

Niyi Osundare and the search for a unique language of literary expression

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ABSTRACT: *The search for a suitable linguistic medium for literary expression has remained a major challenge for the African writer. Over four decades ago, Obi Wali predicted that African indigenous languages were going to replace English as a language of literary expression (13-15). This, and other similar opinions were, perhaps, mainly based on political sentiments and linguistic nationalism rather than on critical and objective assessment of reality, because, forty years after, English has proved to be an eternal legacy to post-colonial Africa, and has continued to shape every aspect of many African nations in the new global enterprise. This paper examines Niyi Osundare's peculiar use of the English Language in his poetry and argues that his search for the quintessential language for artistic expression has given the English language a new outlook which ultimately solidifies its place in this part of the world.*

Introduction

The search among Nigerian writers for an appropriate linguistic medium, which authenticates experience dates back to the 50s, and indeed, has been a Herculean task. Each successive generation of writers is faced with new challenges as they attempt to explore wider horizons within the complex structure of the African experience. For example, Gabriel Okara, a foremost Nigerian poet of the first generation, had this conflict. He says:

In order to capture the vivid images of African speech, I had to eschew the habit of expressing my thoughts first in English. It was difficult at first, but I had to learn, I had to study each Ijaw expression I used in order to bring out the nearest meaning in English. I found it a fascinating exercise. (15) Thought and expression are, perhaps, the greatest weapons of any poet. Yet, to achieve a coalescence of both is a great challenge for the African writer as a result of his peculiar cultural experience. It is in this regard that Chinua Achebe suggests that African writers should fashion out a variety of English which should be judged by its ability to encode African peculiar experience, an experience he describes as both bilingual and bicultural. He argues that:

The African writer should aim to use English in a way that brings out his message best without altering the language to the extent that its value as a medium of international exchange will be lost. He

should fashion out an English, which is at once universal and able to carry his peculiar experience. (165)

Elsewhere, he argues that English for African Literature must be in full communion with its ancestral home, but altered to suit its new African surrounding” (1965:30). In the same vein, Dan Izevbaye insists that for a modern Nigerian poet writing in English, a spontaneous outburst of emotion is not enough. “The poet”, as he puts it, “must not merely translate emotions or ideas from the life of one culture into the language of another, he must create a product that is a new whole in itself ... he must ensure the quality of the expression” (157). This echoes Raymond Chapman who argues that, “A work of literature is not only an imaginative representation of life; it is also an autonomous linguistic structure offering itself for scrutiny in terms of verbal selection and ordering” (15).

This paper examines the extent to which such counsels are reflected in the works of Niyi Osundare. It proceeds on the hypotheses that Niyi Osundare is creating a new linguistic pattern for African poetry and that this unique pattern answers the call by his literary predecessors for a special variety of English for African poetry. Osundare is, no doubt, among the newest arrivals in the Nigerian literary scene but his entrance has left a remarkable impression on the literary culture of the nation. Felix N. Ogoanah remarks that Osundare ranks high among a prominent generation of Nigerian poets emerging after Wole Soyinka and others of his ilk. He also observes that Osundare has won many national and international prizes including the 1986 Commonwealth Poetry Prize (1-5). His works include *Sing of Change*, *Songs of the Marketplace*, *Village Voices*, *Moonsongs*, *The Eye of the Earth*, *The Nib in the Pond*, *Waiting Laughters* and *Midlife*.

Writing from the same cultural background as the Nobel Laureate Prof. Wole Soyinka, Osundare is considered today a most adventurous poet not only in terms of his peculiar use of sound, imagery and exploration of his native Yoruba cultural essence, but also in terms of his deliberate linguistic creations and the general organic alignment of his entire verbal system. In defence of his literary approach, he says:

My overriding mission is to create songs, which jolt the slumbering, give hope to the despondent, open up the eyes that are blind. In a country of astonishing and pervasive ignorance, it is to show my people that the rich were not born so and that the poor need not die so. It is to stress the inevitable change and the possible triumph of justice. (8)

By what means does the poet do this? In examining Osundare's use of language, this paper focuses on his verbal calisthenics manifested

in unusual morphological formations, lexico-semantic puns, functional conversions, reconceptualization and phonological puns of English lexical items. Most importantly, however, emphasis will be placed on the motivation, the total effect of the linguistic creations on his work and the implication of the development for African poetry.

Neologisms and unusual collocations are a regular feature in much of poetry. Dylan Thomas's "A Grief Ago" is a common example. In his "Fem Hill" we have the lines.

And *once below a time* I Lordly had the trees and leaves
 Trial with daisies and barley
 Down the rivers of the wind fall light (2126).
 And in T.S. Eliot's *The Waste Land* we have,
 And I Tiresias have *foresuffered* all
 Enacted on this same divan or bed (1992).

Geoffrey Leech explains that the English morphological rule which permits the prefixation of "fore" to a verb to convey "before hand" is not entirely free in its application. We can have "foretell", "forewarn", "foresee", etc but not "foresell" (i.e sell in advance) (42). This is why the word "foresuffered" in Eliot's line strikes us as a novelty. As we shall see, the poetry of Niyi Osundare manifests a great deal of strange words and expressions deliberately employed to create a new linguistic awareness.

Osundare In The Shadows of Christopher Okigbo

Osundare's search for the quintessential language must have been influenced by the works of his predecessor, Christopher Okigbo, who was said to be most adventurous in his employment of diction and other poetic devices. As Abiodun Adetugbo observes, "the concreteness of Okigbo's symbols, the piling up of images, the juxtaposition of different sensual planes, invest his poetry with a delicacy of perception" (182). For example, in his "Silence," we have:

"Our silences suffered in fragrant
 Long fingered winds
 I hear painted memories
 From the mushroom of the sky" ("Silence" 42)

Osundare shares so much with Okigbo in this regard. Take, for instance, the imagery he captures in this graphic description of the earth:

Temporary basement

and lasting roof
 First clayey coyness
 and last alluvial joy
 Breadbasket...
 spouse of the riving sky
 virgin of a thousand offsprings
ogeere amokoyeri (TEOEV)

Like Okigbo, Osundare renders the last line in his native language. But unlike Okigbo, he provides a gloss, which says the line means, "*The one that shaves his head with a hoe.*" This grand linguistic texture is found everywhere in the poetry of Osundare as it is with Okigbo. His lines are loaded with imagery, consciously deep symbolism and intense feeling. The "Forest Echoes" provides another example of what looks like the poetry of Okigbo.

A green desire, perfumed memories
 a leafy longing lure my wanderer feet
 to this forest of a thousand wonders...

Another obvious similarity between the poets is in their deliberate use of phonaesthetic devices such as rhythm, alliteration, resonance and so on. Their poetry is slightly musical and for Okigbo, his music derives from the measured cadence of his lines and from the use of these phonic devices. The use of sibilants in the following lines is remarkable:

Each song is the sigh of your spirit
 No song is your swansong
 This song is our sense's silence, (41).

As for Osundare, his spry euphonious diction derives from the oral tradition and his love for music. In the first part of "The Rock Rose to Meet Me", we have the lines, "Cornfield flourished around your foot so the dibble does not drill a deafened dross", and in the fourth part, "singing songs of sunken sun and worsted winds". In the last but one movement (in what he calls "Home Call") we have: This earth is

Ours to work not to waste
 Ours to man not to main
 This earth is ours to plough, not to plunder.

While for many poets these elements are found here and there in their work, for Osundare, they make up his entire poetry. He says of the phonological features in his poems:

The phonological puns arise from many factors: the carry-over from my first language (oral tradition)... I try to accommodate one culture in the rhythm of another culture and language. There's also the psychological factor. In writing most poems, I think first in Yoruba before expressing myself in English. ...Yoruba is full of repetition, reduplication and the like. To emphasize a word or structure it has to be repeated. For example, "gban gban", meaning very big. These repetitions also have semantic implications. Using alliterations in this area, I try to accommodate English sketches to phonological imperatives in Yoruba... (Ogoanah 1)

According to Ayo Kehinde, "African postcolonial writers do not strive for competence in the dominant tongue of their literary creation (English). What they often attempt is appropriation of the language" (5). As far as Osundare is concerned, the above assertion is far from reality if 'competence' here relates to the writers' linguistic abilities or even resources acquired through long processes of formal education and contact with the language. The fact is that writers like Osundare, in their search for a suitable language for literary expression, have stretched English to its limit and have transcended that limit by recreating the language to adjust to new possibilities within the context of African fictional discourse. It takes great competence to achieve this.

Our concern, however, is Osundare's infusion of strange neologisms and expressions into his poetry in his search for a language that can capture all of his complex variegated experiences and artistic burden. We shall focus our attention on four of his collections namely.

<i>Songs of the Market Place</i>	-	<i>SOM</i>
<i>The Eye of the Earth</i>	-	<i>TEOE</i>
<i>Moonsongs</i>	-	<i>MS</i>
<i>Waiting Laughters</i>	-	<i>WL</i>

We shall at this point take an inventory of the words in the four collections and group them according to the morphological and grammatical processes by which they were derived namely: affixation, compounding, lexico-semantic puns and functional conversion. Of course, these instruments of lexical creation are not new to poetry. Yet, operating in an ESL situation, where English is playing unaccustomed roles in its romance with new cultures, and where the artistic burden of the postcolonial writer is further made 'heavier' by blighted socio-economic and politically anaemic life occasioned by corruption,

Osundare has employed these instruments with striking effects. We shall also see how the poet changes the concept of a familiar word or expression in order to achieve a greater effect.

Table 1
Some Uses of Affixation

	Prefixes	New Word	Word Class	Text* Page	Context of Use
a	Un-	unwinking	Adj	TEOE 35	The unwinking face of the baking sun
		unwitched	Pt. dj	TEOE 40	Like a wind unwitched.
b	En-	entided	Adj.	WL17	My greed <i>entided</i> land
c	Be-	beclamoured	Adj.	MS7	The parrot's <i>beclamoured</i> beak
d	Fore-	foresings	Vb	SOM59	...that <i>foresings</i> the day song

Suffixes	New Word	Word Class	Text& Page	Context of Use
-ster	Tripster	N	WL11	...tripsters of feathered heels
-ing	Hounding	Adj.	TEOE 10	...and when the <i>hounding</i> hoofs assail the castle
	Treeing	\!	SOM 90	... of deserts ... <i>treeing</i>
	Victorianizing	Adj.	SOM 39	...a victorianizing expedition
-full	Ireful	Adj.	TEOE 9	...not with the <i>ireful</i> fire
	Raceful	Adj.	TEOE 7	...the <i>raceful</i> of turf
	Townful	N	SOM 20	...a <i>townful</i> of monsters
-ment	Robement	Adv.	SOM 47	... fleeced for the <i>robement</i>
-iy	Songfully	Adv.	TEOE 4	... memory ticking <i>songfully</i>
	Tusklessly	Adv.	TEOE 41	... grass fluted <i>tusklessly</i>
	Eyeslessly	Adj.	TEOE 59	...the door stare <i>eyeslessly</i>
-less	Tuskless	Adj.	TEOE 30	...the <i>tuskless</i> blade
	Winkless	Adj.	WL56	... of the <i>winkless</i> sun
	Rainless	Adj.	WL 92	... of <i>rainless</i> regions
-ed	Kwashiorkored	Adj.	SOM 21	.. <i>Kwashiorkored</i> children
	Kaffired	\!	SOM 47	..a <i>kaffired</i> will
	Kiwi-ed	Adj.	TEOE 34	.. A <i>kiwi-ed</i> boot traps a star
-some	Maidensome	Adj.	MS 32	.. with <i>maidensome</i> glamour
	Breadsome	Adj.	TEOE 48	.. their <i>breadsome</i> hands
-wards	Sheathwards	Adv	TEOE 6	.. matchets sent <i>sheathwards</i>

	Seawards	adv	MS 71	. then slither seawards
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*Osundare's Linguistic Strategies****Coinages through Affixation***

In the poem “Siren”, Osundare pictures certain social inequalities between the rulers and the ruled. We feel the callousness of those in power over the less privileged. Three unfamiliar words stand out in the poem: “kwashiorkored”, “Kangarooing” and “debowelled”. The word “kwashiorkor” refers to a disease common in children in tropical countries caused by a protein deficiency of diet. The new word “kwashiorkored” which now functions as an adjective pre-modifying ‘children’ immediately produces a visual imagery of the suffering masses who even stand in the “baking sun” welcoming their insensitive rulers. While riding in their prestigious cars, the rulers pretend not to see the land “debowelled” by erosion. Here again, this word invests the incident of erosion with the same propositional value as that of cutting open the human stomach by its use of ‘bowel’. It thus invites the reader to see a relationship between the two. Altogether, the three words function to provide for the writer apt and adequate means to capture and express a very intricate web of experience.

In *Waiting Laughters*, we have the following lines:

- (1) Exile pilgrims, *tripsters* of feathered heels. (*WL* 11)
- (2) And officers cold and clever like inquisitive godlings. (*WL* 120)
And in *The Eye of the Earth*, we have,
- (3) In the gloomy alleys of NEPA's *darkdom* (*TEOE* 25)
And in *Moonsongs*
- (4) A hawk telescopes the range
From the tower of clever cloud
Diving orphan chicks
And offals of assassinated *henhood*... (*MS* 66)

“Tripster” in (1) above is a combination of the noun “trip” and the -ster”. The word suggests one who often travels. The poet in this regard, or at least in the context, register his disapproval of such endless trips which make these ‘exiles’ and ‘pilgrims’ throng the embassy perpetually. We observe here that with Osundare, there is no limit to the extent to which words can be combined to create meaning extensions. The lexical items, “godling”, “darkdom”. “henhood” are all special coinages with specific semantic connotations.

The inefficiency of the National Electric Power Authority (NEPA) is portrayed in the neologism, “darkdom”. The suffix “-dom” is usually added to words like “king” to derive “kingdom” and “Christian” to derive “Christendom”. These two words, for instance, suggest both “space” and permanence. “Darkdom”, therefore, portrays the endless darkness that is created by NEPA's incessant power outages. This is the negative light in which the poet has chosen to portray the operation of the establishment which has crippled socio-economic activities in the nation. He suggests by this neologism that NEPA has created something close to the religious “kingdom of darkness” in Nigeria.

Again, the suffix “-hood” when added to a word often indicates the idea of status. So we can talk of widowhood or adulthood for instance. To attach the same suffix to 'hen' simply attributes some importance to this domestic bird. This is further stressed by the word “assassinated”, which is often used with regards to important politicians, rulers or statesmen. This right of status which the poet gives to the hen is at the same time a protest against the “hawk” which constitutes a threat to the existence of the hen and its brood. Yet significant is the fact that it depicts human in his use of the 'hood' suffix which is characteristically associated with states of human existence.

Table II
Some Uses of Compounding

New Word	Word Class	Text & Page	Context of Use
Kinsvice	n+n	SOM 33	<i>Kinsvice</i> of superstition
Skysages		MS 37	... when <i>skysages</i> challenge
Painfields	-	MS 40	and <i>painfields</i> so soggy with the sweat of a thousand seasons
Skylanes	-	WL 3,43	Plodding <i>skylanes</i>
Hillsteps		WL 04	... Like mountains unmasking mits, and <i>hillsteps</i>

Coinages Through Compounding

When Osundare employs the morphological process called compounding, the effect is usually tremendous.

1. Ignorance
Kinsvice of superstition
Tyranny's nurture And wills
Cowing instead of kicking (*SOM3 3*)
2. Another mind is cast against

- Bare walls of fortified *minds laughter*
 By *gagsmith* with steel muzzles
 On the mouth of conscience (*SOM59*)
3. With its ears the moon sees the Soweto of our skin
 And *painfield* so soggy with the sweat
 of a thousand seasons (*MS 40*).

Two words are usually formed in the same way as “Kinsvice” is formed. These are “kinship” and “kinsman or kinswoman”. These terms characterize human biological relations. But while these two could be said to have positively oriented connotations, kinsvice has in itself a negative import. There is a negative relationship between ignorance and superstition. Ignorance is nurtured by tyranny; ignorance is the result of superstition; it cowers and never kicks. The poet in using the neologism “kinsvice” to relate 'ignorance' and 'superstition' places both in the same paradigm and thereby beckons on the reader to both see that a relationship exists between the two concepts and that that relationship is negative in effect.

“Mindslaughter” is a new coinage expressing the type of murder which social critics suffer in a hostile political system. In the context, “mindslaughter” means “mental death” and this is caused by the “gagsmith” who uses “steel muzzle” to close “the mouth of conscience.” These neologisms capture the terror, intimidations and harassments which social critics go through in the country.

“Painfields” is a combination of two roots (nouns) to form a single noun. Common words formed in this way include, “oilfields” “minefields” etc. “Painfields” no doubt means a place of pain. The reference to Soweto in former apartheid South Africa also reveals the aptness of Osundare's “painfields” which is foregrounded in the context. We immediately feel the racial tension and the sufferings of the people under that crude political ideology.

Table III
Some Uses of Lexico-Semantic Puns

New Word	Word Class	Text & Page	Context of Use
Archaidemia	n+n	SOM 27	Our papyrous soar <i>archiademia</i> ...
Mindslaughter	•	SOME 59	Bare walls of fortified <i>mindslaught</i> er...
Hueman	-	TEOE9	Dandy <i>hueman</i> who walks. ..
Executhieves		TEOE 46	Native <i>executives</i> hold fort for alien wolves
Awe-ffice		WL 11	The anxious fumes of the visa <i>awe-ffice</i> , thick with queries...

Ill-literate	-	WL 16	... Face of-ill-literate mornings
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Coinages through Lexico-Semantic Puns

Four new words will engage our attention here under lexico-semantic puns. The morphological processes by which they are derived combine some measure of blending and these words are “archaidemia”, “toilwards”, “executhieves” and “awe-ffice”.

1. You can tell a house by its door
A person by his dress
AUniversity by its papers
In our papyrus soar *archaidemia* (SOM27)
2. I have heard
the thud of sleepy boots plodding
toilwards in dreary dawns
I have seen active *executhieves* hold fort for alien wolves
(TEOE 40)
3. The waiting anxious fumes of the visa *awe-office*
Thick with queries, thick with fear (WL 11)

The neologism, “archaidemia” is a combination of the words, “archaic” and “academia”. The first refers to something virtually obsolete while the second refers to the university institution or system. Osundare marries these terms together in “archaidemia” to provide a wider semantic range. He mocks the university system here; a system where in spite of obvious decay and degeneration, nothing matters except “papers”, for you can tell a university by its papers. “Toilwards” and “executhieves” are newly minted poetic coins. “Sleepy boots plodding *toilwards* in dreary dawns” at once reveals the difficulty and trouble with which these movements are made. The prefix “-ward” suggests movements as in “forwards”, “backwards”, “towards”, “upwards” and “downwards”. But none of these words suggests the hard, difficult movement aptly captured by the new word, “toilwards”. On the other hand, the word “executive” is modified in a way that it is equated with criminality. The great men who hold fort for the alien wolves are “thieves”. Greatness and theft are then combined in “executhieves” to show the corruption of those who occupy exalted positions and offices. In the same way, by rendering the word “office” as “awe-ffice”, the poet captures the complexity of the terror and trauma of the ordeal people experience at the visa office. These unpleasant experiences are also occasioned by corruption, dishonesty and many other social evils which make it difficult for intending travellers to obtain visas,

especially to America and Europe. With these neologisms the poet registers his displeasure with the unsatisfactory operations in these institutions.

Table IV
Some Uses Of Functional Conversion

Words	Text & Page	Category 1	Category H	Context
Music	SOM 3	Moun	Verb	.. .What the soft-wind <i>musics</i> to the dancing leaf
Meaning	SOM 4	-	-	... Poetry is man; <i>meaning</i> to man
Tree	SOME4fl	•	-	... these rising shoots will <i>tree</i> into spaces
Blue	MS 3	•	-	the sun which <i>btoes</i> the sea
Snail	SOM 22	-	-	.. .where potholes <i>snail'</i> the jaguar.
Lame	WL95	Adj.	-	...the lamb which <i>lames</i> the lion
Wanderer	TEOE 3	Moun	Adj.	... leafy longing lure my <i>wanderer</i> feet
Wanderer	TEOE 17	•	-	... the rock rose to meet my <i>wanctere</i>
Gates	TEOE 4	-	Vert)	...Whose middle eye <i>gates</i> our comings and goings
Adult	TEOE 11	•	-	.. WM they too <i>adult</i> into a bricktaytoc brood?
Midwives	WL88	•	-	...and a steel-hand sun <i>mrtwves</i> the mists
Rivers	WL89	-	-	and the sweat which <i>rimers</i> the mountains

Coinages through Conversion

Finally, we consider a few examples under functional conversion. Lexical conversion is common in poetry. It is one of the devices poets employ to heighten the linguistic texture of a text and compel some attention. Gerald Manley Hopkins, for instance, in “Carrion Comfort” converts two adjectives “terrible” and “rude” to a noun and a verb respectively:

But ah, but O thou *terrible*, why wouldst
Thou *rude* on me
Thy wring-world right foot rock? (1471)

These are not neologisms as such because they do not involve any change in form. Yet, the usage is so innovative that it produces the

same stylistic effect as pure neologisms. Functional conversion is simply the adaptation of lexical items into a new linguistic function. They are omnipresent in the poetry of Niyi Osundare.

In his first collection of works called *Songs of the Marketplace*, Osundare attempts to define poetry. This was necessary in order to put the ship of his poetic adventure on course. What poetry means to him will eventually determine the main thrust of his literary engagement.

1. Poetry is
What the soft wind
Musics to the dancing leaf..
Poetry is
No oracle's kernel
Fora sole philosopher's stone..
Poetry is
man
Meaning
to
man. (SOA/3,4)

In the above text, the noun “music” has been converted to a third person singular verb predicating the action between the “softwind” and the “dancing leaf”. The usage compels attention and strikes us as an innovation. The usual word “sing” could not have captured vividly the image of this musical drama between the softwind and the leaf. It becomes a style marker since its occurrence in that position is not predictable. The last stanza defines poetry as: “man meaning to man”.

This again is an innovation. The abstract noun “meaning” functions here in a verbal category. The lexical rule or the usual function of meaning” is waived and the poet brings us into a new awareness of the concept of the word “meaning”.

For William Wordsworth, poetry is “man speaking to man”. By this, we understand that the poet sharing the life and experiences of the common people, should use the language they can understand. Wordsworth's “speaking” does not create the same tension that Osundare's “meaning” creates here. He takes poetry beyond the mere idea of speaking or talking. Poetry is meaningful. It is the communication of meaningful experiences of life to man, not just the language, but the idea, the truth, the life. Osundare himself explains this definition by saying it “also means that you mean something because you're there” (Ogoanah 2003:4).

In the “Forest Echoes”, which is the first movement in the volume, *The Eye of the Earth*, the poet pictures “shades” and

“shadows” of a remembered landscape, “echoes of an Eden long departed when the rain forests were terrifyingly green, though each tree, each vine, each herb, each beast, each insect, had its name in the baffling baptism of nature” (*TEOE* 12). In exploring memories of the earth here, Osundare vitalizes his diction through functional conversions.

2. Agreen desire, perfumed memories
 A leafy longing lure my *wanderer* feet
 to this forest of a thousand wonders ... (*TEOE*3).

The noun “wanderer” modifies “feet” structurally but it has a greater semantic import than what is indicated in the surface structure. To “wander” means to go from place to place without a special purpose or destination. The person who does this is a wanderer or a tramp. The poet, therefore, in his search and longing for his natural environment considers himself a wanderer, and his feet, “my wanderer feet”. The structure is repeated in the “Rock Rose to Meet Me”.

The rock rose to meet my wanderer eyes
 Singing songs of sunken suns and worsted winds (*TEOE* 17).

In both instances, we must understand that the “feet” and the “eyes” are not simply “wandering feet or eyes”; that is, we cannot understand the eyes as moving from object to object or the “feet as moving from place to place”. Rather, the wanderer feet are those feet belonging to a wanderer tired, dusty or muddy; the eyes also, those belonging to the wanderer not so much as wandering from object to object as searching, strained, and so on.

Functional conversion, like all the special linguistic creations discussed, create tension, reduce redundancy, enable the poet achieve linguistic compression and promote the aesthetic appeal of the poems. Osundare's employment of these style markers aptly fits into M.A.K. Halliday's definition of “foregrounding” as prominence that is motivated” (144). In his search for a quintessential language, Osundare violates rules and conventions, transcending the normal communicative resources of the language and awakening “the reader by freeing him from the groves of cliché expressions to a new perceptibility” (Leech 1970:75).

In these regards, Osundare goes one step beyond Okigbo in that these verbal creations are integral to the vety structure of his entire poetry, and indeed, we dare say that Osundare is on the same pedestal with the Nobel Laureate playwright, Wole Soyinka in terms of language

use even though it has been asserted that very few writers in any age or tradition are able to use words more suggestively than Soyinka (Jones 122). Osundare himself says:

I studied Soyinka. The poetry is said to be difficult. I didn't buy that idea. I felt there should be a way of impressing the reader without making him feel small. It's possible to use common words in an uncommon way. When words are not available I create them. I do this unconsciously. I use compounding. It helps in understanding the mystery of the experience. I like words which have wide intimations...I don't waste words. Sometimes I reconceptualize words. For example, "Grace and grass". "Grace the cloth of the ground". I like exploiting the semantic and archetypal potentials of words.

I employ "collocational scatter" - my words don't mean one thing(Ogoanah 4)

Conclusion

Many scholars have stressed the need for a special language of literary expression in Africa. Ngugi Wa Thiong'o advocates writing in vernacular languages. He says, "I believe now more than ever that Africa must use its languages and peoples as strength with which it can leap into tomorrow. African scholars and writers must lead the way as we enter the twenty-first century" (11). Michael Onwuemene, argues and calls for the codification of Nigerian pidgin as the national literary language (1065). But such an argument seems to beg the question. Inherent in it is a subtle idea of linguistic nationalism that seems to undermine the utilitarian values of the language in question. Pidgin, no doubt, plays a vital role in our national life, but it is arguable that it possesses any special attributes that would enhance literary expression more than the Standard English could. Osundare has, however, demonstrated that we can domesticate Standard English with such a flexibility that is at once appropriate for our socio-cultural development and literary expression, without inhibiting international intelligibility. Moreover, as William Van Peer observes, the violation of the existing standard in poetry can enrich the Standard English itself (6). and there is little doubt that Osundare's linguistic strategy may come to enrich the English language as used in Nigeria.

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