

RESEARCH ARTICLE

Neologisms in French-Speaking African Writings: Source of Self-Affirmation and Proclamation of One's Identity

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Abstract

African writers create linguistic upheavals by integrating African language terms into their writings, thus transforming French expression. This approach aims to preserve and enhance African culture and identity, while asserting and proclaiming its identity. How do these authors proceed? In our paper, we will show how they present these linguistic upheavals in their works.

Keywords: African Writers, Linguistic Upheavals, Identity, Culture, African Languages.

1. Introduction

African writers introduce into their texts neologisms that are either words or expressions of their mother tongue, or words created, all foreign to the French language. This is why we question the usefulness of these elements in African writings. What do they really contribute to the construction and message of these texts? To answer these questions, we will rely on « The identity card » by Jean Marie Adiaffi and « La vie et demi » by Sony Labou Tansi. And, from a morphosyntactic and lexical analysis, we will show that the study of words in African literature reveals linguistic upheavals related to several factors.

The interest of this study is to show that the presence of these words is not accidental. This is why we formulate the hypothesis that neologisms contribute to the valorization of the texts of French-speaking African writers by the creation of a proper language, an « Africanization » of French, lexical enrichment through new lexemes and morphemes. To do this, we first present the authors chosen without any particular criteria. Then we define the theoretical framework. Finally, we will highlight that African authors, aware of the plurilingual context in which they evolve, use their writing to assert themselves and express their

cultural and linguistic identity, sometimes by drawing on local languages, or even by inventing new terms.

1.1 Presentation of the Authors

The two authors chosen are francophone African writers. How do they look? We make a brief summary of the biobibliography of each of them.

1.1.1 Sony Labou Tansi

His real name, Marcel Ntsoni, is Sony Labou Tansi, a Congolese writer born in 1947 in the Belgian Congo, now the Democratic Republic of Congo. He died in 1995 in Brazzaville, Republic of Congo. He is a novelist, playwright and poet. His writing is often called « tropicalized », using distorted French to express the violence and absurdity of the world. As outstanding works, we can quote: *Life and a half*, *The Shameful State* and *I undersigned cardiac*. He is considered a major writer of French-speaking African literature, known for his unique style and harsh criticism of society. After this summary of the life of Sony Labou Tansi, what can we say now about Jean Marie Adiaffi?

1.2 Jean Marie Adiaffi

Born on January 1, 1941 in Béttié, Côte d'Ivoire, Jean Marie Adiaffi died in Abidjan on November 15,

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1999. Writer, filmmaker, literary critic, novelist and poet, he has published several works including *Yalè sonan*, in 1969, *La carte d'identité*, in 1980, *D'éclairs et de foudres*, in 1980, *La galerie infernale*, in 1984 and *Silence, on développement*, in 1992. Known for his writing « n'zassa », his concept of « Bossonism » and his novel, *La carte d'identité*, Jean Marie Adiaffi has developed a theory that values African spirituality and criticizes the effects of colonialism on cultural identity. In *The Identity Card*, he addresses the themes of postcolonial cultural alienation and conflicts of values. The novel was awarded the Grand Prix de la littérature francophone d'Afrique in 1981.

2. Theoretical Framework

This part specifies that we will use morphosyntax and lexical linguistics to do this study.

2.2 Morphosyntax

We use morphosyntax to analyze and understand words and their place in the text. Indeed, according to Oswald Ducrot and Jean Marie Schaefer (1995; 140), the term morphosyntax, composed of the prefix « morpho » (morphology) and the radical « syntax », has two main meanings in modern linguistics. 'On the one hand, morphology is the description of the rules that govern the internal structure of words. It is also the description of both the rules of the internal structure of words and the rules of combination of phrases. On the other hand, syntax refers to the part of the grammar describing the rules by which significant units are combined in sentences.'

Thus, morphosyntax is both the structural study of words and the combinatorial rules of words and groups of words in the sentence. The French Academy Dictionary (2024) defines morphosyntax as « the study of morphological variations of words according to the rules of syntax ». Paul Robert (1987; 581), in turn, points out that morphosyntax, from a linguistic point of view, is « the study of the processes of formation of the linguistic statement, both at the level of morphemes and their combination in words and at the higher level ». In addition, morphosyntax, according to Jean Dubois and al (2002; 312), is « the description, initially, of the rules for combining morphemes to form words, phrases and phrases. In a second step, flexible posters (conjugation and declination).»

According to Christophe Parisse (2009; 1), morphosyntax refers to « all the structures that allow us to construct a statement grammatically ». For Jean

Dubois et al (2012; 311) and Noam Chomsky (1969; 11), it is the result of a variation of morphology, which is « the study of word forms (flexion and derivation) » and syntax, which « studies principles and processes according to which sentences are constructed in particular languages of combination of morphemes and syntagms ». This leads us to also use lexical linguistics.

2.3 Lexical Linguistics

Lexical linguistics is the study of the words (lexicon) of a language including their meaning, their formation, their origin and the relations between them. It encompasses fields such as lexicology (the scientific study of words), lexical semantics (the study of their meaning) and lexical morphology (the study of their internal structure). To understand lexical linguistics, we need to look at lexicology.

Lexicology is the whole lexicon or vocabulary of a given language considered in its development and its reciprocal links. And since the richness of a language cannot exist without words, it is measured by the quantitative expression of its vocabulary. Lexicology studies units of the lexical level: words and their functional equivalents. As words are connected with units of immediately lower and higher levels, lexicology is closely related to morphology, syntax and semantics.

3. Identity Research and Self-Affirmation

The « Africanization » of French is manifested by the integration of African linguistic and cultural elements, including lexicon and language-specific turns such as *Vili* and *Agni*, the mother tongues of authors. It also involves the incorporation of African cultural references. This approach aims to enrich literary French and express African reality in a more authentic way.

3.1 Proclamation of his Identity

African writers are aware of the linguistic diversity of their environment and the influence of different languages on their writing. This plurilingual awareness is reflected in the simultaneous presence of different languages in their texts, whether explicitly or implicitly. For example, the following excerpts illustrate this well

« *Kakatika Lapine* », « *Nanan Yaki* » (Map of identity, pp. 55; 99).

These examples show the creative spirit of French-speaking African writers who, from the words of local

languages, create new lexical units such as « Kakatika » (name attributed to the Commander meaning bad little genius) and « Nanan Yaki » (expression meaning forgiveness, Chief or sorry, Chief), which they insert into their writings, thus enriching the French language. We note that the alternation of languages is a process that reflects this linguistic richness. African authors use language not only as a tool for communication, but also as a means of poetic expression. For example, we have the following excerpts

As soon as they saw the prince, the « Dihié », Meledouman, they all rose as one man in one magnificent gymnastic movement.

*Nanan yako, Nanan yako, yako.

*Afai manou, Toubabou, Toubabou manou,

*Borofouè manou. May God keep you! (The identity card, p.74)

*You, you will not die again under the effect of the poison since you escaped at gbombloyano. (Life and a Half, p. 98)

We note, through the preceding excerpts, the presence of new agni words such as « Dihié » (Prince, Noble), « Mélédouman » (It is the name of a person, as explained in the additional information between the parentheses, who has no name or, whose name has been falsified.), « Nanan » (Chief or His Majesty), « yako » (take courage or be fortified), « Afai » (you have suffered), « manou » (in life, in the world), « Toubabou » (Malinké word meaning White), « Borofouè » (Agni word meaning White), (The identity card, p.74), and vili as « gbombloyano » (the most wicked sap of the forest), p. 98), which are not French words. They come from African languages. These words are a much deeper reflection of the realities of Africans than words from elsewhere, such as French words, for example, can express. Their use in texts written in French contributes to the enrichment of the vocabulary of the French language. This process allows French-speaking African writers not only to assert their identity and culture vis-à-vis the colonizer, but above all to show that they master the French language so that they can manipulate it as they please. In this perspective, the use of language then becomes a creative act that goes beyond the simple representation of reality. All this is possible because French-speaking African writers have become aware of the existence of the multitude of languages on the French-speaking African space. They appropriate

them and they use the French language as a space for expressing their creativity and a way to assert themselves.

3.2 Self-Affirmation

African authors take ownership of the French language, but also transform and renew it by integrating their own cultural and linguistic references. For example

-It is you, Meledouman (either: « I have no name », or exactly my name was falsified »)? (The identity card, p. 3)

In the excerpt above, « Meledouman » is an Agni word that is actually the summary of a sentence meaning either « I don't have a name » as the author himself said in the novel, or « I have a name that has unfortunately been falsified ». This creative approach leads to an original and singular writing that participates in the construction of an African literary identity leading to the transformation and renewal of language. It is in this sense that the French Ministry of Culture and Communication states

« Like any living organ, a language never ceases to evolve, and vocabulary changes as society changes. Words are born live and age, they can take new senses, moving from one language to another. This evolution is done largely naturally, but also may be due to decisions or deliberate choices. A language is not a fixed entity, fixed once and for all (...), the world change and the lexicon also evolves. »

This is why this point also highlights the contribution of foreign words, coming from local African languages, to the French language in the writings of French-speaking African authors. For example:

« Not having seen the sun for two years, they gave to the clearing the name Boulang-outana, which means « the sun is not dead. »

(Life and a Half, p. 89)

This excerpt shows us that the proclamation of their identity leads French-speaking African writers to introduce words from their language into the French language (Boulang-outana, which means « the sun is not dead »). In this way, they proceed to the « Africanization » of French and lexical enrichment. They thus create a space of freedom and self-reinvention. Language then becomes a tool to fight against cultural alienation. The authors draw on the richness of African orality, integrating local languages, idioms and myths to affirm a plural and

complex identity. They use language to challenge the reader, whether African or not, and invite him to a critical reflection on North-South relations and common history. They are not content with a single reproduction of the African language but adapt it to reflect their reality. For example

-Kapayahasheu! Kapayahasheu! (Life and a Half, p. 91)

-These are the lands of my ancestors who founded this kingdom: the kingdom of Bettié. (The identity card, p. 3)

In the above sentences, we note the words « Kapayahasheu » and « Bettié ». These are words that come from the African universe and, more precisely, from the Agni and Vili languages. As for « Bettié », it is the name of a city in the east of Côte d'Ivoire. As for the word « Toubabous », it comes from the Malinké or Dioula and refers to whites.

They integrate meanings, turns and rhythms specific to their mother tongue, creating a unique form of French specific to their context. We find out, for example, in the following excerpts

Nanan Yaki, Nanan Yaki, because of God. (The map of identity, p.9)

Francophone African writers appropriate the French language by drawing from local languages words, word groups and expressions that translate their thinking. This is what we see in the excerpts above through morphemes like « Nanan », (Chief or Her Majesty), « Yaki », (pardon, my apologies or sorry) in The ID card, p.9.

Concrete examples include the use of proverbs, songs in local languages, or the creation of neologisms. Neologisms are defined, according to Paul Robert (303), as « all words of new creation or recently borrowed from another language or any new acceptance given to a word or expression that already existed ». For Louis Guilbert (1973; 9), « The term neologism designates all vocabularies of new words to be renewed, or taken in new acceptances ». As for Jean Dubois et al (1994; 322), they define the term neologism as « a lexical unit (new signifier or new relation signifier-signified)

4. Conclusion

In short, the study of words in African literature reveals a complex and dynamic process of linguistic transformation, where the author creates a unique literary space by drawing on the resources of his own

culture and language. What is striking from the outset in lexical creation is the rupture that it introduces into discourse and therefore into writing. So, from the authors studied, we can extrapolate that, in French-speaking African literature, words play a crucial role of identity reappropriation and authentic expression of African reality.

In French-speaking African literature, words are not neutral. They are acts of proclaiming identity and asserting oneself, calls for transformation and bridges to a future where Africa occupies a central place in the global narrative.

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