ABSTRACT

This thesis is a study on the strategic use of English by postcolonial writers where the language becomes an area of contestation and is handled creatively to further the cause of decolonisation. An attempt has been made to foreground this claim in the following novels that have been chosen for study: Gabriel Okara’s *The Voice* (1964), Ngugi’s *A Grain of Wheat* (1967), Sam Selvon’s *Moses Ascending* (1984), Wilson Harris’s *Palace of the Peacock* (1960), Mudrooroo’s *Doin Wildcat: A Novel Koori Script* (1988) and Kim Scott’s *True Country* (1993).

Chapter I surveys the historicity of English in the colonised countries of Africa, Caribbean and Australia, and highlights the need to examine the role of English in postcolonial fiction. The role of English in the process of colonisation is examined and the reasons for a postcolonial writer’s critical engagement with it are analysed. It also seeks to foreground the fact that English does become a bone of contention in postcolonial writing and is used creatively for political purposes by these writers. The various ways in which English is appropriated and nativised in the project of decolonisation are also analysed. The choice of novels, writers and the field of study are justified. The objective and the contents of the following chapters are outlined in this introductory chapter.

Chapter II analyses the appropriation of the English language by these writers who include it as part of the thematic structure of their novels. They not only write in English but also write about it. Each writer according to his cultural background experiments with the language by incorporating the native
idioms and structure of their local languages. In the process, the conventional form of the standard variety of English is altered to make it more culturally relevant to their societies. The second chapter scrutinizes how each writer works his way towards nativisation of English as he captures the local variety and fuses it with the conventional form. The will to violate the standard variety marks the postcolonial resistance in using the language of the colonisers for clear political ends.

Chapter III is a study on the strategic use of English for the valorisation of the writer’s own culture. Since language is an embodiment of culture, English being a non-native variety, is deliberately used to carry the cultural experience of his life. Given the fact that during the colonial process, the culture of the colonised was often dismissed as inferior, it becomes a political act when these writers use the English language to assert and celebrate their own culture. The oral literary forms and cultural practices are not only given expression but also validated as essential components in the assertion of writer’s native life. The novels are analysed in this chapter to highlight the use of English by these writers for the purpose of cultural assertion.

Chapter IV analyses the postcolonial writers’ use of English for confronting colonial discourses with their counter-discourses. Histories are rewritten from the colonised point of view, binaries are subverted and racist ideologies are investigated. Since colonial discourses had far reaching consequences in the process of colonisation, postcolonial writers take it upon themselves to write back in the same language that was used by the colonisers. The English language is used against the colonisers questioning their ideologies and assumed superiority over the ‘other’. Though each writer is
varied in his thematic concerns, this chapter highlights the shared interest of the novelists who use English for counter-discursive purposes, which forms a part of the more complex challenge of decolonisation.

Chapter V is the conclusion. This chapter seeks to draw together the arguments of the preceding chapters. Though the novelists studied here are varied in their thematic concerns and fictional strategies, the study confirms the nativisation of English and its deployment to valorise the writer’s native culture and to offer counter discourses form the matrix of decolonisation in these novels. It also confirms that English is indeed an area of contestation and postcolonial writers, in various ways, decolonise the language and use it for ideological purposes.