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Language, Literature and Identity

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INTRODUCTION

A LEGACY OF ENDURING VALUE IN LANGUAGE, LITERATURE AND IDENTITY

Beban Sammy Chumbow

The twenty-seven articles in this volume are specially *selected* and *edited* works presented at the 2005 Yaounde conference on “Language, Literature, and Identity”. This is therefore not just a “*proceedings*” but a selection of self-contained, rich and inspiring body of works that should prove of enduring value to scholars and practitioners in the field of language, literature, culture and education. The themes that run through the works are varied and include among others: social integration, language, culture and identity, nationalism, identity and development, democratisation, poverty alleviation and gender sensitivity. The analyses are insightful and perspicacious, bringing to the fore a complex matrix of distinctive spiritual, cognitive and material features that characterise issues of language, literature, art and culture predicated on identity as a centralising value.

We have taken the liberty to summarise and highlight the key issues in each article below; but this, at best, can only be an imperfect imitation of the original which I invite you to savour as input to a permanent reflection geared towards an objective deconstruction of the past to value the present and envision a brighter future as a legacy to the inheritors of our dreams and aspirations.

1. The Visual and the Verbal: An Integrated Vision of the Ethnographic and Poetic in Contextualized Performances: *Nol Alembong*

A study of the performances of rituals and incantations that pertain to births, weddings and funerals in the Grassland of Cameroon highlights the interdependence of the visual and the verbal that produces what the author perceives as “an exceptional aesthetically and semantically significant experience”. The insightful analysis leads Alembong to demonstrate that contextualised performance is an “integrative” communication aesthetics” where the performer(s), the audience, the visual and the verbal properties are related and interact in a symbolic dialectic. The poetics that accompany performances in these art forms are synchronisations of paralinguistics (visual) and linguistics (verbal) features and this facilitates the intake of an otherwise symbol-ridden event.

2. Language Matters in the rise of the Nation-State: Comparing Colonial and Post Colonial Practices and Attitudes in America and Asia with those in Africa: *Walt Landry*

What were/are the practices and attitudes in language matters in nation-states of the world during the colonial and post colonial periods and what lasting lessons can be learnt from these? Landry’s perceptive account of the situation in the colonial and post colonial periods in Mexico, Canada, United States, Paraguay shows that with the

exception of Paraguay where an indigenous language, Guaraní, was used as official language in the post colonial era, all others have continued legacies of the colonial heritage in the post colonial era. In India and Pakistan, the exoglossic language of the colonial past alternates in different degrees with local languages (Hindi, Urdu, Punjabi, Bulodi etc). In Africa, while most countries continue a colonial legacy of the languages of the colonial masters, Tanzania opted for Kiswahili as official language. South Africa ascribed official status to all eleven languages of the nation, nine of which are indigenous to South Africa. As for Cameroon and its complex linguistic situation, the author proposes 24 zonal languages and 5 regional languages along with the two official languages, legacies of the colonial past (relevant) as languages of access to internationalism.

3. Motherhood and Masculinity in Ahmadou Kourouma's *The Suns of Independence* and Alice Walker's, *The Colour Purple*: Djokoua Manyaka Toko

What can two novels conceived and crafted in two distant continents (America and Africa) possibly have in common? Djokoua convincingly argues that Alice Walker (African American) and Ahmadou Kourouma (African), through their works, show evidence of convergence in themes and message of their works. *Motherhood* in both novels comes across as an ambiguous blessing because it both constructs and deconstructs the identity of women and men. The heroines of both novels are perceived as sexual objects, objects for child bearing. They are victims of stereotypes imposed by their societies. The *maternity* of a childbearing wife is indicative of the potency of the *masculinity* of the husband. And *ipso facto* a justification of patriarchy. However, the heroines *deconstruct* masculinity in that with the motherhood, rather than play the role of sex objects, they chose to identify themselves as the African mother figure celebrated in African Literature (e.g. by Achebe in *Things Fall Apart*).

4. North South (Dys)functional Relations in Cameroon Literature: Perspectives for a Sustainable National Development : Wirba Ibrahim Mainimo

Wirba's position in this work is that Cameroon literature since the colonial era has been dominated by Southern authors who have consistently and persistently *stereotyped* Northerners, the North's geographical landscape and Northern culture by systematic use (in novels, plays, short stories, etc), of unpalatable and non-felicitous images. Thus, Northern characters in these works are invariably naïve, illiterate, belligerent, vengeful men or else slavishly submissive women. Northern leaders are typified as cruel, tyrannical, chauvinistic, polygamist, while the Northern region is depicted as an arid semi-desert, heat-spreading, drought-ridden, god-forsaken landscape. He illustrates this analysis with *prima facie* evidence from the works of Mongo Beti, Bole Butake and Severin Abega and asserts that female writers of the South (such as Evelyn Ngolle and Calixthe Beyala etc) are even more acerbic in the use of pervasive stereotypes of the "chauvinistic husband, the polygamist, misogynist etc. Thus, the claustrophobic harem lifestyle, physical and psychological torture of

Beyala's heroine (the Southern wife of a Northern husband), leads her to "a descent into madness."

Wirba submits that the North-South dysfunctional relation in Cameroon literature which assumes archetypical proportions, "is orchestrated by ignorance." It is obvious that such non-felicitous generalisations and over-simplifications of reality are at best, objectively viewed as mere *stereotypes* and that all stereotypes are merely metaphorical (mis)representations in this case of the North with or without bad faith.

5. From Postcolonialism to Poststructuralism: The Ideological and Aesthetic Context of John Nkengasong's *Black Caps and Red Feathers*: Teke Charles Ngiewih

Nkengasong uses artistic licence to criticise political ideology of a post colonial government in a fictive Republic. A dictatorial leader Traourou, indulges in inordinate, absolute and indiscriminate power executed by a dehumanising political machinery. It is obvious from the language, actions and activities of Nkengasong that power is not based on democratic principles but on personalisation of power in the Republic by the president, Traourou. The insightful analysis by Teke shows how Nkengasong by use of the text, deconstructs the context (or society). This process of decontextualisation is achieved by recourse to the mother tongue, Pidgin English and untranslated expressions but most importantly by recourse to ambivalence and indeterminacy among other figures of speech.

6. The Purity of Art in Virginia Wolf's *To the Lighthouse*: Ernest Lukong Veyu

Virginia Wolf's *To the Lighthouse* is provided a reading and critical analysis as "a work of art about Art. Written by the very influential founder of 'social feminism'. Wolf decries the plight of women "deprived of real education, confined to the home as housewives, excluded from the liberal professions and considered inferior beings." Veyu's analysis articulates Wolf's view that women have the potential to succeed in the fine arts. Thus, *Lily Briscoe* (in this work, is so intently absorbed by her *painting* which provides her with a sense of wholesomeness and self-sufficiency that "it makes the desire for riches and a husband irrelevant". On the other hand, Wolf shows that the poetry of a male protagonist, Mr. Carmichael lacks a feminine touch because it transmits images of palm trees (solitude), sunset (hopelessness, old age) desert and camels (sterility and barrenness) etc.

Virginia Wolf's message is that the rejection of women (the real artist of life"...the oasis in the desert of life), is a mistake. The marginalisation of female art by male chauvinism is "an attempt to eliminate life itself." For Wolf, there is no room for *phallocracy* for "success in life (including artistic life), is attained only when artists attain an *androgynous* state (where men and women are capable of coming together in a harmonious existence).

Veyu takes the position that in her obvious commitment geared towards the cause of "*literary feminism*", Virginia Wolf is patently biased in that she depicts women as "light with a clear sense of commitment" and men as the epitome of darkness men are consistently chauvinistic, insensitive, assertive, clumsy, ugly,

violent, sterile, vulnerable, syllogistic while women are characteristically, generous, loving, tender, self-sacrificing etc. Since men cannot be generally bad and women systematically good, Veyu points out that the artist violates her own artistic philosophy of androgyny (the harmonious existence of men and women in a new found partnership of complementarity).

7. Wole Soyinka and Bole Butake : Ritual Dramaturgy and the quest for spiritual stasis: *John Nkemngong Nkengasong*

Nkengasong explores the use of rituals in the plays of two African dramatists: Wole Soyinka (*A Dance of the Forest*) and Bole Butake (*And Palmwine will Flow*). A reading of these plays demonstrates the view that ritual is the very foundation of African culture and identity. Consequently, “the imposition of alien religion can never really attain the require stasis because it is not rooted in the history and culture of Africa”. He brings out the specificities and similarities of both dramatists. While Soyinka envisions a new Africa that will escape the colonial past and present characterized by greed, tyranny, corruption and prostitution”, Butake ‘attacks negative forces of the society that undermine the sense of fullness of life and of a traditional work order conditioned by pity, heroism and unwavering belief in the god spirits of the ancestors’. They both consider rituals as symbols of expressions of actual social relation and status etc. and “use rituals and myths to reveal a spiritual vision and establish a stasis fundamental for the improvement of the present and the future”.

8. The Folk Hero in Chinua Achebe and D.H Lawrence: Re-Reading Leadership: *Mbuh Mbuh Tenu*

The work shows how and why Chinua Achebe’s writings are thematically contemporaneous to those of western writers. More precisely, Mbuh Mbuh demonstrates that Achebe and D.H. Lawrence use the folk hero to analyse problems associated with leadership in their respective societies. This is evident in the use of characters in African folktale (*Anthills...*) by Achebe to depict the plight of post colonial Africa characterised by arrogation of rights and privileges by an irresponsible trickster and the use folk heroes Robin Hood and Mellors by DH Lawrence as a pretext to re-assess contemporary England in the light of a glorious past of honest and sympathetic peasant lovers. Mbuh’s analysis of two writers far removed in space and culture shows a confluence of social concerns where values of pre-industrial England and pre-colonial Africa constitute a flight into an *eldorado*, a glorious period of profoundly humane values that need to be recreated now to replace the inglorious present.

9. Issues of Morality in Contemporary Cameroon Poetry: *Eunice Ngongkum*

The researcher delves into a variety of contemporary poetry in Cameroon to bring out the poetic commitment to moral issues in society and an engagement with rigour and

moralisation of the Cameroonian society. Themes visited include inequality in the distribution of wealth and social amenities, oppression, poverty and misery, mismanagement, embezzlement, infidelity in marriages etc. In a nutshell, she examines poetry which “lays bay the moral environment of Cameroon and indeed Africa”. Using eclectic models of literary criticism to bring out the moral vision of the artist and his exercise of his social responsibility, she examines the literary techniques used to captivate and drive home the thought provoking messages.

10. Which Model? The Dilemma of the Teacher and the Learner of English in the Non-Native English Classroom: The Case of Cameroon: *Samuel Atechi*

In this article, Atechi revisits the problem of choosing a standard model for teaching English to speakers of a non-native variety of English. Faced with the arguments that the native-model, (the Received Pronunciation or an equivalent version of American English) tends to guarantee international intelligibility and on the other hand, the advantages of the home standard model which takes into consideration local cultural realities and vehicles speakers’ cultural identity, the dilemma of choice must be resolved realistically. Arguments lead to presenting a proposal congruent with those of other scholars on the issue such as Kachru (Indian English), Bamgbose (Nigerian English), Simo Bobda (Cameroon English). It is proposed that the Native (local) model should be codified, standardised and made available for use in the classroom in place of the native English model.

11. From Indigenous Environment to the Classroom: Using Indigenous Techniques of Communication as a Pedagogical tool: *Balbina Ebong*

Ebong demonstrates that the challenge of enlivening English language classrooms by creating a high level of motivation that raises the enthusiasm of learners can be met by exploiting indigenous techniques of communication as an integral part of methodology design for modern language teaching in Africa. Thus, folk literature, drama and role play, songs riddles, proverbs and other such forms of local reserves can be standardized to play the role currently reserved for expensive and inaccessible materials like video and audio cassettes, CDs etc.

12. Exoglossic Language Policy and National Unity in Africa: The Cameroonian Model: *Nanfah Gaston*

The Language policy of an African nation that establishes one or more foreign languages as *official language(s)* of the nation (whether or not it has some semi-official role for indigenous languages), is an *exoglossic language policy*. Most countries of Africa can thus be said to operate *exoglossic language policies* in varying degrees. Nanfah takes the well known position of African linguistics; nationalists and scholars that national development in Africa can only succeed if African languages are called to play a role in the national development enterprise. Examining Maurice

Tadadjeu's "Extensive Trilingualism" for Cameroon by which the two official languages (French and English) and Cameroonian mother tongues are envisaged for each citizen, Nanfah advocates a policy of "Extensive Trilingualism of Hope" which should aim at making one or more Cameroonian languages (a) "**common national language(s)**" to cement national unity while the two exoglossic languages of the trinity (English and French) function to open up access of Cameroon and Cameroonians to the external world.

13. Language, cultural Identity and the National Question in Cameroon: *Blasuis Chiatoh*

How does the choice of **language policy** impact on the **cultural identity** of the citizen's of a nation? Put differently and more generally, what are the major implications of language policy choices on national (development) questions? Chiatoh's attempt to answer this question in the context of Cameroon attributes social imbalance, political activism and under development to what he calls "the discriminatory treatment of national languages" in favour of the two official languages (English and French). This situation **ipso facto** marginalises the majority of Cameroonians who only speak local languages. Another contributory factor in his view, is the "discriminatory treatment" of English (with respect to French) which in the official domain tends to be ascribed a **de facto** low status in the dynamics of linguistic interaction in Cameroon despite its **de jure** equality with French. He advocates a balanced treatment of languages and above all language planning as a priority for national development.

14. Language and the Construction of a National Identity: The Case of Cameroon: *Kizitus Mpoche*

It is well known that language is one of the principal markers of ethnic and cultural identity. But how can **national identity** be constructed from the micro-ethnolinguistic identities of various tribes in a pluralistic society? Mpoche explores this important question of national integration that seeks to achieve unity in the diversity characteristics of multilingual and multi-ethnic societies of Africa (like Cameroon). From a sociolinguistic fact finding on language use, status, function, role, social effects and language attitudes of the minority Anglophone students in Cameroon, Mpoche proposes **language practice, legislation** and **empowerment** as essential ingredients for strategies in the construction of national identity in a multilingual society. While the majority must have its way as a cardinal principle of democracy, legislation has not only the responsibility but also the duty of guaranteeing the **linguistic rights** of the minority in order to reinforce national integration and limit the phenomenon of voluntary and involuntary exclusion.

15. Flogging a Dead Horse? The Burden of Mounting African Language Programmes at African Universities: *Francis Owino*

Owino laments the negative attitudes of some political forces towards initiatives to create and develop viable Departments of African languages and linguistics in Africa. He celebrates the foresight, initiative and dynamism of those who succeeded in

establishing Departments of Linguistics and African Languages in such countries as Tanzania, Nigeria, Kenya etc. He sets up that these Departments whose work (past and present) for the worthy cause of development of African Languages and Literature is now well known, as examples worthy of emulation in the on-going battle for the revitalisation of African languages for national development.

16. Mother Tongue Integrity and Official Languages Hegemony: The Responses of Politicians, Intellectuals and Language Practitioners in Cameroon: Gabriel Mba

Given the fact that the official languages of Cameroon (English and French) have a *de jure* hegemony over the (local) national languages despite a *de facto* dominance and presence of the latter in Cameroon's multilingual landscape, what are the various responses recorded as forward-looking positions from politicians, intellectuals and language practitioners? An analysis of data collected in this respect shows evidence of divergent views and perspectives. This *cacophony* of views, interests and actions leads Mba to advocate for a *symphony* of action in a more holistic approach to language use, language policy and language education; in a nutshell, a planned language policy for the nation that includes national languages.

17. Linguistic Hegemony and the Fate of Local Languages in South Africa: Stanley G. M. Ridge

Despite the apparent plausibility of the South Africa Language policy which, consistent with egalitarian principles and congruent with reactions against linguistic imperialism, establishes all eleven major languages of the country as *official languages*, there is an observable decline in the demand for the nine local African languages which together with English and Afrikaans make up the eleven official languages of South Africa. Given the supportive activities of the Pan South African Language Board PANSALB to ensure effective implementation of the language policy, how can this decline be explained? Stanley Ridge attributes this in part, to the concepts of *linguistic equality* and *hegemony* which led to unjustifiable attacks on English in the name of *indigeneity* and inadvertently diverts attention away from the actual processes operative in multilingual situations like South Africa. The author uses De Swann's (2001) principles of "*centrality*" and "*communicative value*" of languages in a multilingual society to propose advantages of *diglossia* or *polyglossia* as the best strategy option for linguistic communities in South Africa. "The more languages are formally assigned equal status, the less chance they stand of holding their own against one dominant language, usually English, sometimes French" (De Swann 2001). Thus Ridge argues that just as there has been no point in History when languages have not been ordered hierarchically in a multilingual setting, so dominance is an inevitable reality characteristic of multilingualism, for if *de jure* all languages are equal, *de facto* some are more equal than others, and the individual local language communities can enhance the development of these languages by nurturing an existing bilingualism of English –Xhosa, English- Zulu, English Sotho etc. rather than waging a lost battle against English, a language whose "*communicative value*" and "*centrality*"

are guaranteed by the fact that it is sought after and preserved in the repertoire of multilinguals of South Africa.

18. Competence of Communication: A pre-requisite for Appropriate Self Identification: Stephen Jikong

In this article, Jikong focuses attention on underlying norms as *indicators* of personal identifier's and postulates, with illustration, competence of communication and language use *as social identity markers*. Drawing inspiration and examples from different facts of Cameroon's administrative machinery (Ministries, parastatal corporations etc.), he ineluctably arrives at the conclusion that communicative competence reflects *ego* and must therefore be carefully cultivated.

19. Slippery Pathways in the Implementation of English – French Bilingualism in Cameroon: Eric A Anchimbe

The article evaluates the efforts conceded in the implementation of English – French Bilingualism in Cameroon from reunification to the present and notes that despite some progress made over the years, the results obtained do not reflect the efforts made to promote bilingualism nor do they reflect the goals and expected level of attainment. Anchimbe attributes this to what he terms “slippery pathways” to the implementation of the lofty ideals of Bilingualism. Indicators of slippery pathways include: the attainment of the Fonlon 1968 ideals, and the linguistic emersion concept successfully implemented in the first two Bilingual Grammar Schools of Man o War Bay (now Molyko) and Yaounde, the use of teaching methods geared towards examinations rather than communicative competence, the lack of motivation, allowing the integration (unity) goal to overshadow the linguistic goals, unnecessary tension between Anglophones and Francophones with adverse negative attitudes affecting the learning of the “other language”, polarization accentuated by language loyalty and attachment to the colonial cultural heritage. Prospects and perspectives of the future are possibly bright with conscious actions and avoidance of slippery pathways.

20. Linguistic Attitudes and Socio-cultural Integration of the Yaounde Based Anglophones: Justina Njika

An analysis of qualitative and quantitative data of linguistic attitudes and language use among Yaounde based Anglophone students show evidence of language shift from their heritage languages to English, Pidgin English, and French. (This correlates with similar findings by Bidjaa 2005 for Francophone students in urban centres who have shifted to French). This leads Njika to raise an alarm over the danger of ending up with “*moribund languages*” a first step to the inevitable phenomenon of massive *language death*, coupled with an impending *crisis of identity* for the rising generations of Cameroonians who will live off-rooted from their mother tongue ethnolinguistic identity-base.

21. Nativisation of Dissertation Acknowledgements and Private Letters in Cameroon: *Daniel Nkemleke*

A study of 200 dissertation acknowledgments and 222 private letters in Cameroon shows cultural indicators that underlie the use of English as well as evidence of the transfer of traits and rhetorical style from the native culture to English. Characteristic local traits such as the community spirit, extended family solidarity, repetition and other apparent incongruities in English that have become formalised and standardized illustrating patterns of culturally bound rhetoric indicate Kaplan's assertion that paradigms of logic are not universal.

22. Some Aspects of Home-Grown Speech of Francophone Students: *Paul Mbangwana*

Mbangwana's study of characteristic features and properties of students slang language, known variously as camfranglais, camspk etc. focuses on *clippings* and *blends*, aspects of this hybridised students speech forms. He demonstrates that the language patterns and parallels, in goals and morpho-semantic structure are similar with college students' innovations in English (Crystal (2003)). The study shows that the productive morphological processes of *clippings* and *blends*, the use of reversal patterns, homophones and sonorous words, the use of acronyms as words, the use of anagrams designed to conceal meaning from those outside the inner circle and all such innovative and ingenious linguistic manipulations *underscore* "the desire for novelty and distinctiveness of expression".

23. Pidgin English and the Anglophone Identity: *Thaddeus Menang*

In view of the counterfactual bifurcation of multilingual Cameroon into Anglophone and Francophone Cameroon, whereas this distinction constitutes only one linguistic reality that masks the facts of Cameroon as a multilingual and multicultural pluralistic state, what language best mirrors an Anglophone cultural identity? Contrary to expectations, it is not English! Menang demonstrates that Pidgin English (and not English) stands out as the medium par excellence for the expression of an *Anglophone identity* in Cameroon. This assertion is predicated on an analysis of the linguistic factors of identity and the *visible vitality* of language use in domains such as the media, commerce, trade, Christian religious worship that consecrate the ascendancy and supremacy of Pidgin English as marker of Anglophone identity.

24. African Music and National Identification in Transnational Networks: *Urike Hanna Meinhoff and Zainahaleo Rasolondraosolo*

Paris and other European capitals are today home to African artists, notably professional musicians of the diaspora. This work is a case study of the cultural production of musicians of Malagasy origin in Paris. Interviews and ethnographic observations reveal a paradoxical conflict of two forms of transnationalism; on the one hand the lyrics of songwriters underscore a diaspora displacement characterised by nostalgia for the fatherland to which they are apparently still emotionally attached. On