

ISSN: 1595 - 5052

Journal of Nigerian English and Literature

**O
N
E
L**

**A Journal of Research
in Nigerian English
and Literature**

Volume 10: December 2013

Editor
Ubong Josiah

Language and Social Status: A Socio-stylistic Study of English in Ogali A. Ogali's *Veronica My Daughter*.

Joseph A. Ushie
&
Happiness Uduk

Abstract

The paper portrays the relationship between the status of language and its users in society. The site for the exploration of this language-social status nexus is Ogali A. Ogali's play, *Veronica My Daughter*, which was published within the Onitsha Market Literature series of the 1950s and the 1960s. The analysis of the play is guided by insights from stylistics and sociolinguistics. Randolph Quirk's categorization of performance in English into the three groups of the *assured*, the *anxious* and the *indifferent* is used to label the communicative competence of the characters in the play. The analysis of the play reveals a clear connection between social status and mastery of the incipient supposed "superior" code, the English language. Characters in the play that show no admirable communicative competences in the new language are treated with utter contempt even by their family members, while those who display mastery of the language are respected and accorded more than their fair share of recognition in the same society. It is observed that although Quirk's grouping of language users is quite useful, speakers' actual performance can often be influenced by the level of competence of their co-participants in a speech event. The paper submits that besides Africans or Nigerians using their mother tongue to ensure the languages' survival, the economy, technology and governance of the continent should be upgraded so as to enhance the value and respect for their indigenous languages.

1. Introduction

In their book, *A History of the English Language*, Baugh and Cable (2002) observe that "Languages become important because of events that shape the balance of power among nations...the language of a powerful nation will acquire importance as a direct reflection of political, economic, technological, and military strength; so also will the arts and sciences expressed in that language have advantages, including the opportunities for propagation," (p. 3). Elsewhere in the same book, the authors bring the point home to the individual user of

language: "...the importance of a language is largely determined by the importance of the people who speak it" (p. 142).

Linguists, especially sociolinguists, maintain that human languages are basically the same in terms of their function in relation to their speakers. The question of superiority or inferiority of languages, they argue, is a question of the social and economic status of the users, not of any language itself. The fortunes of languages are, therefore, tied inextricably to the language users' fortunes. Status does reflect in inter-language and intra-language choices. The individual who knows only his/her native tongue and none other is usually considered not very sophisticated, especially where the native tongue is not one of the "global languages" or languages of the metropolis and power such as English, French, Spanish, German, Japanese. In this case, the importance of the speakers gets transferred to the importance of the language(s). Within each language, too, there are varieties ranging from social to geographical, all of which bear the social status of the users. Thus, levels of education, wealth, royalty or political dominance of users of a particular language or variety of language tend to rub off on the status of the language. Such a language may, hence, become synonymous with political or economic dominance. A dominant language is, therefore, a source of power (Essien 2010). Language is thus considered to bestow upon its users the fortunes which it carries and vice versa.

The position of power of a people and, consequently, their language, Okon & Uduk (2007); Uduk (2013) agree, is sometimes not under conscious control, but is determined by subtle socio-political, economic and historical forces. Language users could be approached from this perspective as well - the more important the language one speaks, the more respect one attracts. Essien (2010, p.43) puts it very aptly: 'he who controls language controls history, power and destiny.' Still, stressing the invaluable role of language as an instrument of control, Essien further elucidates:

In a bilingual or multilingual setting, there is usually one language, regardless of its size, which invests its users not only with what Wardhaugh (1986, p.3) refers to as "the full panoply of uses that signify a standard language," but also prestige, self-confidence and power
(p. 46)

The above suggests that linguistic minority or majority (which may also follow the power-powerlessness divide as against sheer numbers) translates into power relationships. This agrees with Skutnabb-Kangas (1990) who sees linguistic dominance in terms of power relationships, not in terms of numerical strength.

It is this understanding that has made some peoples to have political, economic, technological, educational and social dominance over others:

No wonder, then, European nations old and new, are where they are - far above Black nations of Africa, south of the Sahara, whose development does not take cognizance of the enormous potentials and power of language.

(Essien 2010, p.43)

But, the profile of a language may improve positively if it becomes associated with a thriving culture, religion, trade, science and technology, and education, or if it is associated with a dominant political economic power (Okon & Uduk, 2005; Uduk 2013).

2. Languages in Contact

When two or more languages are in contact in the same environment the superior/inferior dichotomy also shows up. The British Isles offers a good example. In the 400 years of Roman domination of the Celts (about 43 AD to 410 AD) the Celts learned Latin, the language of the politically dominant Roman Empire, but there is hardly any evidence that the Celtic language influenced Latin. Similarly, while the Teutons (the Jutes, the Saxons and the Angles) who subsequently dominated the Celts, also looked down on the Celts and their language, the French-speaking Normans, who were to conquer and rule Britain for about 200 years, also initially related with Old English with a tinge of disdain since the Old English users had gone down in social, political and economic power. Indeed, during both the Roman and Norman rule of Britain, knowledge of either Latin or French was one major facilitator of upward social mobility. Baugh and Cable (2005, p. 117) have captured it most accurately, "It is true that English was now an uncultivated tongue, the language of a socially inferior class, and that a bishop like Wulfstan might be subjected to Norman disdain in part, at least, because of his ignorance of that social shibboleth". During Norman domination, therefore, Anglo-French thrived as the language of the Royal court, the ruling and business class division, and of education while the lower classes spoke English. Similarly, up to about the 1980s in many of the Commonwealth countries, American English was treated with contempt especially by school teachers in preference to British English; but with the clear ascendancy of the United States as the leading world power, the American dialect of English has also risen in status and acceptability globally. The status of human language is therefore enhanced or lowered according to the fortunes of the language users. The goal of

this contribution is to examine how, in the play, *Veronica My Daughter*, by a Nigerian, Ogali A. Ogali, the social and educational status of the characters, as fossilized in their different levels of exposure to English, shows up in the attitudes to the characters. The discourse is approached from a socio-stylistic perspective. In discerning the style and social status of the characters, Randolph Quirk's three categories of English language users are employed. These are the *assured*, the *anxious* and the *indifferent*. The sociolinguistic and stylistic feature of status is also engaged in the paper to represent the stylistic predilection of the characters, and hence, the kind of respect each group of language users enjoys in the play.

3. The English language in Nigeria

English language has a rich history in Africa as a whole and Nigeria in particular, beginning from the establishment of trading ports in parts of the African continent in the 17th Century by European merchants. Later on, missionary activities and colonialism came in the 19th Century, coupled with the return of African slaves to the various countries of Africa. The English language has been in Africa well over 400 years. Today, the language is being used for several purposes which reflect all manner of local and regional influences. Over the years of its existence, it has been domesticated to meet the peoples' needs for cultural expression and national identity.

The history of the English language in Nigeria is thus traceable to the colonial period when the Portuguese and the British colonized the country. From that time on, the English language has gained permanence in Nigeria, playing multiple roles: as the language of government and administration, social communication, business, legislation, education, etc. Many scholars have given various accounts of the introduction and subsequent growth of the English language in Nigeria. These include Brosnahan, 1958; Banjo, 1970; Bamgbose, 1971; Adetugbo, 1978; Akere, 1982; Jibril, 1982; Ogu, 1992, Schmeid, 1991 and Awubi, 2000 among others. Beginning from its early stage as "Broken English", English has manifested some changes at the different levels of linguistic organisation in the process of its growth in Nigeria.

Today, the language has acquired enviable significance as a status symbol among Nigerians. Knowledge of the language guarantees upward social and economic mobility in the country. English performs diversified functions in Nigeria because of the multicultural and multilingual nature of the nation. These functions, among others, are for accommodation, participation and social mobility. The language performs the function of accommodation for the manifold peoples of Nigeria. Several attempts to bestow such a function on any indigenous language have been stiffly resisted over the years even as Nigeria has well over

five hundred (500) languages (Eka 2000; 2005). Also, English functions for wider communication as it bridges the gap between linguistically incomprehensible neighbours. One impact of the growth of English has been to reduce native linguistic diversity in many parts of the world as the language grows towards becoming an undisputed world language.

4. English and Social Status in Ogali A. Ogali's *Veronica My Daughter*: Synopsis of the play.

Veronica My Daughter, written by Ogali A. Ogali is a play set in a typical African environment in which colonialism, with the accompanying western education, is just gaining roots. The playwright presents in the work the tension between the old ways of parents having the final word on their children's life, on the one hand, and the new air of freedom being planted and watered by the incipient Christian and Western ways. Chief Jombo, who represents the fading African system, with its own inscribed tinge of capitalism, prefers to give out his daughter to Chief Basse (his wealthy friend who is ready to pay a higher bride price for the daughter, Veronica, than the younger contender, Michael, whom Veronica loves, in spite of his being poor and less well-established materially). Chief Basse is able and ready to pay two hundred pounds as against the fixed thirty pounds. The play is deliberately amusing and sarcastic as the playwright himself states: "VERONICA MY DAUGHTER is a drama intended to amuse the Reader." [sic]. The main source of the humour in the play is the playwright's playfulness with the English language as the major symbol and announcer of social status.

The characters' different status is revealed more by their linguistic choices than by anything else. The main character of the play is a female whose name is also captured in the title of the drama - Veronica. She is the only girl her age in the village not yet married, and who is preparing to write the Standard Six examinations. Veronica is in love with Michael, but her father refuses her contacts with Michael because he wants her to marry his friend, Chief Basse, whom she does not have any iota of love for. Meanwhile, her mother, Paulina, who is also educated, advises her to allow their daughter make her choice of who to marry. She even encourages her daughter to see Michael and even makes excuses on her behalf when her husband inquires about their daughter's whereabouts. Ogali A. Ogali's point in the work seems to be that nobody, especially parents, should try to make a choice of a life-time partner for another. This, he achieves, by making the story climax in the coming together of both lovers - Michael and Veronica -

against all odds. Our next preoccupation in the paper is with the language used in the play and how this reflects status.

(b) The Language Used in the Play

The analysis of the language used in the play will be on the basis of the differentiation of English language users as made by Quirk (1962). Quirk explains in his work that the mark of literacy is that the educated person has a sufficiently wide range of vocabulary and is capable of conversing with anybody using English no matter the other's specialization or otherwise. From the point of view of social functions which language, particularly English, performs, Quirk categorizes users into three: (a) The Assured, (b) The Anxious, and (c) The Indifferent.

The assured, who are at one end of the ladder (the top), have position and status, and are not worried about their language use. This is because their education and occupation make them confident of speaking an "unimpeachable form" of English. They are not afraid of criticism or correction. This gives their speech the usually unself-conscious and easy flow which is often envied. On the other hand, the anxious are between the assured and the indifferent. These users actively attempt to suppress what they believe to be 'bad English' and consciously cultivate what to them is 'good English' and live their lives in nervousness over their grammar, pronunciation and diction as they are sensitive and fearful of betraying themselves. These people are reviled by both the assured and the indifferent. Those at the end of the rung are the indifferent. These are the ones who speak with a degree of careless ease because even if they are aware that their English is condemned by others, they would be incapable of remedying the situation. This category, Quirk labels the indifferent (Quirk 1962, p.74-75).

This categorization was done based on English native speakers' community, but we have adopted and adapted it to the Nigerian environment where English has been earlier shown to perform multiple functions, and with different levels of performance, as manifested in Ogali A. Ogali's *Veronica My Daughter*. Although the characters paraded by Ogali fall into the above classes, the various categories are not so clear-cut for all the characters. For instance, Paulina, Veronica, Michael, Tom, Harry, Momo, Headmaster, Alice, Bomber Billy at some point all exhibit the habits of the assured as they speak impeccable English and are not bothered about their language use. But Tom, Harry and John are intimidated by Bomber Billy who, though in secondary school, uses words and expressions which even teachers claim not to have heard, let alone understand their meanings. John claims to have had an encounter with him and reports to his brothers:

Here come [sic] Bomber Billy, a young student from one of the colleges [secondary school] in the neighbouring town(sic). He came to our class yesterday and spoke many English big words that our Teacher at last confessed he never understood all what he said(p.14).

When Billy meets the brothers he detonates medical jargon on them as word bombs when they inquire why he goes about with the aid of a walking stick:

As I was descending [sic] from declivity yesterday, with such an excessive velocity, I suddenly lost the centre of my gravity and was precipitated on macadamised thoroughfare (p. 15).

The following is a portrayal of the major characters according to their social status, which replicates in their performance in English:

(i) Veronica

Veronica, who is seen in the opening scene of the play in company of Alice, belongs with the category of the assured, and she is one of the only two female characters that have attained Standard Six, the other being her friend, Alice, in whom she confides as a social status mate. She is requested to read the essay Michael wrote on jealousy. All this shows that she is considered to be very "sophisticated" in the use of English. Even her insisting on marrying a man of her choice is a sign of literacy and identification with the current way of life of the community. She displays her social status in her attitude to her father whom she regrets would have known what girls of her time want if he had the most fundamental level of education:

That is where I disagree with my old illiterate father who wants me to marry a person of his choice. If my father Chief Jombo had attended even infant school as to be able to read and write simple English, am [sic] sure he would have known that girls of nowadays choose their own husband [sic] themselves(p.6).

Notice the description of her father which places emphasis not only on the age of the man, but also on his "illiteracy", and the regret that "If my father Chief Jombo had attended even infant school as to be able to read and write simple English...." Here, we find a celebration of literacy and a lamentation over the lack of it, all of which subconsciously translates into contempt for the father on the basis of his

being non-literate. This reminisces the disdain the French-speaking Normans had for even the seasoned Bishop Wulfstan of Britain for the reason that he knew no French but only English. To indicate her seriousness, she asserts her “modernity” in her words to her friend, Alice, that no matter what happens, she would not be forced into marrying someone who is not her choice: “I assure you I must reject any person no matter how rich that person may be who is not my choice” (p.6). In a similar vein, she speaks of Chief Bassey, the man her father prefers she marries, as ‘a grade one illiterate’. Vera’s complete contempt for her father on grounds of his non-sophistication in English comes out most forcefully when, on seeing her father’s countenance as he returns, she advises Alice: ‘Let us go out through the other door or else he’ll poort(sic) his uncooked English on us’(p.7) . She calls the brand of English her father uses ‘uncooked’ and therefore capable of causing them harm if they dared allow the words he would produce to fall on them. But all that seems to vanish the moment Bomber Billy is hired by her father to tame her and her mother. She becomes speechless, somewhat surrenders and hangs now between the assured and the anxious, in Quirk’s categorization. This suggests the need to modify Quirk’s grouping of language users since the question of participant or interlocutor in a speech event seems to play a role in the language user’s display of his/her communicative competence. For instance, Veronica and Paulina, who are certainly among the assured while speaking with Chief Jombo tend to lapse into the group of the anxious when facing Bomber Billy. It follows, therefore, that much as Quirk’s categories are helpful, they are not always stable but often vary depending on whom one is interacting with. One maintains one’s confidence in the knowledge of a language when one speaks it with one’s equals or “inferiors”; but becomes less confident when speaking with those one deems “superior” in the use of the same language. Quirk’s categories of the assured, the anxious and the indifferent may, therefore, not always be stable for the interlocutors in all communicative situations.

(ii) Paulina

Paulina is Veronica’s mother and Chief Jombo’s wife. Chief Jombo claims that his wife went to school in England and America:

... because you go college for America, me I go my own for farm...
you begin preach politician... wetin I sabi, you sabi grammar...
because him go college for England me I go for farm (p.10, 11).

She is an educated woman who is married to a non-literate man whom she regrets to have married. She uses her educated status and exposure to thwart her husband’s desire to marry out their only daughter to the illiterate Chief Bassey

whom her husband prefers to the poor but younger Michael. This is to forestall a repeat of what she experienced which frustrated her dreams of getting a High Elementary Certificate which would have placed her highly in society. She relives her experience:

I think I should have got High Elementary Certificate but you advised my illiterate parents to withdraw me ... stating that my Low Elementary Certificate was even too high for me... most of my friends who completed the course are now heading primary schools and some are teaching in Colleges and here I am a Grade Three Teacher. Don't take for granted that Vero must repeat the mistake I made it was not my mind to marry you. It was my parents who forced me to commit that marriage suicide. Vero must avoid it as am [sic] alive (p. 9, 35).

She is a modern woman who prefers dialogue to threats. Her argument is that she and her husband have done their best in bringing up their daughter who is of age to decide on whom to marry:

She is the only person to check and guard herself as far as this matter of friendship is concerned not you; not me she is of age. I said before. If she likes to be useless that's her own look out and not yours not mine. You have done your best; I have done mine and, the remaining part is her duty(p.8).

The thrust of her interest in her daughter is in her development on the platform of western education and western ways. She tells Momo, their neighbour, who is invited by her husband to intervene and make her change her mind:

I told him as a wife to a husband that he should leave Vero to her discretion. If she loves Mike, I don't see any harm in it. After all she is of age (p. 11).

She sees Mike as a better option because he is educated and encourages Vero to take her studies seriously in various ways. Mike's motivation of Vero through buying her books on political, social and economic life of a woman as well as encouraging her to further her studies is the mainstay of her preference of the younger suitor to Chief Jombo, who has no such plans for the daughter. To show that she is balanced in knowledge and thinking, she advises her daughter to be sure of what she is bargaining for:

In as much as I side you [sic] in this case, that is *no gratis* that you should misbehave after all, this is your final year in school. *Youth is madness* –people say, I do not pray for any disappointment rather I give you a motherly advice. You must move carefully and weigh things on both sides before you implement them (p.19-20).

Even her limited education is a threat to her husband as he claims that if she had gone any further, she would have been too independent for him: ‘Aha I see how! You no read plenty yet you no allow me drink water for house with grammarian talk-talk. If you read plenty plenty dat mean say if I talk, you dey crack me for head’ (p.9-10). In spite of his aversion to his wife’s reading further, Chief Jombo bows to her superior argument, as supported by the family’s friends:

My big teacher, big Misis, big Paulina I know you teacham me wettin I go do Teacham me now. Wettin my sons neighbours Mikere and friends go do when I call them (p.35).

Paulina is grateful to her husband for accepting to rub minds with others so as to take a final decision on Veronica and Michael. She tells him simply: ‘Thank you dear, that’s splendid.’ Although Chief Jombo finally agrees to accept the suggestion of Paulina, he maps out a future plan for himself and possibly his daughter in the world to come. He intends to be educated and, if not, would not marry an educated wife or send his daughter to school:

... make I tell you say for my next world, I go go college because book don me something. But if I no go; I no go marry woman wey go book because they too sabi plenty. If I born daughter for my next world, him too no go go school because they too like poor poor boys wey don give them sweets and biscuits because demtoo, go book and work small clerk work (p.36).

Chief Jombo concedes that knowledge of English is the weapon that confers upon its speakers status and class. Throughout the play those who speak Standard English hardly willingly condescend to the level of the indifferent. Paulina, for instance, never speaks the form of English used by her husband and she does not mind whether he understands her or not. Considerations of the status of one’s co-participant in a discussion are too much of obstacles to the display of her knowledge, which confers on her an identity different from, and superior to, her

husband's. The difference between husband and wife as dictated by language occurs even in the way the couple call names. Her husband refers to Michael as 'Mikere', but she either calls him 'Michael' or 'Mike'. Similarly, she calls her daughter by the shortened, trendy form, "Vero", unlike the husband, who calls her "Veronica" throughout the play. This portrays her as trendy and fashionable in the "modern, western sense," and her husband, as a socially non-sophisticated illiterate.

(ii) **Bomber Billy**

Bomber Billy is a secondary school student in the neighbouring town to that in which the play is cast. He is described as fond of using high-sounding English words that are almost incomprehensible. His use of such words is akin to the alien, Latinized Inkhorn terms used by Englishmen of the Renaissance era to show education and social sophistication. Billy's use of 'big words' reverberates throughout the play. He is the perfect example of the assured, a young man on top of his society who spares no opportunity to show off his mastery of the new language. A few of such usages would suffice:

As I was descending from **declivity** yesterday, with Such an **excessive velocity**, I suddenly lost the centre of my **gravity** and was **precipitated** on **macamadised thoroughfare** (p.15)

The above explanation is a response to John and his brothers who wanted to know why Billy was using a walking stick. Billy resorts to the use of technical jargon to show that he is well informed and has a vast knowledge of the English language. The next set of expressions is addressed to the same group to indicate his wide knowledge of medical vocabulary:

I don't care what the medical officer said but I assure you that this is nothing but a **cocofied** agency **antipasimodical** producing nothing but **voscandium**, **miszcandum** and **tiscono**. This medicine that I have in hand is called Grand Electrical, **Punchutical Demo scandium** which cures all diseases incident to humanity (p. 16).

The opening statement proves the point made earlier that the assured are usually not concerned about what others say because they are at the top of the rung and entertain no fear of correction or criticism. Indeed, the case of Bomber Billy is that of severe affected display of his knowledge of the language before any audience he encounters, all to emphasise his social status in society using the English language.

Unlike others in the play, Paulina and Momo, for example, who seem to have no sense of flexibility and appropriateness in terms of code as they hang on to their own standard (a symbol of class and status as they would not allow anything contaminate them), Billy enters into some league with the non-literate Chief Jombo. It seems hasty to interpret Bomber Billy's aligning with Chief Jombo only as rejection of the western. It would appear equally plausible to see his identification with the illiterate Chief as an act of one grabbing an opportunity to showcase one's prowess in the non-native language; indeed, as one registering one's dominion over all others in the craft of English usage. But when Paulina and Veronica are faced with the word bombs of Bomber Billy 'who speaks many big English words' (p.14) at the instance of the indifferent Chief Jombo, their husband and father, they both tend to lapse into a position of inferiority, thus exhibiting the features of the anxious, as Veronica uses Mike to show off: "Don't mind him. Does he know more than Mike who has his Inter B.A. [sic]"

Instead of living up to the moment, she makes reference to another person, Mike, apparently because she is nervous and unsure of her level of English compared to Bomber Billy's. Also, somewhat later, recourse is made by her to Mike when attacked by Billy: 'My Mike will answer you well when he meets you. (p. 34)' That's all she says. Billy even takes note of the defeatist mode of Veronica:

Your statement, Veronica indicates nothing but psychological defeatism because you do not take into account the spirit of dynamism in my cerebrum and cerebellum. (P. 34).

Paulina suffers more attack from Billy's word bombs. This is seen from the moment he arrives Chief Jombo's house:

Madam what's the meaning of all the hullabaloo that disturbed my capillary and tonsorial artist from discharging his duty efficiently thus compelling me to have a pedestrian excursion to this place? (p.33)

In response to the above question, Paulina informs Billy that her husband wants to force their daughter to marry a much older man whom she does not love. Billy reacts in an uncanny manner. He tells her that contrary to her thoughts, she was the one who was 'laboring' under some form of 'delusion'. Surprised that a young boy of Billy's age could address her thus, she reminds him that she is older than him and warns him against continuing in the disrespectful manner. But Billy forges ahead:

I must advice you Madam to let your conversational communication possess a cherished consciousness and

congeny, let your contemporaneity discernment and unpermitted expectation have intangibility, veroness; and versity. Avoid pomposity, proticity, verbosity and rapacity(p.34).

Paulina is reminded that she is a woman whose conversation needs to be consciously checked and discernment exhibited in her style of interaction with the male. She is told what to do and what to avoid. As if his message has not achieved the impact intended, Billy continues:

Look – here! Are you promulgating your exordiation or articulating superficial sentimentality and amicable philosophical observation, beware of platitudeness and ponderosity and learn to respect my integrity (p.33)

The attitude expressed above by Billy happens to be in tandem with the disposition of Chief Jombo, who still stands for the typical African way of life even as Billy finds it pleasurable to show off with his “sophistication” in the mastery of English. This rather accidental consonance between Billy’s position and Chief Jombo’s truly African world view of the woman is displayed earlier in the play when Chief Jombo warns his wife, Pauline: “Don interrupted me for I am senior you proper.” The African man is seen as the be-all and the end-all. He should not be interrupted or talked back at by the female while the female should only be seen and not heard. And no matter how small an African male is, he could speak anyhow to any female whether older or younger than the male. The female, according to Billy, is to ‘learn to respect’ the integrity of the male. The mission of Bomber Billy is summed up as follows:

Thank you Chief before I go, I must make your wife know that she, as a woman, is expected to maintain perfect tranquility whenever you talk to her (p. 34).

It appears there are two significant roles Billy plays in the play. First, he still has a good measure of what the woman should be in a typical African setting in spite of his “intimidating” knowledge of the English language. Further, as we said earlier, it seems uncertain that Billy’s “humiliation” of Paulina and her daughter, Veronica, was only for the protection of African value system rather than being a golden opportunity to subdue co-contenders to mastery of the English language.

This is because apart from his display of the English language, he does not profess Africanness in any other way in the play.

(ii) Chief Jombo

To indicate that Billy is hired by the Chief to put a check on his wife and daughter, who had hitherto paraded themselves as being very versed in the use of English, Chief says: "Ah Grammar people my brother him friend pikin don come. Ready for talk dat grammarian." He continues to deride them when neither his wife nor daughter responds to Billy while urging him to go ahead: "Yes make una talk grammarian. My pikin talk I day here." (p. 33). He is so elated that he claps and laughs and urges Billy to continue as he has succeeded in shutting them up permanently. For the "indifferent" Chief, the duo have more than met their match: "Talk am my pikin for dem moth don closs." Chief shows how satisfied he is with Billy for bombarding his wife and daughter with word bombs. And since Paulina is unwilling to talk, he promises to invite Billy any other time Paulina and Veronica threaten him with their grammar and logic: '... my picken (sic), go your way and when they talk too much again, I go callam you. ...salute your papa for me-o.'

Chief Jombo enjoys doing this because he finds in this some kind of vengeance for the duo who have been subjecting him to ridicule for being illiterate, as we saw earlier in the daughter's attitude to him when her friend, Alice, comes. He thus finds delight in putting both his wife and daughter to shame from whom he had suffered humiliation before the arrival of Bomber Billy. He sums up his frustration:

... because unu go college, me no go, you hear?
I talk now. unu talk politician. I talk again, unu
make grammarian and logician. I talk again, unu
make grammarian and logician. Oh very wonderfulness....(p.34)

He had earlier attributed the disparity between his wife and daughter, on the one hand, and him, on the other, to the former attending schools while he "attended the farm":

...because you go school for America, me I go my
own for farm. Wetin I sabi, you sabi grammar, me I
sabi money pass you. I go tell you say money pass
book. I go teacham say book different money different
and money big pass book no money no book (p. 10-11).

Chief Jombo does not believe in too much talk and logic, but in money. He advises his wife whom he refers to as politician, grammarian and logician to go to Enugu where she would find politicians whom he calls 'talking drums' who 'preach politician.' He reminds her that grammar is nothing, but money seems to be everything. This shows the Chief's contempt and disregard for English language, which symbolizes western education in the play:

Wetin I sabi, you sabi grammar, me I
sabi money pass you. I go tell you say
money pass book (p. 10)

It is pertinent to stress here the towering image of the English as the proof, if not the very single symbol, of western education, which, by implication, also signals a higher social status in society. This is the point the Chief understands, and which he struggles to disprove: that higher social status without money is nothing.

The next character is Michael, the man who is shown as a clerk with a manservant, or "boy".

(iv) Michael

In terms of language use, Michael is typically an assured person. He speaks and writes with every level of confidence, not afraid of criticism and correction; and the status manifests eloquently. The fact that he is classy is showcased by his keeping of a servant called "boy" who serves him. Colonialism gave rise to this kind of mentality where the educated, in imitating the colonial masters, own houseboys and girls who do them service. Again, Michael is shown to be a great thinker who philosophizes and gets his ideas and maxims published by newspaper houses. Upon writing this time, he requests Veronica to edit his work and offer criticisms which could border on grammar and the subject matter:

...I may like you to read this essay yourself
and make criticism on the subject matter or
matters arising from the main body (p.24)

The above agrees with Quirk's description of the assured as not being afraid of criticism or corrections as they are confident in their ability in the use of the English language. Veronica does the reading and exclaims: "Masterpiece! How sweet! You write this[sic]! No wonder you are a novelist and Newspaper Columnist." This is in tandem with Quirk's description of the assured whom he says have status and position backed up with education and occupation.

The write-up on jealousy hinges on the theories and philosophies of some great teachers and writers like Jesus Christ (p.25), William Shakespeare (p.25), Richard Whatley (p.25), Bishop High Latimer (p.25), William Henley (p.27), G.A Gallock (p.26), Rudyard Kipling (p.26) and Benjamin Harrison (p.27), among others, whose ideologies he agrees with. To have made reference to all these persons speaks of a well and widely read person.

Michael does not get involved in any verbal altercation with any of his detractors, even when he is given a letter by Veronica's brothers. All he is concerned with is how to change the mentality of the people. He is involved in a different kind of wars; not war of words like Bomber Billy. This is an ethical and attitudinal re-orientation. He triumphs at the end because he gets to marry Veronica, his love, not by carrying weapons. The playwright seems to be preaching a different sermon through Michael - the triumph of love and western education over wealth and ignorance, symbolized here by whatever is African. By making Michael and Veronica get married at the end of the play, the writer suggests that love is the most important ingredient in any relationship, not money. The failure of both Chiefs Bassey and Jombo indicates that the time has passed when parents chose spouses for their children. Now, children marry, not because of money but because of the level of education of the people they are involved with and the status they command. This failure signals the passing into oblivion of the old practice of marrying out children to people they did not love so that parents could collect exorbitant bride prices, build houses or reap other material gains from the marriage. This idea earlier put up by Paulina, Veronica and Alice is supported by both Momo and Peter respectively:

I think it is good to allow her to her opinion.

After all, if she marries the person of your choice
am afraid she can't make a good wife. On the other
hand you find her at her best if she marries some one
of her choice(p.38).

Peter just does not lend his voice to this reasoning, but highlights the legal perspective. He tells Chief Jombo the implication of forcing Veronica to marry Chief Bassey and collecting more than the stipulated thirty pounds dowry:

... it is illegal to force her to marry someone she
does not love... allow her to her choice. You must
abide by the Government's decision. No person marries
a wife now with more than thirty pounds. The old order,
I assure you has changed anything more is illegal (p.39,40).

When Michael is finally allowed to marry Veronica, he expresses the overall ideology of the playwright that no single person can be said to have conquered without the support of others in the community:

I do not claim to be the sole agent of this Victory but maintain that through your unparalleled diplomacy, the long fought battle psychological at that has been won without any bloodshed... I embraced everything as a sportsman (p. 41).

Even Chief Jombo, who had been an ardent believer in the old order, changes his mind thus:

I thank you so much for wettin you teacham me today.
That mean say I for don go prison if me no learn wettin you teacham now(p.43).

That the position of Veronica, Michael, Paulina, Alice and Harry are upheld by the majority of the people over those of Chief Jombo indicates the triumph of English language as a status symbol since their ideologies are put forth in this language. Similarly, Veronica's marrying Michael is suggestive of the enthronement of Western Civilization and ways of life and the dethronement of African languages and traditions as represented by Chiefs Jombo and Bassey. A similar situation occurred in Britain, but in contrast to what we find in Nigeria, Englishmen rose in protection against foreign inferences, but not so Nigerians. The complete surrendering of Chief Jombo is a reflection of the attitude of Nigerians as regards their languages and ways of life.

(c) Naming:

Names suggest certain qualities inherent in their bearers as they are abbreviated statements of meaning and significance, interpretations of life's experiences or of events in the history of the family to which the bearer belongs. In the culture of the area under study, and Africa by extension, names serve as a reflection of the peoples' struggles in life, their fortunes, sorrows and joys, hopes and aspirations. This suggests that names are natural and are bestowed with the task of conveying the general world view of their bearers, whether British or African. This agrees with the conclusion that in practical terms, all names in English and Ibibio are bearers of ancestral legacies and that far from being identification tags, names form a great reservoir of sentiments, ideas and values

and are immortal gems of meaning encapsulating reflective thought that has been distilled out of the lived experience of people of all ages' (Uduk 2008, p.17). But Ayandele (2009), in describing the educated elite in Nigeria during the colonial period and immediately after, argues that they preferred British names to the African ones they had been christened with. These Nigerians he referred to as deluded because 'they had adopted European names in favour of African ones' (p.19). These people chose these British names which sounded 'alliterative, polysyllabic or were hyphenated' because they were under 'mental and cultural enslavement.'

A similar scenario plays out in the play under study. Ogali A. Ogali uses naming to reflect status. The elite are known by the names they bear since names are said to convey sentiments, ideas and general world view of the bearers. All but three of the characters bear English and Christian names. The names of the characters which are English and their abbreviated forms include:

- | | |
|------------------------------|-------------------|
| a. Veronica or Vero | h. Mark Johnson |
| b. Paulina | i. Peter |
| c. Alice or Aly | j. Bomber Billy |
| d. Michael or Mike or Mikere | k. Father Clement |
| e. Tom | |
| f. Harry | |
| g. John | |

All of the above characters are shown as persons who are the elite in the society, having molted off their African names, as reflected in their arguments and use of the English language. Bomber Billy, for instance, is shown to be a 'bomber' indeed as his name suggests. He bombards others not with common bombs, but 'word bombs.' This agrees with the view that a name is a reflection of who the bearer is. After all, names influence their bearers whether positively or otherwise. Even though the great writer Shakespeare had once asked: "What's in a name?" he sure did agree through Iago that:

Good name in man and woman is the immediate jewel
of their souls, who steals my purse steals trash; it is
something, nothing; that was mine; it is his and has
been slave to thousand; But he who filches from me my

good name, robs me of that which not enriches him and
makes me poor.

The above rhymes with Essien (1986) who maintains that names are equated with the persons answering them as they are invariable expressions of the personhood of the bearers.

Billy the bomber, just like some of the educated African elite, is shown to be under 'mental and cultural enslavement.' However, unlike the rest of the characters in the play, Bomber Billy is still capable of protecting what is African even if he does so to display his social status through the use of English, as he asserts:

Thank you Chief Before I go, I must make
your wife know that she, as a woman, is
expected to maintain perfect tranquility
whenever you talk to her (p. 34).

He seems to be saying that no matter how educated Paulina is and can speak English, 'as a woman,' she is expected to be submissive to her husband especially when her husband holds the floor.

Chief Jombo and Chief Bassey are represented as illiterates as reflected in the African names they bear. These two hold fastidiously to the African heritage of choosing husbands for their children for economic empowerment. Unfortunately, just as most African traditions, the languages and mores, too, are giving way to Western culture and lifestyle. Thus, symbolically, the two chiefs cave in to the western and new under pressure from other characters in the play. This is what has happened to Nigerian and African languages, which have been deposed by English because the language is a global one and bestows upon its users certain privileges.

Conclusion

The goal of this paper has been to establish the role of language as a status symbol using, in particular, the English language. To guide the study we relied on a socio-stylistic framework, and particularly benefitted from Randolph Quirk's categorization of English language users into the three groups of the assured, the anxious and the indifferent. The paper has explored the play, *Veronica My daughter*, by Ogali A. Ogali, which was published just about the time the English

language and western ways were gaining roots in the Nigerian society. In the work we have witnessed a near-replica of the situation that Englishmen faced during the period of the subjugation of their language by the French-speaking Normans. However, while the Englishmen worked towards the re-establishment of their native tongue, aided by some extraneous circumstances, the Nigerian in a corresponding situation shows no sign of rising from the domination in terms of resuscitating his language or ways of life. We find this in the play even in the fondness of the elitist characters for foreign names. By maintaining foreign names and insisting on using the English language even at very informal occasions because it bestows status on us at the expense of our indigenous languages, we are presented as a people under 'mental and cultural enslavement', a situation that subsists till date, more than fifty years after independence. That the ideas of Paulina and Veronica are supported by the other members of the community is indicative of the triumph of English over indigenous Nigerian languages.

It is important, however, to observe that languages do not rise in status in isolation of the economic and social wellbeing of their speakers. The English language became a world language because of the importance of the English people in the fields of science, technology, economy and stability of their democracy, especially as these enabled them to build a formidable British Empire. Further, the fortunes of the language are being enhanced by its being the official language of two successive world powers – the British Empire and the United States. If African languages are also to rise, or even survive the much-predicted extinction of many languages, then African countries must make themselves relevant in sectors of life other than the linguistic. This is what would attract foreigners to learn and help in the growth of the African languages. After all, robbers do not labour at a door that opens to emptiness. But they do so only at one which opens into treasures. Thus, for our languages to have value, they must, as key, open to a robust economy, high literacy and a cache of scientific and technological breakthroughs.

WORK CITED

Primary Source

Ogali, A.O.----- *Veronica My Daughter*. Onitsha: Appolos Brothers Press Ltd
(nd)

References

- Adetugbo, A (1977). Nigerian English Fact or Fiction? *Lagos Review of English Studies (LARES)* Vol v, 129-142.
- Akere, F. (1982). Sociolinguistic constraints and the emergence of a standard Nigerian English. In Pride, J.B. (ed.) *New Englishes*. Massachusetts: Newbury Home Publishers Inc.
- Awubi, R. A. (2000). *Historical landmarks and Nigerian Experience*. Calabar: Univ. Press.
- Ayandele, E.A(2009[1987]). *The educated elite in the Nigerian society vol. 1*. Inaugural lecture of the University of Ibadan. Ibadan: HEBN Publishers Plc.
- Bangbose, A. (1971). The English Language in Nigeria .In B.B. Kachru (ed.) *The other Tongue: English across Cultures*. University of Illinois Press, 99-107.
- Banjo, A.(1970). *A Historical View of the English Language in Nigeria*. Ibadan: University Press.
- Baugh, Albert C. & Thomas Cable (2002). *A History of the English Language*, 5th ed. New Jersey: Pearson Education, Inc.
- Brosnahan, F. (1958). English in Southern Nigeria. *English Studies* 39, 97-100.
- Eka, D. (2000). *Issues in Nigerian English usage*. Uyo: Scholars Press.
- Eka, D. (2005). *From changes to divergences: Reflections on global Englishes*. 13th Inaugural Lecture of the University of Uyo. Uyo: The University of Uyo Press Ltd.
- Essien, O. (2000). What is in A Name?: A Linguistic And Cultural Explication of Ibibio Personal Names. A Paper Presented at 2nd World Congress of African Linguists at the University of Lei Pzig, Germany, 103-130.
- Essien , O.(2010). *Vital aspects of Linguistics*. Portharcourt: M&J Grand Orbit Communications Ltd.

- Jibril, M.(1982).*Phonological Variation in Nigerian English*. Unpublished Doctoral Dissertation, University of Lancaster
- Schmeid, J. (1991). *English in Africa: An Introduction*. London: Longman.
- Ogu, J. (1992).*A Historical Survey of English and the Nigerian Situation*. Lagos: KraftBooks.
- Okon, F. A. & Happiness E. U. (2007). *Linguistic Creativity in the 21st Century: Pedagogical Implications*. Festschrift in Honour of Prof. Mbong Udofot, 240-259
- Quirk, R. (1962). *The use of English*. London: Longman Group Ltd.
- Schmeid, J. (1991). *English in Africa: An Introduction*. London: Longman.
- Shakespeare, W. (1984). *Hamlet* (Rowse, A. L ed) New York: McGraw Hill.
- Skutnabb-Kangas, T. (1990). *Language, literacy and minorities: A minority rights group report*. London: Minority Rights Group.
- Uduk, H. E. (2008). Ancestral Legacies in English and Ibibio Naming Systems. In Ukpong, I.E et.al (eds) *International Journal of African Culture, Politics and Development*, 3(2)113-121.
- Uduk, H.E.M (2013) *Gender and the use of language in the verbal interactions of selected churches in Calabar and Uyo, Nigeria*. Unpublished Ph.D Dissertation of the University of Calabar.