Lexical Borrowing and the Construction of Identity and Politics in Ushie's Poetry

ROMANUS ABOH
University of Ibadan, Nigeria
romeaboh@yahoo.com

Abstract

The fact that language, identity and politics are interrelated has long been established in linguistic scholarship. Working within the concept of language and culture, and how language gives expression to politics, the present article discusses the place of lexical borrowing in the construction of identity and politics. Data for the study were drawn from Ushie's poetic oeuvre, one of Africa's prominent poets of the twenty-first century. The study identifies poetic use of language as a veritable resource for the expression of identity and politics. It is revealed that when poets indulge in lexical borrowing, they do so (in most cases) to assert their identity on the one hand and to discuss the political situation of their country and time on the other. The linguistic act of borrowing in Ushie's poetry shows how Nigeria's language problem has been politicized and used as an instrument in search of identity.

Keywords: Lexical borrowing; identity; politics; linguistic hegemony; language planning

Introduction

Children flocked to mama's bungalow, crowding the entrance and jabbering among themselves. I doubt there would have been as much fuss if an alien had landed right there in the village. One of the children kept up a running commentary, describing how I was eating, what I was wearing. He didn't realize I understood Khana. I humored him for a while, and then asked him a question in Khana.

There was pandemonium in the house. The children looked at each other, surprised. Two of my grandmother's friends leapt out of their seats, threw their arms in the air, and started dancing around the room, offering praise to God, to our ancestors, to my parents, and my grandmother. Mama sat in her chair, beaming with pride.

(Ken, 2001, p. 16)

The above excerpt describes in a nutshell peoples' attitude towards their language. It shows how people are very particular with their language. Thus, language is a conduit that enhances an individual's relationship with others.

The fortunes of an individual are inextricably tied to the fortunes of its language. Thus, according to Liberson (1982, p.4), "languages do not differ among themselves in their inherent power, but users of languages differ in their ability to alter existing language-user pattern thereby affecting the fortunes of their language". The power position of a people and consequently their language is sometimes not under conscious control but is determined by subtle socio-political and historical forces. Hence, according to Egbokhare (2001, p.105), "The profile of a language may improve positively if it becomes associated with a thriving culture, religion, trade, science and technology and education, or if it is associated with a dominant political and economic power". It therefore follows that language is inseparable from power and economy. For one to get access to power and economy, it implies that one has to understand the language of the people concerned.

The tendency for people to associate freely with other people is always facilitated by the fact that the people involved speak the same language. This is because language does not only embody the world view of a people; it also carries their belief system. It is a

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means of expression through which their belief systems are constructed. Belief is not just power, it determines to a large extent, if not totally, the way people use language to mean. Language in this regard, becomes a powerful instrument in the (re) construction of identity.

Given individuals' understanding of the role language plays in their daily existence, it has gone far beyond the level of merely representing world views to the construction of reality and belief systems. This position seems to represent Escober's view. He notes:

> I do not conceive of it (language) as a mere political direct instrumentality or as an "object" of study that belongs exclusively to linguistics or any other academic discipline. Language must be something alive – not a closed (dead) system of signs. It is not equivalent to ideology either.
>
> (Escober, 1992, p.1)

Escober's perspective on language suggests that language has a more involving function and determines, if not dominates our sensibilities in relation to how we respond to issues in our world. Ogunsiji (2004, p.19) sees language as an "essential denominator of human beings; it is an important means of communication in the human society. Language gives structure to human society; without it, society would be devoid of meaning, if it existed at all". Ogunsiji's views do not differ from the ideas of linguistic determinism: language determines how we view the world. The implication, however, is that human beings can hardly exist without language. It is the orbit through which they rotate in their encounter with life. In other words, language facilitates human existence.

According to Gisbon (2004, p.1) "Language is a control feature of human identity. When we hear someone speak, we immediately make guesses about gender, education level, age, profession, and place of origin". Beyond this individual matter "a language is a powerful symbol of national and ethnic identity" (Spolsky, 1999, p.181). Language is therefore the carrier of an individual or peoples' identity.

For data, the study draws from Ushie's five volumes of poems produced from 1995-2005. His poetry is of special interest to us because he is one of Nigeria's finest writer-critic of the twenty-first century. Besides the fact that his poetry shows a pattern of great incorporation of indigenous vocabulary as well as grammatical forms in English, Ushie is one of Nigeria's scholars who have shown a fascinating mastery of the English language. The choice is also motivated by the need to examine the poet's consistency in the expression of identity through language and poetry.

Language and Culture

The issue of language and culture was an attempt to explicate the relationship between language and the interpretation of social reality. Sapir (1949) popularized this effort. According to him, language is central to the understanding as well as, the illumination of human experience. He argues further that language is an insight to social reality, and that language being imbued in culture controls to a great extent our thinking of social processes and problems. Sapir claims that language conditions our world view and that different speakers view the world along the different clines laid down by their respective

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languages. In a nutshell, we see the world in terms of the categories through which our society constitutes.

Linguists of this persuasion hold the view that linguistic differences determine differences in world's view "thus language delineates the boundaries of our understanding" (Simpson, 1993, p. 163). Put differently, we see things or the world based on the categories our language offers. Linguistic determinism or relativism as a linguistic concept proposes that the language used by a particular society influences its thought and accounts for saying similar things in different ways. The emergence of linguistic determinism raised an unimaginable array of scholarly criticisms. It seems that, in spite of the oppositions to its credibility, the concept has continued to interest linguists as well as anthropologists who are interested in showing the intricate relationship between language, culture and society. Their argument is hinged on the premises that culture plays a significant role in peoples' understanding of their world.

Firth (1962) presents language as a social material that performs the function of facilitating and promoting the shared values of members of a speech community. This means that every utterance occurs in a culturally determined context of situation and the meaning of the utterance is the totality of all the features in it that can be identified as contributing to the maintenance of the patterns of life in such a setting. The society can never be organized without the use of language and the use of language cannot be organized without society; it is an indispensable mechanism of human life.

Culture, is "socially acquired knowledge, it is easy to see that culture is one part of memory, namely the part which is acquired socially" (Hudson, 1980, p.73). Culture,

from Hudson's position, is "the knowledge someone has by virtue of his being a member of a particular society". This position suggests that language and culture have a symbiotic relationship.

Hymes' concept of social context recognizes language use or "speaking" as the use of language codes deeply rooted in the culture of a people. Therefore, Hymes communicative competence is a break away from structuralism and a rejection of Chomskyan theory of linguistics, which sees 'competence' as a mentalist thing (Schiffrin, 1990). Thus, Hymes communicative competence is an awareness and ability to produce meaning in "a socially and culturally appropriate ways" (Hymes, I974, p.26).

In furtherance of this position, Butler (1985) argues that linguistic interaction plays a major part in the exploitation of critical socializing contexts. He notes that learning the language and learning the culture are different things, but they are clearly interdependent. Since the linguistic system is part of the social system, neither can be learned without the other as the expressive and symbolic aspects of human behaviour, language and culture are twin offspring of society. This is because they are both communication systems and language is often used in culture to carry a linguistic message. It is therefore, easy to think of culture as a form of language and language as a way of accessing a literature.

It is from this theoretical background that I attempt to look at Ushie's poetic oeuvre and how it is influenced by his culture, showing the intertwined link between language and identity. This paper will also show how the borrowing of lexical items from a writer's indigenous language is an effort aimed at denouncing the supremacy of other languages over his.

Language, Identity and Politics

Language is not reducible to its sound effect neither is it limited to what is going on in human mind (cognition). It transcends describing human activities to knitting the human mind with the social world (social action) in which human beings function.

Given the role language plays in the way we perceive of ourselves and of other people, it has gone far beyond the level of merely representing our world views and realities. It is centrally involved in the practice of human construction of their identity. Similarly, it is an individual's belief of self that informs how s/he relates with others and as people converse (use language) they explore:

> The magical power that it has, the power of constructing and organizing social situations, of providing a foundation for interpersonal relations and the socialization process of maintaining and giving a history to personal identity, and of creating and modifying the structure of reality.

> (Halliday, 1984, p.10)

Halliday's position reveals that acts of identity and politics are embedded in language. And this is a matter of choice from several other available linguistic options.

Identity is an ambiguous concept to describe. This is given the fact that different scholars have approached the concept based on the theoretical postulations of their respective disciplines. To Norton (1997, p.410) identity describes "how people understand their relationship to the outside world, how that relationship is constructed across time or space, and how people understand their possibilities for the future". Identity is a reflection of a person's individuality, and language either helps to further or hinder an individual from constructing his/her identity. Language is not used arbitrarily,

rather in most instances, it is used to promote self and give a listener insight to a speaker's sex, class, group, education, temper, etc. Hence Le Page and Tabouret–Keller (1985) aver that linguistic behaviour is a series of acts of identity in which people reveal both their personal identity and their search for social roles.

In recent times, scholarship has emphasized that identity is a process which is always embedded in social practices within which discourse practices (Fairclough, 1995) have a significant role. Both social and discourse practices frame, and in many ways, define the way individuals and groups present themselves. By taking the concept of practice as central to processes of identity formation and expression, it entails looking more closely at ways in which definitions of identity change and evolve in time and space, ways in which membership is established and negotiated within new boundaries and social locations, and ways in which activity systems impact on processes of identity construction.

The term politics like identity is a fluid term to define. Scholars have agreed that the term varies according "to the situation and purposes of its usage" (Adegbite, 2009, p.10). However, Chilton (2004, p.4) observes two broad perspectives in which it is viewed namely, (i) a struggle for power between those who seek to assert and maintain their power and those who seek to resist it; and (ii) as co-operation in the sense of practices and institutions that a society has for resolving clashes of interest over money, influence, liberty, etc. This is categorized into micro and macro levels.

At the micro level, there are conflicts of interest, struggle for dominance and efforts at co-operation between individuals, between genders and social groups of various

orientations (Chilton, 2004). In these struggles and conflicts, a myriad of techniques is used to achieve individuals' goals such as "persuasion, rational argument, irrational strategies, threats, entreaties, bribes, manipulation and anything that will work" (Adegbite, 2009, p.11). The macro level will be ignored because Chilton (2004, p4) observes that what is absent in conventional studies on politics is the non-acknowledgement of the fact that micro level behaviours are actually kinds of linguistic actions. Lexical borrowing, which the present study seeks to examine here, is a linguistic act of resistance that one can categorize under Chilton's 'micro level'. Thus, this exposes the limitation of studies on political science that undermine the roles of language in politics.

Language, identity and politics are connected. It is the realization of what one's identity that determines one's political behaviour. Sealey and Carter (2004) hold the view that languages are emergent products of the engagement of the human practice with the material world; the connection between language and social action remains concrete.

Related Literature

A great number of sociolinguistic research has been devoted to the study of the intricate relationship between language and identity. Trudgill (1994) for instance studies local and national identify; Fishman (1989) ethnic identify; while Hall and Buacholt (1995) and Hale (1997) explored political identify. These studies are not exclusively mutual but mark a complex "fabric of interesting affiliations, commitments, convictions and emotional

bonds such that each individual is a member of various overlapping groups with varying degrees of incorporation" (Coulmas, 2005, p.179).

Using two examples of language choices involving the variable value of German for identity claims, Coulmas (2005) maintains that during the 1st World War, the use of German by German Americans was relegated to the background. This is because Germans faced public hostility and were virtually left with no option but to be assimilated. German was considered an 'enemy language' and many German Americans felt vulnerable to officially endorsed antipathy to world minorities. They had to abandon their ancestral language at the same time their identity was put to question.

Rickford and Rickford (2000) examine identity assertion by choice of variety. Still within the United States of America, African Americans, even when their variety of English is regarded as low-prestige language, did not discard it. Because it is a symbol of identity, regardless of their level of education, they come 'down' to use the variety. It gives them a sense of belonging. However, in Nigeria, a work that examines language and identity, particularly using poetry is yet to be done. This paper is therefore interested in filling such a gap.

In terms of Ushie's poetry, Udoh (2008) explores the stylistic features of *A Reign of Locusts* and *Eclipse in Rwanda* and holds the view that stylistic performance shows a close tie between medium and message. Similarly, Ebam (2008) compares Ushie's poetry with Osundare's and concludes that the lexical selection in Ushie's poetry, like Osundare's, is influenced by the message being communicated. This reinforces Udoh's (2008) claim that the poet's stylistic choices are determined by the intended message. It is

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obvious that these works have concentrated on Ushie's stylistic preferences. Such efforts limit the veritable resource of language to style. This is where the present study takes a different turn. Unlike previous studies, the present study is strikingly different since it looks at language as a veritable resource for the construction of identity and politics. It is also an expansive linguistic study that examines the entirety of Ushie's poetic oeuvre. This effort breaks the miniature analysis one finds in Ushie's works. His entire collections are *Popular Stand and Other Poems* 2nd ed. (henceforth PS) (1995), *A Reign of Locusts* (henceforth RL) (2004), *Lambs at the Shrine* 2nd ed. (henceforth LS) (2004), *Hill Songs* (henceforth HS) (2002) and *Eclipse in Rwanda* 2nd ed. (henceforth ER) (2004).

Lexical Borrowing and Nigerian Poetry

Borrowing from one language to another is not particularly a feature of Nigerian English rather it is general language behaviour. For instance, items such as 'resume', 'adieu', 'elite' are borrowed from French and Latin respectively into English. In the Nigerian context, individual languages borrow from each other. For example, 'haba' is a Hausa exclamation mark that is frequently used by Bendi-Bette people and other Nigerians. Borrowing is therefore "the occasional use of language from one language in utterance of another language" (Akindele and Adegbite, 1999, p. 44). Lexical borrowing implies the adoption of individual words or even large sets of vocabulary items from another language or dialect. To Sankoff (2003, p. 643) lexical borrowing is a linguistic process that describes "a privileged window of linguistic inter-influence". Lexical borrowing points to the fact that, owing to historical antecedents and the emerging spirit of

globalization, languages borrow from each other to cater for certain communicative needs, more especially in the area of technology. The implication is that while nations that have advanced technologically will have their languages enriched (by the borrowing from other languages), the technically underdeveloped countries, especially African countries, will have their language subjected to extinction.

Lexical borrowing operates at the levels of sounds, collocation, root and affixes and grammatical processes. While most scholars have seen lexical borrowing as lack of facility in a language or by a speaker in discussing a topic in a language (Akindele & Adegbite, 1999; Lyons, 1981; Kachru, 1986), it is important to stress here that it is not actually because of lack of facility but because the writer is conscious of the fact that "language displays its identity" (Coulmas, 2005, p. 171). It is an act of linguistic nationalism: the use of language to assert the identity and prestige of one's own people.

The return to indigenous languages is undoubtedly a search of identity. I am my language. This has remained a recurring decimal in recent Nigerian poetry. Ushie (2005, p. 10) notes "…but they turned to their African roots in matters of style and language as a response to the trend in East Africa". In spite of the multicultural situation of Nigeria and besides inclusion of proverbial expressions, there is the preponderance of Pidgin English, conscious introduction of loan words from indigenous languages and experimenting with syntactic structures in to Nigerian poetry. Such linguistic models are models which every Nigerian can relate to. Ushie however argues that:

> Thus, much as one appreciates that there is often a loss of meaning
> through translation from one language to the other, affected
> inundation of mother tongue into poetry in English may rather

constitute unnecessary stumbling blocks to readers with a different linguistic background from that of the poet

<div align="right">(Ushie 2005, p.11)</div>

To strengthen his argument, Ushie anchors his views on Banjo's observation:

It is necessary to note that the presence of locally derived metaphors does not necessarily guarantee accessibility to an African audience…partly because of the multilingual nature of Africa which makes it difficult for metaphors derived from one particular language to be comprehensive to the speakers of other languages. And to further confound the situation, accessibility is not guaranteed even to all the native speakers of that same language because of a general lack of any education in local language and cultures

<div align="right">(Banjo in Ushie, 2005, p.11)</div>

Sincere as Ushie and Banjo's views may sound, they are probably not oblivious of the fact that the frequency of language 'A' in language 'B' (as in lexical domestication) is often a deliberate search for a familiar linguistic pattern that will adequately express the writer's world view. It is also an effort to refute the dominance of 'B' over 'A', given that language is power. Within these linguistic acts, shaping identities become fundamentally political. While most literary scholars may look at linguistic transfer, lexical borrowing, transliteration, code mixing/switching, etc as merely stylistic devices employed by creative writers in order to give aesthetic value to their works, it is pertinent to stress that in linguistic 'wars' and politics, it is seen as a struggle against the supremacy of one language over another. Thus, the natural inclination to see a person's mother tongue

survive, to grow and do things for him/her will be antagonistic if the language of another is imposed on him (Calvet, 1998).

It is the need to identify, to promote one's language, that in spite of one's level of mastery of the English language the new generation Nigerian poet has decided:

> To explore new linguistic models which can combine elements of both the indigenous languages and the English language to reach a broader local audience without sacrificing their international listeners. Earlier writers had used similar experiments – local idioms, loan-words from local languages, transliterations, code-mixing and, especially, pidginized expressions but in a rather limited way to portray local colour, socio-economic class of certain characters or to produce humour. But these earlier writers did not use a non-standard English variety in a wide and consistent way as unique mode of expression to reach their chosen audience, till now (Uzoezie 2009, p.186)

Whether the above assertions are true or not, one should be interested in the pragmatic inclusion of indigenous linguistic patterns in works of literature. What is the rationale, if any, for such inclusion? The lacuna which these questions point to forms the basic concern of this study.

The Nigerian literary firmament demonstrates massive nativization of English. The aim is to enable it to carry the weight of its Nigerian peculiar experience. This trend also demonstrates itself with diasporic writers. Nigerian diasporic writers such as Habila, Afolabi, Okri, Ojiade, and Adichie, to mention but a few, have continually used their respective art as tools for identifying with the country. Sometimes, the English language

(the nativized variety) speaks to the Nigerian about his experiences, emotions, fears, aspirations and world views, the way his indigenous language works without losing much of its vital standard composition. It seems that most Nigerian poets achieve poetic feats because of their inclusion of indigenous linguistic behaviours in their art.

Data Presentation

In the tables that follow, we present lexical borrowing in Ushie's poetry.

Table 1: **Lexical Borrowing in *HS* (2002)**

S/N Borrowed items	Context	Meaning	p
Kepepeh	Bendi-Bette	Fastest moving bird in the Bette - Bendi world view	18
Anwiasu	Bendi-Bette	The trickster in Bette-Bendi oral literature	29
Abeb	Bendi-Bette	A river in the western valley on the outskirts of Obudu town	33
Goliath	Bible	Strength/domination	33
Bekwang	Bendi	A stream in the poet's village	35
Izor	Bendi-Bette	A deadly deity	42
Pendelum	Physics	Aimlessly	15
Mustard seed	Bible	Little beginning, great end	45
Offertory tray	Education	Mentorship	45
Tristan da Cunha	Geography	Remotest part of the world	49

Scorates	Education	Inspirational	62
Ukai	Bendi-Bette	Strength/Bravery	61
Market place	Bendi-Bette	Rendezvous	74

Table 2: Lexical Borrowing in *RL* (2004)

S/N Borrowed items	Context	Meaning	P
Massa	Cameroon pidgin	Mister	15
Brother	Bendi-Bette	Community/togetherness	30
Christmas goat	Christianity	Scapegoat	43
Ramadan goat	Islam	Scapegoat	43
Chewing stick	Pidgin	Poverty	47
Ashi-ande	Bette	A class of four villages in Obudu	49
Whudwel	Bendi-Bette	Climber that sucks its host to death	65
Au revoir	French	Goodbye	84

Table 3: Lexical Borrowing in *ER* (2004)

S/N Borrowed items	Context	Meaning	p
Kamikaze	Japanese	Suicide bombing mission popular during WW2 among Japanese soldiers	12
Hosanna	Bible	Reverence, used to herald Jesus into Jerusalem (Triumphant entry)	14
Haba	Hausa	Exclamation mark	14

Manna	Bible	Food one gets without laboring for	15
Libong	Bendi-Bette	Swamp	19
Kekwoe-Abai	Bendi	A village in Bendi	19
Whuna	Bendi-Bette	A vegetable, the people's delicacy that grows mostly in the mountains	20
Ashilisa	Bendi-Bette	Bowl made of clay	20
Kekimlikwu	Bendi-Bette	A medicinal tropical shrub which hardly grows above knee level	21
Oga	Pidgin	Mister	33
Shakara	Yoruba	To be stylishly conscious of oneself	34
Likelegedie	Bendi-Bette	Birds whose singing announces the onset of the dry season	47
Kpoh-chaaa	Bendi-Bette	A sound made by a mould maker to signal the completion of a mould	53

Table 4: Lexical Borrowing in *PS* (1995)

S/N Borrowed items	Context	Meaning	P
Hallelujah	Bible	An agreement to a preacher's comment	12
Aka-uke	Ibibo	Literarily, a motorbike cyclist	14
Whudiawai	Bendi	A wild tree, exceedingly rich in	32

		fruits	
Empire Race	History/Colonialism	Competition on erstwhile empire day celebration	32
Bishi-useh	Bendi	Earlier settlement of the people and now farmland	19
Methuselah	Bible	Oldest man of Biblical times	35
Amebo	Pidgin	A slang for gossip	37
Haba	Hausa	An exclamation	54
Foofoo	Pidgin	Starcy food made from cassava flour or yam	60

Table 5: Lexical Borrowing in *LS* (2004)

S/N Borrowed items	Context	Meaning	P
Agbada	Yoruba	A glowing gown usually worn by men	14
Deus ex machine	Latin	Hand of God	34
Izzah	Bendi-Bette	A war deity	36
Ubang	Bendi-Bette	A war deity	36
Ityoung	Bendi	Also known as Itying is a traditional society of warriors	36
Ukwei Ulanga	Bendi-Bette	A place in Obanlikwu local government believed to be where the poet's ancestors once resided before migrating to their present location	36

Akplagia	Bendi-Bette	War machete	52
Ekpo	Efik/Ibibo	Masquerade	42
Goro	hausa	Kola nut stained teeth	52
Ogogoro	Pidgin	Also called 'kai-kai'refers to a hot drink and regarded as a drink for the lower class	61

Discussion of Findings

For the purpose of clarification, the frequency of occurrence of borrowed lexical items is presented in the table below and later in a chat.

Table 6: Frequency distribution of lexical borrowings in Ushie's poetry

	Poems	HS	RL	PS	ER	LS	TOTAL
Borrowed items and their frequency of occurrence in each poem	Pidgin English	0	2	2	1	1	6
	Bette Bendi	6	3	2	8	5	24
	Religion	2	2	2	2	0	8
	others	4	1	3	3	4	15
							53

The percentage of these items is presented in the chart below:
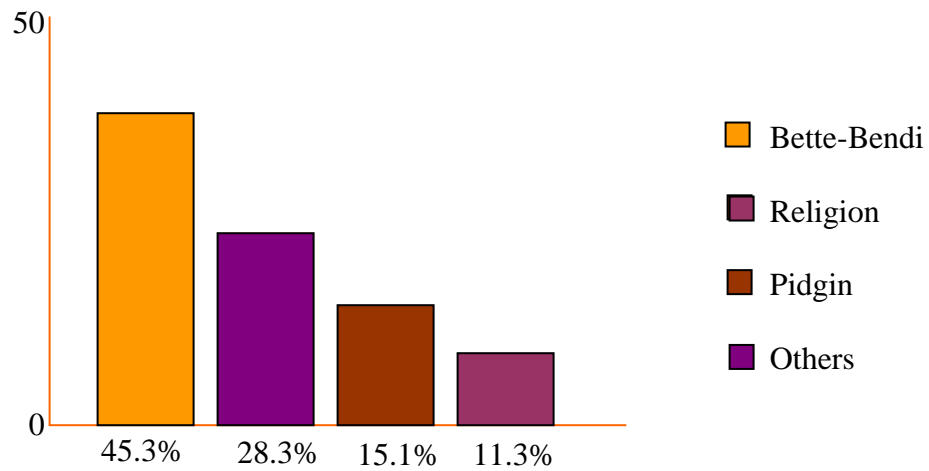

Fig.1 Percentage distribution of lexical borrowings in Ushie's poetry

The chart indicates that 45.3% out of 100% of the borrowed items are taken from the poet's Bendi-Bette language. 15.1% is borrowed from religion, 11.3% is from Nigerian Pidgin and other borrowed items are 28.3%. 'Others' refers to borrowing from other languages and fields of human endeavour.

Moreover, the lexical borrowing processes indicate that the poet makes use of simple interference technique that is "the outright transfer of the phonemic sequence from one language to another" (Weinreich, 1953, p. 47). It is such that when languages come in contact, linguistic items are transferred from language Y to language Z and the reverse is the case. Nigerian English being an instance of languages in contact, one finds examples of transferred items from indigenous languages to English and from English to indigenous languages.

Lexical borrowing has been particularly studied among genetically related languages. In Colorado, Spanish for instance, 'ministro' 'cabinet official' acquired "the meaning of 'Protestant ecclesiastic' on the model of English minister, extending the previous similarity of expression to the content as well" (Weinreich, 1953, p.48). That, however, is not the case with English and indigenous Nigerian languages. The truth is that Bendi-Bette from which the poet under study borrows extensively and English are not genetically related. The rationale for borrowing from his (Ushie) language is to give it a place in his art. It is essentially an identity thing. For example, the item 'Ukwel Ulanga' refers to a place in Obanlikwu Local Government believed to be where the poet's ancestors once resided before migrating to their present location. Besides the capitalization process that recognizes the borrowed item as a proper noun, one sees the need to identify with his people and trace his origin through the mechanism of language.

Linguistic borrowing in certain instances is to resolve the clash of homonyms and in other instances; it is to cater for the absence of a word that can adequately express an experience. The reverse is the case with Ushie's borrowings. Ushie's process of lexical borrowing shows a deliberate objective of identifying with his people. The borrowed items are deployed to express the ideas intended, but most importantly, they are to enable the poet to give a force to his language in a country where several languages are contesting for national attention. In Nigeria, Hausa, Yoruba and Igbo (the three dominant ethnic groups and languages), have been theoretically accorded the status of national language. Such pronouncement was greeted with antagonistic criticisms from the minority groups. In the academic circle, the rejection of the three dominant languages is

demonstrated when teachers use their indigenous languages to give examples while teaching in the classroom. And in the literary circle writers' deliberate inclusion of their indigenous languages in their creative works is to give their respective languages recognition.

Thus, as a bilingual who is 'given' a foreign language owing to historical and Nigerian peculiar sociolinguistic antecedents, Ushie's preponderant borrowing from his Bette-Bendi language works within the frame of mind of seeing his language as an intact entity that has the capacity of functioning as a national language on one hand, and the need to protect and preserve his threatened language in a country with over four hundred languages. This is why borrowing from Nigerian indigenous languages and other world languages, categorized here as 'others' is 28.3%. A critical look at the frequency chart reveals that borrowing from indigenous Nigerian languages is only 3%. For example, there are only two instances of borrowing from Yoruba namely, 'agbada' in Table 5 and 'shakara' in Table 3. While there is no instance of borrowing from Igbo, one of the 'recognized national languages', borrowing from Hausa is 4%. The truth is that Hausa is the most widely used indigenous Nigerian languages. In the north and in some States in the Middle Belt region of Nigeria, it serves as their lingua franca. In fact, in the Middle Belt the people have a positive attitude towards Hausa. The reason for such spread is not far fetched. For about Nigeria's fifty years of political independence, the north has ruled for over thirty years. It follows that the language of the ruler is advertently the language of the ruled. Moreover, the poet's specific intent is to use his threatened African

language to outrightly resist the continuing dominance of indigenous Nigerian languages over and above his.

The borrowing processes, arguably, carry the message that the English language, in spite of its global usage, 'must' begin to accommodate indigenous languages. And this change will start from the level of vocabulary, giving place to the silent Nigerianization of English. The truth is that African intellectuals are increasingly becoming aware that their infrastructural underdevelopment rhymes with the underdevelopment of their indigenous languages. Young writes:

> Anglophone postcolonial analysis of 'the language question' have concentrated on its broader ideological operation: the institutional power structures that employ a hierarchy of languages, enforcing the dominance of the language of the colonial power (past or present) over indigenous languages   (Young, 2001, p.393)

A close reading of Young's assertion will reveal that during colonialism (past) and in the era of neo-colonialism (present), language planning was/is aimed at changing the behaviour of the colonized and the neo-colonized into believing that the colonizer's and the neo-colonizer's culture is more valuable. Language then becomes a kinetic force: a force of dominance. It is this hegemonic view that Ushie's lexical borrowing rejects.

Thus, the dominant mixing of Bette-Bendi lexical items is not a mere stylistic exercise. The significance of such an act (borrowing) will be appreciated if it is placed in the frame of deconstruction and in the tracing of origin. Coulma's observation seems to explain this better. She avers:

Identity assertion by choice of variety, especially by a disadvantaged group is often an act of defiance which can be understood only against the background of its sociolinguistic context.   (Coulmas, 2005, p.177)

The Bette-Bendi borrowed items serve as an outlet through which the poet expresses his identity as an educated Nigerian elite who is conscious of the political development of his country. This is evident in his exploration of Bette-Bendi metaphors in the discussion of Nigeria's political woes. 'Anwiasu', a trickster in Bette-Bendi oral literature, is deployed to describe Nigerian politicians as tricky and fraudulent. Such is the use of 'kepepeh'. In Bette-Bendi world view, 'kepepeh' is the swiftest bird and whose maneuvering skill exceeds other birds. So when the people say that one has tied one's fortunes to the bird it means that one has invested in a venture from which one can never recover the investment. In this light, Ushie likens present day politicians to this bird: investing in them is evidently investing in an irrecoverable venture because they shy away from their political responsibilities. Therefore, the investment in the democratization process is a regrettable exercise. Such linguistic act shows that language is a political entity. And those who know how to use it will achieve greater heights in the society.

The chart also shows that Nigerian Pidgin (henceforth NP) occupies 11.3%. In spite of its wide-spread usage in Nigeria and even neighbouring Cameroun (especially in its border towns with southern Nigeria), NP has been denied a communicative function. Its denial is explicitly political. Faraclas (1996) notes 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. It is not recognized in the National Policy of Education. It is not used as a medium of instruction neither is it taught as a subject. In this regard, Egbokhare argues:

> There are 1 million or more for whom NP is a mother tongue or L2. Hausa, Yoruba and Igbo are accorded privilege position in the NPE and the constitution of Nigeria and they are taught as subjects in the school curriculum. They are recognized as national languages on account of the population of their speakers. NP has about 40 million speakers more than the population of Hausa and Yoruba speakers put together…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.
>
> (Egbokhare, 2001, pp.111-12)

The reality is that NP is functioning as a language, performing the functions that other languages are performing. It ought to be given the same right as other languages with equal credentials, taking into cognizance the population of its speakers and the function it performs.

The refusal to adopt NP as a national language has been a silent war. In literary creation and the media, there is an insistent effort to 'strangle' it. Unfortunately, the Nigerian literary firmament has not helped NP. For instance, in Ushie's *In the Beggar's Own coin* 'Oga', an NP expression for 'Mister/Boss', is used by a beggar. In Vincent Egbuson's *Love my Planet*, it is the language of militants and in Soyinka's *The Interpreters*; it is the language that is either used by the uneducated or spoken to the less

educated. In the media, the same thing applies. It is the language of carton characters, humour, social miscreants and grass-root political campaign. In deed, pidgin is a 'reduced' language for the reduced class. The implication is that Nigerians who can only speak NP have been denied access to power and economy.

Another issue is that Ushie's lexical borrowing captures Nigeria as a multilingual society with commonly shared linguistic elements. Words such as 'haba' (Hausa), 'Aka-uke' (Ibibio), 'agbada' (Yoruba), 'Ekpo' (Efik/Ibibio) are common Nigerian expressions that are shared by most Nigerians. It also points to the fact that NE like other world 'Englishes' has regional varieties. For instance, 'Aka-uke' (where are you going to?) a name that describes a motor-bike cyclist, is shared by Cross River State and its sister state, Akwa Ibom. (Both states are in the Niger Delta Region.) This could be a take-off point for the codification of NE because it recognizes the diversity and multilingual situation of Nigeria.

In all, Ushie's lexical borrowings are definitive. They show that in Nigeria there has been conscientious effort targeted at creating a new form of language that embodies the cultural identity of its people. The linguistic act of borrowing is aimed at resisting linguistic imperialism. Ikiddeh buttresses this position as he notes:

> The cultural revival of the last two decades has been significant in bringing in its wake greater interest in the study of our oral literature and a refurbished creativeness in literary and musical compositions in indigenous languages. Every achievement in these areas is like a spear aimed at the English language.
>
> (Ikiddeh, 2005, p.362)

Historically, the Nigerian artist is left with no option but to use the English language as a medium of expression. But then, the artist has come to the realization that his continuous enrichment of the English culture at the expense of his language is not just an act of political imperialism, but must cease. Interestingly, they (the borrowed items) introduce us to the complex issues that surround the codification of NE and the problem of a Nigeria's national language.

Conclusion

In concluding this article, it is pertinent to recall that while in other nations of the world about 60% of the standardization process of a language or languages, as the case may be, is an intellectualistic property, in Nigeria the government has little or no regard for intellectualism. This disregard for intellectualism by government and the disrespect of the people rhyme with the absence of confidence on government by the people. This has contributed in plunging the country into its seemingly irresolvable language dilemma.

For any meaningful development to take place in the country, the government must begin to give prime attention to scholarly observations and suggestions about the way out of the country's language problem. This is because language remains an inescapable object of political choices and language protection relies on its standardization.

No doubt, Nigeria has its English, but in Nigerianizing English, we need to pay close attention to indications which seem to go against the general trend, i.e., our political and historical antecedents must be taken into consideration. The following issues may be

reasonable points for the codification or Nigerianization of English (which of course, is the only way out to Nigeria's language problem). First, the educated variety should be preferred. Secondly, the standardization process should involve every indigenous Nigerian language. This could be realized by picking at least a linguistic item from each language and infuse into NE, rather than having only three languages. Lexical items such as 'haba' that is commonly shared by Nigerians should be integrated into Nigerian English. If this is considered currently, i.e., if items which are popular from ethnic minorities are involved in the Nigerianization process, it will tame cultural tension as well as retain the identities of the federating states.

NP should also be elevated to the status of a national language. Virtually every true Nigerian speaks NP, even when deliberating on serious national issues. Recently, an ex-Nigerian president was seen using NP to address a very delicate issue of national interest. The professors of English in Nigerian universities speak NP like do the market women. It is not the language of 'ordinary Nigerians'. In the real sense, it is a language of the Nigerian people: both high and low.

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