

English Language Development of Black Africa

Kambhampati Rajesh, Doctoral Scholar

Department of English Literature

English and Foreign Languages University

Hyderabad, India

Introduction:

Ever since the inception of the literary works of Black Africa the fascinating conversations and discussions pivoted around the common regional vernacular language of different regions of Africa and literary languages. The Contemporary writers, scholars, critics, linguists, and the readers of Black Africa had a major problem of what language is more profound for literary works. Multilingual Africa has different vernacular languages which placed the writers in a situation to what language to adopt for the literary works. The pre-colonial period confined the literary works to a particular region, opportunity, and limited readers of a given language community.

To build a bridge between the language choice and literary language has become mandatory for the writers as the world has shrunk into a global village. The colonial period has broken the boundaries between the countries, trade, and technology has left people no more in isolation. This period brought with it significant strife between Indo-European, Islamic Arabic languages, and Black African languages. To narrow down the choice list of the languages appropriate/ suitable for the literary works the writers of black Africa prioritized three aspects i.e., Language choice, Language Development, and Language Interference. This approach to the language has evolved a 'standard language and the creation of a literary language'. In the pre-colonial period before standardizing the literary language of Black Africa, the influence of other languages (Arabic) had a strong impact.

In the late 19th and early 20th centuries had simplified the most controversial language choice related concept to a superficial regime with 'socially restricted sense' to a monolingual adherence. In the early post-independence period in French-speaking areas, the writings were labeled as French-writings.

In the post Independence era, the writers started measuring the quality of the writing not with the choice of the language but with the language opportunity.

With the widening boundaries of the literary world, Black African Literature has found its niche on par with the literature in English. The critics of literary criticism started acknowledging African literature as contemporary literature. Grading the works of African writers with the set standards of criticism has forced to modify/adjust 'normal critical techniques'. The scenario of the literary world has evolved with leaps and bounds with the accessibility of the technology. This has provided an opportunity for the linguists, critic's enthusiasts of the civilized world to peep into the cultural, regional, the traditional arena of the other regions of the world.

Colonization has enhanced the connectivity and accessibility to serious critics to measure and evaluate the works of the commonwealth or ex-common wealth writers. Establishing systematized literary terms, the native speakers of the language consider themselves to be the ambassadors to evaluate the literary works of the expanding circle in recent years. In this process, they had to face different problems and 'editorial practices'. These difficulties fostered a noticeable inferior criticism renamed as 'patriotic advertising'. Chinua Achebe, Ibe Nwoga, A. D. Hope to name few are the Africa writers who wrote in English and stood one among the native writers. Many writers of the world fashioned their writing skills of English as literary works which in turn elevated the value/status of the English literature. The parameters that are used to evaluate the works distinguished white and black American literature as two culturally different identities. Even the Afro-Americans wanted to uphold the recognition of their innate cultural heritage as a distinct and separate identity. Gross –The writer has kept himself away from criticism but voluble about the impact of the American writings on the works of the non-native writers. The theories of the traditional critics have been debunked by many writers who strongly enforced that the writing of a particular culture has to be judged by its cultural standards but not with the western critical standards. Both Gross and Steiner stated that universalizing the perspective/principles of the criticism to one particular western culture is not fair and, in a way, breaches the dignity of the writer. On a note of looking at the language, Steiner categorized English into three distinct groups

1. English as a mother tongue,
2. English as a second language
3. English as a foreign language.

But now the focus is not on the language problem rather on the style of writing.

Joseph Okpaku reacted strongly against the view that western criticism and standards are considered as anchor sets to evaluate the non-native writings of literature. He even articulated that western culture is irrelevant in evaluating African literature. In a way, it is like offending African art.

An analysis of a particular art has to be made within its periphery with its standards and for its readers, rather than equating it with some other standards. To illustrate “The primary criticism of African arts must come from Africans using African standards” Joseph Okapaku reacted strongly against the view that western criticism and standards are considered as anchor set to evaluate the non-native writings of literature. He even articulated to the extreme extent that western culture is irrelevant and absurd. (The treatment meted by the African writers is invariably influenced the core traditional culture) Irrespective approaches towards the criticism the problem sustained lurking in respect of both in ‘matter and manner, content and style, culture and language, interests and expression’.

Conclusion

Soyinka, Achebe, Lewis Nkosi enshrined the revolutionary declaration that they should be recognized as writers but not African writers. The west also started recognizing the cultural literary heritage of Africa as a rich and independent culture with its own identity. The truth that is unavoidable to ignore is the influence of Greek and Latin literature on western world literature has engulfed all the areas of the language i.e Tradition, Thought, and grammar. The chronological evidence shows that the influence of renaissance has made an impact based on education. Aristotle the father of English literature and his contemporaries were never anachronism, though there was a group of new writers. As the change is an inevitable process in any field so also with the African literature. Earlier the former literary works were an amalgamation of folktales, culture, and art, which has started evolving itself out of its confined periphery into a wider ‘world literature’ in English. The modern African writers marked their territory in the literary

world and their works become topics of discussion with the critical paper presentations in the academics and articles in periodicals. Their works were consciously viewed critically with all the criteria of the literary work. But the fact that the commonly agreed standards of evaluation nor the problems that are encountered in achieving the standards were not clearly stated.

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