CHAPTER - 2

THE NATIVISATION OF ENGLISH

The study of Postcolonial fiction in English gains significance in the fact that the language in which it is written is the same language that was introduced in the native shores through the experience of colonisation. Taking into account the significant role played by the English language in the process of colonisation, postcolonial writers appropriate the language and re-fashion it to suit their own purpose. The attitude towards English in postcolonial writers cannot be defined in a simple and all encompassing fashion. While at the one end of the continuum, a writer like Thiong'o rejects English as culturally and politically alien and reverts back to Gikuyu, to many postcolonial writers it is English that is the language they are most comfortable in. Many can write only in English as their mother tongue does not serve their artistic needs because of various reasons. So while the position of English itself is ambivalent in the postcolonial writers life, their attitude towards it is also equally complex. This complex and ambivalent attitude towards the coloniser's language expresses itself in the way the writer handles it in his work. He not only talks through the medium of language but also talks about it. Therefore the issue of language in postcolonial writing is vital for it redefines not only the English usages but also the writer's relationship with it.

Postcolonial writers appropriate the English language to suit their specific purpose. As they are conscious of the historicity of the language that is incriminated with British colonisation they nativise the language to make it culturally relevant to their society. In the process, English no longer remains as the coloniser's language for it becomes a tool in the hands of postcolonial
writers as they use it creatively in the project of decolonisation. In *The Post-Colonial Studies Reader*, Bill Ashcroft et al. are of the view that:

Language is a fundamental site of struggle for post-colonial discourse because the colonial process itself begins in language. The control over language by the imperial center—whether achieved by displacing native languages, by installing itself as a 'standard' against other variants which are constituted as 'impurities', or by planting the language of empire in a new place—remains the most potent instrument of cultural control. (283)

As the language is appropriated, the use and function of English in postcolonial fiction stretches beyond its artistic boundaries to define the author’s complex sociopolitical and linguistic identity. English, thus, is more than a medium in their writing, as it becomes one of the shards of theme in these novels. Postcolonial writers destabilise the supremacy of English by experimenting with the variant forms of English and by incorporating their indigenous language forms into the English language. Therefore it is not the standard variety of English of the colonisers that these writers strive to write in, but various forms of ‘englishes’ with its idiosyncrasies of regional and specific sociohistoric features. The tinkering of English as a volitional activity inserts itself into the gamut of politics that concern postcolonial writers. As English is reworked to reflect the life of the colonised, the language is decolonised not only at the content level but also the form of the language is brought closer to the native experience of the writers. Different writers have taken different stances to bring in this effect and this chapter seeks to examine the ways in which English is nativised in the works of the selected writers as they work towards decolonisation.
The intellectual response to the agonizing experience of colonisation and its aftermath has resulted in the growth of modern 'African Literature'. It is admitted that a broad term like African Literature does not suggest the varied differences in English usage in the African countries. But a generalised term such as this has been used for the convenience of argument. The emergence of this body of imaginative discourse tries to address and redress the socio-political and cultural issues of Africa, many of which are seen as the consequence of the western intrusion into the traditional system of life. It is concerned with modes of resistance to the hegemonic influences of the west that are manifested at various levels in the contemporary African society. At the same time it is also concerned with critiquing the internal social afflictions of the writer's own land.

It can be argued that the craft of writing is in itself a colonial product, as the traditional African literature predominantly existed in oratures. It is not possible for postcolonial African literature to revert back to its oral form, nor is it possible to go backwards in an attempt to resuscitate the pre-colonial African consciousness. However, many writers present through their fiction the indelible effect of English and the impact of written mode upon the indigenous oral traditions of literature. It should also be noted that it was through various colonial writings that the African lost his identity. The various reports, fictions and bills of the west denounced and denigrated the Africans as savages and brutes, predating the Dark Continent. The imagination of the creative writers of the west took its flight of fancy associating everything evil and negative with 'black' and 'Africa'. By interpellating the blacks, the west consciously constructed various discourses, which had its ultimate end in the
colonisation and exploitation of Africa for its gold and minerals and forcefully transplanting the African into slavery.

Therefore an African writer who bears the scar of his race, takes to writing, though a new modality of expression, to re-create an identity for himself and his race. As the western assumptions and constructions that negate the identity of an African are questioned there is also an effort to reconstruct the identity of an African and to restore the sense of solidarity with his community. It is a scramble for the erasure of the images created by the west as well as offering alternative frames of reference for the ameliorative purpose of the black consciousness.

The colonial impact has been so severe that the native has learnt to revere the west and accept its autonomy of power without questioning the legitimacy of its authority. The black individual was reprimanded if he followed his traditional cultural practices, which were seen as monstrous and barbaric by his colonial authorities. Instead he was forced to learn the ways of the west, which resulted in the negation of his identity and effacement of his self-respect. Therefore the African writer, as a recuperative measure, attempts to create a society, which will be free "without chains on his legs, without chains on his mind, without chains in his soul" (Thiong’o, Petals of Blood 236).

Therefore, however creative and imaginative a writer be, in the African literary scenario, the writer finds himself shouldering a responsibility to address the evil impacts of colonisation. Unlike his western counterpart, he is not an outsider who is alienated from the society. He is not a man who lives in the attic and takes a solitary walk when the city is asleep. Rather he is an
integral part of the main stream of his closely-knit society. He has a commitment to the society he lives in and his work is concerned with forces that are at play in his social ambience. It goes to explain the thematic differences among various literatures of the different regions, which form the complex fabric of African literature. But however committed and responsible the writer be, the debate over the language-choice is a moot point on which the African writers stand divided. With the disintegration of the traditional society and its culture, the traditional means of interaction within the community had to be substituted with the written mode. It is not the old storytellers of the past but the young intellectuals who have been educated in the coloniser’s language have taken the center stage. Therefore the choice of novel as form becomes the natural choice as the new form of story-telling in which many tales of the past are interwoven with the realities of the present.

Since English was used as a tool by the colonisers for the cultural indoctrination, critics like Ngugi, Obi Wali and Anthony Appaiah call for the linguistic indigenisation of African literature. While the language issue is articulated at an emotional level, writers like Achebe are alive to the indispensability of English that has been left as a colonial legacy in Africa. He discusses the issue of language-choice with all its practical concerns in *Hopes and Impediments: Selected Essays*:

To those colleagues who might be tempted to hasty switch of genres I will say this: consider a hypothetical case: A master singer arrives to perform in a large auditorium and finds at the last moment three quarter of his audience are totally deaf. His sponsors then put the proposition to him that he should dance instead of because even the deaf can see a dancer. Now although our
performer had the voice of an angel his feet are as heavy as concrete. What should he do? Should he proceed to sing beautifully to only a quarter or less of the auditorium or dance atrociously to a full house?

I guess it is clear where my stand would be! The singer should sing well even if it is merely to himself, rather than dance badly for the whole world. (60-61)

Though a novel written in English will not gain much currency with the peasants of Africa, Achebe prefers to write in English, as it is the language that he is proficient in and which also suits his creative expression. Therefore writers like Achebe are more concerned with immediate issues that need to be addressed in a neo-colonial situation rather than rejecting or redefining the position of English in the African scenario. Chidi Amuta is of the view that,

Even if all of African literature were suddenly to be created in African languages without due attention to the ideological content of the literature and its relationship with its audience, the revolutionary dreams of the advocates of linguistic indigenization would be thwarted. (113)

Choosing a medium and mode of expression is also to choose one’s audience. While the problem of readership is something an African writer has to contend with, the shift in the mode of expression and the transition in the strategies of cultural communication are issues that cannot be sidelined. Fixing the problem in its current historical perspective, Chinweizu et al. point out:
Ideally, African literature should be written in African languages. But the same historical circumstances that presently compel African nations to use Western languages as their official languages also compel African writers to write in them. (242)

However when an African writer uses the English language as his mode of expression, it is not the same standard variety of the British English, but a new form of English in essence is brewed with an unmistakably distinct African flavour enriched with African cultural terms.

Achebe, in his effort to recreate a pre-westernized African reality, bends the English language to express his Igbo proverbs and idioms. Tutuola has developed a style, where he experiments with his Yoruba forms and inserts traditional oral forms with the English language. Ken Saro-Wiva has been brave to call his novel *Sozaboy: A novel in rotten English*. Incidentally, it is a war novel, which highlights the gruesome nature of war that can annihilate people, relationships, dreams, desires, families and societies. ‘War’ is a major motif in the novel and is fought at various levels between different people and ideologies. It is also a war against British Standard English as the novelist has broken every possible grammatical rule and structure. To cite a passage from the novel *Sozaboy*:

So that night, I was in the Upwine Bar. No plenty people at first. I order one bottle of palmy from the service. This service is young girl. Him bottom dey shake as she walk. Him breast na proper J.J.C, Johnny Just Come- dey stand like hill. As I look am, my man begin to stand small small. I beg am make 'e no disgrace me especially as I no wear pant that night. I begin to drink my palmy. The service sit
near my table dey look me from the corner of him eye. Me I dey look am too with the corner of my eye. I want to see how him breast dey. As I dey look, the baby catch me”. (13)

Even as it is a conscious and deliberate reworking of the language, it is a mixture of Nigerian Pidgin English with local varieties, written as if spoken. Commenting on the language, the novelist himself has stated in his author's note of the novel that,

To its speakers, it has the advantage of having no rules and no syntax. It thrives on lawlessness, and is part of the dislocated and discordant society in which Sozaboy must live, move and have not his being.

By carving out a new identity for himself, an African writer is concerned, at the content level, not only with the cultural values of his society but also with the English language as he includes it as part of the thematic structure of his novel. It is also a part of the bigger project of decolonisation where the language is forcefully made to bear the cultural that are unique to Africa. As English is a foreign language in a foreign soil, the writer who employs it has to be sensitive to the untranslatability of his cultural components which the language has to confront.

It was in English that the history of Africa was constructed, and its pre-colonial past was effaced and denounced. English functions to generate racism as it expresses the whole negativeness of the idea of blackness in its imagery and vocabulary. Therefore the African writer posits, in English, a counter narrative and tries to rewrite the history of his past, race and injustices from the African perspective. While doing so, the writer dons the mantle of a historian
who interrogates the European versions of truth and presents an alternate history of the people that comprises of legends, myths stories and songs.

**Okara’s Experiments with English**

When Okara writes his first novel *The Voice* in English, he is confronted with the predicament of using a non-African language to give voice to his local culture and rural life. Therefore he experiments with it by incorporating patterns from his native language, Ijaw. As he deals with the rural life of a village called Amatu, Okara sheds all pretensions to use the normative variety and instead chooses to use the language of their everyday experience. He wilfully breaks the conventional patterns of English and employs relexification as a strategy to express his postcolonial experience.

Though it can be argued that the authenticity of feeling and expression can be achieved only in one’s mother tongue, the post-colonial setting of Nigeria gives little choice for Okara as he wishes to address not only his fellow Nigerians but also the entire English-speaking world. Peter Nazareth puts forward the problem of language-choice faced by an African writer:

> So the writer discovers that he has no choice but to use English, the same English that he may feel rebellious against as an imposed language. His next problem is how he is to transmute his experience in order to make it relevant to the nation as a whole.

To put it another way: as the imperial powers had arbitrarily drawn borders on the atlas and thus lumped diverse groups of people together, how is the writer to deal with the ethnic group or race of his origin and yet be relevant to the nation as a whole? (6)
As English is tribally-neutral in a country like Nigeria, an African writer chooses English as his vehicle for expression to widen the readership. As Okara's mother tongue, Ijaw, does not feature in the six major language groups in Nigeria, the cup of problems is full as he has to translate his mother tongue or find its near equivalent phrase in order to provide intelligibility for his readers. When Okara published an essay, "African speech...English Words," in 1963, he is of the view that,

As a writer who believes in the utilization of African ideas, African philosophy, and African folklore and imagery to the fullest extant possible, I am of the opinion the only way to use them effectively is to translate them almost literally from the African language native to the writer into whatever European language he is using as his medium of expression. (15)

Okara undertakes this fascinating exercise as he stretches, bends breaks and moulds the English language, to suit his Nigerian idiom and African experience. As this exercise is understood by postcolonial critics as 'indigenisation', 'nativisation' or 'abrogation and appropriation', Okara is conscious of the task that is cut out before him: to handle a theme which is universal while the action unfolds itself in a particular Nigerian setting (two villages), expressing the varied emotions, ideas, philosophy and local culture that have to be handled in deft narrative strategies in a language that is not his own. To achieve this end, he experiments with the mode of English language that has been appropriated in the Nigerian setting. While describing about the use of English by an African writer, Okara in his essay, "Towards the Evolution of an African Language for African Literature" opines:
It will not be African English like American English, Canadian English or Australian English. These are possible only because the nationals of these countries have the metropolitan culture as their reference culture. An African cannot claim such a reference. His culture is different. His culture is rooted nowhere else but in Africa. If, therefore, an African wishes to use English as an effective medium of literary expression, he has to emulsify it with the patterns, modes and idioms of African speech until it becomes so attenuated that it bears little resemblance to the original. (16-17)

When Okara appropriates the language, there is nothing sacrosanct about the English language that he wishes to retain, as he dishes out a stepmotherly treatment to the English language. As English was a component of the colonial package and remains as a remnant of colonialism, it reminds him of the bitter experiences of the past, and the African writer uses the English language to give vent to his feelings. As Chantal Zabus points out in “Language, Orality, and Literature”:

When ‘the Empire writes back to the centre’, it does so not so much with a vengeance as ‘with an accent’ by using a language that topples conventions of the so-called ‘centre’ and inscribing post-colonial language variants from the ‘margin’ or ‘the periphery’ in the text. (34)

*The Voice* is a novel in which the English language is twisted, stretched, pulled out, mangled and made pregnant with connotations that are very different from the standard variety. Okara defies the rules of English by altering the syntactical structures and tense forms. He uses the main verbs and
adjectives in quite an unexpected manner and radically too. Few English words are stripped of its conventional meaning and instead dressed up to denote a new meaning completely out of the way. Comparisons, metaphors, images and similes are throbbing and full of life with African blood pumped up in its veins. By doing so, the English language of the coloniser is given the privilege to don the African spirit and is sent back flaunting the richness of the African culture. The adoption of English by the third world writer makes David Crystal to remark, "The loss of ownership is of course uncomfortable to those, especially in Britain, who feel that the language is theirs by historical right; but they have no alternative" (130). The adopted language undergoes a world of change and is forced to carry the local cultural elements to denote the liberty with which it is used in the present social environment. Alan Davies is of the view that,

And since for English there is no official Academy, as there is in France, the role of language arbiter is taken by unofficial bodies: the standards of Standard English are determined and preserved to a far greater extent than most people realise by the great Publishing houses. (172)

Therefore it is apt that Okara, as a third world writer who deliberately subverts the standards of English language so as to make it appropriate to his local conditions, marks his sweet revenge by getting his novel published.

In The Voice, incidentally, the first occurrence of deviation from the standard variety is, "Your nonsense words stop" (TV: 24). All those who raise a hue and cry against the liberty of language-style adopted by Okara may better stop their 'nonsensical words', as his style is shaped by the present and past historical experiences of Africa and the language he writes in, is a variety of
his own. The conventional form of the sentence pattern in the standard variety of English is SVO. But Okara has been very careful to alter this syntactical form in *The Voice*, wherever he felt he should. In the novel, when the boat travelling to Sologa is caught in a storm, a woman prays to her clan's deity, "Will you in the river take me? A sign show. Blow, blow, the sky's eye blow open..." (TV: 62). In another incident, when asked whether he seduced Ebiere, Okolo answers, "'No. I did not her body touch. You ask her. She will tell you if any part of her body I touched,' he said with a strong voice" (TV: 108).

In the above passages, it can be noted that the inversion of syntax is a deliberate and a calculated effort. It is not that Okara cannot write in 'good', grammatically correct standard variety of English. The style that he has employed in this novel is deliberate, intentional and experimental. Writing about Okara's style, O.P. Jonejn observes:

He, therefore, makes experimental use of language: semantically, syntactically and even grammatically. By making a frequent departure from the normal English sentence pattern and also by changing its syntax, Okara introduces the linguistic characteristics of Ijaw into English. Moreover, it brings a kind of freshness to a rather hackneyed theme of the courage of a man pitted against national thuggery. (196)

Not only does he invert the 'sentence pattern' but also sometimes the positioning of 'verbs' and a characteristic placement of 'be' towards the end of a sentence speak for themselves. To cite an example from the novel:
Shuffling feet turned Okolo's head to the door. He saw three men standing silent, opening not their mouths.

'Who are you people be?' Okolo asked. The people opened not their mouths. 'If you are coming-in people be, then come in.' the people opened not their mouths. 'Who are you?' Okolo again asked, walking to the men. As Okolo closer to the men walked, the men quickly turned and ran out. (*TV: 26-27*)

Okara's style may be a violation of the standard English usage, but interestingly it is precisely what Okara is manoeuvring to do. *The Voice* is the voice that has been suppressed and hampered due to the colonial designs. But ever since the colonised took to writing, by deploying this exotic style and defying all logic and rules of the coloniser's language they assert their presence and force their voices to be heard. Commenting on Okara's style, Kwaku Larbi Korang and Stephen Slemmon is of the view that,

Okara is after a distinct 'African' style that is capable of expressing a specifically 'African' philosophy, as well as the cadences of his own native Ijaw language, *through* English. He is also attempting to render an idea of 'Africa' as a territory in the *world*: a territory that comes *after* the colonial moment and which remains 'without a name'. (252)

As it is the voice from the periphery, which has been neglected and sidelined, Okara, by distorting the language of the colonisers carves out a place for himself as a postcolonial writer who not only wreaks vengeance on the English language for its complicity in the colonial atrocities but also expresses his African experience in a language that is alien to his land and culture.
The Voice deals with the post-Independent scenario of Nigeria, which is gnawed, especially after being mauled by the colonisers, by the selfish and corrupt politicians. The anti-colonial rant was used as a mask by the privileged few to further their ends at the expense of the masses. Though Okara does not take side with any particular political ideology, it can be seen that it is a novel of protest against the existing systems, against superior powers and against moral degradation. It is a novel of protest in theme, spirit and language.

Okolo, the central figure in the novel is shown as a rebel who is a misfit in the town of Amatu simply because of his moral conviction and integrity, which is seen as a threat to the very existence of the debased chief Izongo, who rules the roost and the elders who sing his praises. Even when he lands in Sologo after being ostracized from Amatu, he discovers to his great dismay that the dismal condition is the same everywhere and with everybody. In Ijaw, Okolo means ‘voice’, and it is the voice of Okolo that haunts and taunts everybody and hence a ploy is conceived by the corrupt leaders to silence him forever.

Even while the story unfolds itself, Okara consciously coins new vocabularies and attributes a meaning that is entirely different from the conventional mode. In the novel The Voice of Okara repeatedly uses the word ‘inside’ which is pregnant with meanings. Arthur Ravenscroft in his introduction to the novel is of the view that, “In many African languages the words for what we call the spirit or the soul, or the inner life of a human being, can be literally translated into English as ‘inside’” (TV: 15).
Okara knows the problem of words like ‘spirit’ or ‘soul’, which carry with them a strong odour of their moral and religious associations and therefore he resorts to the direct translation of its African equivalents. According to Pushpinder Syal,

We find a tension between text and social context, because of gaps and fissures between the felt experience of the community and culture, and the transmutation of it into a literary text in English, since English is not the language in which the community and culture by and large expresses itself. (18)

Okara indulges in relexification when he rips the conventional meaning away from the word, and uses the word ‘inside’ to mean severally based on its context and desists from attributing any specific meaning to it. The word ‘inside’ has various meanings like spirit, heart, mind, conscience, conviction and so on.

Similarly the word ‘shadow’ is used to mean strength, courage, person, power and so on. To cite an example, “Okolo twisted, struggled and kicked with all his shadow, with all his life . . .” (TV: 28). Though words like ‘inside’ and ‘shadow’ appear to be English, Okara deliberately uses these words in an unconventional manner by attributing different meanings to it. Ezenwa-Ohaeto remarks about Okara’s style of English in his essay “Gabriel Okara” as follows:

Okara has not just vernacularised the English language for the language possesses numerous versions, but he has added vigour to it. His experimentation is not as restrained as that of Chinua Achebe who surreptitiously manipulates the language. In The
Voice, Okara rather uses the idioms of his own Ijaw language in a manner that is less understandable in English. He does not use equivalents. (80)

Okara has a specific purpose in the rendering of these terms as he finds the English language to be incompetent to carry out his intended meaning. As his cultural experience is different from that of the language that he uses, it becomes inevitable that Okara has to grapple with terms that have a different connotation from his intended meaning. Arthur Ravenscroft opines that,

Okara uses ‘inside’ and ‘shadow’ very frequently, so as to establish as soon as possible a new set of reactions to them in the English reader, while the speakers of most African languages will probably gather the ‘soul’ or ‘spirit’ connotations of the words immediately. At the same time ‘inside’ in English is a much less abstract word than ‘soul’ and ‘spirit’ are, which enables Okara to write with more intensity and a greater sense of the reality of man’s inner, spiritual life. (TV: 16)

African writers use relexification and transliteration as a strategy to impose their native cultural connotations on a foreign language. Since English, in the historical sense, is not an African tongue, it does not have it in itself to carry the African experience. In the essay, “Under the Palimpsest and Beyond: The “Original” in the West African Europhone Novel”, Chantal Zabus opines:

As a method, relexification stems from a need to solve an immediate artistic problem: that of rendering African concepts, thought-patterns and linguistic features in the European language. As a strategy in potentia, relexification seeks to affirm the hidden
or repressed original behind what is construed as the original language text. (106)

Okara finds the English language similarly crippled when it comes to the description of qualitative nouns. He dismisses the usual technique of using adjectives to qualify the said nouns. Okara feels that the adjectives in the English language are quite inadequate to express the intensity of meaning that he wishes to convey as his narrative is inspired by the traditional oral forms. Emmanuel Oblechina is of the view that:

The most striking feature of Okara's art is the repetition of single words, phrases, sentences, images or symbols, a feature highly developed in traditional narrative, especially the folk-tale with its scope for dramatic pauses, facial contortions and gestures. (173)

As Okara incorporates the folkloric elements into the novel form he desists from using adjectival usages to achieve his desired effect. In the oral tradition, the speakers rely not merely on words but a whole range of non-verbal elements that partake in the communication. Okara experiments with the oral tradition to achieve this effect in his written narrative. To cite an example: “Your hair was black black be, then it became white like a white cloth and now it is black black be more than blackness” (TV: 25).

English is considered to be the language of the elite which has the ability to convey the feelings and expressions of any given situation. One of the greatest claims of the English language is the profundity of its rich vocabulary. As Claiborne puts it, “Like the wandering minstrel in the Mikado, with songs for any and every occasion, English has the right word for it- whatever ‘it’ may be. (4).
But Okara denies this claim and exposes its inefficiency to cater to his cultural need, as he is unable to find the right English equivalent for words in his mother tongue which would be appropriate to capture the mood of the setting. Due to the inadequacy of the English language, Okara opts to coin new phrases as he dovetails two or more words together such as, “wrong-doing-filled inside” (TV: 31), “know-God people” (TV: 32), “surface-water-things” (TV: 34). Okara preys on the pliability of the English language even as he reveals its limitations when it crosses its shore.

Another characteristic feature of Okara’s style is his use of the word ‘it’. Better known as a poet, Okara employs his poetic strategy to suggest things and never reveals what ‘it’ exactly means. Arthur Ravenscroft says in his introduction to the novel,

> In fact Okara makes Okolo at one point debate in these terms with himself: ‘Names bring divisions and divisions strife. So let it be without a name; let it be nameless . . . ’ (p.112). And we are never told in so many words what ‘it’ means”. (TV: 6-7)

The novel opens with Okolo going about in search of ‘it’. He questions everybody whether they have got ‘it’. Nothing is said about what ‘it’ means. But the readers can infer from the ripples it creates in the society, when Okolo asks for ‘it’, that it has once existed but no longer does in the present world. Okolo is treated with derision, hatred, and later killed for asking ‘it’. According to Tuere, “You do not want to see him for his merely asking if you have got ‘it’” (TV: 121). Throughout the novel Okolo is seen searching for ‘it’ but of no avail. Except the reader everyone else in the novel seems to understand what ‘it’ means. To the reader ‘it’ has a plurality of meanings but the characters
seem to know precisely what 'it' means as it haunts them even in their sleep. Chief Izongo says,

Only a mad man looks for 'it' in this turned world. Let him look for 'it' in this wide world if he can find 'it'. But we don't want him to stay here asking, “Have you it? Have you it? Have you it?” Even in our sleep we hear him asking. (TV: 72)

Even when Okara discusses about 'it' in the novel, he is careful not to give any categorical or dogmatic meaning. From the various inferences, we assume that it is something related to an ethical issue. Okolo comes close to explaining it as 'meaning of life'. He feels that apart from bringing forth children, everyone has a purpose in life and one's life becomes meaningful only if that purpose is fulfilled (TV: 112).

On the possibility of what 'it' could mean in the novel, Ravenscroft observes that:

To begin with, we have no idea what Okolo's 'it' can possibly mean, but gradually as he finds himself having to explain his quest not only to those who would persecute him but also to the few individuals who sense what he is striving after, we begin to find certain associations of meaning forming around the word 'it', and steadily being added to, until the vagueness disperses. (TV: 7)

Critics have tried to decipher what 'it' could possibly mean. Starting from communal wisdom, 'it' has been interpreted in various ways. Whatever be it, all the meanings that are associated with 'it' are only assumptions and conjectures, and by doing so they only, as Bill Ashcroft et al. in The Empire
*Write Back* put it, “contain them rather than allow their meaning to be determined by their place in the discourse.” (43).

Okara’s *The Voice*, is a linguistic experiment undertaken with a calculated risk. He does not hesitate to violate the grammatical and structural codes of the English language. His deviant form should not be construed as a blot on the African English usage. As Chinweizu et al. have noted:

We would like to point out that the King’s English, or the English of schoolmen, is not the only kind of English. Writing in an English different from standard English should not be construed as “letting Africa down.” Africans have no business speaking the King’s English indistinguishably from an English don: and they have no business trying to prove to Europeans that Africans can speak or write European languages indistinguishably from Europeans. Therefore, no sense of embarrassment is warranted when an African deviates from standard English by speaking or writing an African variant of it. (264)

After centuries of colonial oppression, the African writer talks back to them in their own language and while doing so Okara cares little for the respectability and sanctity of the coloniser’s language. Okara knows that the language that he uses has been handed down forcibly by the colonisers. But now the language is at his mercy and Okara toys with it. All the inverted structures, aberrations, contortions and violations that have been rendered to the English language by Okara refer symbolically to the violations and aberrations that have been rendered to Nigeria and its culture. *The Voice* might not be the voice of an angry young man but certainly it is the voice that
has hacked its way through and has caused a forcible hearing. Okara experiments with the English language using different strategies to appropriate the language to suit his Nigerian setting.

**Ngugi’s Africanisation of the English Language**

Ngugi wa Thiong’o, though, takes the radical stand to switch over to his African mother tongue, Gikuyu, in his effort to work towards decolonisation, his novel *A Grain of Wheat*, was written in English. In the novel, although Ngugi’s immediate concern was to deal with the Kenya’s emergency or the Mau Mau war and come to terms with his encounter with his nation’s and people’s history, his novel does not escape the cultural interferences which are manifested in his use of English as the medium. He does not subscribe to the school of thought which believes in experimenting with the English forms to adapt it to suit the African cultural idiom. However it is evident from his writing that the present social milieu does affect his use of the language and consciously or unconsciously, he reworks the coloniser’s language to cater to his African needs. Ngugi uses simple prose and diction that would be comprehensible to any average African senior school student. In *Ngugi Wa Thiong’o: An Exploration of His Writing*, David Cook and Michael Okenimkpe observe that,

Thus, throughout, Ngugi’s apparent simplicity is in a sense deceptive. He is simple in that he writes prose which is easy to read, but not in the sense of avoiding the full range and variety of the English language. If ever an author has worked hard and successfully to have the best of both worlds, Ngugi has done so.
At a cursory glance, it appears as though Ngugi has employed the normative variety of the English language without any violations. Since there is nothing as East African English as such, Ngugi has been content to capture the everyday speech forms of his setting. In “Tolstoy in Africa: An Interview with Ngugi wa Thiong’o”, Ngugi has expressed his views on this issue:

We don’t, on the whole, have an East African English yet, although it may come into being. So the kind of English we have in East Africa is very much the sort of school English with correct grammar, etc. But may be in a few years’ time in East Africa there will be a variation of English that can be used as a form of method of characterization. Meanwhile we shall be content merely to capture everything of ordinary life and speech, using the so-called Standard English. (48-49)

As the novel unfolds in a rural setting of a remote village called Thabai, Ngugi has captured the everyday speech of the people. The rustic setting and the simple life that the people lead are expressed in the language that they use. Since the people of Thabai are primarily agriculturists, they till their land to cultivate crops. While referring to their tools and land, Ngugi has retained their original forms instead of their English equivalents. “He took a jembe and a panga to repeat the daily pattern of his life had now fallen into since he left Maguita, his last detention camp. To reach his new strip of shamba which lay the other side of Thabai” (GW: 3).

The crops that are grown by Mugo are also left without being translated. Nor does he attempt to explain what they are like: “In the shamba, he felt hollow. There were no crops on the land and what with the dried-up
weeds, gakaraku, micege, mikengeria, bangi- and the sun, the country appeared sick and dull" (GW: 7).

As the tools and crops are rendered in their original names, Ngugi translates the morning greeting. When Mugo goes early in the morning to his shamba, he meets Warui, who greets him, "'How is it with you, this morning?' Warui called out to him, emerging from one of the huts" (GW: 4).

It should be noted that it is not the standard greeting of 'Good Morning' that is used by Ngugi. Instead he Africanises the English greeting. Ngugi undertakes relexification as he appropriates the English language and renders it with meanings that are grounded in African culture. He manipulates the English words to carry the cultural experience of his native land. Thus he challenges the conventional structures of English and extends the horizon of English semantic system to accommodate his African experience.

In the novel, the train is referred to "iron snake" (GW: 62); the guns of the colonialists are described as "bamboo poles that vomited fire and smoke" (GW: 12); human excreta is referred to "small loads" (GW:170); to urinate is reworked as "the desire to pass water" (GW: 7); the chain of concentration camps are called "pipe-line" (GW: 51); a man doing a woman’s job is referred to "Brushing sides with women’s skirts" (GW: 52).

True to the rustic setting of his novel, Ngugi employs the imagery to reflect the actual condition of the society that he portrays. In the novel, the description of Gitogo’s mother, who is referred as ‘old woman’ has an unmistakably African identity:
She had a small face grooved with wrinkles. Her eyes were small but occasionally flashed with life. Otherwise they looked dead. She wore beads around her elbows, several copper chains around her neck, and cowrie-like tins around the ankles. When she moved she made jingling noises like a belled goat. (GW: 6)

Ngugi, also translates African sayings into the English language. As his vernacular is replete with such sayings and quipping, Ngugi renders a literal translation so as to bring out a realistic effect to his writing. In the novel, when Karanja joins the white man betraying his fellow men, his mother reprimands him but does not disown him: “Although ashamed of his activities, she stuck by him, for, as she said, a child from your own womb is never thrown away” (GW: 196).

Ngugi by experimenting with the English language captures the African experience in a non-African language. By doing so, he negotiates with the problem of language-choice and works towards bringing English closer to the African life. Therefore though the expressions appear to be in English, it carries quite a different meaning altogether in the given context. These new usages might be baffling to the non-African English speakers but an African individual can identify his cultural experience which has been manifested through the language. In the novel, Wambui, an activist, leads a group of women to join the strike that has been organised by the party against the white rulers. She walks to the platform, grabs the microphone and gives a stunning speech. In her oration, she blurts out: “Was there any circumcised man who felt water in the stomach at the sight of a white man? Women, she said, had brought their Mithuru and Miengu to the platform” (GW: 157).
In the above passage, the expression, 'feel water in the stomach' has a connotation that eludes a non-African reader. Even the terms like 'Mithuru' and 'Miengu' will not be understood if the reader were not an African because Ngugi does not care to explain what these terms really mean in the present discourse. Ngugi, in his effort to de-centralize the language so as to make it suitable for his rural setting, manipulates the English language by infusing African words, translation equivalents and coinages. While discussing about the problems that the African writer faces, Ngugi, in his interview with Aminu Abdullahi, opines:

... the African writer in fact has got this added problem, you've just reminded me of it, whereas people like George Lamming or an English English writer can get narrative value from the 'slang', from the twists of language from his community; we have to get the slangs and the twists of language in a different language and then try to put that into English. (130)

Ngugi, as a postcolonial writer, cannot but grapple with the coloniser's language as he appropriates it and subverts its normative grammar. This is a useful discursive strategy used by postcolonial writers as it gives them the potential not only to appropriate the coloniser's language but also gives the scope to alter the dominant images by representing the colonisers through the eyes of the colonised. In the novel, Ngugi, exercises the rights of representation of the whites from a black perspective:

The whiteman told of another country beyond the sea where a powerful woman sat on a throne while men and women danced under the shadow of her authority and benevolence. She was ready
to spread the shadow to cover the Agikuyu. They laughed at this eccentric man whose skin had been so scalded that the black outside had peeled off. The hot water must have gone into his head. 

(GW: 11)

Ngugi thus uses the coloniser’s language as a tool to invade and reposition himself at the center as the standard form is marginalised. It should be noted that even a writer like Ngugi, who does not believe in experimentation of the coloniser’s language as a step towards decolonisation, has deliberately manipulated the English language so as to showcase his Afrocentricity. Edmund O. Bamiro is of the same view in his article entitled, “Recasting the center: Ngugi wa Thiong’o and the Africanization of English”:

It is thus doubtful whether any post-colonial writer using English as a second or foreign language can escape nativizing or indigenizing the language altogether. Consequently, although Ngugi has successfully moved the center of his creative writing from the code of ‘standard’ British English to that of his mother tongue, Gikuyu, this movement has not occurred without his prior reterritorialization of the English language. (74-75)

Ngugi, as a postcolonial writer appropriates the English language by his creative use of it and makes it relevant to the setting of his novel. Even as his novel offers a counter perspective of Kenyan freedom struggle, Ngugi, in the first place, Africanises the English language to suit his political purpose.

Thus both Okara and Ngugi experiment with the English language to express the African identity and sensibility through the language. As postcolonial writers they decolonise the English language by breaking it free
from its fixity of referential meaning. As they use the language in a social milieu that is different from its historicity, Okara and Ngugi experiment with the language to make it closer to the lives of their characters. Hence the desire to appropriate the language by mixing it with local forms of language and thereby making it closer to the reality of life is preferred than to preserve the standards of the language which is governed by a system of rules and conventions. Therefore even as these writers express their resentment towards the western ideologies that supported colonisation they appropriate the coloniser's language but not before breaking their rules that govern the language.

**Caribbean Creole and Selvon's Language Game**

Sam Selvon, though a Trinidadian, sets *Moses Ascending* in London and chooses English to be the vehicle of communication for his novel. But Selvon does not comply with the traditional forms; on the other hand he daringly undertakes experimentation in his usage of the English language. He knows well that he cannot, as a writer, write like an English novelist for whom English is his mother tongue. This is not his aim either. Neither does he want to write in a style that complies with the traditional forms of English. On the other hand, Selvon incorporates 'Creole' and fuses it with English without sacrificing its intelligibility. As the plot centers on the blacks who are immigrants in London, the novel deals with the problems they face with the contact culture and their assimilation into the main stream which are deftly portrayed by Selvon. The language they pick up is a variety in its own as it is constantly influenced by their native dialects. As Bill Ashcroft et al. in *The Empire Writes Back* put it:
This literature is therefore always written out of the tension between the abrogation of the received English which speaks from the centre, and the act of appropriation which brings it under the influence of a vernacular tongue, the complex speech habits which characterize the local language, or even the evolving and distinguishing local English of a monolingual society trying to establish its link with place. (39)

There is an inherent tension between the blacks and the English language, which they are forced to speak in a foreign land. All the characters in the novel are non-natives of London as they come and settle in London for various reasons. By depicting the characters who speak in their own Creole English, Selvon has brought a touch of realism to his fiction.

Sam Selvon's handling of the English language is unique, as he uses Creole even in the narration of his novel, *Moses Ascending*. Not only do the characters speak Creole but also the entire novel, which is the jottings of Moses, the narrator, is rendered in Creole. As Ismail S. Talib points out,

Selvon's novel does appear to be particularly successful in its language use. Other Caribbean writers, such as Wilson Harris and Roy Heath, have expressed their admiration of Selvon's language in his work. Wilson Harris specifically commends Selvon for making 'dialect part of the consciousness of the narrator'... (139)

When Selvon employs the Caribbean Creole, he does not render as it is spoken in the islands. On the other hand, Selvon modifies the Creole to make it communicable to the speakers of the English language. Ismail S. Talib points out that,
Comprehension may be difficult not only at the international level but, occasionally, it may also be difficult for people from different regions of the same country, even if they belong to the same ethnic group. (124)

Not only is the language difficult to comprehend, even in the Caribbean islands, it bears the stamp of being depraved and uncivilised. Therefore Selvon attempts to reposition the view that indigenous languages are primitive and animalistic. He exposes the racist ideologies that are operating behind these discourses. As Sarah Lawson Welsh observes,

In many European travelers’ account of visits or residence in the West Indies from the eighteenth century onwards, Creole languages are figured as ‘broken English’, ‘degenerate’ linguistic forms which were thought to reflect the alleged ‘depravity’ and ‘uncivilized’ or ‘childlike’ status of their speakers. (416)

These assumptions are found not only outside the Caribbean islands but also within. There is an ill-conceived notion about the Creole continuum among the elite of the society. Jean D’ Costa states in the Encyclopedia of post-colonial literatures in English: “Within these cultures, the educated assumed that Creole language signified ignorance, backwardness, and distance from the metropole” (810). Therefore taking into account the many difficulties of employing a Creole in writing a novel, it calls for a great amount of courage to indulge in experimenting with the Creole. It also attests that the decolonisation process calls for a creative handling of the language and genre which will be quite distinct from that of the western models. At the same time the new imaginative work must be exploratory in nature rather than be propelled by the
Atavistic aim to revive the pre-colonial models that have been relegated to the margin during the onslaught of colonisation. Selvon’s novel, though deals with a particular set of people, it is not written for any particular community. The use of Creole may restrict wide readership of the novel, and the problem of comprehension of the language will be not only at the national but also at the international level. Therefore, bearing this in mind, different Caribbean writers have taken different stances when it comes to the use of language. Selvon points out the reason why he experiments with the dialect in his novel,

I could [not] have said what I wanted to say without modifying the dialect . . . the pure dialect would have been obscure and difficult to understand . . . Greek to a lot of people. . . . (qtd. in Talib 126)

Sam Selvon, as a postcolonial writer asserts his right to use a language to suit his style by subverting the language of the coloniser. As language and culture are inseparably intertwined, the Africans who were transported and transplanted in the Caribbean islands were deprived of both and hence the inherent resistance to the colonisers and their systems are made manifest when the suppressed voice took to writing in the master’s language subverting the ideologies through which the whole colonial enterprise was made possible. Underscoring the power politics that are at play in the recognition of a language. Derek Attridge points out:

Why does the culture privilege certain kinds of language and certain modes of reading? Such a question can receive an answer only when we reach the realm of political and economic relations, the structures of power, dominance, and resistance which determine the patterns and privileges of cultural formations. (15)
When compared to the main stream of writers who use standard variety of English, the use of Creole by Selvon is a classic example of postcoloniality where the concept of language and practice takes center stage as opposed to the concept of 'center' and 'marginal'. It highlights the problems and complexities at the performance level of the speaker, and also affirms that language thrives not in concepts and theories but by its speakers. As Bill Ashcroft et al. in *The Empire Writes Back* put it:

The theory of the Creole Continuum, undermining, as it does, the static models of language formation, overturns ‘concentric’ notions of language which regard ‘Standard English’ as a ‘core’. Creole need no longer be seen as a peripheral variation of English. (47)

Therefore when Selvon writes in the Creole Continuum, he gives voice to the suppressed thoughts, feelings and emotions that had been kept under the shackles of silence for ages. The much-celebrated plasticity of the English language, which is its forte, has been exploited and is forced to accommodate the various projections and distortions, which has ultimately extended the narrow confines of the English language.

Language dons the role of being more than a means of communication, as it is raised and nurtured in the social, political and cultural climate of a particular place. Colonial masters presumed that the slaves who were brought in were incapable of having any human traits such as inter-personal relationships based on the natural instinct to communicate. Therefore they were allowed to herd and breed together without any distinction. Therefore Gerald Moore observes in “Use Men Language”. “The most important of the discoveries made... is that the West Indies has languages of its own” (331).
But the discovery of the fact that there is a distinct West Indian variety of speech is not as pleasant as the discovery of Columbus when they had a whole stretch of islands to inherit. Rather it is a much disconcerting and disturbing fact, as it is a matter of accommodating the periphery into the main stream. The accommodation, in its initial stages would have raised a few eyebrows if not any severe opposition. But after the painful realisation that it is just a backlash of the colonial excesses, the accommodation needs to be seen as its rightful place rather than an exemplary action of tolerance on the part of the west, who till then were maintaining a sympathetic attitude towards the literature of the colonised countries. It is a like-it-or-lump-it affair for the west when it comes to the third world literature however substandard it may appear to be. Moore puts it quite succinctly in “Use Men Language” when he says,

Gone is the comic intrusion of the Creole-speaker into the polite circle of the educated – strictly comparable with the comic cockney housemaid or man servant in a pre-war West End play. How can what is indigenous and natural to the vast body of people in a society be presented to them in a comic or eccentric light, except by a kind of cultural confidence trick? (331-332)

Therefore, Selvon’s experimentation of the Creole goes to show the assertion of the marginal voices, which were hitherto suppressed. Neither can it be viewed as a comic intrusion used to evoke humour in the novel which abounds in the portrayal of the black immigrants who are misfits in London. On the contrary, using a language such as Creole becomes a political exercise given the fact that the writer is using it as a part of his cultural assertion. As he
is cornered with the problem of unintelligibility, he therefore has to constantly modify and reshape the language to suit his purposes. To cite an example from Selvon's *Moses Ascending*:

> Who you think was at Marble Arch at the stroke of six precisely next evening, with notebook and pencil poised? Who you think wait there like a poor-me-one till seven o’ clock, then had was to catch the tube and come home in a fiery mood of destruction? (*MA*: 62)

Though it sounds like English, it is not easy to ignore the influence of the local dialect in the above passage, which can be seen in its grammar and phrases like ‘poor-me-one’. These are not simply examples of the Substratum theory where the immigrants learn their contact language imperfectly. After seducing Brenda, Moses says, "After that glorious salutatory stroke with Brenda, I got to thinking that in for a penny, in for a pound, and that might not be a bad idea to have she available on the spot" (*MA*: 26). The violations and aberrations of grammar found in the above passage are not the mistakes of a schoolboy in his second language acquisition nor are they ‘backsidings’ due to the mother tongue influence. Jean Aitchison in *Language Change: Progress or decay?* is of the view that,

> Faced with such superficially hilarious adaptations of the English language, some people have condemned pidgins as ‘crudely distorted by false ideas of simplification’ and dismissed them as ‘broken language’ or a ‘bastard blend’, unworthy of serious study. (*220*)
The variety of language found in the above passages can neither be criticized for breaking the conventional rules of the language nor be wished away as sheer ignorance of the language principles. On the other hand it is a deliberate effort to modify the English Grammar and forcing it to cater to his purposes. As Bill Ashcroft et al. state in *The Empire Writes Back*:

Writers in this continuum employ highly developed strategies of Code-Switching and Vernacular transcriptions, which achieve the dual result of abrogating an English as a culturally significant discourse. (46)

Sam Selvon's *Moses Ascending* is in a sense a metafiction where the principal character Moses, attempts to compose his memoirs by jotting down the experiences of his life. A black man who has no reputation of a writer, attempting to write is a theme in itself. The content of the writing and the language in which he expresses himself are the problems, which Selvon tries to highlight in the novel. In spite of all the problems that Moses has to face, the desire to write and his wanting to prove a point to the whites that even the blacks are capable of writing seem to be the propelling force behind his efforts to write. To quote Moses: "I longed to get back to my philosophizing and my analyzing and my rhapsodizing, decorating my thoughts with grace-notes and showing the white people that we, too, could write a book" (*MA*: 100-101).

As a writer from the Caribbean, Selvon's is a quest to show his stamp of class as a writer, giving voice to all the pent up feelings and emotions of his race, people and nation that have been suppressed for ages. It is the white-skinned writer, who, all this while, has represented the blacks, interpellating, interpreting and trying to understand their peculiar ways. This exercise of
misinterpretation has only resulted in the formation of a colonial discourse, which has been responsible to keep the voice of an entire race buried and unheard. Therefore when Moses takes to writing, he knows well that the intellectual community would raise meaningless questions like, “In any case, who tell you you could write” (MA: 42)? Since writing needs an amount of scholarship, people deride him saying, “You think writing book is like kissing hand? You should leave that to people like Lamming and Salkey” (MA: 42).

Without expecting any encouragement from any quarters Selvon knows that his work will break a new ground in the great literary canon, though there are established writers like Lamming and Salkey who are associated with Black Literature with some powerful books to their credit. But Moses knows his work, with its radical techniques and strategies will stand out: “So? Well, my memoirs will create a new dimension” (MA: 43).

In the novel we see Moses as a man trying to enjoy his post-retirement age. As a black immigrant he has started off from the scratch, stomached all the unmentionable suffering that ‘belongs’ to his race but through his hardship and toil, he is now propertied and wants to eat the fruit of his years of labour. He wants to make a sense out of his life and ultimately find his self-image and identity. Though he desires to be left alone in peace, there is an inherent desire to compose his memoirs for which he jots down his experiences and hunts for materials. Edward Baugh in “Friday in Crusoe’s City: The Question of Language in Two West Indian Novels of Exile”, points out the significance of memoirs and the very act of writing by a West Indian individual:

To complete his ascent, Moses is writing his memoirs (with capital M, of course). This work is important to him not only as the act of
self-definition which memoirs tend to be, but even more so because it will display his supposed mastery of English. To have arrived is, in its ultimate expression, to have arrived linguistically. (9)

We see Moses ascending up the social ladder against all odds, but his desire to write invites criticism from one and all, even to the extent of telling straight in his face that, "you are heading straight for the mad house" (MA: 43) and is warned that he will be seen, “talking to yourself in the streets as you head for the Arches in Charring Cross to join the tramps and drop-outs” (MA: 43).

For Moses, insulting his work "was a hard thing to bear" and it is worse than calling him "a black bastard", or "refuse to be served in the pub", or "even piss on me like them pigs piss on that poor African chap" (MA: 45). Writing is something that is dear to his heart. But Moses is prepared to grow a thick skin to weather all criticisms. Therefore when people around him make fun by calling him British Baldwin, he only retorts to them in anguish, "'You won't understand', I say. 'What do you know of the deep maelstroms churning inside an author, or how touchous he could be concerning his work'" (MA: 108)? Writing is irresistible and unavoidable for Moses, though he is faced with a legion of problems. The content of his memoirs deals with the harrowing experiences of the neglected sect of people, which has to have an appeal to the tastes of his readers and his use of language that belongs to a peculiar style, has to find a publisher who will have nothing against it. But Moses is unfazed by these hurdles even when Brenda assails him with her stinging words, “Of course, it will never see the light of day through any reputable English publisher” (MA: 137). He cares little for her caustic remarks and continues to compose his memoirs tirelessly. He identifies with those who

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are engaged in the grim struggle of life. As Rose C. Acholonu observes in "The West Indian Novelist and Cultural Assertion: Samuel Selvon’s Artistic Vision":

The socio-cultural evolution of the West Indian masses naturally resulted in the emergence of a language or dialect which is special to the community. The West Indian English or Creole is the hallmark of the Caribbean cultural heritage. This special English, like any other language, serves to reinforce the people’s cultural identity. To individual characters the language becomes a means of conformity and a vital way of asserting their existence and self-image. (80)

Therefore Selvon employs Creole and puts dialectal forms into the mouth of his characters. He not only employs language to communicate his views but also uses it as a tool to assert the West Indian identity.

Selvon is unapologetic in his use of language and experiments with it. He plays with the English language and preys upon its pliability. He uses archaic words, local dialect, and Creole continuum and yokes it with the standard variety of English. Brenda’s BBC English is mixed with the dialectal forms and Moses’s archaisms. As Mervyn Morris points out in his introduction to the novel:

The characteristic effects of Moses Ascending as of (Moses Migrating) derive from the surprising combination of styles: archaic and modern; formal, often stilted, Standard English and casual Trinidad slang, academic phraseology and non-standard grammar; pseudo-literary affectations clichés, foreign expressions
all tumbled together with splendid indecorum, and the detail often wrong. (*MA*: xi)

Selvon creatively uses the English language. It is stretched, broken, and its grammatical structures are left mangled. Adding to its woe, it is yoked with the local slang and its phrases are subverted. It is not seen as a system of meaning but becomes a plaything in the hands of a third world writer who loves to play with his master’s tongue. In the novel *Moses Ascending*, it can be seen in the case of Galahad who says, “We is we . . . and after we is, we [will]”. But Selvon plays with the language and shows Moses as having understood it as “weevil” (*MA*: 13).

There are also instances of the writer indulging in a deliberate play of malapropisms. He interchanges the spelling and produces a beautiful symposium of twin meanings. For example, as Morris points out in his introduction to the novel,

When, for example, he says ‘I had to *peddle* my own canoe for survival’ (39), Moses no doubt means ‘paddle’. There is a glance at Mr. Biswas, ‘the paddler’. ‘Peddle’ suggests that the writer, however independent he pretends to be, will need people to buy his work. It may also signal an upper class English pronunciation of ‘paddle’. Similarly, when Moses says, ‘In this world you must not *heng* your hat too high’ (3), ‘heng’ simultaneously represents a version of upper class English speech and a West Indian Creole usage: thus neatly fusing dream and reality”. (*MA*: xv)

It is the pleasure-principle that governs the language of Selvon when he handles the former master’s language with utter playfulness. Deborah
Cameron is of the same view when she talks of the deliberate play with the normative variety of language in her essay, “Mixing it: The poetry and politics of bad English”, “Language used ‘badly’ offers pleasures which are not always to be had from language used more ‘appropriately’ . . .” (108).

Selvon, though a contemporary of Lamming and Baldwin who write in elegant English and have created a reputation for themselves, refuses to budge and breaks free with his experimental language use. He has not forgotten that English language was a powerful imperial tool in the hands of the colonisers. Therefore he wants to face the challenge and deliver the counter punch using the same weapon of language. As Moses proclaims defiantly, “I will knock them in the Old Kent Road with my language alone”, I boast. ‘My very usage of English will have them rolling in the aisles’” (MA: 78).

True to his claim, his English is as sensational as it is startling. His deliberate play with spelling interestingly does not confuse the reader, as the intended meaning is well within the grasp. For instance in the novel when Bob comes unexpectedly when Moses is scrubbing the back of Jeannie, Moses is caught red handed and to quote his own words, “. . . I was trimpling with shock and fear” (133). The letter ‘e’ in ‘tremble’ is substituted with ‘i’ for obvious reasons. Similarly, when Moses recollects his nostalgic memories of his clandestine affair with a Dutch girl, he ‘misspells’ paradox as parabox. We do not know whether he had ‘Pandora’s box’ or ‘skeleton in the cupboard’ in mind when he altered the spelling, but what we know for sure is his intention to topple the conventional form of English. Also he changes the spelling of the words like ‘loin’ into “lion” (MA: 63), ‘choke’ into “chook” (MA: 28), to name a few, and shows a fancy for coining new words like “unbeknownst” (MA:
27), "grudedity" (MA: 117), "onlyest" (MA: 41), "ingrate" (MA: 123) and so on. He takes special delight in breaking the grammatical structures as it can be seen in the following passage:

Now, I know, though Bob don't know that I know, that white men feel they only have to wag their fingers and a black woman would a-running and spread sheself wide anytime, anyplace, any old how, and deliver the goodies. (MA: 22)

The interesting aspect of Selvon's style is that he mixes his grammatical violations with formal language and archaisms as it can be found in the following passages: "'Glad to be of service, Robert', I say humbly. 'Speak your piece and depart before you become contaminated'" (MA: 139). And when a policeman arrests Moses, he says, "If I had had time I would of said, 'Unhand me, knave'. but instead I say, 'Let me go man, I ain't done nothing'" (MA: 36).

From Selvon's free play with language, it is quite clear that he is in the process of decolonising the English language by altering the grammar and subverting its structures. It is an intellectual response to his emotional grievance as the coloniser's language takes a severe beating in Selvon's usage. As the language is rendered odd and quixotic, Brenda drubs it as "ignorant unschooled piece of work" (105). Selvon is full of mischief when he says ironically that his style of language is similar to the "usage of the Queen's language, which had always been my forte . . ." (105).

Several critics may say several things like Brenda who takes a formalistic approach when she says:
‘The only sentence you know . . . is what criminals get. Your conjunctions and your hyperboles are all mixed up with your syntax, and your figures of speech only fall between 10 and 20. Where you have punctuation you should have allegory and predicates, so that the pronouns appear in the correct context. In other words, you should stick to oral communication and leave the written word to them what knows their business’. (MA: 105)

Obviously the reference here is to leave the business of writing to writers like James Baldwin, George Lamming and Andrew Salkey who write in elegant English conforming to all the rules and regulations of the language. But it is precisely what Selvon is against, as he attempts to topple the applecart of the notion of standard English. He not only topples it but also does it in style when his protagonist kicks aside Lamming’s Water with Berries that was in his way and gets it name comically wrong as “Water for Berries” (MA: 138).

Selvon tampers with the normative variety of English and underscores his postcolonial response to the colonial affiliations of the language. As Sivanandan puts it in “The Liberation of the Black Intellectual”:

It is not just the literature of the language, however, that ensnares the native into ‘whititude’, but its grammar, its syntax, its vocabulary. They are all part of the trap. Only by destroying the trap can he escape it. ‘He has’, as Genet puts it, ‘only one recourse: to accept this language but to corrupt it so skilfully that the white men are caught in his trap.’ He must blacken the language, suffuse
it with his own darkness, and liberate it from the presence of the oppressor. (74)

As Selvon decolonises the English language, he does not stop with just playing with words but also takes a great deal of pleasure in subverting the popular phrases. He alters and subverts the phrases in a way that it sounds comic and is bereft of its original grandeur and dignity. For example when Moses describes his extraordinary success in his sexual exploits with various kinds of women, he borrows the popular phrase, ‘He came, He saw, he conquered’, and alters it as, “Blonde blue-eyed Scandinavian, fair English rose, vivacious Latin – all have come, and see, and I conquered” (MA:25). Also the phrase, ‘to earn one’s bread with toil’, suffers a severe damage when Moses changes it as, “I would not know about that; in my heyday I earned my piece of cunt by the sweat of my brow . . .” (MA:98).

While there is racy irony and ribald humour dressed up in the language of Moses, it does not totally mitigate the fierceness and anger that is lurking behind these thoughts. As a person who belongs to the oppressed class and hobnobs with similar sect of suffering people, he is an angry old man who does not try to conceal his bottled up feelings. His language is quite abusive and he makes no bones of it but flaunts it audaciously as it can be seen in the novel which is replete with tabooed words like, ‘fuck’, ‘shit’, ‘arse’, ‘cunt’, ‘pussy’, ‘stroke’ and the like. Whenever things get emotionally charged, Moses spares no thought and quite liberally uses such brash and offensive terms. For example, when Moses gets the bail and comes out of prison he fires at Bob saying, “‘Fuck you, fuck Galahad, and fuck the party,’ I say bitterly” (MA: 38).
Selvon also employs Rasta English, which is popular among the younger generation of the West Indians. Because of his harrowing encounters with white policemen and their off handed treatment towards the Blacks, Moses prefers to call them 'pigs from Babylon':

"Are we really making any headway against the fuzz and the pigs from Babylon?"

Brenda look up and smile pitifully. 'You mean the police?'

'Yes. Why call you them Babylon?'

'Read your bible and you'll find out'. (MA: 82)

Because the police subjected the blacks into unspeakable and inhuman treatment, it is quite understandable, why Moses calls them pigs. Also the reference to 'Babylon' can be traced back to the Bible where it stands for oppression and slavery. As Christopher O'Reilly points out,

Babylon is the Rastafarian term for the corrupt, oppressive world that Rastafarians believe they will be delivered from when they return to Ethiopia, Africa. Babylon was a place of slavery for the Jews of the Old Testament. (100)

Selvon's use of Rasta English is very appropriate as it is marked with social protest as Rastafarianism itself is concerned with the rejection of many traditional western values and aims at branching off from the main stream of society. Peter A. Roberts describes about Rasta English in his book, *West Indians and their Language*:

Within recent times this same biblical language has become enmeshed with the language of harsh urban ghetto life, a context in
which Rasta language flourished. Familiar biblical terms, which in their history had already been subject to re-interpretations and extensions in meaning, were again re-interpreted in the context of Jamaican ghetto life and the Jamaican society at large. For the Rastafarian, well-known proper names like Babylon, Zion, Israelites, and the title Pharoah were given new meaning. . . . many words therefore took on double significance—eg. Brethren, judgement day, captivity, redemption, freedom, war, darkness, enemy, paradise— and words like love, hate, burn, wail, dread, violence, came to characterize Rasta speech. (38)

There are also numerous references and allusions taken from English ballads, history and classical Greek literature. It has always been a matter of pride, for any writer, to quote from ancient Greek literature so as to show off their wide scholarship. But it is not so for Selvon as it can be found in the following passage:

Then Farouk take off the head and wrap it up, like that Greek hero do with a woman head, I forget the whole story at the moment, but you know the one I mean, about the chap who had wings on his foot, and he slash off this woman head: she was so ugly he had was to look in a mirror to do it, else she turn him into stone— you remember? (MA: 56)

As it can be understood, the above reference is to Medusa, but the author does not mention it specifically and he makes no effort to do so as he does not feel the necessity to do it. He leaves it to his readers to decide upon the fate of his allusion. Though he claims to have forgotten the whole story, he proceeds to
narrate the allusion in its entirety. His alleged forgetfulness is only a proof of his not wanting to remember, as he attaches no importance to it. While commenting on Selvon's use of language, Curdella Forbes, is of the view:

In the final analysis, the insertion of the Creole narrative voice and Moses' powerful malapropisms into literary discourse becomes not merely a Manichean opposition to British colonizing projects, but more primarily the assertion of a creative essence in the speech of West Indians. It expresses faith in the ability of the language to carry the burden of their searches through to acceptable resolution, and becomes a ground of possibility for the discovery and creation of psychic and social order and therefore of a liveable relation to constructs of identity which are essentially gendered. (60)

Beneath the playfulness of Selvon lies his artistry to command the language for his ideological purpose. As he deals with the life of the marginalized community, he chooses to capture the real life language of the people. Through the character of Moses, Selvon disrupts the myth of standard English and its role in the West Indian society. As Edward Baugh observes:

For the moment, we laugh at English as much as we laugh at Moses' misadventures with it. The sense of subversion is conveyed partly through the many levels of parody on which the story moves, as well as through the fact that the hybrid or non-language which Moses produces is the result not just of a failure to cope with Standard English, but also of a positive, if largely instinctual manipulation of Trinidadian speech, with its own distinctive rhetorical patterns. In Moses' unconscious blunders with English is
Selvon's conscious artistry, as, for instance, in the congruous but pointed juxtapositions of a cliché-ridden, allusive literary style with the earthiness of an oral tradition. (10)

Therefore, in Sam Selvon's Moses Ascending, the life of the West Indians, racial conflicts, and their struggle for emancipation and empowerment are dealt in a language that itself is under the process of decolonisation as it is not only the artistic medium but also becomes the subject matter. It should also be noted that Selvon appropriates the English language by experimenting with it. He does not strive to retain the normative variety of English which will be far removed from the everyday reality of the characters that he deals with. Selvon uses a range of linguistic registers that reflect the rich cultural resources that are available for a West Indian writer. By deploying various varieties of English that are at vogue in the Caribbean islands, Selvon achieves an unmistakably West Indian variety of English and brings in a touch of authenticity to his novel.

**Harris's Fusion of English and Creole**

Wilson Harris, faithful to his Guyanese setting, employs the Creole language in his novel, Palace of the peacock. The use of Creole continuum is one of the ways in which post colonial texts de-centers the myth of standard English by abrogating the center and extends the frontiers of the marginal and periphery. The emergence of postcolonial fiction with a deliberate use of 'englishes' rather than 'English' constitutes to the widening of the mainstream of the canon of English Literature.

The ambivalence that clouds the problem of using English language is a double-edged sword. Ever since the third world writers took to writing, they
have been dogged by the problem of language-choice that is to be employed as a means of their communication. If English is a foreign tongue in which the native writer’s emotions and sensibilities cannot be best expressed, the predicament is that the colonial impediments have left them with a legacy of the English language from which there seems to be no way out. No matter how broken their language is, they cannot but communicate in English. The problem just does not stop here. Now that the third world writers have begun to write in various forms of English, with its distortions and deviations, it backfires on the English as the concept of center is questioned and negated. However to a postcolonial writer, it marks a sweet revenge on the master’s language as they appropriate the language to yoke it with their native experience. It also furthers the cause of decolonisation by interrogating and dismantling the existing discourses that were perpetuated through the power of language.

Wilson Harris employs the Creole Continuum interspersed with standard variety of English. As Bill Ashcroft et al. in *The Empire Writes Back* point out, “. . . the most distinctive feature of the Caribbean novel is the narrator who ‘reports’ in Standard English, but moves along the continuum in the dialogue of the characters.”(72)

True to the above statement, Harris uses Code-switching and Code-mixing to facilitate the reading experience. The narrator, who is the brother of Donne, uses standard English whereas the other characters use different varieties of the Creole continuum as it can be seen in the following passage:

Cameron sobered a little. “Where there’s life there’s hope, Boy.”

He tried to jeer daSilva by giving his words a ribald drawling twist.
"You lucky bastard-you." He poked daSilva in the chest. "What's in hell's name keeping you from settling right here for good?"
"You don't know what?"
"Naw Boy, I don't."
"I ain't marry to she," daSilva confessed.
"Ah see," Cameron laughed like a man who had at last dismissed his fool.
"Pon this mission," daSilva explained in a nettled voice, "you know as well as I the law say you must marry the Bucks you breed. Nobody know is me chile."
"Is it a secret?" Cameron roared and laughed again. (PP: 50-51)

The characters involved in the novel *Palace of the Peacock*, belong to various tribes and regions. Cameron is a Negro, Schomburgh is a Mulatto, and Donne is a white Creole who claims to have gone native. The coming together of people from different races to form a crew is so typical of the West Indian scenario which is a melting pot of various cultures. The people who are bred in the Caribbean islands were once shipped in from various parts of the colonised countries and were yoked under the system of slavery. It was a post-Babel situation where everyone spoke in a different tongue resulting in mutual unintelligibility. To keep them under linguistic shackles was a ploy adopted by the colonisers to keep the slaves under control. Any sort of rebellion or coup will be taken care of by their own semiotic confusion.

Therefore the emergence of Creole in the Caribbean islands was inevitable. It is through this Creole Continuum, every individual tries to redefine himself and carves out an identity for oneself. As this happens to be
the actuality in the real life of a West Indian, Harris does not desist from making his characters speak in their own Creole language, while the narrator is at home with the standard English.

In the novel *Palace of the Peacock*, the crew is mixed and varied in nationality and language. Yet their coming together as one man with a definite purpose is precisely what the West Indian character is made of. The language that they have learnt and communicate is the language of oppression, which has kept their voices suppressed. When old Schomburgh tries to soothen the nerves of the narrator, words tumble out with "grave difficulty" (PP: 28). He is not very articulate in communicating his thoughts and feelings. Though he is the oldest member of the crew, he speaks only if there is a necessity. He says, "Is a risk everyman tekking in this bush", he champed his mouth a little, rasping and coughing out his lungs the old scarred broken words of his life. I thought of the sound a boat makes grating against a rock" (PP: 28-29).

The linguistic inefficiency of the West Indian individual can be seen in the above passage. It is not the sweet rhyming with its mellifluous intonation that Schomburgh speaks in. English might be the language of Milton and Shakespeare who have enriched the language with their profound thoughts and linguistic artistry. English was like a musical instrument in their hands, which mesmerized its hearers. It might be the glorious language with all its sweetness and grandeur. Harris hints at the irrelevancy of the history of the language once it crosses its native shores. In the Caribbean islands, the position of English is different from what it is in England. For Schomburgh, it is the coloniser's language, the language of oppression and he cannot help but croak the foreign tongue. All that he can manage is only a few "scarred broken words", which sounds like a boat grating against a rock. Cameron, who is of
an African descent, shares the same feeling of antipathy towards the coloniser’s language:

Fact is we don’t speak the same language that is God’s truth. They speak shy and tricky—the mission folk. I speak them hard bitter style of words I been picking up all me life. . . . I got to keep making these brutal sounds to live. (PP: 43)

While he acknowledges that he does not speak the way the English men speak, he also realises that it is the “hard bitter style”, which he has managed to pick up. He goes a step ahead to denounce the English language as brutal. The cycle of time comes round when a black complains about the English language of having brutal sounds. It is a matter of survival that forces these characters to speak in English. As English has taken the centre stage in the islands, the socio-political condition offers little choice for these characters to speak any other language. It was the crime of the colonisers who denounced the indigenous languages as barbaric and nothing more than animal cries. Now that the colonised have picked up English, they express their antipathy towards the language and the predicament that forces them to use it. The colonial discourse that was built on the premises of language is bulldozed when the same language is used as a site for confrontation with the colonial past. The socio-cultural displacement of the West Indians has forced them to struggle with creolization and miscegenation, the two elements they have to contend with. Elucidating on this, Femi Abodunrin, in Blackness- Culture, Ideology and Discourse, is of the view:

The results of miscegenation and creolization have created, one might say, a divided alliance to two world views, in which the
‘mulatto of style’ becomes a man or woman committed to writing in the oppressor’s language while looking with a keen eye on aspects of his/her ancestral African culture to endow him/her with a cultural framework that will rescue the imagination. (31)

Wilson Harris through his varied characters has tried to capture the tension that arises out of living between two worlds. Since the characters are already loaded with the baggage of their past cultural sediments, any means of escape is possible only through their power of imagination to posit a worldview for themselves. Though they are on a civilising mission exercising their power over the Arawaks, they feel that they do not belong to that place and realise that “We’re all outside of the folk” (PP: 59). The West Indians, though hail from different places they share the common experience of colonisation and its effects on the society as a whole. They have found their unifying force in the chords of misery that binds them through the experience of creolisation that gives them a distinct identity and solidifies the society. In the novel, the narrator points out to this fact:

After a while this horrifying exchange of soul and this identification of themselves with each other brought them a partial return and renewal of confidence, a neighbourly wishful fulfillment and a basking in each other’s degradation and misery that they had always loved and respected. It was a partial rehabilitation of themselves, the partial rehabilitation of a tradition of empty names and dead letters, dead as the buttons on their shirt. (PP: 100)

Another characteristic feature of Palace of the Peacock is its musicality. Words are used to evoke sound patterns that delve deep into the traditional
system of life in the Caribbean islands. The music that pervades in the natural environment of the islands is captured and fused into the novel. To cite an example from the novel:

The voice of roaring water declined a little. We were skirting a high outcrop of rock that forced us into the bush. A sigh swept out of the gloom of the trees, unlike any human sound as a mask is unlike flesh and blood. The unearthly, half-gentle, half-shuddering whisper ran along the tips of graven leaves. Nothing happened to stir. And then the whole forest quivered and sighed and shook with violent instantaneous relief in a throaty clamour of waters as we approached the river again. (PP: 26-27)

Harris’s use of the adjectival insistence in the above passage highlights his effort to use the language to translate the musical pattern to evoke the visual effects of the Caribbean setting. When there is a scuffle between the crew Carroll breaks out into an uncontrollable laughter which is captured in Harris’s artistic use of language:

The laugh struck them as the slyest music coming clear out of the stream. It was like a bell and it startled away for one instant every imagined revolution of misery and fear and guile. It was an ingenuous sound like the homely crackle of gossiping parrots or of inspired branches in the leaves, or the slicing ecstasy and abandonment of the laughing wood when the hunter loses and finds his game in the footmark he has himself left and made. (PP: 63)

The novel abounds with such passages. The everyday experiences are captured along with the musicality that is manifested at various levels in the West
Indian setting. Commenting on this issue, Russel Mc Dougall is of the view that,

The musical motifs of what Harris calls in Conrad 'an orchestra of the heart of the Bush' could be traced throughout Palace of the Peacock to the 'final' cadenza of coniunctio- the cry of the peacock- which the singing here anticipates. Indeed, the novel is well considered as a sound poem, since it operates on a symphonic scale and yet remains free of the structural restraints of the 'pure' genre- and because it is 'programmatic' rather than 'absolute' in its musicality: an orchestration of the re/memberment of the eclipsed body of subjective community. (98)

Harris uses the language to depict the distinct West Indian scenario which is deeply rooted in their colonial experience. There is an eerie atmosphere that pervades the place as people dialogue with their consciousness, which is reflected in the perception of their natural surrounding. As Bill Ashcroft et al. in The Empire Writes Back observe:

. . . Harris sees language as the key to these transformations. Language must be altered, its power to lock in fixed beliefs and attitudes must be exposed, and words and concepts 'freed' to associate in new ways. (151)

Therefore, Harris appropriates English to suit his Guyana's setting. The natural environment of the land is pictorially captured through the deft handling of words and sound patterns: As the members of the crew hail from different social backgrounds, their marked diversity is expressed through their various usages of English. Harris portrays the polyphonic setting of the
Caribbean islands through his experimentation of the language. While he captures the Creole and fuses it with the normative variety of English, Harris, as a postcolonial writer affirms and validates the native expression of the speakers.

It should be noted that in the Caribbean islands, though there are a few Amerindian languages spoken in the interior parts, it is mostly English and Creole that are commonly used. As English serves as the official variety, the compelling issues that make English indispensable have resulted in the emergence of Creole. Though the transplanted individuals mostly belong to the African descent, there are no African dialects spoken in the islands. F.G. Cassiday affirms this point in *Jamaica Talk*:

> There is no real evidence . . . that any articulate African speech survives in any community in the island today, and it is doubtful whether any has been spoken at all within the twentieth century. A few snatches of African or African-like words are preserved in some songs and some of the revivalist cults keep up a terminology among themselves that has African elements, but these are all vestiges in a structure that is not genuinely African but Jamaican. . . . (86)

Since the individuals are bereft of their native languages, they adopt varieties of Creole to forge their identity. The loss of one's language and learning another language are issues that affect West Indian individuals who grapple with these problems in their every day life. They are wary of this problem of linguistic slavery and therefore attempt to liberate themselves linguistically by learning and using the language in one's own way as a sequential course to
colonisation. The writers, in this context, Selvon and Harris record these experiences in their novels and handle the issue of language by appropriating it for their purpose of decolonisation.

**English in Australia**

Though English is the national language and lingua franca of Australia, it is not the language of Australia. It came along with the colonisers/settlers and is responsible for the extinction of many indigenous languages in Australia. Before the conquest, Australia was a multilingual society where the Aborigines spoke different languages depending on the tribe they belonged to. W.H. Edwards observes that:

> It is estimated that there were approximately 270 different languages in Australia at the time of colonization. If we take into account dialect variations within these language groups, the number is expanded to approximately 600. Each dialect had about 500 speakers although those in more highly productive regions may have had many more than this number. (78)

Many languages that had existed for thousands of years have disappeared in the last 200 years of white conquest. Modern researchers and linguists believe that all the Australian languages can be traced back to a single source called Macrophylum, which was divided into twenty seven language families. However, the Aborigines have a concept of language which has a degree of divinity attached to it. They believe that their ancestral spirits gave the languages to their forefathers. In “Living the Dreaming”, Bill Edwards throws more light on this:
The stories record that the Ancestral Spirit Beings gave their first descendents the various languages in which the stories have been related. For example, the Kangaroo-men left the dialects of the Western Desert groups and the first mother, Waramurungundji, emerged from the sea and as she gave birth to the first children of Arnhem Land, she gave them the languages they were to speak.

Therefore, languages, for the Aborigines were more than just a mode of communication. To speak their native language is to be in communion with the heritage of their ancestors and to feel the solidarity of their respective tribe.

But the early settlers had a prejudiced perception regarding everything that was Aboriginal. Therefore the indigenous languages, which include a wide range of nasal sounds, were simply dismissed as nothing more than the grunts and shrieks of animals. The complexity and the richness of their languages remained hidden until the missionaries introduced the written script to the Aboriginal languages. As Rob Amery and Colin Bourke observe in their "Australian Languages: Our Heritage":

Prior to the invasion in 1788, Australian languages were not written, though the precursors of writing existed in the symbols used in message sticks, drawings or bark and sand paintings. The writing systems used today were first developed by missionaries and linguists. . . . In Central Australia and, undoubtedly, in other areas as well, sand paintings or group drawings were used to reinforce verbal communication. They were used to illustrate
stories told to children, stories related to the group’s activities.

Dreaming stories and ceremonies. (136)

Though the writing systems were a later introduction, the Aboriginal verbal communication was assisted by various other modes such as drawings and paintings. The Aboriginal societies had another unique way of communication called the Gesture Language. Without uttering a single word an entire conversation was made possible by use of hand signs. As W.H. Edwards observes:

However in Aboriginal societies gestures were formalized and conveyed a wide range of ideas. They were capable of conveying a sequence of ideas. Gestures covered such parts of speech as nouns, pronouns, interrogatives, verbs, adverbs, adjectives and number. They could be joined together to make a sentence. This meant that two men hunting together could carry on a silent conversation at a distance without alarming their prey. If there was some urgent need for communication between a man and his mother-in-law he could convey a message by signs. Messages could be passed during times of ritual and mourning. Gossip and secret messages could be conveyed without others overhearing the message. (86)

Contrary to the common assumption that primitive societies have limited range of vocabulary, Aboriginal languages have a rich repertoire of vocabulary specific to their cultural and religious needs. Ritual ceremonies have their own sacred language which is limited to particular audiences. Talking about their lexical competence, Rob Amery and Colin Bourke, point out:
The lexical competence of the average speaker of an Aboriginal language is equivalent to that of the average speaker of other languages. The vocabularies of Aboriginal language allow their speakers to express their mythology, culture, thoughts and feelings. Working vocabularies in excess of 10,000 words are common. (132)

But with the advent of colonisation, Aborigines were slaughtered and tribes were wiped off from the face of the earth. Along with them most of the indigenous languages became extinct. Even the few surviving languages are not the same as it were before colonisation but a mere conglomeration of different languages. As Jack Davis points this out in his “Aboriginal Writing: a personal view”:

Dispersed and dispossessed, tribes dwindled and many of our people vanished from the face of our land which was no longer theirs. Driven by the natural human instinct to survive, groups merged and became part of the group which was largest in number. Where the white man had turned the soil whole tribes were completely obliterated, and the dialects of various groups became as one. An example of this is the fourteen tribes which inhabited the South-West of Western Australia, only one language remains, a composite of the fourteen languages, and that is the Nyoongah tongue, and I regret to say that if by some miraculous means our people of the eighteen-thirties were to return, they would find it difficult to understand and speak the Nyoongah language of today. (11)
However, the intrusion of English made things worse. People were caught up between the two languages and two cultures. As in the Caribbean islands, the emergence of Creole became inevitable in Australia, as the Aborigines were forced to interact with the white settlers. The onslaught of modernism saw the Aborigines settling down in urban cities and develop a unique language called Aboriginal English. While most of them are ignorant of their ancestral languages, they use a variety of English in their family settings and social networks, which is distinct and different from Australian English. As Rob Amery and Colin Bourke discuss in their “Australian Languages: Our Heritage”,

Aboriginal English varieties spoken in urban settings are social dialects and are linguistically distinct from standard Australian English. They may reflect grammatical structures and features of the sound systems of their ancestral languages which have long ceased to be spoken. They may also incorporate words from those ancestral languages or use English words in different ways or with changed meanings. In some places Aboriginal English varieties are diverging from Australian English spoken in the same urban centre. The speech of urban Aboriginal people may range from standard English through to varieties of Aboriginal English which on occasion may not be understood by non-Aboriginal Australians.

(138)

The emergence of Creole is a classic example of abrogation and appropriation of the postcolonial experience of the colonised. Especially when the native languages are systematically suppressed and denigrating discourses are built around the indigenous languages, the colonised attempt to appropriate
the coloniser's language, though not without resentment. In Australia, to speak the Aboriginal language was to express resistance to budge and assimilate. In some cases, children who were caught speaking in their native languages were separated from their families and sent to Welfare Homes by the white authorities. Thus the systematic suppression of native Aboriginal languages saw the flowering of Aboriginal English which in turn gave them their Aboriginal identity.

Another significance of the Creole is that it is closer to the native culture than the foreign language. Since the inevitable historical experiences have obliterated the native languages, the emergence of Creole serves as a bridge between the two worlds and their differing cultures.

**Mudrooroo's Experimentation with Aboriginal English**

Mudrooroo, who writes in the postcolonial space, is aware of the imbroglgio that clouds the Aboriginal writer in his choice of the medium of communication. As a writer who strives to be closer to reality in the depiction of Aboriginal life in a white community, he experiments with the language and uses the dialect as a positive force for productive purposes. In *Writing From the Fringe*, Mudrooroo opines:

Aborigines are usually fluent either in their language or in their Aboriginal English dialect and they use these in communication with other Aborigines. I bring this up as an example because if it is possible for us to do this in oral discourse there is nothing to prevent us from so doing in our written discourse. (97)
To break the western standards and to resort to the speech patterns of Aboriginal communities is to affirm the spirit of non-conformity and non-dependency on the patronizing attitude of the colonisers.

Five years before publishing the novel *Doin Wildcat: A Novel Koori Script*, Mudrooroo (Colin Johnson) presented a paper entitled “White forms, Aboriginal Content” at the first National Aboriginal Writers’ Conference, which was held at Murdoch University in February 1983. During the discussion, when asked whether he would experiment with dialects in his next novels, Mudrooroo answered,

I don’t know. The problem is that you get set in your ways. I mightn’t be good enough as a writer to do that, to tell you the truth. It depends. Possibly, the younger generation of writers can do it much better than I can, because I’ve got fixed in my ways now. It takes a hell of a lot of work and effort to write a sentence in Standard English and this is what I’ve done for so long now. It depends, I would have to work at it. (30-31)

Five years later, in 1988, Mudrooroo published his *Doin Wildcat* where he has experimented with the dialects of his community and authenticates his cultural forms. It should be observed that most Aborigines live on the fringes of the white community. Therefore by writing a novel in a language of the marginalised, Mudrooroo erases the boundaries of the ‘center’ and the ‘periphery’. In *Doin Wildcat*, the narrator seems to highlight the need to be true to oneself without any artificiality.

Yuh know, yuh ave to be like a chameleon in yer speech. Mimic their style of talking, but when yer ad too much yuh find yerself
usin yer own language. Yuh stop pretendin an be yer natural self when yuh want out, an there's nuthin to be gained sucking up to em. That's ow I writ the dialogue, an that's ow Ernie is speakin it. Must come natural to im, just as it comes natural to all of us.

(DWC: 79)

Therefore Mudrooroo has employed the real life language of the Aborigines to portray the Aboriginal experience in Australia. Not only the characters of the novel speak in Aboriginal English but also the novelist's narrative voice is unmistakably Aboriginal. The entire novel is written in a variety of Aboriginal English which gives an Aboriginal identity to the language they use. It also goes to show that the choice to use a specific dialect as a mode of discourse is a political exercise undertaken by Mudrooroo to prove that the Aborigines are capable of producing written forms of literature and more importantly, they can do it in a language that is unique to them. When Mudrooroo writes in Aboriginal English, he not only writes for his fellow literate Aboriginals but also has the white audience in mind. Therefore, the desire to experiment does not cross the borders of intelligibility. The change in spelling, definitely, slows down the pace of reading without rendering a grinding halt. To cite a passage from the novel:

'Yuh know, there's swimming ole on the Murrumbidgee river, right near to Canberra an they all go to swim there. Well, this Koori, this Aborigine, ee's taken there. Come to Canberra on some business an ad a day off, an some of the people ee met took im along. Well, ee's there, an ee sees this absolutely beautiful woman in a very spunky bikini. Well, ee looks, yuh know is eyes just about poking outa is ead, an ee pushes it all down an goes up to er, very cool-
like, an ee sez: "Excuse me, miss, you got any Aboriginal in you?"

Well, she was brown from the sun an all that she could of bin a Koori. Ee was new in Canberra an didn’t know the local mob. Well, the woman was taken aback by is question, yuh know ow it is, but then she decided to be friendly an answered: "No!" Well, our Koori chap, ee thought ee ada toe in the door, so ee put on is charm, an is best accent an replied: "Well, how would you, like a little bit of Aboriginal in you?"

( DWC: 5-6)

Though the novel is predominantly written in Aboriginal English there are instances where the non-Aborigines are endowed with normative variety of English. The director, Al Wrothberg who has come from America speaks quite differently from other Aborigines. To cite an example:

AL: Cut, cut, that’s getting near to how I want it. Now we’ll go straight to the same shot of Ernie. I want those mouths to be emphasised. Ernie, kid, don’t look mean, just bewildered, make it show in the mouth, but with a twist of toughness. You’re a kid of seventeen, but you’ve seen it all. Right, that’s good. This is it-cameras, action! (DWC: 13)

As Doin Wildcat deals with the filming of a play, not only the white director, but even the play that he directs is written in the normative variety of English. Except for the dialogues of Aboriginal characters like Ernie, Clarissa and Winjee who speak in Aboriginal English, the other characters and the narrative voice speak the normative variety. Mudrooroo freely mixes Aboriginal English with standard English as both the varieties have a specific role in contributing towards the fabric of the novel. The myth of superiority of
standard English is taken to task as Mudrooroo fuses both the varieties without any distinction.

Since standard English has become mandatory for progress in the white-dominated Australia, it holds the key for the future of Aborigines as well. Its dominance has relegated Aboriginal languages to the defensive, and even a Creole language such as the Aboriginal English is far from being accepted. It is under these circumstances, Mudrooroo uses Aboriginal English predominantly in his novel. Any deviation from standard English was thought of as ignorance and incompetence in handling the language. But Mudrooroo, who has already established himself as a writer and won accolades from his western counterparts for his efficacy in handling the language and genre, is fully aware of his political stand in using Aboriginal English.

In the novel, *Doin Wildcat*, Kevin, the trainee director narrates an incident where an Aboriginal lady from Queensland is gang raped by three white blokes. She meets a lawyer, a white, and narrates the incident in her Aboriginal English. The lawyer who is appalled by her natural lingo, tries to teach her some polite words that should be used before the judge.

The lawyer listens, then shakes his head. "Mary, yuh know yuh tellim me that story, bout what appened. Now if yuh come before the judge an yuh tellim like that, well the judge won't like it. Yuh tellim different way. Now instead of 'cock' yuh say 'penis' an instead of 'cunt' yuh say 'vagina' an instead of 'fucking' yuh say 'intercourse'. Yuh tellim like that in court, yuh savvy?" (*DWC*: 81)

The setting is a white man's court and the officials are white officers. The court etiquette demands that the language used should be one that would
be pleasing to the judge. The insolence and the natural lingo of an Aborigine is something the white man resents. Therefore the lawyer tries to teach his client how to speak politely to the white officials. But the whole exercise turns out to be a farce when the lady gets everything muddled up on the day of trial.

I was walking ome when these three white fellas gin following me. I run, but they catch me up an fling me on the ground. I lyin on ground an one of them takes out his penis an begins to ave, ave intercourse with me. You know ee puts his penis in me, in me”- an she looks across at the lawyer an call out, “Ey, what was that word yuh toldim me to call me cunt?” (DWC: 81)

Mudrooroo ridicules the artificiality of the language that is imposed on the Aborigines. Therefore, he chooses to employ the natural lingo of the Aborigines, though it is considered insolent and uncouth, as the vehicle of communication. The educational system which promotes standard English is controlled by the colonisers and the Aboriginal children are forced to learn a foreign language and an alien culture. At the same time, they are also taught to devalue their Aboriginal forms of practices. Therefore in his novel Doin Wildcat, when Mudrooroo prefers Aboriginal English and fuses it with standard English it is a shot in the arm in asserting their Aboriginal identity.

As a postcolonial writer it is a useful exercise in decolonising the English language, which was compliant with the colonisers in the colonial policies and practices. The gift of English is used to wreak vengeance on the colonisers for their role in the extinction of Aboriginal languages. The Aborigines lost their identity in the writings of anthropologists, biographers and creative writers who misrepresented and falsified the Aboriginal systems of living. Discourses
were built around the Aborigines to support and justify the white settlement in Australia. Any resistance was seen as a rebellion which resulted in the killing of countless Aborigines. White laws were promulgated to subjugate the local Aborigines, and favour the white settlers. The Aboriginal oratures were desecrated, simplified and rewritten as children’s stories for the white community. The language policies favoured the spread of standard English and the suppression of Aboriginal languages. Taking all this into account, the presence of English language and its role in the colonial enterprise cannot be sidelined. Therefore as a postcolonial writer, Mudrooroo’s effort to write in Aboriginal English is an overtly partisan exercise in the regeneration of Aboriginal voice and ways of life.

Kim Scott’s Experimentation with Aboriginal English

Kim Scott, in his novel *True Country*, explores the cultural history of his Aboriginal past. He uses the Kimberley topography to form the backdrop of his novel. He also borrows the dialect of the Aboriginal community and uses the poetic cadences of tribal idiom that is interspersed with various forms of English in the novel. The novel deals with the mission settlement in Karnama and the tension that evolves between the mission folks and the Aboriginal community. It is also concerned with Billy’s coming to terms with his Aboriginal past. The mission is populated with different people from different background who speak different languages as stated in the novel:

Though the point of view shifts between omniscient narration and Billy's first-person narrative, an unmistakable Aboriginal authorial voice can be deciphered. Rendered in short, pithy sentences, the straightforward prose creates a story-telling poise that communicates with the reader almost immediately. The novel opens with the description of the topography of the land as follows:

And it is a beautiful place, this place. Call it our country, our country all 'round here. We got river, we got sea. Got creek, rock, hill, waterfall. We got bush tucker: apple, potato, sugarbag, bush turkey, kangaroo, barramundi, dugong, turtle . . . every kind. Sweet mangoes and coconuts too.

There is a store, school for our kids and that mission here still. That's alright. Yes, you might never see a better place. Our home.

When it's rainy season rivers fill up and flood surround us. Is like we are a forgotten people then, on a maybe shrinking island; a special place for us alone.

You might fly in many times, high up and like reading river, hill, tree, rocks. Coming from upriver and the east, you flying flying fly in looking all the time and remembering; you flying quiet and then you see this place. You see the river. You see the water here, this great blue pool by High Diving where the kids swim. You see the mission grounds all green, and the houses all quiet and tiny from up in the air. You notice the dark mango trees, and the coconut trees standing tall along that airstrip road. (TC: 13-14)
As the novel unfolds in a rural setting surrounded by the wealth of natural resources, Kim Scott true to his Aboriginal culture uses the language to reflect the life it represents. He desists from any extraneous use of diction and imagery that would sound irrelevant to Aboriginal life. While describing about the appearance of people in the mission, Kim Scott uses the imagery of that of a tree: “One was tall like a tree, the other one short with a round gut” (TC: 15).

Karnama, the mission field, is not just a particular settlement but metaphorically stands for any Aboriginal settlement that came under the patronage of the white settlers. Kim Scott has faithfully captured the various forms of English that operate in an Aboriginal settlement. The white teachers who come to teach in the mission school find it difficult to interact with the local mob as they find it difficult to understand their English. In the novel, Billy expresses this: “Few of the adults could read and write, and the students had very low levels of education. We had trouble pronouncing their surnames, and understanding their English” (TC: 20).

Though the language that they speak is apparently English, it is adapted and localized to the extent that the native speakers of English are baffled at their inability to comprehend a language that sounds familiar but still is very different from theirs in many ways. Even within the Aboriginal community there are variations in their use of English depending upon their interaction with the settler community. In the novel, Sebastian, one of the oldest men of the community and hence not influenced much by the whites uses English that is completely broken and closer to the vernacular:

‘Early days this lot gardiya been shoot ’em Aborigine, you know blacksella? They been shoot ’im and see ’im. Ah, that man drop.
White bloke see 'nother one, 'nother Aborigine, and he go to shoot him too. He running running and the white bloke go to shoot.

'Bang! Bang! Not the gun shooting, a bang like a big bomb, and that Aborigine bloke disappeared. Gone! That was Walanguh that one, Walanguh when he was young, eh? . . . He had the power that fella. That dead one, Dada that was, nothing. He had no power. With power, they can disappear, fly, you know. Sing things.' (TC: 48)

If Sebastian's English is closer to the vernacular, Fatima's is much closer to the normative variety. As Fatima was born in the mission and was grown up by the Spanish monks, she has had her schooling in Beagle Bay school. Though her English is not without the local colour, when compared to Sebastian, she is much closer to the main stream:

'The lady told us, "You are going out now, with this man here". We said "No!" many times. We didn't know he was Bishop, Bishop Somebody. He told us, "I'll take you". We used to say "No!" We used to say no.'

'After all he took us for a train, from the jetty you know. We went on the train, we get out, and one of the nuns was working in the garden just watering the place. Stop us. Then she take us to the girls. We take two, three days in Broome. Then after Brother took us to Beagle Bay Mission.' (TC: 32)

Pitted against these two varieties is Gabriella's English. She is an Aboriginal girl who has gone to university in Melbourne. Whenever she comes to
Karnama, she teaches the kids in the mission school. She has also composed poems and she has written a lot of poems about Karnama. She is quite proficient with the normative variety of English. She converses with Billy and there is little difference between the two in their use of the language:

‘Gabriella, I think ... Yes. A breakdown may be. Could be an evolution of sorts, there’s something in common that must be offered ...’

‘You think? What we can do? Look at it. Put the little bits together like one of the paintings? You know, how I’ve been brought up, I don’t know anything of the old ways; a few words, this and that. But there’s something there, that’s what I reckon. Should we try and put it all together and believe in it? Or try and rediscover things, like that Renaissance thing? Do like they say Walanguh could, you know, sing for this new world.’ (TC: 82)

One of the remarkable achievements of Kim Scott as a novelist is his ability to capture the various forms of English that are true to the characters that he is dealing with. He does not try to alter it and help join the grand canon of English language. Even as he captures various forms of English as it is spoken in the Aboriginal settlement, he places it on equal footing without any discrimination. The myth of the superiority of the purity of the English language is broken as the Aboriginals constantly interrogate with the grand tradition and extend its boundaries so that the dividing line between center/margin gets blurred. Margaret Bowden stresses the importance of the theme of English in Aboriginal works in her essay, “Australian Language Issues Depicted in Literary Works by Aboriginal Authors”: 
When studying the works of Aboriginal authors, it is important to focus on the language as well as the content, in an informed way, since Aboriginal English contains a grammatical, phonological and lexicosemantic history of language colonization in Australia. (151)

Kim Scott, in his employment of English, experiments by writing it phonetically to effect a touch of reality. Not only the English grammar and words are altered but also the pronunciation is marked with their Aboriginal interference. In the novel, words like “sittin”, “lookin”, “watchin” (TC: 115-116) are used by the novelist. It is the local influence of Australian languages that govern the grammatical, phonological, lexical and semantic rules of Aboriginal writing instead of the Standard Australian English.

Kim Scott, along with his various forms of English, fuses a few Aboriginal words as well. Since the characters are predominantly Aboriginal, the presence of Aboriginal words only asserts their identity and provides for their cultural authenticity. When he uses the Aboriginal words, he also gives its English equivalent to ensure intelligibility to non-Aboriginal readers: “‘But these books, these journals, I see things a little bit like they do, I can understand it a bit. But they are like devils, djimi, like the old people say when they first saw gardiya, white people’” (TC: 82).

By incorporating Aboriginal words into the main stream of English Kim Scott, destroys the myth that surrounds the speaker of Aboriginal language that he is either lazy or stupid or both. As language and culture are inextricably intertwined, the use of Aboriginal words highlights the fact that it is an attempt to decolonise the English language and make it bear the burden of an opposing culture.
Postcolonial writing in English, therefore, assumes immense significance when it becomes a site for confrontation with the language of the colonisers and its stereotyped assumptions. Not only the language is altered and subverted, it is handled as a plaything and rendered ridiculous. It is the desire to wreak vengeance that is expressed in destroying the existing myths surrounding standard English that was complicit in destroying their various institutions and culture. The language is thus appropriated to invade the center and conquer its dominant discourses and images. Though the six writers discussed above vary in their strategies of handling the English language they share similar interest in appropriating the language. They do not strive to reproduce a novel in a language that conforms to the rules of conventional standards. Instead, they experiment with the language forms that are available to them and nativise the language so as to make it relevant to the societies they deal with. They also incorporate various components of their indigenous languages and destabilise the centrality of standard English. The will to violate the standard variety marks the political overtones and their postcolonial resistance in using the language of the colonisers, who often considered the variant forms as degenerate and broken English which reflected the depravity and uncivilised nature of the colonised. As postcolonial writers, the fusion of indigenous language varieties with the normative variety of English is also an exercise in the assertion of the writer and his community's identity which had been denied recognition due to the colonial excesses. As the writers investigate various colonial assumptions and assert their native forms, the English language is decolonised in the first place as it serves the ideological interests of the writers in their bigger project of decolonisation.