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## EDITORIAL

In spite of the challenges associated with the ability of Journals worldwide to come out on schedule, Drumspeak has been able to live up to its promise of coming out with three issues for the year 2009. In line with the policy of the Journal, this present Issue, Volume 2, Number 3, features diverse articles in different areas in the humanities. There are two language based articles, namely, *Nigerian Pidgin as a National Language* and *The Suffixes – tɔ, - nɔ, - la and – si in Ewe*. There are articles in Philosophy which address issues in Epistemology and Metaphysics. The articles on Music education and Conflict and Organisational efficiency focus on some critical issues in the field of education. The variegated nature of the Humanities is further captured in an article on International relations, the *Role of Sierra Leoneans in the Development of Calabar*, and another on a Socio-legal issue, that is, whether there was *Public Support for Widows and Orphans in Athenian Society*. From the area of African Traditional Religion come two articles, namely, *Women's Participation in the Ritual of Worship in African Traditional Religion* and *Okomfo Anokye and Nation Building in Ghana*.

In sum, this Issue includes articles from the broad spectrum of the Humanities ranging from Language and Linguistics, Classics, Philosophy, Music – Education, Educational Administration, International Relations and Religion. Our gratitude goes to our contributors for their continued interest in the Journal.

Your comments will be highly appreciated.

**Rev. Eric Nii Bortey Anum, PhD.**

**Executive Editor**

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## **NIGERIAN PIDGIN AS A NATIONAL LANGUAGE: A THEMATIC APPRAISAL OF SEGUN OYEKUNLE'S KATAKATA FOR SOFAHEAD AND OLA ROTIMI'S "GRIP AM"**

**Mahfouz A. Adedimeji,**

**Department of English,**

**University of Ilorin,**

**PMB 1515, Ilorin, Nigeria.**

**E-mail: [mahfouzade2@yahoo.com](mailto:mahfouzade2@yahoo.com)**

## **ABSTRACT**

*Language being crucial to the survival of individuals and societies, this paper explores the Nigerian linguistic ecology. It is viewed that an open wound which assails the national psyche is that Nigeria has no clear-cut language policy. The dearth of language policy thus constitutes a serious problem for the nation with the national language question remains largely unaddressed. With this situation warranting the propositions of Hausa-Igbo-Yoruba, minority, artificial and Nigerian Pidgin (NP) languages, this paper argues for the NP as the most logical and objective option, adopting a scientific approach. A thematic analysis of two drama texts by Nigerian playwrights in NP is undertaken to show the capacity and effectiveness of NP for literary enterprise. It is ultimately advanced that with proper attention focused on NP and its utilities appreciated to the level of commanding official recognition as the national language, the problem of codification ensnaring it now will be solved and resolved. Its standardization will also be carried out more determinedly by*

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*linguists, language experts and literary writers. It is foregrounded that creative writers should further explore the NP medium in articulating their art.*

## INTRODUCTION

Language is a pervasive human phenomenon without which societies cease to exist. The status of language as the human-specific endowment that facilitates effective communication has made it generate a lot of interest for over 2000 years now (Crystal, 1997:400). Its functions are crucial to human survival and progress and such functions have been variously identified (Halliday, 1973; Adegbite, 2000; Oyetade, 2001; Adedimeji, 2005). For Crystal (1997:10-13), whose submission is adopted, language serves eight purposes. These are concerned with the communication of ideas, emotional expression (as in frustration), social interaction (as in greeting), the power of sound (i.e in alliteration) the control of reality (as in magic or incantation) recording of facts, the instrument of thought, and the expression of identity or the signaling of who we are and where we 'belong'.

It is arguably based on the last function identified by Crystal that the issue of language question always arises, giving birth to language policies, especially in multilingual, multicultural contexts. A language policy can be defined "as a programme of action on the role or status of a language in a given community" (Bamgbose, 1991: 111). In a country like Nigeria, the language question is a volatile issue about which many stakeholders have accentuated their curiosities based on their sentiments. While calls are being made for the adoption of one of the three major Nigerian languages, Hausa, Igbo and

Yoruba, suggestions are also being made for the adoption of the Nigerian Pidgin (NP) as the national language among other proposals (Shobomehin, 2001). This article reiterates the desirability of NP as a candidate for national language through a critical-thematic appraisal of two literary works in NP. The first part of the paper discusses conceptual and theoretical issues underpinning the national language as well as the NP while the second part focuses on the two drama texts thematically appraised.

## THE NATIONAL LANGUAGE: MATTERS ARISING

The enlightenment brought about by the famous Sapir-Whorf hypothesis has made the language question central in multilingual settings. The hypothesis is based on the two principles of linguistic determinism, meaning that language determines the way we think, and linguistic relativity, which connotes that the distinctions encoded in one language are not found in any other language. As the symbiotic relationship between language and national development has been further identified (Achebe, 1988:160), the quest to solve the language question had informed the classifications of the decisions to be taken by developing multilingual countries. There are Type A, Type B and Type C decisions, for instance.

Type A decisions are taken by countries without a great tradition to invoke interaction. These countries thus resort to a Language of Wider Communication (LWC) as a way of fostering nationalism or integration. Type B decisions are taken by countries with just one great tradition. The choice of language is thus informed by nationalism resulting in the adoption of an indigenous language, though a LWC may be adopted temporarily. Type C decisions, on the other hand, are



taken by countries of multiple great traditions like Nigeria. To achieve a compromise between national integration and ethnic identity, the choice of national language tilts towards a LWC (Fishman, 1971; Bamgbose, 1991).

According to Elugbe (1990:10-11) and Shobomehin (2002:14), attempts to define the national language have yielded various perspectives such as:

- (a) a language that is indigenous to a particular country;
- (b) a language that is constitutionally and by deliberate governmental orchestration elevated to the national limelight as a rallying point for national identity (like Hausa, Igbo and Yoruba); and
- (c) a language that has a nation-wide geographic spread within a country.

Features of a national language are that such a language constitutes the emblem of national oneness and identity, it is used widely for everyday purposes, it is widely and fluently spoken in the country, it is the major candidate for such a role, it is acceptable as a symbol of authenticity, it has a link with the glorious past, and it must be politically neutral. It can be generally observed that no Nigerian language fulfils all the given criteria.

Given that "language is a nation's most obvious and most important attribute, there is no such a thing as a nation without a common linguistic basis" (Isayev, 1977:2), at least five schools of thought have emerged from the task of evolving a truly national language for Nigeria. These are the Hausa-Igbo-Yoruba school, the Minority language school, the Artificial language school, the Swahili school and the Nigerian Pidgin school (Shobomehin, 2002:15).

The Hausa-Igbo-Yoruba school advocates for the emergence of one or all of the three major languages based on their vast population and official recognition. Though, empirical and general considerations have always favoured Hausa above its contenders, the allegation of cultural imperialism and political domination levelled against the Hausa speakers have not allowed a consensus. The Minority language school, on the other hand, posits the adoption of a minority language like 'Afrike', (proposed by Joseph Ushie) spoken in Rivers State and Igala, (proposed by Sofunke) spoken in Anambra, Benue and former Bendel State (Odebunmi, 2001:130; Sofunke, 1990:45). An example of a minority language used and functional as a national language is Tagalog in the Philippines. The trade language of Bahasa Indonesia is also used as a National language in Indonesia.

The proponents of the Artificial language believe that a blend of three or more Nigerian languages will provide a way out of the linguistic labyrinth. This will be in the form of WAZOBIA, a combination of Yoruba, Hausa and Igbo words for 'come' through which a new language is fashioned out. Another experiment is that of GUOSA, proposed by one Mr. Alex Igbinewaka, with lexical items drawn from twenty-two Nigerian languages. The Swahili school is chiefly attributed to Wole Soyinka who proposed it during the World Black Festival of Arts and Culture (FESTAC) in 1977. Swahili is proposed as a result of its developed oral and written forms, African indigeneity and its already established status as the national language of East Africa.

The Nigerian Pidgin school posits that Pidgin is the best candidate for the Nigerian national language contest. According to Bamgbose (1991:29), Pidgin is an attractive



candidate for the national language because it does not suffer from the elitism associated with English, and as such, satisfies the requirements of authenticity and vertical integration. It is a view shared by this writer that the Nigerian Pidgin would be qualified for a national language because not only does it command millions of speakers, it is, according to Elugbe (1995:291), ethnically neutral, nationally spread and useful as the language of education in areas where many local languages would make it difficult to implement the national policy as it serves as the bridge language in the teaching of English.

### THE NIGERIAN PIDGIN: A GENERAL PURVIEW

Pidgin languages have evolved throughout the world as a result of language contact. Essentially, the need for communication between the natives and the European traders in the early centuries of European expansion accounted for different pidgins. As such, there are pidgins in French, Portuguese, German as there are in English. The Nigerian Pidgin, Jowitt (1991:13) asserts, undoubtedly originated and developed "its 'standard' forms during the period of 300 years that elapsed between the sixteenth and nineteenth centuries." It served as a language of trade between the Englishmen and Nigerians. It was only after some time that some Nigerians started to gain proficiency in English, as a result of access to Western education, that Pidgin became relegated and stigmatised.

NP is today a mother tongue to at least one million speakers and it is spoken by about forty million people, more than the population of Hausa and Yoruba speakers put together (Egbokhare, 2001:112). It is gaining ascendancy in political,

### Nigerian Pidgin as A National Language

social, economic and cultural levels to the extent that its knowledge is fast becoming indispensable "for an understanding of Nigerian affairs and for practical communication in Nigeria" (Faraclas, 1996). NP is vastly employed in intra-ethnic and inter-ethnic communication, commercial transaction, information dissemination, mass mobilisation and national orientation.

In many radio and television programmes, especially of the National Television Authority (NTA), Federal Radio Corporation of Nigeria (FRCN) and newspapers, NP is extensively utilised. Egbokhare (2001:113) tabularises sixteen programmes in NP across Nigeria on the broadcast media, chiefly NTA and Radio Nigeria stations. The functional dynamism of NP in Nigeria informs the submission of Iroko (1989) that through government's extensive and intensive resort to NP, "it would seem that the Nigerian government has suddenly realized that NP is a powerful language of communication which cuts across a wider audience than any other Nigerian language" (cited in Egbokhare, 2001:113).

Jubril (1995:233) also shares a similar view regarding NP:

The functions of NP have become more extensive. Apart from expanding its territorial spread as a lingua franca in ethnically-homogenous areas such as Warri, Sapele, Port-Harcourt, Lagos, Abuja and other large cities and among the lower ranks of security forces, it is now used in radio and television



broadcasts and in poetry and drama.

Linguistically, NP has its distinctive features at all levels of language study. Phonologically, NP is marked by cluster reduction, which results in favouring CV (consonant verb) syllables. In other words, absence of consonant clusters that characterise all Nigerian languages is imposed on the NP. Also, unlike English where it is mainly sourced, being the superstrate, there is a correlation between orthography and pronunciation. In this way, the NP words, even those sourced from English, are phonologically Nigerianised.

Morphologically, NP relies on borrowing and NP is made up loan words from its language contact tradition with Portuguese, English and several Nigerian languages. Besides, NP does not have affixal markings; it drops the s-agreement marker for example. While at the level of syntax, NP mainly uses the SVO sentence structure, with abundant use of articles and preposition, the semantics of NP reveals a small range of vocabularies and lack of lexical complexity. A full linguistic description of NP has been undertaken by Faraclas (1996).

#### **NP AS THE NIGERIAN NATIONAL LANGUAGE: A REVIEW**

The attempts towards evolving a national language for Nigeria have always been bedeviled by hair-splitting arguments and altercations among the stakeholders. This is because Nigeria is a peculiar country, a massive assemblage of about 450 ethno-linguistic groups characterised by mutual suspicion and distrust. The observation of Nida and Wonderly

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(1971:65) that there is "no politically neutral language" in Nigeria is still relevant. And as they observe, should the three major languages (Hausa, Yoruba and Igbo, which were to be given constitutional recognition later) be imposed on the country, "the political survival of Nigeria as a country would even be more seriously threatened than it is." Their observation is evidently correct till now and as the submission of Chief Anthony Enahoro, a foremost Nigerian nationalist shows, if we may make his own a case study of such numerous similar views, none of the three languages should be given a chance. According to him (i.e. Enahoro, 2002:19):

All the languages of Nigeria have equal validity, or if you please, equal lack of validity, before the law and under the constitution. No linguistic group has the right - the moral or constitutional right - to impose his (sic) language on any other linguistic group in the country...

...Any attempt to impose any particular tribal language or languages on the country is fraught with grave danger for the peaceful development of the federation.

It is evident therefore that choosing the majority languages of Hausa, Igbo and Yoruba is not feasible, not to talk of a minority language.



In an earlier work (Adedimeji, 2004), it has been argued that English should continue to perform its role in Nigeria as the official language as the challenges of adopting a Nigerian language to replace it are highlighted. However, since a national language is not automatically the official language, and English cannot be our national language because there are no native English speakers in Nigeria, it is desirable that NP be accorded that status. While English retains its international functions exclusively, NP should be constitutionally backed for it to share part of the national functions with English. The suggestion of Nigerian English, a faithful copy of the English language itself with secondary, often negligible, characteristics peculiar to the Nigerian society, as a national language is construed as an unwitting perpetuation of linguistic imperialism (Shobomehin, 2002). And to assume that "English has become a Nigerian language" (Akindele and Adegbite, 2000: 46) and therefore allow the present status quo approach to go *ad infinitum* is self-defeating, apologetic, unacceptable and superficial. As observed by Thompson, (cited in Bamgbose, 1991:19):

European languages are still foreign to the African masses... To make one of them the sole official language in an African state is to prolong, perhaps to perpetuate, the horizontal cleavage which colonialism created in African societies, and thereby to impede rather than

promote the growth of nationality.

Regarding the factors to be considered in the adoption of a national or official language which are chiefly nationalism versus nationism, vertical integration, acceptability, population and language development status (Bamgbose, 1991:19), NP ranks higher than its contenders. NP fulfils the criteria of the 'claims of authenticity' (having to do with nationalism) because it is more or less indigenous for it is a "mother tongue to at least 1 million speakers" (Egbokhare, 2001:114) with other scholars attributing higher figures (Ihemere, 2006). It also fulfils the "claims of efficiency" (having to do with nationism) that any language can perform, other factors being taken into consideration.

NP, more than any indigenous Nigerian language, promotes vertical integration, a function it shares with English. As for acceptability, it is a question of language attitude which varies and NP is not strong at this level, just like other Nigerian languages. In the research of Igboanusi and Ohia (2001: 125-142), which involved a thousand respondents across social and professional statuses, 65.7% of their respondents prefer English as Nigeria's future lingua-franca, 19.3% desire their local languages, 5.3%, 3.6% and 6.1% of respondents want Yoruba, Igbo or Hausa in respective order to become Nigeria's future lingua franca. The study of Babajide (2001:6) reveals that 70.63% of the sampled population have positive attitudes to English, against the positive attitudes to indigenous languages of Hausa, Igbo and Yoruba. He concludes that the native speakers of Nigerian languages only have positive attitudes to their own languages with a few non-native speakers who have,



by virtue of birth or long sojourn, been assimilated in one way or the other. Such negative attitudes to Nigerian languages are corroborated in the studies of Adegbija (2000) and Oyetade (2001); all which make NP not isolated, if agreeably there are negative attitudes to it as "its major drawbacks" (Bamgbose, 1991:29; Elugbe, 1995; Jubril, 1995; Faraclas, 1996).

On population, NP rates highest as it is spoken by about 80 million people across ethno-linguistic boundaries. According to Ihemere (2006), NP is the native language of approximately 3 to 5 million people and is a second language for at least another 75 million. The number of NP speakers is greater than the number of those who speak Hausa and Yoruba put together. The weak point of NP is the area of language development status. The body of literature in NP is few and how best to codify it is still a matter of controversy. While some prefer the Nigerianised spelling (Elugbe and Omamor, 1991; Elugbe, 1995) the dominant trend in NP codification is the anglicised spelling and a further school still canvasses for a mid-way, a "pidginization" of English orthography (Egbokhare 2001:121).

The merits of adopting NP as a pragmatic solution to the Nigerian linguistic logjam lies in its ethnic neutrality, national spread, suitability for language of education in areas where local languages will make the implementation of national policy on education difficult and its utility as the bridge language in the teaching of English (Elugbe, 1995:291). The intra-national functions of NP put it in the best stead for national language, though it is an open secret in the Nigerian linguistic ecology that it is the informal national language.

What NP only needs is official recognition to which a gradualist approach is suggested rather than the radical approach. It already performs a wide range of functions which make it qualified to assume that role. We agree with Egbokhare who strongly believes that since the constitutional recognition of Hausa, Yoruba and Igbo and their inclusion in the National Policy of Education is premised on their vast populations, it is unfair, unjust and illogical to marginalise NP:

The exclusion of NP in the NPE is indefensible. It is a clear violation of the linguistic rights of the speakers of the language; their right to literacy, information, freedom of expression, as well as their right to participate in the process of governance.

Based on the functions of NP to be subsequently presented a table of language roles in Nigeria can be presented thus:

	Languages	Designation	Functions
1	English	Official language	International/ intra-national
2	Nigerian Pidgin	National language (lingua franca)	National/intra- -national
3	Hausa, Igbo, Yoruba	Major/majority languages	National/ intra-ethnic
4	Other Nigerian languages	Minority languages	Tribal/intra- ethnic

Table 1: Suggested Language Designation in Nigeria



Some of the functions of NP in Nigeria today are outlined as follows. Their discussion is constrained by the scope of this work:

- (i) NP is a lingua franca in Nigeria, second only to English.
- (ii) It is a language of trade and business.
- (iii) It is the unofficial language of the armed forces and the police.
- (iv) It is a language of nationism.
- (v) It is a language of nationalism
- (vi) It is a language of intra-ethnic communication.
- (vii) It is a language of informal interaction (among those who are proficient in English).
- (viii) It is a language of entertainment, music, drama, etc.
- (ix) It is a language of advertisement.
- (x) It is a language of government propaganda and awareness programmes.
- (xi) It is a language of information used by some media.
- (xii) It is language of inter-ethnic communication (especially in the multi-cultural urban areas).
- (xiii) It is an emergent language of literature.

Other candidates for the national language contest do not serve such important functions. Any minority language is not qualified for the same reasons for which majority languages are disqualified. Where natural languages fail, with all their merits and cultural affiliations, an artificial language, undoubtedly does not stand a chance. Indeed, the WAZOBIA project of the artificial school died a natural death: it "lived and died only as a television programme" (Babajide, 2001:10).

As good as the suggestion of Swahili appears on the surface level, the fact that it is still foreign to Nigeria is its major problem. To opt for Swahili as a result of the domineering toga of English is to run from one linguistic imperialism to the other. It is therefore not surprising that apart from mere academic referencing, nothing concrete has been heard about it since 1977 that the proposal was made. The general attitude is that if the "giant of Africa" cannot provide other African nations with an acceptable language, it should not at all import a national language from them. The only option left, among the contending schools, is the NP school - the most qualified. The rating can be presented as follows:

Languages	Nationalism	Nationalism	Vertical integration	Acceptability	Population	Language Development Status
Hausa-Igbo-Yoruba	-	+	-	+	+	+
Minority Language	-	+	-	+	-	-
Artificial Language	-	-	-	-	-	-
Nigerian Pidgin	+	+	+	+	+	-

**Table 2: How Languages Stand in Nigeria (see "Rating of Language Types" in Bamgbose, 1991:27).**

To prove that NP is the most qualified language as table 2 above shows, figure 1 below presents the result in a graphic form. Sign (+) is 5 points while sign (-) is 0 point. Sign (±) equals 2.5 points, that is, the mid-way between (-) and (+). The result shows that Hausa-Igbo-Yoruba has 17.5 points, Minority



Language, 5 points, Artificial Language 0 point and NP 22.5 points or 39%, 12%, 0% and 49% respectively.

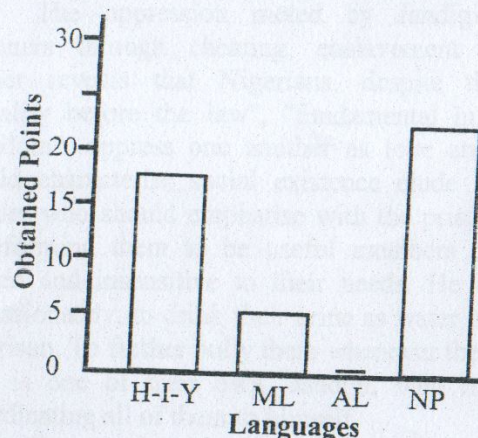


Fig. 1: The Ranking of Languages for National Language Status

#### A THEMATIC APPRAISAL OF KATAKATA FOR SOFAHEAD AND "GRIP AM"

Apart from references to NP in informal interactions in Nigerian novels, such as Wole Soyinka's *The Interpreters* and *The Road*, Chinua Achebe's *A Man of the People* and *Anthills of the Savannah*, and Zainab Alkali's *The Stillborn* and *The Virtuous Woman* (to mention a few, representing the three major ethno-linguistic divides), a full-length novel in NP is yet to emerge, to the best of our knowledge. Among many poems already published in NP, Wole Soyinka's "Etike Revo Wetin?" and Frank Aig-Imoukhuede's "One Man One Wife" deserve a

mention. With all these, the language development status of NP is being steadily enhanced.

It is perhaps towards standardising the NP and making it the language of literature, perhaps for its ultimate adoption as a national language in Nigeria, that Segun Oyekunle and Ola Rotimi wrote their plays, *Katakata for Sofahead* and "Grip Am" respectively in NP. While the former is a published work, performed at the Studio Theatre of Ahmadu Bello University, Zaria in 1978, directed by Tony Humphries, the latter is an unpublished manuscript performed at the Africa Hall of the University of Ilorin in 2003, co-directed by Ayo Akinwale and Rasheed Abiodun Musa.

*Katakata for Sofahead* is a caustic dramatic comment on the deplorable conditions of life in contemporary Nigerian society. That the play is woven around a group of prisoners is an artistic portrayal of Nigerians in their abject poverty, unmitigated filth and socio-political decadence as a vast population under the chains and shackles of their successive jailers or rulers. It is an all inclusive captivity in which Nigerians are estranged involving every Buhari, Darudapo and Ndem, representing the three major ethno-linguistic groups. The prisoners' frustration and lamentation begin from the basic needs of life as the play starts with their song while they return from the farm. The only recourse – out of their helplessness and hopelessness – is to God as they recount the social injustice typifying the prison setting in Yoruba, rendered also in NP:

Na God go be judge,  
Na God go be judge,  
Prisoner dey work,



Warder dey get pay,  
Na God go be judge (p.1).

The oppression meted by Jandigi on his fellow prisoners through cheating, enslavement and exploitation further reveals that Nigerians, despite the platitudes of "equality before the law", "fundamental human rights" and "freedom", oppress one another as love and humanism that should characterise social existence elude the citizens. The Warder who should emphasise with the prisoners with a view to reforming them to be useful members of the society is wicked and insensitive to their needs. He tells them, quite dispassionately, to drink their urine as water is not available in the prison. To further bully them whenever the Warder is not in sight is one of their own, Jandigi, who has succeeded in subordinating all of them to himself.

The unimaginably bitter experience of Lateef who comes from the village after his education to look for a job is another typical example of the fate of educated Nigerian job seekers. After fruitless searches for job and being confronted with 'No Vacancy', his hosts, Femi and Kunle, leave him in the lurch by tactically driving him away. His aimless wandering in extreme hunger leads him to "any eating house to eat" (p.29). After eating his fill, he has no money to pay and he is beaten, handed over to the police who eventually jail him with criminals. He lives his life in the play to narrate and dramatise his story with fellow prisoners constituting his cast to the delightful sight of the indomitable Jandigi. In the prison, euphemistically called the "White College", he is subjected to physical and psychological agonies.

Other themes like prostitution, parody of justice, corruption and official recklessness featuring prominently in Nigeria are highlighted in the play through the utterances and actions of the prisoners. The compound of problems assailing Nigerians therefore needs urgent attention by the authorities so that the masses or the prisoners may have a new lease of life; just like the language NP with which they mainly communicate but which is often 'ignored' and 'denied'. The dynamic nature of Nigerians to suffer and smile is the hallmark of the play. The prisoners in spite of their deplorable condition still enjoy themselves through their own stories often rendered dramatically. They also have fun even if such is derived from inflicting punishment on some of them, who are made objects of scorn and ridicule.

On the other hand "Grip Am" is a gripping single act play (no pun intended) of an old Yoruba folklore. Based on African cosmology with its underlining anthropocentrism (i.e, man is the centre of the universe, all things revolve around man), "Grip am" re-creates the epistemology of poverty, gossip and misery that typify human, especially African societies. The thrust of the story lies in a mythological explanation of the predominance of poverty and gossip as well as their unstoppable perpetuation as long as life exists. The socio-semantic trappings of the characters' names are of crucial import to the theme of the play: Aso (meaning 'gossip'), Ise (meaning 'poverty'), Tem (a clip of Temedu, a proper name for 'anybody') Ang (a clip of Angeli or 'Angel'), Iku (meaning 'Death') and Oye (meaning 'wisdom'). A synopsis of the play is germane to its thematic decomposition.

Ise is a slothful fellow *blessed* with an uncaring, lousy and cantankerous wife, Aso. Though he has nothing in the farm



to bring home, he loves his orange tree that produces juicy fruit with passion and does not joke with anybody, including his wife, Aso, regarding tampering with his fruits. He is obsessed so much with his orange tree that when Ang visits him with a divine help for just one request, Ise thought and said: "Anybody wey I catch on top of my orange tree, when I say 'GRIP AM' na so! Na so make dhe person gum for the tree like stamp for animal letter... Say tay I come sorry for am, leave am" (p.4). It is the turn of the wife, Aso, to make her own sole request in the world. Her request has to do with her husband: "dis katakata man, ehn, make God kill am for me!" (p.4).

It is Oro, Ise's landlord, that would be the first victim of the evocative power of Ise's spoken word. Oro unwittingly decides to climb the orange tree and pluck some fruit before his debtor tenant returns: Ise returns, and catches his landlord red-handed on the cherished orange tree. He says "GRIP AM" and the man gets stuck. It is only after the landlord has promised not to bother him again that Ise releases him. His wife taunts him that he is a cheat that he "go see pepper!" knowing that Ise will soon die as she requested. When Iku eventually comes, Ise pleads to no avail. He cunningly craves Iku's indulgence to let him eat first and asks him to help him pluck some fruit. Iku does not want to waste time and decides to help him but Ise pronounces "Grip am" and Iku gets stuck, to the consternation of Aso. Iku is given a condition and he promises, on the prompting of Ise, that "you and your wife no go die lailai!" (p.12) so as to get released. Oye acts as the mediator. Iku is released and runs away as Ise laughs. Aso laments that she will not die and will have to live forever with Ise, her poor, wily husband.

Essentially, "Grip Am" humorously presents a functional theme: human wisdom can overcome nature. Foresight, intellect, bravery are the keys to success and life phenomena are a complexity: what is taken as foolishness may be the peak of wisdom and vice-versa; and with keen insight and deep thought, man can conquer his fears and anxieties, problems and troubles. Life will continue to be haunted by the undying poverty/misery enveloping the world; and wherever there is poverty, there will be gossip.

Through the medium of NP, Segun Oyekunle and Ola Rotimi have established the suitability of NP for literature, a medium of projecting "man's conflict with forces which challenge his efforts" (Soyinka, 1976:11). The two plays revolve around survival strategies in difficult days and turbulent times. They reinforce human worries in Nigeria and in the larger world. The centrality of the thematic preoccupations of the two playwrights, whose works complement each other indirectly, is reinforced by the popular, accessible language NP that distills the messages in a wider audience with limited education. The authors, by successfully using NP as their medium of creative artistry, have thereby succeeded in calling our attention to the development of NP to serve further roles. The two works have also apprised us with some knowledge of the world in general, and Nigeria in particular, that will serve as a compass in navigating the restless seas of life.

#### 4.0 DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSION

Pidgin had for a long time been regarded as a debased form of a standard language which was used instead of the standard language by those who were incapable of, or at least



not had the opportunity of learning the latter (Jowitt, 1991:12). NP, on its part, is the outcome of language contact between the Nigerian languages and European languages, mainly English. in "an imperfect attempt at communicating in each other's language", (Elugbe and Omamor, 1991:2). The trend in modern linguistics, however, is to consider NP a language on its own, deserving scholarly attention though it may be made up of a superstrate (English) and substrates (Nigerian languages). Apart from English, a colonial language forcefully imposed on Nigeria, no other language exerts the same influence on the national linguistic scene as NP.

This paper has attempted to properly position NP in the context of the Nigerian national language. It highlights the flaws and incapacities of majority and minority languages, artificial and Swahili languages, hence their unsuitability for the coveted national language status as it gives the functions of NP in Nigeria which rank it (NP) as *premier inter pareil*. A further thematic excursion into two plays in NP is undertaken to show the capability of NP to bear the burden of creativity, not just an 'unserious' language, "the debased English, spoken by uneducated people" effective only for informal linguistic intercourse (Jowitt, 1991:13).

Part of our finding is that the two plays have a vitality and a compelling creative attention which would have been missing if English had been employed in projecting the themes. Apart from this, the adoption of NP has made the works accessible millions of Nigerians who are not literate in English but are comfortable with NP, having received some basic education. Besides, the synchrony of functionality and aesthetics, or content and style, which engenders the use of the

official language of the Nigerian prison setting and the language close to the grassroots in articulating a mythical story, makes the plays further successful. We therefore accentuate the view of Farclas (1996) that "despite the fact that NP is the most logical choice for a national language, it has received little recognition from those responsible for language policy in Nigeria" (cf. Egbokhare, 2001:111).

It is based on the utilities and the 'good standing' of NP as a national language candidate that it is here proposed as such. It is suggested that as a matter of urgency, the Nigerian policy makers should proclaim, recognise and acknowledge NP as the Nigerian national language, a role that it unofficially performs. This proclamation will give a sense of national identity to Nigeria, in line with Crystal's notion of language signalling "who we are and where we 'belong'" (Crystal, 1997:10) as a multilingual country contrapped by Britain just as the African American Vernacular English (AAVE), a term encompassing "the entire range of speech forms used by African Americans, including African American Standard English", gives a distinctive identity to the African Americans (Microsoft Encarta, 2005). The focus on two literary works or plays in NP is informed by NP's general poor rating on the criterion of language development status to show that NP is not absolutely marked by literary aridity. Thus, efforts should still be made to further enrich the existing, though few literary works in NP as its codification is made more harmonised, not titling haphazardly from anglicised to Nigerianised spellings or just the individual fancies of writers in NP. Against this backdrop, we submit that, NP should be given its due and deserved attention and status by the authorities concerned.



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