly growing English dialect have in the eyes of the rest of the world? Linguistic status is always a reflection of power – political, technological, economic, cultural, religious – so this is really a question relating to the future of India as a world player. India is likely to become an eventual cyber-technological superpower. The call-centre phenomenon has stimulated a huge expansion of internet-related activity.....

India has a unique position in the English-speaking world. It is a linguistic bridge between the major first-language dialects, such as British and American English and the major foreign-language varieties, such as those emerging in China and Japan. China is the closest competitor for the English-speaking record with some 220 million speakers of English*, but China does not have the pervasive English linguistic environment encountered in India ; nor does it have the strength of linguistic tradition that provides multiple continuities with the rest of the English-speaking world.

When Indian operators answer your call about train times between Birmingham and Glasgow, they are far more likely to be aware of where you are travelling than would any equivalent operators in China.

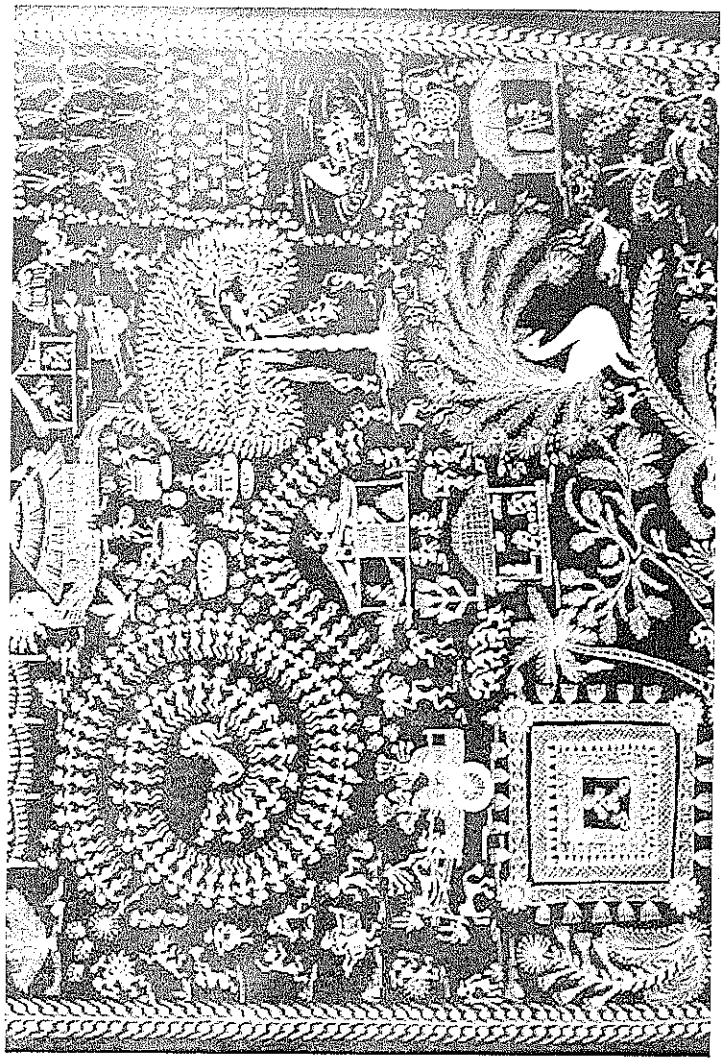
And it is the Indian presence in Britain that marks the other end of this linguistic continuity. British people are familiar with (British dialects of) Indian English as a result of several generations of immigration.

When the TV comedy programme *The Kumars at Number 42* became successful in Britain, I heard local English kids using its catchphrases and copying its speech rhythms.....There are parallels in the literary world. Suhayl Saadi's new novel, *Pschoraag,* is an amazing mixture of South Asian English (Urdu, in this case), Standard English, and Glaswegian. We ain't seen nothing yet.

And India is special in one other respect. Alongside the spread of English there is a powerful concern for the maintenance of indigenous languages. I repeatedly heard ** young students express the need for a balance between an outward-looking language of empowerment and an inward-looking language of identity.

"Choose your language for you power bill", says one of the Mumbai billboards, offering Marathi, Hindi,Gujarathi and English. Many of the smaller tribal languages are seriously endangered, but there is an enviable awareness of the problem that is lacking in many Western countries. India, it seems, can teach the rest of the world some lessons not only about multidialectism but about multilingualism too.

*India has an estimated 350 million English speakers
** David Crystal had just returned from a two-week lecture tour of India



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ARVIND KRISHNA MEHROTRA

What Is an Indian Poem?

Here are two poems. The language of the first, which I have transcribed in the Roman alphabet, is not English. However, it uses English words – 'manager', 'company', 'rule', 'table', 'police', 'complaint' – that readers will recognise. If one keeps only the English words and erases the rest, the poem will resemble a Sapphic fragment:

main manager ko bola mujhe pagaar mangta hai
manager bola company ke rule se pagaar ek tarikh ko milega
uski ghadi table pay padi thi
maine ghadi uthake liya
aur manager ko police chowki ka rasta dikhaya
bola agar complaint karna hai to karlo
mere rule se pagaar ajhee hoga

The second poem is a translation of the first:

i want my pay i said
to the manager
you'll get paid said
the manager
but not before the first
don't you know the rules?
coolly I picked up his
wrist watch
that lay on his table
wanna bring in the cops
i said
'cordin to my rules
listen baby
i get paid when i say so

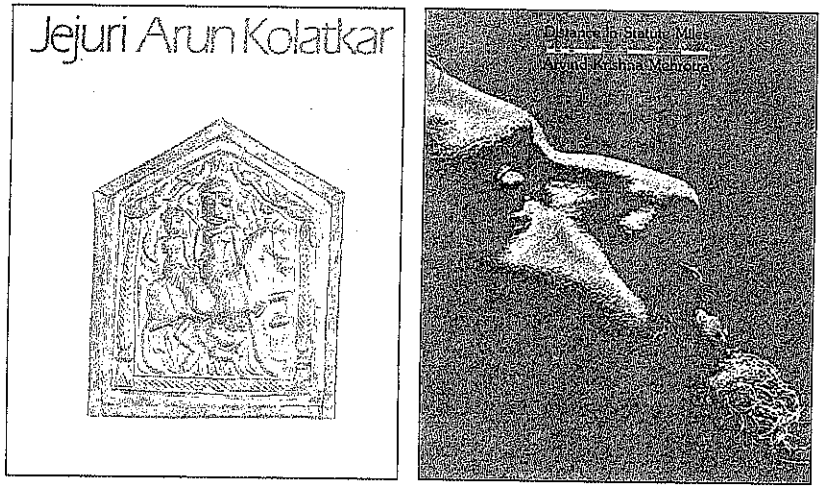
The language (it is more of a patois) of the first poem is Bombay-Hindi; that of the translation is American English. Both poems are by Arun Kolatkar. He was a bilingual poet who wrote in Marathi and English. 'Main manager ko bola', which was written in 1960, is part of a sequence of three poems, all written in the same patois. The sequence, which does not have a title, first appeared in a Marathi little magazine and subsequently, in 1977, in Kolatkar's first collection of Marathi poems. In English, Kolatkar titled the sequence 'Three Cups of Tea'.

Occasionally, Kolatkar translated his Marathi poems into English, but he mostly kept the two separate. Sometimes he wondered what the connection between them was, or if there was any connection at all. Kolatkar created two very different bodies of work of equal distinction and importance in two languages. The achievement, I

think, has few parallels in world literature. What has a parallel, at least in India, is that he drew, in his work, on a multiplicity of literary traditions. He drew on the Marathi of course, and Sanskrit, which he knew; he drew on the English and American traditions, especially Black American music and speech ('cordin to my rules / listen baby / I get paid when i say so'); and he drew on the European tradition. He drew on a few others besides. As he said in an interview once, talking about poets, 'Anything might swim into their ken.'

Fortunately, in Kolatkar's case, we know something about that 'anything'. Kolatkar died in September 2004. Recently, while going through his papers in Bombay, I came across a typed sheet in which Kolatkar had put down a chronology of his life. In it, against each year, he gave the name of the advertising agency he worked for at the time (Ajanta, National, Press Syndicate); the area of Bombay he lived in (Malad, Sion, A Road); illnesses, if any; and the poems he wrote, both English and Marathi. That is how we know when he wrote 'main manager ko bola'. He also gave the names of the authors he read that year. Against 1965, he mentions the following: 'Snyder, Williams, Villon, Lautréamont, Catullus, Belli, Apollinaire, Morgenstern, Berryman, Wang Wei, Tu Fu, Li Po, *Cold Mountain*'. *Cold Mountain* is the title of a book of translations of the Chinese poet known as Han Shan (Cold Mountain), whom, incidentally, Gary Snyder had also translated.

'Art', Ezra Pound said, 'does not exist in a vacuum.' And Claude Lévi-Strauss, 'Whether one knows it or not, one never walks alone



POETRY COLLECTIONS WITH COVER DESIGNS BY ARUN KOLATKAR

Arun Kolatkar's *Jejuri* (Clearing House, 1976) and Arvind Krishna Mehrotra's *Distance in Statute Miles* (Clearing House, 1982)

along the path of 'creativity'. Kolatkar's list of authors, which appears to be random, is in fact a capsule biography, a life of the life of the mind. Show me your books and I'll tell you who you are. It's a mind that could move with ease from 1st-century BC Italy to 8th-century China to 15th-century France to 20th-century America, while at the same time picking up the language spoken in the backstreets of Bombay, a slice of which he offers, without comment, in 'main manager ko bola'. But that said, the names of poets that appear in the list are not in themselves surprising. We were all reading the same or similar things in Bombay in 1965. There is, however, one exception to this, and that is Belli. Though his name belongs among the greatest in 19th-century European literature, he is known to very few, even in Italy. In the mid-60s, there was only one English translation of this poet around, and it's the one Kolatkar must have read. The translation is by Harold Norse and is called *The Roman Sonnets of G.G. Belli*. It has a preface by William Carlos Williams (a name that also figures in Kolatkar's list) and an introduction by Alberto Moravia. It was published by Jonathan Williams in 1960. What is striking about Harold Norse's translation is the idiom in which he translates Romanesco, the Roman dialect (perhaps not unlike Bombay-Hindi) in which Belli wrote his sonnets. Here is the opening sentence of Williams's preface:

> Gogol wanted to do the job, and D.H. Lawrence, each into his own language but they were written not into the classic language Italian that scholars were familiar with, but the Roman dialect that gave them an intimate tang which was their major charm and which the illustrious names spoken of above could not equal.

Coming to Norse's translation, Williams says:

> These translations are not made into English but into the American idiom in which they appear in the same relationship facing English as the original Roman dialect does to classic Italian.

'Three Cups of Tea' first appeared in Saleem Peeradina's anthology *Contemporary Indian Poetry in English* in 1972. The anthology was the first to represent the new Indian poetry in English, and 'Three Cups of Tea' has been a part of the canon since. I don't have a date for when Kolatkar made the translation, but I suspect it was made after 1965, after his discovery of Norse's Belli and the demotic American that Norse employs to translate Romanesco: 'If ya wanna be funny, it's enough to be / A gentleman.'

So there it is, your Indian poem. It was written in a Bombay patois by a poet who otherwise wrote in Marathi and English. It then became part of two literatures, Marathi and Indian English, but entered the latter in a translation made in the American idiom, one of whose sources, or, if you will, inspirations, was an American translation of a 19th-century Roman poet.

2 AFRICA

POEMS

Excavation Sites

In Acholi there is a place and people called Lamogi;
They came from up north, from another group and place
called Romogi:
It was from this self-same place that the Kenya Luo called
Romogi came.

The Lamogi group came and settled under Got Kilak.
The area was not without people, though.
They found some aboriginals dwelling in the caves.
These, they called Jo-Boro.[1]

One day Lamogi had an *awak*[2] call and many peasants came to
the communal dig.
They failed to eat all the sheep that were slaughtered,
Nor the *kwon*[3] that was provided; nor the many potted *kongo*.[4]
The work was also not complete when they retired home for
the night and left their hoes by the field.

At night a scout from the cave-men came to reconnoitre and
divine the day's noises.
His nostrils partook of the beer and he sipped a bowlful.
Mutton, cooked and salted, tasted so heavenly his captain
despaired the gallant was dead.
And of course he was dead – with new experiences.
Curiosity filled up, he remembered duty.
The report was never fully given before the cave mouth was
torn wide open.
Those cavers who met with *kwon* first, solidded their stomachs;
Those who took bones first, sniffed away in merriment Mount
Olympus-like;
Those who grabbed flesh, had the best of food;
Others drank of the soup, and were filled with fat;
Some pushed their heads right into the beer and were drunk
almost to death.

These godly feasts over, duty called.
Obviously savages and pygmies are all the same:
To them, the rule of fair exchange is the bond of faith:
If it is a pygmy who wrenched your plantain
You'll surely get a lump of meat instead.
After these cave-dwellers had had the food
They set to work, and cleared quite an acre,
After which they dragged drunks and drowns,
And repaired the mouth of cave.

'We can see for certain that the goblins still roam the earth!'
they thought out aloud.
'But goblins may do the digging. Can they also eat some
sheep and drink off beer?'
They deliberated long, had maxims many, and saged all the
while.
The elders spoke quite a bit and the chief let the augurers talk.
The fruit of the day-long work was even this, that another dig
be repeat;
And able-bodied men watch at night to catch the ghosts or foes
if they failed to run or harm.

Human flesh fears pests, Lamogi watchers found this out.
The night advanced and the mosquitoes bled the veins of men.
Men who could brave the spears and arrows in the heat of the fray,
Men who fear not the smart of the canes or slaps of hands . . .
Men when they are enforced to quiet, become restless.
Men when they are entreated not to stir, find even their tranquil blood stirring, their soft skins pricking.
Now, when men have to be on guard for an enemy
And are not to show they are living
Better they were made Buddhists
Than bear such an ordeal.
No event took place whatsoever by midnight.
It was only towards three or four
That the earth shook to the onrush of the cavers.
Men observed their dress of wild leaves of banana *musa ensete.*
Men observed their eating as the decoy disappeared with such a speed.
And men observed all these sons, daughters, fathers, and mothers
Taking up hoes and deciding to be human.
And men could no longer stand the bites of the mosquitoes:
They took the cue from the beasts and rushed out to show some action.

The beasts fled to hell;
Human speed was not fast enough.
Only an elder with decades unknown had lost himself:
The others all went back to cave.
And man showed the prudence he had by sealing up the cave
In order to entomb the beasts for good, as if they had no sense at all.

Of course the cavers died – they died cursing.
And their ghosts committed revenge on Lamogi day in day out
To the extent that a while ago the Lamogi themselves
Had to open quickly the caves, led by the elder old
And run to beat the British who smoked them out or starved them[5]
Amidst the beasts they had killed.

My reader dear
If you do not fear ghosts
Go and make yourself a name
By excavating these grottoes
And finding out the civilizations
That are buried down underneath.[6]

1. cave men
2. communal work, in this case, digging
3. bread
4. beer
5. Lamogi war against British
6. all African migrants have stories of encounters with little people walled in caves or who disappeared in caves.

Taban lo Liyong

Ask not
reader
if this be
poetry
or
not
because it isnt.

Poetry is science
with all rules for scanning
Mathematics
with all metrical calculations.

Thoughts arranged
in inhuman ways
are
called
poetry.

nobody speaks poetry

If one thinks
'tis enough
he utters his thoughts
or
else
muddle-headed poetic rules make him.

Writers write in prose
good enough
BUT
prose is
as long
as
War and Peace
and
Don Quixote
as any Russian astronaut
or
Spanish bull-fighter
will tell you.

Reading prose
is
likened unto
wriggling
wriggly
wrigglily
in a laby
rinth
of Crete.

Happy (and few!)
are
the heroes
who can find the way and run: tip tip tipity tipity.

Poetry
a
ccor
ding
to Aris
to
tle
is imitation

of what?

ask Ari
sto tle

He who talks
should talk
and not
i
mi
tate.

Grand folks mine
eloquent they were in
neither prose
nor poetry;
rule-wise.
Spoke they
story-tell they
in words.
Words
all full of emotion
and feeling
and wisdom
and rhythm
rhythm
thm
thm
thm
boom boom boom

Million poets abound
(who lack thoughts);
few thinkers we find
(who lack law-full poetry).

I would be dead
before
poetry rule-full I learn.

Where will my thoughts be?
where be?
where be?
where where where where?
be be be be?

Call it
what you may.
Digestible
bit by bit
my thoughts I present
read on.

If you be crazy
and hunt poetry gravy
(not thoughts)
pick up
Dante,
mill thru
Milton,
(he dictated for the ears in his blindness!)
shake the pages of
Shake
spear
(and who wrote Shakespear? perhaps a blindman, too!)
or go
home with hollow-socketted deep browed
Homer
into human anti
quity.

John Dos Passos
William
Carlos (!)
Williams

e
e
cu
mmi
ngs
+
Ezra Pound
il miglior fabbro
are
the best artisans
with ears for sounds:
assonance
rhythm most
rhyme least
and
consonance;
with eyes alert for shape of poetry

its

A
R C H
I T E C
t u
r e

they write
marv'lously
modernly

like me.

Tobare to Liyang

Okot p'Bitek

Song of Lawino

I

My Husband's Tongue is Bitter

Husband, now you despise me
Now you treat me with spite
And say I have inherited the
stupidity of my aunt;
Son of the Chief,
Now you compare me
With the rubbish in the rubbish
pit,
You say you no longer want me
Because I am like the things left
behind
In the deserted homestead.
You insult me
You laugh at me
You say I do not know the letter
A
Because I have not been to school
And I have not been baptized

You compare me with a little dog,
A puppy.

My friend, age-mate of my
brother,
Take care,
Take care of your tongue,
Be careful what your lips say.

First take a deep look, brother,
You are now a man
You are not a dead fruit!
To behave like a child does not
befit you!

Listen Ocol, you are the son of a
Chief,
Leave foolish behaviour to little
children,
It is not right that you should
be laughed at in a song!
Songs about you should be songs
of praise!

Stop despising people
As if you were a little foolish man,
Stop treating me like salt-less
ash*
Become barren of insults and
stupidity;

* Salt is extracted from the ash of certain plants, and also from the ash of the dung of domestic animals. The ash is put in a container with small holes in its bottom, water is then poured on the ash, and the salty water is collected in another container placed below. The useless saltless ash is then thrown on the pathway and people tread on it.

Who has ever uprooted the
Pumpkin?

★

My clansmen, I cry
Listen to my voice:
The insults of my man
Are painful beyond bearing.

My husband abuses me together
with my parents;
He says terrible things about my
mother
And I am so ashamed!

He abuses me in English
And he is so arrogant.

He says I am rubbish,
He no longer wants me!
In cruel jokes, he laughs at me,
He says I am primitive
Because I cannot play the guitar,
He says my eyes are dead
And I cannot read,
He says my ears are blocked
And cannot hear a single foreign
word,
That I cannot count the coins.

He says I am like sheep,
The fool.

Ocol treats me
As if I am no longer a person,
He says I am silly
Like the *ojuu* insects that sit on
the beer pot.

My husband treats me roughly.
The insults!
Words cut more painfully than
sticks!
He says my mother is a witch,
That my clansmen are fools
Because they eat rats,
He says we are all Kaffirs.
We do not know the ways of
God,
We sit in deep darkness
And do not know the Gospel,
He says my mother hides her
charms
In her necklace
And that we are all sorcerers.

My husband's tongue
Is bitter like the roots of the
lyonno lily,
It is hot like the penis of the bee,
Like the sting of the *kalang*!
Ocol's tongue is fierce like the
arrow of the scorpion,
Deadly like the spear of the
buffalo-hornet.
It is ferocious
Like the poison of a barren
woman
And corrosive like the juice of
the gourd.

★

My husband pours scorn
On Black People,
He behaves like a hen
That eats its own eggs
A hen that should be imprisoned
under a basket.

His eyes grow large
Deep black eyes
Ocol's eyes resemble those of
the Nile Perch!
He becomes fierce
Like a lioness with cubs,
He begins to behave like a
mad hyena.

He says Black People are
primitive
And their ways are utterly
harmful,
Their dances are mortal sins
They are ignorant, poor and
diseased!

Ocol says he is a modern man,
A progressive and civilized man,
He says he has read extensively
and widely
And he can no longer live with
a thing like me
Who cannot distinguish between
good and bad.

He says I am just a village
woman,
I am of the old type,
And no longer attractive.

He says I am blocking his
progress,
My head, he says,
Is as big as that of an elephant
But it is only bones,
There is no brain in it,
He says I am only wasting his
time.

2

The Woman With Whom I Share My Husband

Ocol rejects the old type.
He is in love with a modern
woman,
He is in love with a beautiful
girl
Who speaks English.

But only recently
We would sit close together,
touching each other!
Only recently I would play
On my bow-harp
Singing praises to my beloved.
Only recently he promised
That he trusted me completely.
I used to admire him speaking
in English.

★

Ocol is no longer in love with
the old type;
He is in love with a modern girl.
The name of the beautiful one
Is Clementine.

Brother, when you see
Clementine!
The beautiful one aspires
To look like a white woman;

Her lips are red-hot
Like glowing charcoal,
She resembles the wild cat
That has dipped its mouth in
blood,
Her mouth is like raw yaws
It looks like an open ulcer,
Like the mouth of a field!
Tina dusts powder on her face
And it looks so pale;
She resembles the wizard
Getting ready for the midnight
dance.

She dusts the ash-dirt all over
her face
And when little sweat
Begins to appear on her body
She looks like the guinea fowl!

The smell of carbolic soap
Makes me sick,
And the smell of powder
Provokes the ghosts in my head;
It is then necessary to fetch a goat
From my mother's brother.
The sacrifice over
The ghost-dance drum must
sound
The ghost be laid
And my peace restored.

I do not like dusting myself
with powder:
The thing is good on pink skin
Because it is already pale,
But when a black woman has
used it
She looks as if she has
dysentery;
Tina looks sickly
And she is slow moving,
She is a piteous sight.

Some medicine has eaten up
Tina's face;
The skin on her face is gone
And it is all raw and red,
The face of the beautiful one
Is tender like the skin of a newly
born baby!

And she believes
That this is beautiful
Because it resembles the face of
a white woman!
Her body resembles
The ugly coat of the hyena;
Her neck and arms
Have real human skins!
She looks as if she has been
struck
By lightning;

Or burnt like the kongoni
In a fire hunt.

Song of Ocol

I

Woman,
Shut up!
Pack your things
Go!

Take all the clothes
I bought you
The beads, necklaces
And the remains
Of the utensils,
I need no second-hand things.

There is a large sack
In the boot
Of the car,
Take it
Put all your things in it
And go!

Song of the woman
Is the confused noise
Made by the ram
After the butcher's knife
Has sunk past
The wind pipe,
Red paint spraying
On the grasses;
It is a song all alone
A solo fragment
With no chorus
No accompaniment,
A strange melody
Impossible to orchestrate;

As if in echo
Of women's wailing
At yesterday's funeral,
Song of the dead
Out of an old tomb,
Stealthy cracking
Of dry bones,
Falling in of skulls
Under the weight
Of earth;
It's the dull thud
Of the wooden arrow
As it strikes the concrete
Of a wall
And falls to earth,
Extinguished
Without life
Like a bird
Hit by stone
From a boy's catapult.

★

8

Woman
I see cups of tears
Streaming down your cheeks,
Your body shaking
With anger and despair
Like a mother
Sitting by her dead son;

Let them raise the alarm,
Sound the war drums
And blow the war horns,
Let the women make ululations,
Call all the tribesmen
And all the tribeswomen,
Let them gather together
For the last time;
Let them put ash
On their heads
And on their bodies
Let the women cry aloud
And beat their chests with stones,
Let them throw themselves
On the ground
And roll in the dust
And tear their hair
In mourning!
Let the men
Polish their weapons
And arm themselves with spears,
Shields, bows, arrows
And battle axes,
Let them wear ostrich feathers
On their heads
And swishes
On their arms,

Let them blow their horns
And their wooden trumpets,
Let the youths
Perform the mock fight
And the women shout
The praise names of their men
And of their clans
And of the clans of their husbands;

Let the drummers
Play the rhythms
Of the funeral dance,
And let the people sing and dance
And celebrate the passing of
The Old Homestead!

★

Weep long,
For the village world
That you know
And love so well,
Is gone,
Swept away
By the fierce fires
Of progress and civilization!
That walk to the well
Before sunrise,
The cool bath in the stream,
The gathering of the family
Around the evening fire ...

That shady evergreen *byeyo* tree
Under which I first met you
And told you
I wanted you,
Do you remember
The song of the *ogilo* bird
And the chorus
Of the grey monkeys
In the trees nearby?

★

Let the people drink
Kwete beer and *waragi*,
Let them suck *lacoi* beer
With the sucking tubes
As they mourn
The death of
The Old Homestead!

You village chief
Sitting on the stool
And leaning on the central pole
Of your hut,
Mount the rostrum
At the drum post,
Let the people draw near
And keep silence,

Deliver your farewell speech;
Farewell to your friends
And your age-mates,
To your sons and daughters
And to your grandchildren,
Let them bid farewell to you
And to each other,
For tomorrow morning
As the cock crows
For the first time,
The people will disperse,
Each following his or her own route:
Pilgrims to the New City,
And once they depart
They will never meet again!

Say Goodbye
For you will never
Hunt together again,
Nor dance the war dance
Or the *bwola* dance....

9

Your Excellency
Bwana President
I salute you,
And you Honourable Ministers
Discussing the White Paper;
Mister Speaker, Sir,
You Backbenchers
And Opposition chiefs;
Greetings to you!

I rise
For your Lordship,
Robed, bespectacled,
I see the learned attorney
Addressing the jury,
And his brother advocate
Consulting a volume
Of the *Law Reports*
A House of Lord's judgement;

Amen!
The black Bishop
At the altar
Is blessing the people
In Latin,
Do you see his golden crown
And scarlet robe?

★

Tell me
You worshipful Mayors,
Aldermen, Councillors,
You Town Clerks in wigs,
You trade union leader
Organising the strike,
You fat black capitalist
In the dark suit,
You sipping the Scotch,
Bank manager computerising overdrafts,
You surgeons and physicians
At Mulago and Kenyatta Hospitals,
Surveyors, architects, engineers,
Accountants, broadcasters ...
You artists, novelists,
Dramatists, poets,

Military men
And you Police chiefs,
I see you
Studying the situation
And plotting the next move;

You Permanent Secretary
Composing the Minister's speech,
You Party leader
Standing on top of the Land-Rover
Addressing the market crowd,

You African Ambassador
At the United Nations,
Your Excellency
Speak,

Tell the world
In English or in French,
Talk about
The African foundation
On which we are
Building the new nations
Of Africa.

You scholar seeking after truth
I see the top
Of your bald head
Between mountains of books
Gleaming with sweat,
Can you explain
The African philosophy
On which we are reconstructing
Our new societies?

Mango Seedling

Chinua Achebe

Through glass window pane
Up a modern office block
I saw, two floors below, on wide-jutting
Concrete canopy a mango seedling newly sprouted
Purple, two-leafed, standing on its burst
Black yolk. It waved brightly to sun and wind
Between rains—daily regaling itself
On seed-yams, prodigally.

For how long?
How long the happy waving
From precipice of rainswept sarcophagus?
How long the feast on remnant flour
At pot bottom?
Perhaps like the widow
Of infinite faith it stood in wait
For the holy man of the forest, shaggy-haired
Powered for eternal replenishment.
Or else it hoped for Old Tortoise's miraculous feast
On one ever recurring dot of cocoyam
Set in a large bowl of green vegetables—
These days beyond fable, beyond faith?
Then I saw it
Poised in courageous impartiality
Between the primordial quarrel of Earth
And Sky striving bravely to sink roots
Into objectivity, mid-air in stone.

I thought the rain, prime mover
To this enterprise, someday would rise in power
And deliver its ward in delirious waterfall
Toward earth below. But every rainy day
Little playful floods assembled on the slab,
Danced, parted round its feet,
United again, and passed.

It went from purple to sickly green
Before it died,
Today I see it still—
Dry, wire-thin in sun and dust of the dry months—
Headstone on tiny debris of passionate courage.

To the memory of Christopher Okigbo May 1968

Not my Business

They picked Akanni up one morning
Beat him soft like clay
And stuffed him down the belly
Of a waiting jeep.
What business of mine is it
So long they don't take the yam
From my savouring mouth?

They came one night
Booted the whole house awake
And dragged Danladi out,
Then off to a lengthy absence.
What business of mine is it
So long they don't take the yam
From my savouring mouth?

Chinwe went to work one day
Only to find her job was gone:
No query, no warning, no probe –
Just one neat sack for a stainless record.
What business of mine is it
So long they don't take the yam
From my savouring mouth?

And then one evening
As I sat down to eat my yam
A knock on the door froze my hungry hand.
The jeep was waiting on my bewildered lawn
Waiting, waiting in its usual silence.

Niyi Osundare

A New Dream of Politics by Ben Okri

They say there is only one way for politics.
That it looks with hard eyes at the hard world
And shapes it with a ruler's edge,
Measuring what is possible against
Acclaim, support, and votes.

They say there is only one way to dream
For the people, to give them not what they need
But food for their fears.
We measure the deeds of politicians
By their time in power.

But in ancient times they had another way.
They measured greatness by the gold
Of contentment, by the enduring arts,
The laughter at the hearths,
The length of silence when the bards
Told of what was done by those who
Had the courage to make their lands
Happy, away from war, spreading justice
And fostering health,
The most precious of the arts
Of governance.

But we live in times that have lost
This tough art of dreaming
The best for its people,
Or so we are told by cynics
And doomsayers who see the end
Of time in blood-red moons.

Always when least expected an unexpected
Figure rises when dreams here have
Become like ashes. But when the light
Is woken in our hearts after the long
Sleep, they wonder if it is a fable.

Can we still seek the lost angels
Of our better natures?
Can we still wish and will
For poverty's death and a newer way
To undo war, and find peace in the labyrinth
Of the Middle East, and prosperity
In Africa as the true wayA
To end the feared tide of immigration?

We dream of a new politics
That will renew the world
Under their weary suspicious gaze.
There's always a new way,
A better way that's not been tried before

WHATEVER happened to the elephant –
Hurrah for Thunder –

The elephant, tetrarch of the jungle:
With a wave of the hand
He could pull four trees to the ground;
His four mortar legs pounded the earth:
Wherever they treaded,
The grass was forbidden to be there.

Alas! the elephant has fallen –
Hurrah for thunder –

But already the hunters are talking about pumpkins:
If they share the meat let them remember thunder.

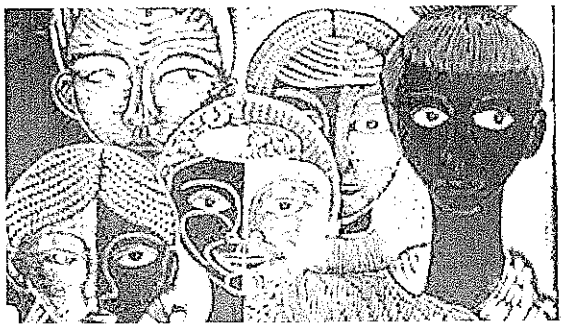
The eye that looks down will surely see the nose;
The finger that fits should be used to pick the nose.

Today-for tomorrow, today becomes yesterday:
How many million promises can ever fill a basket...

If I don't learn to shut my mouth I'll soon go to hell,
I, Okigbo, town-crier/ together with my iron bell.

Chris Okigbo, *Labyrinths* 1971,(Nigeria, 1930-1967)

ESSAYS AND LANGUAGE NOTES



INTRODUCTION

African writers who choose to use English or French set themselves certain problems. They wish to express African ideas, but they have chosen a non-African tool to express them. There is a grave danger that with the tool of language they will borrow other foreign things. Every language has its own stock of common images expressing a certain people's way of looking at things. Every language has its own set of literary forms which limit a writer's manner of expression. How many of these tools can a writer borrow before his African ideas are affected by the influence of foreign ideas implied in them?

The first few African writers in colonial countries were not concerned with this problem. They simply imitated and praised their conquerors.[1] But this group was small, short-lived and insignificant. Ever since the idea of 'negritude' emerged in the 1940s among French-speaking writers[2] most African writers have been conscious of the dangers. They have tried in various ways to mould European languages and forms so that they could express African ideas. The 'negritude' writers based their poems on images taken from African traditions. Chinua Achebe, one of the earliest successful English speaking writers, uses the European novel form, but he is very careful to create an 'Africanised' English for the dialogue of his characters.[3]

Despite these efforts, many European influences are present in African writing and in the criticism of African writing. Sadly, the written literature of the African nations has been clearly separated in many people's minds from the oral literary heritage that is present in every African community. Comparisons have more often been made between African poems and European poems than between African poems and traditional songs. Fortunately this emphasis is now changing.

Okot p'Bitek compels us to make comparisons between his poems and traditional songs. The title 'Song of ...' that he has given to all his poems suggests the comparison. He used many features borrowed from traditional songs in the writing of *Song of Lawino*. Partly because

of the familiarity of these features to all Africans, *Song of Lawino* has become one of the most successful African literary works. Some African writers have been read mainly by a small well-educated elite. Okot succeeded in reaching many people who rarely show an interest in written literature, while still winning praise from the elite for his poems.

This success seems remarkable if we consider the fact that some publishers rejected this poem only a few years before this achievement. These rejections probably came mainly from the publishers' familiarity with European rather than African forms of literature. But the idea of a long poem is now a rather strange one in either tradition. Few poets use long poems now. Again *Song of Lawino* does not fit into any Western model for a long poem. It is not an epic poem, it is not a narrative poem, it is not the private meditations of the poet. This written 'Song' form was born in Uganda while Okot was writing *Song of Lawino*.

If there was now only one 'Song', we could perhaps discount this originality of form as an insignificant accident. Okot, however, continued to write even longer poems. *Song of Ocol*, *Song of Prisoner* and *Song of Malaya* are all in similar form to *Song of Lawino*. In addition, two other writers were sufficiently impressed by *Song of Lawino* to write their own 'Songs'. Joseph Buruga in *The Abandoned Hut* is strongly influenced by Okot, and Okello Oculi in *Orphan* and *Malak* is experimenting in different ways to use long poems in English in an African way to express African emotions and problems. It is interesting to look further at these 'Songs' to see why they have made an impact.

An equally important reason for the success of these poems is the controversial issues that they raise. In some circles in East Africa, the words Lawino and Ocol have become common nouns. You will hear the 'Ocols' or the 'Lawinos' of Africa praised or condemned in many arguments. The two characters have become prototypes of two opposing approaches to the cultural future of Africa. You will have your own opinions in this debate and after you have enjoyed these poems you will be able to make up your own mind about the relevance of Okot's contribution to it. This introduction contains a short biography of the writer and a consideration of the influence of Acoli songs on *Song of Lawino*. Then I discuss some details of the form and imagery of the two poems. Finally I try to suggest some issues raised by the poems which may be discussed.

Biography

Okot p'Bitek was born in Gulu, northern Uganda, in 1931. He went to Gulu High School and King's College, Budo. In 1952, he went for a two year course at the Government Teacher Training College, Mbarara. He then taught English and Religious Knowledge at Sir Samuel Baker's School near Gulu. His parents were well-known people in the local Protestant community and in this period Okot also was a Christian. He was already interested in music, he was the choir-master at Sir Samuel Baker's School. He was also active in politics during this period.

His first venture into literature was a poem called 'The Lost Spear'. This poem retold the traditional Lwo tale of the spear, the bead and the bean. Okot wrote this while at Budo and Mbarara. He says the poem was very much influenced by Longfellow's *Hiawatha*, which Okot admired greatly. He lost this manuscript. However, in 1953, while still at Mbarara, he published a novel, *Lak Tar*, in the Acoli language.

Lak Tar tells the story of an Acoli boy whose father dies while he is still very young. A few years later he falls in love with a girl and she agrees to marry him, but he is unable to pay the very high bride-price. His stepfather and his uncles refuse to help him. The rest of the novel relates the series of misfortunes that befall him when he goes to Kampala to try to earn the money he needs. Despite nearly two years away, he earns only a fraction of the bride-price, and during his return journey he is robbed. The novel ends with his arrival home, miserable and penniless.

Okot's other major interest at this time was football. He played for his school, his college, local clubs, his district team and the Uganda national team. It was through this interest in football that he first travelled widely in northern Uganda. He made many friends and gained more varied experience of the traditions of his people which was later very useful to him. Football also helped him to travel even further afield. In 1958 he went with the Uganda team on a tour of Britain.

Okot took this opportunity to extend his education. He stayed in England to study. He did a one year course for a diploma in Education at Bristol University. He then did a degree course in Law at Aberystwyth. It was during this period that Okot lost his Christian commitment. It was also at this time that the direction of his interests changed from

the European traditions he had been studying to the traditions of his own people. While studying the Medieval European tradition of trial by ordeal he recognised a parallel to the traditions of the Acoli. He wanted to investigate this.

When he finished his Law degree in 1962 he had an opportunity to pursue his interest in African traditions. He moved to Oxford University to study for a B.Litt. in social anthropology. It was in this period that he developed many of the attitudes he expresses strongly in his poems and academic works. In his Preface to his book *African Religions in Western Scholarship*, he tells us of his conflicts with his teachers:

> During the very first lecture ... the teacher kept referring to Africans or non-Western peoples as barbarians, savages, primitive tribes, etc. I protested, but to no avail.[5]

In this book he is strongly critical of the whole idea of social anthropology. He claims that anthropology has always been concerned to support and justify colonialism, and that it should therefore not be studied in African Universities.[6] This kind of rejection of Western traditions parallels his attempts to use African forms for his poetry.

The movement towards Ugandan independence persuaded Okot to return home for a short time in 1962. He intended to stand as the U.P.C. candidate for Gulu, but he changed his mind. While back in Uganda he took the opportunity to do some fieldwork for his B.Litt. degree. He than returned to Oxford. His research now centred mainly on the oral literature of his people. He completed his thesis *Oral Literature and its Background among the Acoli and Lang'o* in 1964. He then returned to work in Uganda.

First he worked in Gulu again, for the extra-mural department of Makerere College. He continued his research in traditional songs, especially investigating the religious ideas expressed through them. He was also involved with a large group of friends in the creation of the Gulu Festival. He was a performer as well as an organiser, singing and dancing with a group and devising ways of adapting traditional songs to the different performance conditions of the Festival. It was in this period that he wrote *Wer pa Lawino*, the Acoli version of *Song of Lawino*. It is easy to see how songs that Okot was working on could influence the composition of his own poem.

In 1966 he moved to Kampala. There he tried to carry on similar work by changing the emphasis of the Ugandan Cultural Centre from

mainly foreign works to mainly traditional performances. He was involved from the beginning in the formation of a large and successful traditional dance group called 'The Heartbeat of Africa'. He was later appointed Director of the Uganda Cultural Centre. He organised an eight day Festival to coincide with the Independence celebrations in October 1968.

Shortly after this, his career in Uganda was abruptly cut short. While returning from a trip to Zambia he learnt that he had been dismissed. He was later told that his strong criticisms of politicians in *Song of Lawino* and elsewhere caused this dismissal. He left Uganda and went to work at the University of Nairobi, first in Kisumu and then in Nairobi. Okot packed a great deal of activity into his life, always working hard. In 1975 he published a collection of essays *Africa's Cultural Revolution*. A collection of Acoli songs was published as *The Horn of My Love* in 1974 and in 1978 a refreshing version of familiar tales, *Hare and Hornbill*. These widely different books are all united by Okot's concern that the nations of Africa should be built on African not European foundations. He returned to Makerere University as Professor of Creative Writing but tragically died in 1982 within five months of taking up the appointment.

Influence of Songs and Effect of Translation

Okot wrote the Acoli version of *Song of Lawino* in a period in his life when he was daily concerned with Acoli traditional songs, both in his research and in his activities in connection with the Gulu Festival. In his work for the Festival, he co-operated very closely with a large group of friends. These are some of the people whose help he acknowledged on the title pages of *Song of Lawino*. Naturally when Okot was writing his poem he also worked together with these friends. He read new versions of each chapter of the poem to these people as soon as they were completed, and their comments were taken into account if the chapter needed rewriting. Thus even its method of composition is similar to that of traditional songs. A group of singers work together and continuously alter the songs as they perform them.

Other elements link the poem to traditional songs. In most parts of

the poem, Lawino addresses herself to someone, for example: 'Husband' (p. 34), 'my clansmen' (p. 35), 'Brother' (p. 37). This form of address is a rhetorical device taken straight from Acoli oral literature. Another feature used a lot in *Wer pa Lawino* and sometimes also occurring in the translation is the use of a repeated phrase as a refrain, emphasising an important idea. There is a good example of this in Chapter 3:

> Timme ducu lutimme Munu-Munu
> Ping'o lewic pe mako Munu,
> Lukwako dako atyer, calo Munu
> Luting'o pong' kor, calo Munu
> Wumato taa cigara, calo Munu,
> Wa mon, wa co calo Munu;
> Wunato lem-wu calo Munu,
> Wunato dog-wu calo Munu,
> Wunango laa dogwu calo Munu,
> Ma dog co nywak ki reng'ng'e pa Munu.[7]

In the English version this repetition is considerably reduced:

> You kiss her on the cheek
> As white people do,
> You kiss her open-sore lips
> As white people do
> You suck the slimy saliva
> From each other's mouths
> As white people do. (p. 44)

This translates only three lines of the original. In the translation of the other lines the refrain is missed out. This repetition can be used over a few lines, as in this example, or to tie together a whole chapter. The repetition of this phrase strongly emphasises the idea of slavish imitation which Lawino finds so ridiculous in the dance.

The whole of the poem is tied together by a similar refrain. It is taken from an Acoli proverb. In *Wer pa Lawino* it reads:

> Te Okono obur bong' luputu.[8]

Okot's translation is:

> The pumpkin in the old homestead
> Must not be uprooted! (p. 41)

Pumpkins are a luxury food. They grow wild throughout Acoliland. To uproot pumpkins, even when you are moving to a new homestead, is simple wanton destruction. In this proverb, then, Lawino is not asking Ocol to cling to everything in his past, but rather not to destroy things for the sake of destroying them. Again, the refrain is used to emphasise an important idea the writer is putting across in the whole poem.

The most important influence Acoli songs have had on *Song of Lawino* is in the imagery Okot uses. Okot has completely avoided the stock of common images of English literature through his familiarity with the stock of common images of Acoli literature. In the English version, this gives his poem a feeling of freshness for every reader, and a sense of Africanness for African readers. One place where these images are found in the poem are in the quotations for songs that are set out as quotations in the text. There are examples of these on pages 60; 62; 66–7; 76–8; 98; 101; 115; 120. These songs often convey Lawino's feelings more fully than her own words. The song on page 83, for example, expresses the sorrow in the names of sadness very clearly:

> Fate has brought troubles
> Son of my mother
> Fate has thrown me a basket,
> It all began as a joke
> Suffering is painful
> It began before I was born.

More important than these are the innumerable places where Lawino's own words echo the words of a traditional song. If we look at a few lines of *Song of Lawino* next to a few lines from an Acoli song, we can see this clearly:

> Beg forgiveness from them
> And ask them to give you
> A new spear
> A new spear with a sharp and hard point
> A spear that will crack the rock
> Ask for a spear that you will trust (p. 119)

> The spear with the hard point
> Slits the granite rock
> The spear that I trust
> Penetrates the granite rock
> The hunter has slept in the wilderness
> I die oh,[9]

Through his thorough knowledge of an African literary tradition Okot has succeeded in using English as a tool to reach a wider audience without borrowing foreign elements that distort his message.

All but a very few lines of *Song of Lawino* were written in Acoli originally and later translated into English. For most parts of the poem, the translation was an afterthought. When Okot was trying to publish the Acoli version, he translated a small extract for a writer's conference in Nairobi. The enthusiastic reception of this persuaded him to translate the whole poem. *Song of Ocol* was also an afterthought. Lawino was an unsuitable spokesman for one or two of Okot's comments on the East African scene. *Song of Ocol* was needed to add this extra dimension. *Song of Ocol* was written in English throughout; there is no Acoli version.

Okot's 'Songs' are not songs in any literal sense. You cannot sing them. They are not simply a written version of Acoli songs. Acoli songs do not grow to book length. They are one or two verses repeated with musical accompaniment. They are not written down under one person's authorship. They are sung and adapted by singer after singer, and each singer is free to create in his own way and change the song to fit current events or refer to his own girl-friend. They do not use rhyme or the regular rhythm used in *Wer pa Lawino*.

So it is possible to exaggerate the influence of Acoli tradition on Okot's poems. From western tradition he takes the idea of individual authorship, of spoken verse, of rhyme, of division into chapters, of the printed word. But many of the aspects that give them their impact are those aspects which are a direct continuation of his people's own tradition. Okot has adapted a traditional form to new conditions of performance, rather than created a new form.

The writer chose to make a very literal translation of *Song of Lawino*. The main differences between the two versions are the rearrangement of the order of certain sections within the chapters, the filling out of some descriptions of things unfamiliar to readers of the English version, and the dropping from the English version of some details which are in the Acoli original. There is no doubt that, as Taban lo Liyong has said:

> the meaning of deep Acoli proverbs are made very light by their rendition into English word for word, rather than sense for sense, or proverb for proverb.[10]

Certain areas of meaning are lost through this kind of translation. If we take the lines:

> The pumpkin in the old homestead
> Must not be uprooted ... (p. 41)

it is obvious that, even after an explanation, non-Acoli readers will not feel the force of the proverb as Acoli readers would. And the poem is full of such references to songs, carrying meanings that have been built up over years of familiarity with the words. It is possible that with a longer, less literal, translation some of this meaning could have been retained, but the result would have been very cumbersome.

But the advantages of Okot's method outweigh these disadvantages. As I have pointed out, many African writers using English or French have attempted to 'Africanise' these languages. Okot p'Bitek has succeeded in this more than any other previous writer. A less literal translation would have involved the intrusion of foreign elements into his poem. It is true that Okot's 'Acoli-English'[11] carries deeper meaning to Acoli readers than to others, but it is rarely obscure for Africans.

There are occasions when Okot deliberately adds strangeness in the translation which is not there in the original. The most obvious example of this is in Chapter 8. Instead of using the biblical terms, 'gospel', 'Holy Ghost', 'God', Okot gives us a literal retranslation of the Acoli translation of these words. So we have: 'good word' (p. 73), 'clean ghost' (p. 74) and strangest of all 'the Hunchback' (p. 75). Here the English version carries the strangeness of these words to Lawino when she first heard them more strongly than the Acoli version. Most Acoli readers will be familiar with the Christian meaning of these terms and will not find them strange at all.

If we look at the first few pages of Chapter 4 (p. 47), we can see a more normal example of Okot's translation working well. The first 74 lines of this chapter (up to: "Should they open it/So that the pus may flow out?") correspond more or less exactly in ideas to the first 49 lines of the Acoli version. One or two details in the description of the house and the abuse of Ocol that are in the original are missing in the translation. The arrangement of the passage has also been slightly changed. The Acoli version uses '*diro me Acoli*' or '*ryeko me Acoli*' (the skill or wisdom of the Acoli)[12] as a refrain in a very tight description of the home. This repetition is missing from the English version, and

the description is filled out with a little explanation, as the scene is unfamiliar to non-Acoli readers.

Okot leaves two words untranslated: '*Lyonno* and *nyadyang*'. These give the passage a feeling of strangeness without making it difficult to understand. The passage contains a quotation from a song:

> Father prepare the kraal etc. (p. 48)

and also an image borrowed from another song:

> And my name blew
> Like a horn
> Among the Payira. (p. 48)

Okot does not explain the reference to the expected bride-price of cattle but this will present no difficulty to Africans. In this section, Okot gets the advantages of a literal translation with very little loss of meaning.

Verse

In *Song of Lawino* Okot replaces the regular rhythm and rhyme of the Acoli version with irregular free verse in the English version. His lines in *Song of Lawino* usually end with a strong emphasis. He builds his lines around the words he wants to emphasise, crowding weaker words into the beginning of the line:

> They mould the tips of the cotton nests
> So that they are sharp
> And with these they prick
> The chests of their men (p. 39)

This gives a staccato effect to his verse. This can be clumsy, but it sometimes successfully underlines Lawino's contemptuous moods:

> He just shouts
> Like house-flies
> Settling on top of excrement
> When disturbed. (p. 49)

The arrangement of the verse suits Lawino's feelings.

Sometimes Okot successfully softens these lines to convey Lawino's wistful moods. The section from the beginning of Chapter 4 illustrates

this. While she remembers Ocol's wooing of her and the beauty of her home, Lawino's voice takes on a note of nostalgia (p. 47). The staccato effect of the lines is reduced in sympathy. There are soft sounds ending many of the lines, for example: 'briskly', 'lily', 'cattle', 'silently'. The lines flow smoothly to express Lawino's gentler mood.

In *Song of Ocol* the emphatic stresses at the end of Okot's lines are replaced by much more varied patterns of stress. The lines are shorter and Okot often misses out structural words which sometimes crowd out the lines in *Song of Lawino*. Okot also makes very effective use of one or two syllable lines to provide shock changes of pace. This changes the staccato effect into a lively bouncing rhythm:

> You sister
> From Pokot
> Who grew in the open air
> You are fresh ...
> Ah!
> Come,
> Walk with me ... (p. 138).

Song of Ocol is very easy to read aloud. In this poem Okot shows himself to be a master of English free verse.

The language and imagery of *Song of Ocol* lack the references to oral tradition which give *Song of Lawino* some of its richness, but Okot shows himself well able to create his own imagery. One source of pleasure in the poem is the poet's evident delight in the use of words. The images crowd on top of one another so that the reader's imagination is feasted on a succession of vivid pictures:

> Mad creature
> Her hair
> A burnt out forest
> Her eyes
> Shooting out from the head
> A pair of rockets
> Serpent tongues
> Spitting poison
> Lashing crocodile tail ... (p. 127).

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

. . . I was born into a large peasant family: father, four wives and about twenty-eight children. I also belonged, as we all did in those days, to a wider extended family and to the community as a whole.

We spoke Gĩkũyũ as we worked in the fields. We spoke Gĩkũyũ in and outside the home. I can vividly recall those evenings of story-telling around the fireside. It was mostly the grown-ups telling the children but everybody was interested and involved. We children would re-tell the stories the following day to other children who worked in the fields picking the pyrethrum flowers, tea-leaves or coffee beans of our European and African landlords.

There were good and bad story-tellers. A good one could tell the same story over and over again, and it would always be fresh to us, the listeners. He or she could tell a story told by someone else and make it more alive and dramatic. The differences really were in the use of words and images and the inflexion of voices to effect different tones.

We therefore learnt to value words for their meaning and nuances. Language was not a mere string of words. It had a suggestive power well beyond the immediate and lexical meaning. Our appreciation of the suggestive magical power of language was reinforced by the games we played with words through riddles, proverbs, transpositions of syllables, or through nonsensical but musically arranged words. So we learnt the music of our language on top of the content. The language, through images and symbols, gave us a view of the world, but it had a beauty of its own. The home and the field were then our pre-primary school but what is important, for this discussion, is that the language of our evening teach-ins, and the language of our immediate and wider community, and the language of our work in the fields were one.

And then I went to school, a colonial school, and this harmony was broken. The language of my education was no longer the language of my culture.

One of the most humiliating experiences was to be caught speaking Gĩkũyũ in the vicinity of the school. The culprit was given corporal punishment – three to five stokes of the cane on bare buttocks – or was made to carry a metal plate around the neck with inscriptions such as I AM STUPID or I AM A DONKEY.

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

As you may know, the colonial system of education in addition to its apartheid racial demarcation had the structure of a pyramid: a broad primary base, a narrowing secondary middle, and an even narrower university apex. Selections from primary into secondary were through an examination, in my time called Kenya African Preliminary Examination, in which one had to pass six subjects ranging from Maths to Nature Study and Kiswahili. All the papers were written in English. Nobody could pass the exam who failed the English language paper no matter how brilliantly he had done in the other subjects. I remember one boy in my class of 1954 who had distinctions in all subjects except English, which he had failed. He was made to fail the entire exam. He went on to become a turn boy in a bus company. I who had only passes but a credit in English got a place at the Alliance High School, one of the most elitist institutions for Africans in colonial Kenya.

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

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

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

Language, any language, has a dual character: it is both a means of communication and a carrier of culture. Culture transmits or imparts those images of the world and reality through the spoken and written language, that is through a specific language. [. . .] Written literature and orature are the main means by which a particular language transmits the images of the world contained in the culture it carries.

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

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

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

For colonialism this involved two aspects of the same process: the destruction or the deliberate undervaluing of a people's culture, their art, dances, religions, history, geography, education, orature and literature, and the conscious elevation of the language of the coloniser. The domination of a people's language by the languages of the colonising nations was crucial to the domination of the mental universe of the colonised.

. . . . our imposed

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

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

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

But obviously it was worse when the colonial child was exposed to images of his world as mirrored in the written languages of his coloniser. Where his own native languages were associated in his impressionable mind with low status, humiliation, corporal punishment, slow-footed intelligence and ability or downright stupidity, non-intelligibility and barbarism, this was reinforced by the world he met in the works of such geniuses of racism as a Rider Haggard or a Nicholas

The African writer and the English language

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

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

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

[. . .]

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

[. . .]

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

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

[. . .]

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

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

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

[. . .]

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

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

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

I do not see any signs of sterility anywhere here. What I do see is a new voice coming out of Africa, speaking of African experience in a world-wide language. So my answer to the question: *Can an African ever learn English well enough to be able to use it effectively in creative writing?* is certainly yes. If on the other hand you ask: *Can he ever learn to use it like a native speaker?* I should say, I hope not. It is neither necessary nor desirable for him to be able to do so. The price a world language must be prepared to pay is submission to many different kinds of use. The African writer should aim to use English in a way that brings out his message best without altering the language to the extent that its value as a medium of international exchange will be lost. He should aim at fashioning out an English which is at once universal and able to carry his peculiar experience. [. . .]

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

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

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

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

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

[. . .]

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

But for me there is no other choice. I have been given this language and I intend to use it. I hope, though, that there will always be men, like the late Chief Fagunwa, who will choose to write in their native tongue and ensure that our ethnic literature will flourish side-by-side with the national ones. For those of us who opt for English there is much work ahead and much excitement.

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

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

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

English in Africa

from 'A Survey of Modern English' S. Gramley and K. Patzold 1992

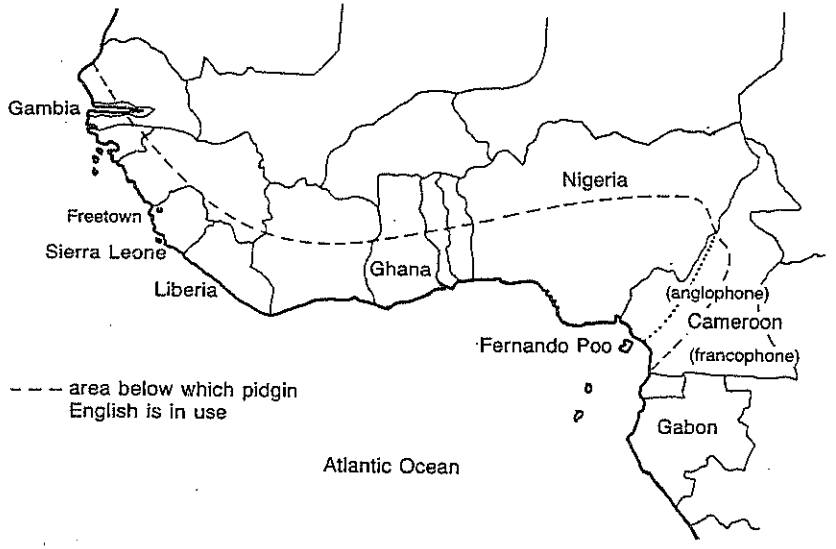
Second-language English in Africa may be divided into three general geographic areas: the six anglophone countries of West Africa (Cameroon, Gambia, Ghana, Liberia, Nigeria and Sierra Leone, plus Fernando Poo, where Creole English is spoken), those of East Africa (Ethiopia, Somalia, Uganda, Kenya, Tanzania, Malawi and Zambia), and those of Southern Africa (Namibia, Botswana, Zimbabwe, Swaziland, Lesotho and South Africa; cf. 13.3 on South Africa). 'English is . . . an official language for over 160 million Africans, though its native-speaking population amounts to little more than 1% of this.' (Angogo and Hancock 1980: 88).

The first group includes two countries which have native speakers of English (Liberia, 5 per cent) or an English creole (Sierra Leone, also 5 per cent) (percentages according to Brann 1988: 1421). All six are characterized by the presence and vitality of Pidgin English, used by large numbers of people. Neither Eastern nor Southern Africa have pidgin or creole forms of English. However, South Africa, Zimbabwe and Namibia all have a fair number of non-black native speakers of English (South Africa: approximately 40 per cent; Namibia, 8 per cent; Zimbabwe, virtually all the white population). There are, however, statistically speaking, no native speakers of English among the black African population and, except for the possibly more direct influence of native-speaker English in Southern Africa, there is no reason for distinguishing these countries from those of East Africa. Indeed, in the following only the basic division into West and East Africa has been maintained.

English in Africa, though chiefly a second language and rarely a native language of African blacks, is, nevertheless, sometimes a first language in the sense of familiarity and daily use. Certainly, there are enough fluent, educated speakers of what has been called African Vernacular English who 'have grown up hearing and using English daily, and who speak it as well as, or maybe even better than, their ancestral language' for it to serve as a model (Angogo and Hancock 1980: 72). Furthermore, the number of English users is also likely to increase considering the number of Africans who are learning it – '47.1 percent of primary school students and 96.9 percent of those in secondary schools throughout the continent' (Conrad and Fishman 1977: 16).

Despite numerous variations, due especially to the multitudinous mother tongues of its speakers, this African Vernacular English is audibly recognizable as a type and is distinct from, for instance, Asian English.

It tends to have a simplified vowel system *vis-à-vis* native-speaker English. Furthermore, it shares certain grammatical, lexical, semantic and pragmatic features throughout the continent. These include different prepositional, article and pronoun usage, comparatives without *more*, pluralization of non-count nouns, use of verbal aspect different from StE, generalized question tags, a functionally different application of *yes* and *no*, semantic extension, shift and transfer, as well as the coinage of new lexical items. Various expressions, such as the interjection *Sorry!*, are employed in a pragmatic sense unfamiliar to StE.



West Africa

West Africa

The six anglophone West African countries of Cameroon, Gambia, Ghana, Liberia, Nigeria and Sierra Leone (see map 14.1) are themselves polyglot. Nigeria has up to 415 languages; Cameroon, 234; Ghana, 60; and even Liberia, Sierra Leone, and Gambia have 31, 20 and 13 respectively (Brann 1988: 1418f). In this situation it is obvious that any government has to be concerned about having an adequate language for education and as a means of general internal communication. Where there is no widely recognized indigenous language to do this, the choice has usually fallen on the colonial language. When the two Cameroons were united, both colonial languages, French (80 per cent of the country) and English (the remainder), were adopted. A bilingual French–English educational policy is pursued. Of the six states just mentioned, only Nigeria has viable native languages which are readily available for written use, most clearly Hausa in the north, but also

Yoruba in the west and Igbo in the east; all three are being developed as official languages. However, in Nigeria as a whole, as well as the other five countries, it is English which fulfils many or most of the developmental and educational functions of language. It is possible to speak here of **triglossia**: at the bottom, the autochthonous languages; at an intermediate level, the regional languages of wider communication; and superimposed on the whole, the outside or exogenous language, English (ibid.: 1416). For the most part the vernaculars and English are not in conflict, but are complementary (Adekunle 1972: 100), with English reserved for the functions of a High language in the sense of diglossia, viz. use on formal and public occasions and as the written language, while the local languages are the Low languages of informal, private, vernacular, oral communication. Note that speakers who do not share a native language prefer to communicate in a regional one. If that is not feasible, they will choose pidgin English. 'English is generally utilised in horizontal communication as the "default" code: when there is no other alternative' (Bokamba 1991: 499).

English in West Africa

The English language is a complicated phenomenon in West Africa. It is present in a continuum of sorts which runs from British StE with a (near) RP accent (in Liberia the orientation is towards AmE), via a local educated second-language variety, to a local vernacular and to West African Pidgin or one of its creolized varieties. This diversity of levels is one of the results of the history of European–African contact on the West Coast of Africa.

Pidgins and creoles

Europeans went to the Atlantic coast of Africa in the first phase of European imperialism from 1450 on, during what was known as the Age of Discovery. Initial trade contacts gradually expanded as a part of the West Indian–American plantation and slave system, in which West Africa's role was chiefly that of a supplier of slaves. Throughout the era of the slave trade (Britain and the United States outlawed it in 1808; other European countries slowly followed) Europeans and Africans conducted business by means of contact languages called **pidgins**. Although simplified linguistic systems, their grammatical structure resembled that of the West African languages (themselves relatively similar) while their vocabulary came largely from the European language involved – first Portuguese, later French and Dutch, and finally English.

Pidgin English continues to be used today all along the West African coast from Gambia to Gabon, though it is not always immediately intelligible from variety to variety. It is a diglossically Low language like most of the indigenous vernaculars and is, for example in Cameroon, 'the most widely used language' (Todd 1982: 132). It is perhaps so easily learned not only because it is simplified, but also because it is structurally so close to the indigenous languages. Its spread and importance in Cameroon is described as follows:

> Pidgin English is used on plantations, on work-sites, in church, in the market, in playgrounds, and in pubs, by preachers and by politicians. It is also the lingua franca of prisons, the armed forces, the police force, and the most commonly heard language in the law courts.
>
> (ibid.: 137)

> As a contact Pidgin in various varieties of Weskos [< *West Coast* Pidgin English], it may be spoken occasionally by as many as 30 millions in the 5 'anglophone' states of West Africa and Cameroon, either as an inter-ethnic lingua franca, or as a relaxed or joking language.
>
> (Brann 1988: 1421)

Furthermore, creolized (mother tongue) forms of pidgin are in wide use in Sierra Leone, where it is becoming more important than English (Fyle 1976: 47), and in Liberia, both of which are countries to which slaves were returned – either from America, Canada and the West Indies or from slave ships seized by the British navy – from the late eighteenth century on. Their first language was or became a form of (creole) English. This accounts for the approximately 5 per cent of Liberians who are native speakers of English and the 2 to 5 per cent of Sierra Leoneans who speak Krio, the English-based creole of that country. Today, creolized forms of pidgin English are continuing to emerge among the children of linguistically mixed marriages in many urban centres, especially in Cameroon and Nigeria (cf., for example, Shnukal and Marchese 1983; Agheyisi 1988). For more on pidgins and creoles, see chapter 16.

Standard English

Standard English was introduced in the second major phase of colonialism in the nineteenth century, when the European powers divided up as much of Africa and Asia as they could. As a part of this movement there was a wave of Christian missionary effort in Africa: 'English was to become the language of salvation, civilisation and worldly success' (Spencer 1971: 13). Although the Church made wide use of the native languages and alphabetized various of them for the first time, it had little use for Pidgin English. The result was the suppression of Pidgin and Creole English by school, church and colonial administration in favour of '"correct" bourgeois English' (ibid.: 23). StE was and is used in education, in government, in

ENGLISH IN AFRICA (3)

international trade, for access to scientific and technical knowledge and in the media. It is a status symbol, a mark of education and Westernization. While StE thus functions as the badge of the local elite, Pidgin English has little prestige, but does signal a good deal of group solidarity. A passage from Chinua Achebe's novel *No Longer at Ease* (p. 77) provides an example of the complex linguistic situation in Nigeria:

> 'Good! See you later.' Joseph always put on an impressive manner when speaking on the telephone. He never spoke Ibo or pidgin English at such moments. When he hung up he told his colleagues: 'That *na*[1] my brother. Just return from overseas. B.A. (Honours) Classics.' . . .
>
> 'What department he *de*[2] work?'
>
> 'Secretary to the Scholarship Board.'
>
> ''E *go*[3] make plenty money there. Every student who wan' go England *go*[3] *de*[2] see *am*[4] *for*[5] house.'
>
> ''E no *be*[6] like dat,' said Joseph. 'Him *na*[1] gentleman. No *fit*[7] take bribe.'

Notes:

[1] *na* 'be' (marker for a following predicative complement)
[2] *de* + infinitive (progressive, cf. StE *be* + *Ving*)
[3] *go* 'will' (future, cf. *going to*)
[4] *am* 'him, her, it, etc.' (transitive verb object marker)
[5] *for* 'to, at, etc.' (generalized preposition of place)
[6] *be* 'be' (copular verb, uninflected)
[7] *fit* 'be able to' (modal verb)

To return to the continuum of Englishes in West Africa today, it might be remarked that StE at the upper end, with no syntactic or semantic differences to native-speaker StE and few if any *phonological* differences to RP, is spoken by no more than a few *been-to*'s, i.e. those who have returned from Great Britain or the United States. Although it is internationally intelligible, it is not socially acceptable for native Africans in local West African society. At the other extreme are the pidgins and creoles, which, linguistically speaking, are often regarded as independent languages, and hence outside the continuum of English (Bamgbose 1983: 101f); for 'throughout West Africa, speakers are usually able to say at any time whether they are speaking the one or the other' (Angogo and Hancock 1980: 72). Nevertheless, the situation is not quite so straightforward whatever perspective is taken, it is a fact that only a local, educated va. . . may be regarded as a serious contender for the label West African StE. Suc. a form of English, which implies completed primary or secondary education, is available to perhaps 10 per cent of the population of anglophone West Africa. A study of prepositional use in Nigerian English provides support for the view that an independent norm is growing up which contains not only evidence of mother tongue interference, but also of what are termed 'stable Nigerianisms'. In addition, this study shows that a meaningful sociolinguistic division of Nigerian English is one which, reflecting the educational structure of the country, provides for 'two or three broad categories (corresponding to the masses/sub-élite/élite classification)'(Jibril 1991: 536). Some of the characteristics of this variety will be enumerated in the following section.

Linguistic features of educated West African English (WAE)

Within WAE there is a great deal of variation; indeed, the higher the education of a user, the closer his or her usage is likely to be to StE. In this sense WAE is perhaps less a fixed standard than a more or less well-learned second language. This is substantiated to some extent by the fact that a good deal of the difference between the StE of native speakers and that of educated West Africans can be explained by interference from the first language of the latter. All of this notwithstanding, there are, nevertheless, features of educated WAE which form a standard in the sense that (a) they are widely used and no longer amenable to change via further learning (cf. the non-acceptance of *been-to* StE mentioned above) and (b) they are community norms, not recognized as 'errors' even by the relatively most highly trained anglophone West Africans.

The pronunciation of WAE

Most noticeable to a non-African is, as with all the types of StE reviewed in this book, the pronunciation. Generally speaking, West Africans have the three diphthongs /aɪ, ɑʊ, ɔɪ/ and a reduced vowel system which can be represented as in table 14.1. What is noticeable about the list is the lack of central vowels. This means that schwa /ə/ is also relatively rare, which fits in with the tendency of WAE to give each syllable relatively equal stress (syllable-timed rhythm). Furthermore, stress is realized differently and the intonation is less varied. Important grammatical distinctions made by intonation, such as the difference between rising and falling tag questions, may be lost. Emphasis may be achieved lexically, by switching from a short to a long word, for instance, from *ask* to *command* to show impatience (Egbe 1979: 98–101). In the same way cleft sentences are likely to be more

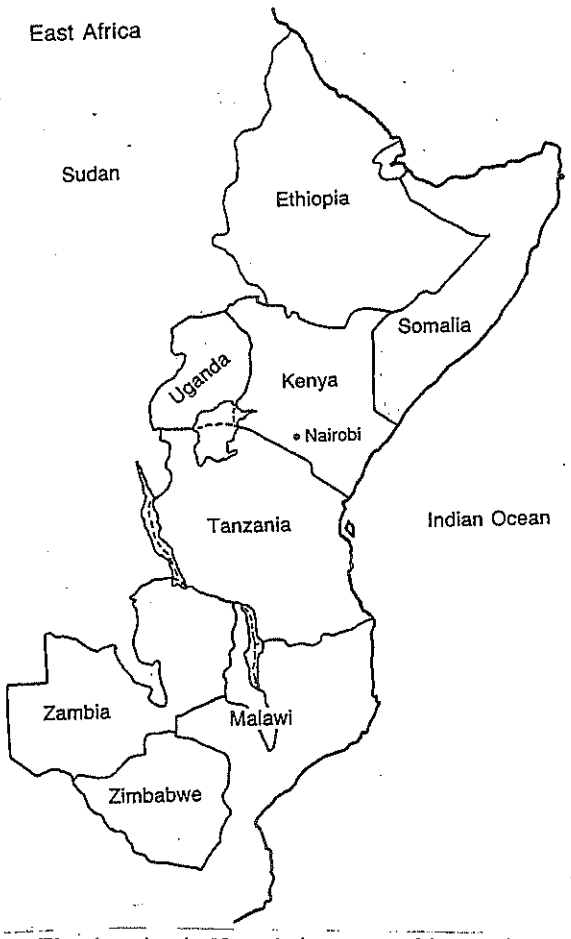
becomes 'nativized' or 'indigenized'. A frequently quoted example is the use of *Sorry!* as an all-purpose expression of sympathy, that is, not only to apologize for, say, stepping on someone's toes, but also to someone who has sneezed or stumbled. Likewise, *Wonderful!* is used to reply to any surprise (even if not pleasant), and *Well done!* may be heard as a greeting to a person at work (cf. Bamgbose 1971: 44; 1983: 107).

The difference in family structure between the Western world and West Africa means that kinship terms (*father*, *mother*, *brother*, *sister*, *uncle*, *aunt*, etc.) may be used as in the West, viz. in regard to the kernel family. Because polygyny is practised in West African society the terms may be extended to the father and all his wives and all their children. An even more extended concept may be adopted to include a father and all his sons and their wives, sons and unmarried daughters. The terms *father* and *mother* are sometimes also applied to distant relatives or even unrelated people who are of the appropriate age and to whom respect is due. When far away from home, kinship terms may be applied to someone from the same town or ethnic group, or, if abroad, even to compatriots (Akere 1982: 91; cf. also 9.2.2). One further example of such culturally constrained language behaviour concerns greetings. The indigenous (Yoruba) culture provides for far more variants than StE English does, such as special greetings for various activities and emotions. It also prescribes different norms of linguistic politeness:

> The terms *Hi*, *Hello*, and *How are you* can be used by older or senior persons to younger or junior ones, but not vice-versa. Such verbal behavior coming from a younger person would be regarded as off-hand.
> (ibid.: 92)

East Africa

The main countries of East Africa as far as this review is concerned are Tanzania, Kenya and Uganda (see map 14.2). All three of them share one important feature: the presence of Swahili as a widely used lingua franca. Structurally within East African society this language is therefore somewhat parallel to Pidgin English in West Africa. However, while Pidgin English is almost totally without prestige, the same cannot be said of Swahili, which, together with English, is the official language in Kenya and Tanzania. In each of these countries English is used widely in education, especially at the secondary and post-secondary levels. However, in Tanzania, despite the continued prominence of English in learning and much professional activity, Swahili is the preferred national language; it is also probably slowly displacing the autochthonous mother tongues.



The situation in Uganda is more ambiguous because of the ethnic rivalries between the large anti-Swahili Baganda population (approximately one-sixth are Luganda native speakers and an additional almost one quarter speak Luganda as a second language) and the anti-Baganda sections of the population, who favour Swahili. In the meantime, while Swahili is used in the army and by the police, English remains the medium of education from upper primary school (year four) on, if not earlier (cf. Abdulaziz 1988: 1348–51; Ladefoged *et al.* 1972: 25). In all three countries English is a diglossically High language in comparison with Swahili; but Swahili itself is High in regard to the various local mother tongues. In Tanzania and in Kenya the (local) mother tongues provide ethnic identity and solidarity; Swahili contributes to national identity; and English serves to signal modernity and good education (Abdulaziz 1991: 392, 400).

frequent in the spoken language of Nigerian speakers than of non-African native speakers (Adetugbo 1979: 142). The consonant system is the same as in RP, but there is a strong tendency towards spelling pronunciations of combinations such as *-mb* and *-ng*; this also means that although WAE is non-rhotic, less educated speakers may pronounce /r/ where it is indicated in the spelling. There are, of course, numerous regional variations such as that of Hausa speakers, who tend to avoid consonant clusters, so that *small* becomes /sᵘmɔl/ (Todd 1984: 288). Among other things, for some speakers /θ/ becomes /t/. For further details, see Bamgbose 1983; Jibril 1982; Todd 1984; Willmott 1978–9.

Table 14.1 The vowels of WAE in comparison with those of RP

WAE	RP	as in	WAE	RP	as in
i	iː	bead	ɔ	ɜː	bird
	ɪ	bid		ʌ	bud
				ɒ	bod(y)
e	eɪ	bayed		ɔː	bawdy
ɛ	e	bed	o	əʊ	bode
a	æ	bad	u	ʊ	Buddha
	ɑː	bard		uː	booed

(adapted from Angogo and Hancock 1980: 75)

The grammar of WAE

The syntactic features of standard WAE are much more difficult to define. A study of deviation from StE in Ghanaian newspapers reveals numerous syntactic problems, but very few general patterns (Tingley 1981). Among the points that are frequently mentioned and which therefore presumably have a fair degree of currency are the following:

1 the use of non-count nouns as count nouns (*luggages*, *vocabularies*, *a furniture*, *an applause*);
2 pleonastic subjects (*The politicians they don't listen*);
3 an overextension of aspect (*I am having a cold*);
4 the present perfect with a past adverbial (*It has been established hundreds of years ago . . .*);
5 comparatives without *more* (*He values his car than his wife*);
6 a generalized question tag (*It doesn't matter, isn't it?*);
7 a functionally different use of *yes* and *no* (*Isn't he home? Yes* [*he isn't*]).

See Angogo and Hancock 1980; Bamgbose 1983; Tingley 1981; Todd 1984 for these and further examples. Most of these points (except 5) show up in Asian English as well, which suggests that their source may well lie in the intrinsic difficulty of such phenomena in English.

The vocabulary of WAE

The English vocabulary of West Africa, like that of any area, has special words for local flora, fauna and topography. In addition, the special elements of West African culture and institutions have ensured the adoption of numerous further items. This, more than grammar, is said to give WAE 'its distinctive "flavour", because it reflects the sociolinguistic milieux in which English is spoken' (Bokamba 1991: 502). The words themselves may be:

1 English words with an extension of meaning, e.g. *chap* 'any person, man or woman';
2 semantic shifts, e.g. *smallboy* 'low servant'; *cane* 'bamboo';
3 new coinages using processes of affixation, compounding, or reduplication, e.g. *co-wives* 'wives of the same husband'; *rentage* '(house)rent'; *bush-meat* 'game'; *slow slow* 'slowly';
4 new combinations, e.g. *check rice* 'rice prepared with krain-krain'; *head tie* 'woman's headdress';
5 words now outdated in Britain/America, e.g. *deliver* 'have a baby'; *station* 'town or city in which a person works';
6 calques/loan translations, e.g. *next tomorrow* 'day after tomorrow' from Yoruba *otunla* 'new tomorrow';
7 borrowings from a native language, e.g. *awujor* 'ceremony giving the ancestors food'; *krain-krain* 'a leaf vegetable';
8 borrowings from pidgin/creole, e.g. *tai fes* 'frown'; *chop* 'food';
9 borrowings from other languages, e.g. *palaver* (Portuguese) 'argument, trouble'; *piccin* (Portuguese) 'child'.

Most of these are restricted in use to West Africa, but some may be known and used more widely, for example, *calabash*, *kola* or *palm wine*. For the examples above and further ones, see especially Pemagbi 1989; Bokamba 1991; but also Jibril 1982; Bamgbose 1983; Willmott 1978–9.

14.3.4 Some pragmatic characteristics of WAE

The cultural background of West African society often leads to ways of expression which are unfamiliar if not misleading for outsiders. This is surely one of the most evident ways in which second-language English

ENGLISH IN AFRICA (6)

Ethiopia and Somalia to the north (see map 14.2) are countries in which English plays a much more restricted role. While Amharic is the official language of Ethiopia (spoken by approximately 25 per cent of the population) English is used in secondary and higher education and in various areas of public life (for example, radio and newspapers; laws are published in Amharic and English). Somalia is virtually monolingual in Somali, but English, Italian and Arabic are the chief written languages because Somali has little tradition of writing. Furthermore, English is used in the civil service, secondary school, radio, newspapers, local novels and correspondence (cf. Whiteley 1971: 550–2; Bender *et al.* 1976: 12–19; Schmied 1985b: 241).

To the South lie Zambia and Malawi (see map 14.2), in both of which English is the official language. Little information is available on Malawi, but it is reported that 'English permeates all these official activities [i.e. school, radio, government] as a separate, nationwide code which in most respects carries a superior status' (Serpell 1982: 104).

English in East Africa

A survey of the domains of English in all these East African countries (plus Zimbabwe and the Seychelles) reveals that it is used in a full range of activities in Uganda, Zambia, Malawi, Kenya and Zimbabwe: high (but not local) court, parliament, civil service; primary and secondary school; radio, newspapers, films, local novels, plays, records; traffic signs, advertisements; business and private correspondence; and also at home (Schmied 1985b: 241). For instance,

> most literature in Kenya is indeed in English, and the publications are increasing, from dime-store novels to more sophisticated examples which form part of the African literature syllabus in schools and the university. (Zuengler 1983: 114)

In Tanzania, where Swahili is well established, English is used in the high courts, secondary schools, radio, newspapers, local novels and films, correspondence, and, sometimes, advertisements (Schmied 1985b: 241). The image which English has is relatively more positive than Swahili over a range of criteria, including beautiful, colourful, rich; precise, logical; refined, superior, sophisticated – at least among educated Tanzanians (ibid.: 244–8).

ORAL POETRY

Oral poetry may be considered 'oral' in three distinct ways:

its composition, which does not rely on writing and may involve improvisation or composition-in-performance

its transmission, only by word of mouth

its performance, which makes each rendition a unique and unrepeatable event, often involving the participation of an audience.

Not all poetry considered 'oral' has all three of these characteristics.

The way oral poetry is composed and transmitted means that it is associated with simplicity and directness in its language and message while written poetry is more likely to be associated with sophistication and subtlety.

In defining ways in which poetry differs from prose, typography or visual shape plays an important role. Although typography is obviously not a characteristic of oral poetry, other features common to any form of poetry may take on particular importance in the oral tradition (oral storytelling is closely linked to oral poetry and shares many of these characteristics):

repetition - of sound, word, phrase, sentence or stanza (this therefore includes rhyme, alliteration, use of formulaic expression, syntactic parallelism, use of refrains)

use of metaphor

use of onomatopoeia

rhythm or metre

musical accompaniment

particular use of the voice (singing, chanting or intoning)

Repetition in its many forms is probably the most prominent feature of oral poetry in that it gives the poet /performer time to improvise and the audience time to understand and interact with the poet.

GROUP PERFORMANCE

Some oral poetry is performed in solitude (a lone worker in the fields, a mother singing to her baby) and is personal, contemplative, often melancholy. The blues are a good example of this type of poem or song . However, oral poetry is more readily associated with group performance; one of its chief functions is to reinforce collective identity, and group cohesiveness. Traditional work-songs help workers keep going in tedious or painful work , help them maintain a constant rhythm and create a feeling of solidarity and mutual support. Marching songs have a similar function.

THE GRIOT

In oral cultures, stories and poems are also an important way of transmitting knowledge. The 'griot' of Western Africa is a poet / musician who inherits his position in society and is usually attached to an important family . He is often referred to as the 'living memory' of his people or a 'walking encyclopedia' because his poems, songs, stories are the main means of remembering the history of the tribe, but also of consolidating authority and social obligation.

The griot 's audience are expected to participate in the telling of his stories and the singing of his songs this participation is the origin of the call-and- response structure common to African and Caribbean poetry. It is the typical structure of the work-songs. The leader's improvisation of new lines alternates with a short refrain, usually just one line from the chorus, which often corresponds to each exhalation.

The satirical component in a lot of oral literature from Africa and the Caribbean can also be traced to the griot. The griot has a special position in society and is permitted to criticise and ridicule even his superiors. Thus ,oral poetry has often been associated with protest and self-expression rendered acceptable by verbal dexterity and word play. In Africa, the ability to use words cleverly is a highly -valued skill for the slaves on the plantations double meaning oblique reference and even the use of creole itself became a way of disguising the subversive nature of many of their songs.

Notes based on 'Oral Poetry: Its Nature, Significance and Social Context' by Ruth Finnegan