

## **ABSTRACT**

Linguistics and literary studies approach the same object – language – from different perspectives. In spite of their shared interest, these fields of research are still separated by a border that is all too rarely crossed. The discipline of stylistics, however, has tried to exploit the common ground between the two domains. This dissertation will attempt to bridge the gap further by examining how linguistic theory can contribute to the elaboration of literary interpretations of selected works by three Nigerian authors.

This study takes as its point of departure the Bakhtinian view that language is inextricably linked to its development in society. The medium carries the ideologies to which it has been attached throughout history, leaving speakers with the difficult task of appropriating words for the expression of their own intentions. This socially based perception of linguistic codes finds echoes in post-colonial theory, which has paid attention to the ideological implications behind the imposition of the colonial language in the former British Empire, to which Nigeria belonged. Post-colonial movements of linguistic decolonization have taken many forms and, in the literary field, the responses given by African authors have been among the most remarkable.

The first chapter of this dissertation provides an overview of the question of language in African literature, an issue that has divided both writers and critics for decades. It is discussed here in relation to the definition of African literature and to more general considerations on the subject of categorization. The second part of the chapter is devoted to a discussion of the methodological choices that have informed the analyses conducted in the rest of the study. It is argued that linguistic

investigations into Nigerian fiction should take into account the many culturally specific strategies that can be found in the country’s literature, but should also extend their scope to stylistic techniques that are not directly linked to the literary works’ post-colonial status.

The second chapter focuses on the novel *Another Lonely Londoner*, a rarely discussed work by the little-known author Gbenga Agbenugba. The narrative is written in an experimental style that mixes English with Nigerian Pidgin and includes elements of Nigerian English, Black British English, Cockney and Yoruba. Extensive analyses of the interaction between English and Nigerian Pidgin are undertaken from sociolinguistic and grammatical perspectives, each time with the view of assessing the impact of the languages on the novel’s possible literary interpretations. The other codes, varieties and linguistic influences contained in the book also receive systematic treatment, and it gradually appears that all these elements combine to produce a complex polyphonic piece.

The third chapter provides an examination of selected works by Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie. The investigation into Adichie’s writing constitutes the point of methodological articulation of this study. The first part follows the way paved by the analysis of Agbenugba’s novel, and further looks into issues relating to cultures and linguistic codes, among which the themes of language and food in some of Adichie’s short stories, and the presence of Igbo, codeswitching and proverbs in her novel *Purple Hibiscus* (2003). The second part of the chapter departs from explicitly cultural models and investigates the narrator’s use of language with a variety of theories, borrowed for instance from functional grammar and cognitive linguistics. This combination of approaches aims at demonstrating that literary, cultural, social

and cognitive methods can complement each other to produce a coherent interpretation of Adichie’s work.

The final chapter compares Ben Okri’s second novel, *The Landscapes Within* (1981), with the author’s revised version of the same book, *Dangerous Love* (1996). A general introduction outlining the changes that have taken place between the two narratives is followed by a discussion of some of the stylistic aspects that distinguish Okri’s earlier novel from his later text. The chapter then takes a cognitive turn, and tries to establish the importance of metaphor in the novels, especially in *Dangerous Love*. This analysis of metaphor leads to the creation of an interpretative framework that forms the basis for a textual analysis of some of the novels’ narrative sequences.

The conclusion reaffirms that the adoption of an eclectic methodology has contributed to the exploration of Gbenga Agbenugba’s, Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie’s and Ben Okri’s approaches to the notion of identity. In the light of these results, possible lines of research are evoked.