

Beyond Loan Words: Bette-Bendi Ethnic Identity Construction in Liwhu Betiang's *Beneath the Rubble*

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Abstract

Much ink has been spilled over the intertwined bond between literature and identity construction, and how language gives expression to ethnic identity. Yet, works that have examined the use of loan words as a practice of ethnic identity construction in novels written by “minority” Nigerian novelists are very few. In order to bridge this gap, this paper examines the adoption of loan words in Liwhu Betiang's *Beneath the Rubble* as a practice of ethnic identity construction. It is hoped that this study will reveal how some novelists' writings serve as avenues for the expression of ethnic identity. The paper follows the primordialist approach which accounts for how individuals are treated as unique quasi-beings who express their identities through certain cultural features unique to them, and the analysis shows that Betiang's use of loan words is motivated by the need to project his minority Bette-Bendi ethnic identity rather than to fill lexical gaps.

Key words: Loaning, ethnicity, identity, primordialist, Bette-Bendi, the Nigerian novel

Introduction

Sociolinguistic studies have shown that when languages come in contact, there is transfer of linguistic items from one language to another due to “loaning”. In linguistic studies, however, “borrowing” has been used to cover “loaning” without paying attention to the sharp contradistinction that exists between the two sociolinguistic notions. While “borrowing” describes “the adoption of individual words or even large set of vocabulary items from one language, register or dialect” (Ezeife 2012: 118), “loaning,” according to the *Encarta Dictionary* (2009), it describes “word [s] borrowed from another language: a word that has become part of everyday usage in another, often with slight modification”. In a slightly different description offered by *Encarta Dictionary*, the *Oxford Advanced Learner’s Dictionary* describes loan word as “a word from another language used in its original form”. This definition is quite revealing, as most loan words exist in another language without any form of modification. This is not to imply that certain loan words do not undergo modification and get integrated into the host language. The Latin word, *vinum*, for example, was modified into Old English as *wine*. But, this is not the case with *macho*, a Spanish word loaned into English without modification, and there are many English words that were loaned from French with slight or no modification.

Even when there seems not to be a crystal clear difference between “loaning” and “borrowing”, Hock’s (1986: 380) definition that “the term ‘borrowing’ refers to the ‘adaptation’ of individual words or even large sets of vocabulary items from another language” suffices, as it distinguishes clearly “loaning” from “borrowing”. Hock’s definition suggests that “borrowing” transcends the use of individual words to include a large set of vocabulary items. Moreover, “loaning,” has to do with “the occasional use of words from one language in utterance of another language” (Akindele and Adegbite 1999: 44). This discrepancy in interpretation demonstrates the arbitrariness of linguistic terms and thus difficulties arise regarding what the actual meaning of “borrowing” and “loaning” are. Although this paper adopts the definitions of the *Oxford Advanced Learners’ Dictionary* and Akindele and Adegbite (op.cit.) because they succinctly account for the contact relationship between English and most African languages, there is need to provide a working definition for this paper. Loaning is, therefore, in this work is seen as the adoption of individual words with single thoughts from one or many Nigerian languages into English with a slight or no modification of any form. It is also important to distinguish between calque and loan word. Calque, also known as lone transfer, describes “a word or expression that enters a language as a direct translation from another” (*Encarta Dictionary 2009*). Calque is a linguistic term, from the French word meaning “to copy”, hence, it is a translation of a word with the same meaning into another language. While calque is a consequence of translation, loaning is not. Moreover, calques require a language user to be bilingual wherein loaning does not have such a requirement.

Kachru (1994) provides two hypotheses about the motivation for loaning in languages. He terms one “deficit hypothesis” and the other “dominance hypothesis”. He states that the “deficit hypothesis” presupposes that loaning entail filling linguistic gaps in a language and the primary motivation for loaning is to remedy the linguistic “deficit,” especially the lexical resources of a language. This implies that words are loaned or borrowed into another language because there are no equivalents in the host language. This is usually easier when languages belong to the same endogroup. The “dominance hypothesis” presumes that when two cultures come into contact, the direction of culture learning and subsequent word-borrowing is not mutual, but from the dominant to the subordinate. In this case, loaning is not informed by the need to fill lexical gaps. Many words are loaned and used even when there are English equivalents because they have prestige. Moreover, loaning, in a multilingual society like Nigeria, has great utility values. Reasons for loaning, then, range from the need to find a term for an unfamiliar thing, or cultural device to the question of ethnic identity construction. This is especially the case with bilingual speakers who, by using a foreign element in their speech, make a statement about their own self-perception. Loaning, at least in the Nigerian literary context, figure as the most prominent linguistic strategy of ethnic identity construction.

The study of language and ethnic identity among Nigerian writers is particularly interesting, as their linguistic repertoire often features their indigenous language, the language that is naturally associated with their ethnic culture. In a related opinion, De Fina (2007: 380) avers that “the centrality of language use in the expression of ethnicity among multilingual communities is an established fact in sociolinguistics”. Ethnicity is a critical component of the overall framework of individual and ethnic identity. For the visibly defined and legally categorised minority groups in Nigeria, ethnic identity is consciously manifested in diverse ways. One of such ways is populating a writer’s creative work with linguistic items drawn from the writers’ indigenous language. Although it has been argued that the adoption and adaptation of indigenous expressions has to do with style (Ushie 2005), this paper argues that the use of indigenous expressions is a linguistic practice which bypasses stylistic motivation. Baker and Jones (1998:113) contend that ethnic identity can be “expressed, enacted and symbolized” through language. In fact, the symbolic functions of loaning as a linguistic strategy employed by “minority” Nigerian writers cannot be understood without reference to the linguistic situation in Nigeria.

In his study of Candelario Obeso’s poetry, Porrás draws attention to Obeso’s use of “Black Spanish” as a linguistic device to “...reflect his ethnic identity and, secondly, to react against linguistic, racial, and cultural prejudice and, thirdly, to foster positive attitudes toward prestige formation in Afro-Hispanic traditions” (2011:263).

This entails that the use of indigenous expressions, in this case loaning, in the writings of “minority” Nigerian novelists is a linguistic practice motivated by the need to project their ethnic identity in a country where three ethnic groups, the Yoruba, the Igbo and the Hausa are considered “major” ethnic groups over approximately 400 ethnic groups. In this way, indigenous languages are conceptualised as markers of ethnic identity in the specific contexts in which they are put to use. Suffice it to say that loan words have strong basis in ethnic identity construction, which enables ethnic groups to engage with cultural and primordial sentiments.

Furthermore, the ethnic identity of a writer can hardly thrive in a language that is not indigenous to the writer. This is, perhaps, why Ayeleru (2012) argues that the use of indigenous expressions in Nigerian writers’ creative works is meant to adequately convey cultural representations in a far reaching manner than the “borrowed” language, English. It therefore implies that indigenous languages coherently express the experiences and existence of the people the literature speaks for or about. The core concern in this paper is two-fold, first, to examine how Betiang’s use of loan words is a discursive practice of ethnic identity construction, and second, to account for how many “minority” Nigerian novelist write with ethnic consciousness at heart.

Liwhu Betiang

Liwhu Betiang was born in the hill-village of Bebuabe in Obudu, Cross River State, Nigeria. He studied at the Universities of Ife, Calabar and Ibadan, and teaches in the Department of Theatre and Media Arts at the University of Calabar. He has an array of radio and television plays, he is also a co-author of a collection of experimental development plays titled *Our Forest Our Future* (LENF, 2000), and he has a second novel titled *The Cradle on the Scales*.

Betiāng’s novel belongs to the group of Nigerian novelists known as post-Independence novelists because a majority of them were born around the period Nigeria received its Independence. Other novelists of this group include Wale Okediran, Chimamanda Adichie, Sefi Atta, Maik Nwosu, Akachi Adimora–Ezeigbo and Jude Dibia. The writings of this crop of writers thus reflect the continuing trend by African writers to use their literary works as tools of cultural consciousness and rejuvenation. Hence there is an incursion of indigenous expressions, and consequently, a significant element which Nigerian novelists employ to express their ethnic identity.

In this exercise, Liwhu Betiang has been selected because he belongs to one of the “minority” groups of Nigeria which allow for an investigation into how his “minority”/ethnic identity influences his lexical choices based on notion that given Nigeria’s multiple ethnic groups, a critic of Nigerian literature can investigate *Beneath the Rubble* in terms ethnic identity construction.

Theoretical Foundation

Considering the above, there have been arguments among different theoretical perspectives on ethnicity and ethnic identity construction. Hence, a review is necessary, first the instrumentalist and constructivist theories, for instance, are opposed to the primordialist for insisting that ethnic groups are inevitable because of the unchanging and essential characteristics of members of these categories. Yet, two theories particularly contest the primordialist's belief that violent ethnic conflicts result from hatred, resentment and antagonism that are enduring properties of ethnic groups. And next, implied in the views of instrumentalist and constructivist is the idea that ethnic identity is more about the subjective choice rather than the determining hard "givens", and like nationalism, ethnicity is propagated by elites aiming at either material resources or political power or both. Thus, ethnicity is a voluntary situation, functional and pragmatic response to socioeconomic and political pressure, as well as basis for group action for the deprived in society (Seol 2008).

The primordialist's persuasion, the approach followed in this paper, which is strongly informed by the nearly inseparable bond between language and culture, holds the view that ethnicity is not inherently changing, subjective and socially constructed groups for crisis. For the primordialist, ethnic group is a communal entity possessing certain common objective factors such as language, myth of common descent, culture, sociopolitical organisation and a homeland, all of which provide the basis for subjective separatist definition as an ingroup vis-à-vis an outgroup. Therefore, ethnic identity is viewed as an individual's identification with a "segment of a larger society whose members is thought, by themselves or others, to have a common origin and shared activities in which the common origin and culture are significant ingredients" (Yinger 1976: 200). Hence, ethnic identity is often perceived as a frame in which individuals identify either consciously or unconsciously with those with whom they feel a common bond because of similar traditions, behaviour, values, and beliefs. These points of connection allow individuals to make sense of the world around them and to find pride in who they are, and thus, stressing the connectedness in tradition as a basis for ethnic identification, Adetiba and Rahim aver that:

(...) an ethnic group consists of those groups that share a common language and ancestry and are equally regarded as so by other ethnic group (sic). Each ethnic group has its own constituted features which do not change and are consistently distributed within this group. Hence, the Yoruba of the West in Nigeria, the Zulus in South Africa, the Marathi in India, the Krahn in Liberia and the Akan in Ghana can all be classified as ethnic groups that share a common language/culture and ancestry and they are regarded as so by other ethnic groups. In a nutshell, an ethnic group can be defined on the basis of their distinct differences that the members of the group and other ethnic groups see as significant to their identity (2012: 3).

Ethnic identity construction, therefore, consists of individuals' movement toward a highly conscious and tendentious identification with their cultural values, behaviour, language beliefs and traditions. It also provides a framework for understanding individual's negotiation of their own culture and other cultures. Thus, the core of ethnic identity construction is the deliberate promotion of the cultural values of the ethnic group an individual identifies with.

Although theories of instrumentalist and constructivist ethnicity encourage us to shift attention from cultural ties to the socioeconomic aspects of ethnicity and the benefits to be derived, the perspective of primordial ethnicity and group formation is also important for understanding ethnic demands and struggles for recognition and relevance. Hence, it must be stressed that ethno-national emergence of a people for social and economic benefits cannot be studied in isolation of their historical and cultural attachment to a primordial past (Entessar 2001). In his book, *Ethnic Relations in Nigeria*, George (1976:39-40) writes that:

Members, of any speech community that share one language, usually have a feeling of belonging to a particular ethnic group and all other speech communities with whom direct linguistic communication is impossible are automatically regarded as aliens. It may in fact be the case that the 'aliens' have many non-linguistic features in common with the group, but once they are separated by language, other similarities are almost obliterated. Language then is a magnetic force binding a speech community together since it provides a means of identifying its members as belonging to a specific group.

George's view highlights the constitutive role of language in strengthening ethnic bonds. Ethnicity is the character, quality and condition of an ethnic group membership, based on an identity/or consciousness of group belonging which is differentiated from others by symbolic markers such as cultural, biological, territorial qualities and mostly language (Nagel, 1994). Since ethnic group formations persist in the wider society because of cultural heritage, situational and circumstantial experiences, it is important, therefore, for any theory or empirical investigation of ethnic identity construction to take into account not just the instrumental function of ethnicity in the pursuit of social interest, but also the linguistic and cultural formulation and the shared sense of decent that people derive from their ethnic identities. Perhaps Seol's (2008) insistence that ethnic expression changes and primordial ties of ethnicity can only be transformed into rational and instrumental interest and is thus an emphasis of the primordialist's position that cultural sentiment is the basis for ethnic identity construction.

Synopsis of the Novel

Beneath the Rubble (2009) tells the story of a community, Agigah, turn against itself. The novel depicts the culture, tradition, beliefs and idiosyncrasies of the Bette-Bendi people among whom it is set. Plagued by the ideological differences that exist between the water-society and the land-society, and also the quest for power, Agigah is forced into a communal carnage which ravages the community beyond the calculations of the instigators of the conflict. Caught in the middle of the crises is Itisha Bisong, who is so woven into the life of Agigah to the point that the only pointer to his root is his name.

The story reaches its climax when Ishabo, the crown prince of Agigah is to be used as the peace offering to his restive community. He is caught by some human hunters while returning from Andornimye's. Ironically, Andornimye is the granddaughter of Ukandi Igbal, the priest of the land-society. Due to her familial attachment, Ishabo is expected not to have anything to do with her. Even though the human hunters would "negotiate" with Ishabo to escape, he will not. He chooses to offer himself for sacrifice for peace to reign in his troubled community. But this self-offering does not sit well with Utsu Agaba, the head of Agigah. He will not idle by and allow his only son to be used as the needed sacrificial lamb. So Itisha Bisong is employed to hatch an escape plan. At night, Ishabo is smuggled to Kakwel, his maternal village, and his escape breeds war. In all, *Beneath the Rubble* decries the loss of many lives to a senseless war and expresses the passion, fear, hopes, and aspirations of the Agigah community.

Assuredly, the novelist draws significantly from his Bette-Bendi culture. "Bette-Bendi" describes the two-related dialects of the Bette people in the Obudu Local Government Area and the Bendi people in the Obanlikwu Local Government Area, both in the northern part of Cross River State in Nigeria. According to Ushie and Imbua (2011:140), both "Bette" and "Bendi" designate each of the peoples and their languages, and also "Bendi" describes the geographical territory of the Bendi people." Though it is difficult to ascertain which of these are languages of each other, they cannot be regarded as separate languages. Until the split in August 1991 of the Obudu Local Government Area into the present, Obudu and Obanlikwu Local Government Areas, both Bette and Bendi were under the Obudu Local Government Area. The splitting of Obudu into two was informed by political and administrative conveniences, however, it has not in any way blurred the filial, religious, cultural, historical and sociolinguistic bond between the two endogroups. Given the close ties that hold between these groups, it is extremely difficult to discuss these groups as distinct from each other. It is such that a discussion of one of groups is invariably the discussion of the other. Today, owing to the number of Bette-Bendi people and political calculations, they are considered one of the smallest ethnic groups in Nigeria. The region of Bette-Bendi is surrounded by mountains and hills, and the people do most of their crop farming on the fertile land of the hills. One of the vast table tops of the mountains is Obudu Ranch Resort, one of the most beautiful tourist centres in Nigeria. The weather there is as temperate as that of European countries, no wonder it is where many go for holidays, honeymoon, and weddings.

Lexically, the novel is replete with expressions mostly drawn from Bette-Bendi. While the loaning process shows a fair degree of loaning from Hausa (*wahala and juju*); an item from Yoruba (*agbada*); one from Latin (*sotto voce*); none is taken from Igbo, one of Nigeria's three major languages. The loan words refer to local dance (*Ikwom-Ishor*), drinks (*asobel*), streams (*Kigbe*) and clothing and artifacts (*agbada*). Moreover, most of the loan words function as adjectives and others function as proper and common nouns, respectively. Morphologically, except for *Imbue-Ifeh* and *Ikwom-Ishor*, which are hyphenated-compound words, the borrowed items function as simple words. This work will not derail into such detailed morphological analysis since it is not its primary focus. Rather, the focus is on the latent and salient meanings of the loaned items. The loaned words are imbued with several meanings which the text itself has not accounted for. They have denotative English equivalent forms and can be replaced by their English equivalents either by translation or circumlocution (a linguistic feature of bilinguals).

Being a relatively new text, *Beneath the Rubble* it is yet to attract serious scholarly reflections. However, Eziefe (2012) investigates lexical borrowing as a discourse strategy which Betiang employs to depict the compartmentalisation of society along gender dialectics. Though an insightful study of Betiang's use of language in relation to gender discourse in the Nigerian context, Eziefe's study seems to undermine the utility value of loan words, and thus, does not account for how loan words are used as linguistic strategy for the construction of ethnic identity. Nevertheless, I go a step further to explore the intricate bond between loan words and ethnic identity construction. The loan items are examined from items referring to place, religious/spiritual practices; music, dance and dance groups; and from the process of "othering".

Place, Religious/Spiritual Practices

There are different linguistic strategies which writers employ to promote their ingroup. One of such strategies is to assign words with positive connotations to the ingroup. Thus, the preponderant items drawn from Betiang's indigenous language are lexical strategies of Bette-Bendi ethnic identity construction. For instance, the first borrowed item, *ugoligie*, a beautiful blue bird with a lot of feathers around its chest is strategically placed by Betiang to introduce the reader to the beautiful landscape of his origin, hence:

Across the village, on the far side were other mountains, beautiful things that looked so green and feathery-soft like ugoligie the blue bird, and the peaked top of the hills thrusting like breasts into heavens (p.11).

Thus, the novelist's description is consciously aimed at eulogising the beauty and serenity of his place of birth. He achieves this aim by comparing his village with "*ugoligie*, the blue bird. The feminine feature "breasts" metaphorically projects the riches of the mountains, in terms of its ability to sustain the farming population. Being a subsistence community, the people do most of their crop farming on the fertile land of the mountains. This fertility of the mountains is symbolically embedded in the life-giving and sustaining grace of "breasts". Encapsulated in the allusion to the grandeur and aesthetics of *ugoligie* is the projection of the notion that there is a vibrant harmony between human beings and nature, indicating the habitable nature of the novelist's village. Moreover, the loaned word, *ugoligie*, describes a bird which owns an abundant part of the world. And empirically, the novelist's Bette-Bendi people are not in the minority as purported, they could be minority in number, but not in the beautiful landscape and fertile soil of the region. Also, the novelist's reference to the mountains is also an "indexing" of the Obudu Ranch Resort which is located in the mountainous region of the novelist's hometown.

There is also an excursion into the cultural, as well as religious beliefs of the novelist's Bette-Bendi people in:

...These were the things that flitted through Ishabo's mind as he sat with his father and one man in his kidyang, a naturally ventilated hut where a man spent most of his day when he was not away from home....(p.43)

The item, *kidyang*, describes a hut usually located at the centre of a man's compound. It performs two distinct functions: administrative and spiritual. Administratively, it is a place where a man receives his guests, mediates and legislates over the affairs of his extended family compound. It is in *kidyang* that a man settles disputes among fighting co-wives; among family members; and above all, it is in *kidyang* that children find solace. Whenever an erring child runs away from their threatening mother or any other person into *kidyang*, it is abominable for the pursuer to follow the child into *kidyang*, and if the pursuer did, the pursuer would be severely reprimanded. In time past, the head of the family relaxed in *kidyang* after retiring from a day's job, and when was night, he would visit his wives. It is also a transition ground, a place a man passes on the family's legacy and the community's history to his favorite son who will take over the family affairs at his death. This is symbolically captured in the novel as Ishabo, the heir apparent, sits in *kidyang* to ponder over his becoming the next chief of Agigah.

Spiritually, *kidyang* is where a man meditates and connects with his ancestors. It carries all the totems of trade for hunters and medicine. During inter-group wars, men who fought in battles did not sleep in their wives' huts. Rather, they slept in *kidyang* to avoid being "contaminated" by their wives. So warfare paraphernalia were kept in *kidyang*. The use of *kidyang*, therefore, is not just an indication of where people rest, but a loaned item that enables the novelist to "reproduce" the cultural values of his people. Thus, the language of the novelist functions as a tool of cultural-rejuvenation. Ayeleru (2011:15-16) stresses the influence of culture on the African writer's use of language in an intriguing manner, thus:

The African writer has to, first and foremost, create the story and then devise a means of mediating his experience in the European language. In this case, the European languages are maneuvered to reflect the African traditions.

Beyond their stylistic enunciations, the Bette-Bendi loaned items have some cultural significations which help harness the novelist's creative mind with his ancestry. The novel therefore functions as an agent of socialisation which inducts strangers to the novelist's people's ways of life. Betiang's lexical process echoes the primordialist view that ethnicity appeals to emotional and instinctive constraints as ultimate distinctive explanations for group mobilisation. The deliberate introduction of the readers to the mystical practice/witchery and wizardry of the Bette-Bendi people is the reason for the use of *Imbue-Ifeh* in:

...Bisong could still not understand how he came into this confinement...He also remembered crossing the Imbue-Ifeh stream but slipped off as he placed his foot on one of the many tiny rocks that lined the stream bed. And then he found himself full-length inside the not too deep water. He remembered he tried to stand but it was like fighting in a dream, someone pulling at his legs and then he was overwhelmed and passed out...he found himself in this mansion-like cave with these half-familiar half-strange beings (p.123).

Hence, the loaned item *Imbue-Ifeh* is a small stream that separates two villages: Ohong and Bebuabe in the Obudu Local Government Area of Cross River State. It is famed for many mysterious and mischievous disappearances of people. History has it that people of Ohong and Bebuabe used to "kill" and dispatch their victims on the other side of the stream to cause confusion. Yet, two things are worthy of note in exception to the above, first, the non-italicisation of *Imbue-Ifeh*, and second, the use of the definite article, *the*, as a pre-modifier to *Imbue-Ifeh*. The significance of such discourse strategies is that *Imbue-Ifeh*, besides being known as a stream that always brings about confusion between two neighbouring communities, is also known as the coven of *Ikwanyumbue*, the water-society, which roughly translates as "fish of the water."

Additionally, *Imbue-Ifeh* is just ankle-deep, but when the water-society is set to take a victim's life, the victim can be drowned in water as shallow as *Imbue-Ifeh*, and in spite of its shallowness, *Imbue-Ifeh* harbours a mansion-like cave. This explains in a far reaching manner, the numinous existence of *Ikwanumbue*. Eagerly, Bisong, one of the characters, tries to cross *Imbue-Ifeh* but he slips on one of the rocks that line the bed of the stream and falls full-length inside the ankle-deep stream. When he tries to stand, it amazes him that someone is pulling at his legs; overwhelmed he passes out. Thus, Bisong only comes to consciousness to find himself *in this mansion-like cave with these half-familiar half-strange beings*. Here, the adoption of *Imbue-Ifeh* is an obvious celebration of the novelist's people's magical existence, not a mere reference to a geographical item. This is also inferred from the extravagant explanations given to *Ikwanumbe's* place of abode. Arguably, Betaing's loaning of *Imbue-Ifeh* from his Bette-Bendi language into English is to recreate the mystical existence of a stream which harbours a water-society, and also symbolizes the historical conflict between the Ohong and the Bebuabe. And in further need to enlighten his readers about the supernatural ways of life of the Bette-Bendi people, he uses *asobel*, writing::

...He sprayed the pasty mixture on the luminescent object on the small pot. From inside the bigger pot, he retrieved a bottle of locally distilled asobel ...then added the asobel. He stirred the mixture with his forefinger.... (pp.72-3)

Asobel is a gin that is locally distilled from palm wine. In a broad sense, *asobel* also means the distortion of truth. This is particularly the purpose for how it is used in the novel. When Adida is angry with his educated and rich younger brother, Pastor Ugal, for campaigning against him in an election, and for calling him an illiterate, Adida uses *asobel* to solicit with the gods to fight against Pastor Ugal. *Asobel* is also the principal item that steered the god of thunder into action. Adida, in an oratory performance that laces reason with anger, invokes the gods, thus:

The stomach of the frog does not rumble at the taste of bad food. Fathers and gods of my fathers, lords and princes of the white prince, accept my greetings...Lords and princes of the white prince, I did not spit at him but he spat at me. Lords and owner of the white prince, it was not your design that blood should fight against blood. But if blood divides itself against blood, prince of justice, white as the cattle egret, herald of laughter at the mouth of the iron-box, intercede for me.... (p.72)

In this light, Betaing causes us to think that *asobel* is an indispensable item that is usually used to trigger the god of thunder to act in a desired way, however, it is an expose on a people's extant system of retribution. And more importantly, there is the presentation of *asobel* as a magical item that has the capacity to change the tide of things in the favour of the person who uses it first.

Another example where loaning relates to religious practice is seen in:

The day for the sacrifice was finally fixed for the next azul which was a day away and the shadows were lengthening as the sun fell fast down the leeward side of the sky (p.103).

The loan word, *azul*, is one of the five days in Bette-Bendi of the days of the week. It is also a name of a deity that is long lost to the Bette-Bendi people. Besides the fact that each of these days rhymes with a particular market, they are also symbolic spiritual days. For instance, on *lefidian*, one of the days in the Bette-Bendi days of week, men do not engage in hard work. Sacrifices and burial rites are usually performed on *lefidian*, but not on *azul*, as seen in the excerpt above. It can, therefore, be said that the use of *azul* does not only explain how the Bette-Bendi people number the days of the week, but also a conscious effort targeted at bringing to remembrance a lost deity. The novelist would have ordinarily used “Monday” or any other day in the English calendar to refer to the day the event he describes took place, but he opts for *azul*. The core of such practice is to “reproduce”, as well as preserve the burial rites of his Bette-Bendi people. This is an aspect of ethnic identity construction, and *azul* adequately articulates the novelist’s ethnic identity, and ultimately justifies his reasoning for its use in the novel.

Music, Dance and Dance Groups

Besides the use of loan words to refer to the religious/spiritual practices of the Bette-Bendi people, there is also the use of Bette-Bendi items that refer to dance, and dance groups. There is, for example, the use of *bityul* in:

...Itisha Bisong followed him out, wondering who the visitor was. He moved nearer, unsure of what he was seeing. His heart throbbed like bityul drums.... (p.96)

This excerpt describes Bisong’s mother’s visit; he has not seen her for several years, and it is in this familial re-union between mother and son that Betiang uses *bityul*, one of the drums used in Bette-Bendi legendary *Ikwom-Ishor*, a powerful masquerade found in most parts of Bette-Bendi. The drum’s sharp and deep effervescent rhythms monitor the dance steps of the masquerade, and it is often the accord between the dancer and drum that gives beauty to *Ikwom-Ishor*. This comparison captures the tense emotions in Bisong which cathartically explodes in the re-union with his mother. The anticipated harmony between *bityul* drum and dancer really creates that dramatic feeling.

Musically, *bityul* is sharp and precise in its beat, and it directs the feet and steps of the masquerade/dancer whose performance wins or fails, depending on his understanding and interpretation of the rhythm. And evidently, it is this cultural tapestry that the novelist intends his readers to know, not the familial re-union between mother and son, which the peripheral meaning proffers. The novelist's preference for *bityul* is good, because it is a presentation of masquerade and dance that the Bette-Bendi people can still call their own. Here Betiang's loaning practice, perhaps, rhymes with Hale's (2004: 482) views that, "Ethnicity thus serves to structure such actions, by providing people with social radar that they use to efficiently identify or impose social possibilities and potential constraints in a world of immense uncertainty and complexity"

Furthermore, there is the concurrent use of *Ikwom-Ishor* and *Ikpatemana*, hence:

Dance groups supplied the music while in another corner of the compound, Ikwom-Ishor played;... in another corner, Ikpatemana, a prestigious war-dance group danced... The only one thing that made the event different from any colourful birthday or wedding party in town was the gold-coloured glass casket that lay conspicuously inside another labyrinthine glass structure....Even so, one of the villagers mistook the casket for part of the new architectural design of the compound (p.102).

As noted above, *Ikwom-Ishor* is a sacred dance-society that is performed on two occasions: when the members of the society are performing their annual ritual, which lasts for several days and when any of its members die. An important thing to note is the novelist's use of a noun phrase, "a prestigious war-dance group," loaded with strong associative and affiliating adjectives to describe *Ikpatemana*. This exposes the novelist's commitment to use his work as a platform for promoting his people's cultural practice.

Originally, *Ikpatemana* was a dance exclusively reserved for warriors. It was danced with human skulls that were killed in wars, but in the wake of colonialism, because it fomented trouble among communities and caused disorderliness for the colonialists, it was abolished by the colonialists. Furthermore, *Ikpatemana* was a dance for "men", meaning those who came back from war with human heads. Critically, since these dances are performed when a pastor, a non-initiate of the groups died, the novelist decries a situation in which his cultural values are being rubbished by greedy politicians and their traditional cohorts. The novelist, thus, sees the performance as a desecration of his people's cultural values. In the light of this, the linguistic strategy of the novelist is explicitly resistant. Consequently, his novel becomes an outlet which he uses to rail against those who have turned *Ikwom-Ishor* and *Ikpatemana*, the core of the people's culture and spirituality, into a money-making venture.

This way, Betiang redefines and upholds the behavioural norm of the Bette-Bendi people to a specific life that lies in the protection of what they attach great significance. Betiang's cultural commitment thus agrees with Young's (1986) assertion that primordialism seeks to identify and define the cultural, psychological dimensions of ethnicity. It calls for emotional attachment and ethnic solidarity from members of the group and invariably provides a basis for their ethnic consciousness. The ideal of primordialism which Betiang has exposed here is characterised by absolute loyalty and solidarity to one's ethnic group and its cultural values. Therefore, to be considered a member of this endogroup, it is not sufficient to be a passive member of the community. Rather, it is necessary to share this life style, where relationships among neighbours are basically informed by shared-communal sentiments. Betiang's adoption of *Ikwom-Ishor* and *Ikpatemala* is therefore an "argument," projecting the idea that the preservation of his Bette-Bendi culture can guarantee the retention of his ethnic identity. This therefore supports the axiom that one's ethnic identity is not only connected to one's culture, but it is also expressed through their culture.

Loaned Items and "Othering"

As noted earlier, while there is just one item taken from Yoruba and two from Hausa, none is taken from Igbo – one of the three major Nigerian languages. The reason for this can hardly be determined. However, these languages have been accorded the status of national languages. Being a disturbing idea to those whose people and languages have been classified and legalised as minorities, writers from the minority groups have employed various means to resist what they consider linguistic cannibalism. The rejection by many of the legalisation of only three languages over about four hundred Nigerian languages as national languages show us why writers of minority origins are tendentiously concerned about the survival of their language. In a related context, Ogunsiji (2001:159) draws attention to how languages are closely related to "the psyche of the people who use them, to marginalise any language is to puncture the psyche of its native speakers". The deflection of the speaker's psyche and the possible obliteration of their culture have thus led minority writers, working within the framework of ethnicity and ethnic identity construction, to continually use their novels to uphold the existence of their culture.

For example, the Yoruba word, *agbada*, as used in:

He had hardly recovered from the barrage of honourific titles that assaulted his ear lobes. He wondered silently whether the men had any existence or self-worth outside the worthless titles they used as crutches... He distrusted fat-bellied, multi-layer-necked men in official coats and agbada (p.171).

Thus, this is an instance of linguistic *othering*. The word, *agbada*, describes a flowing gown worn by men. “He” in the above excerpt refers to Ishabo, Betiang’s protagonist. The excerpt, which discusses a visit by some politicians of the ruling party to Agigah, at a time the villagers were engaged in a senseless war among themselves, shows Ishabo’s yawning dissonance with men who wear *agbada*. It can be inferred from the excerpt above that Ishabo conceives of *agbada* as a gown worn by men who pilfer the country’s treasury. *Agbada*, thus, symbolises the clothes “worthless” men wear to cover their stolen riches. Put differently, *agbada* is a metaphor of corruption and extortion. Implicitly, Betiang loans this word (in a negative sense) from one of the major languages in Nigeria to undermine the group’s perceived importance. The metaphor of *agbada* strikes one interestingly in relation to the expression of primordial sentiment. The way the novelist frames language to construct the negative identity of *agbada* is actually informed by the need to undermine Yoruba’s identity, and to project his own Bette-Bendi ethnic identity. In showing dissension to the “other”, Yoruba in this case, Betiang activates solidarity in a linguistic move to his language that is deprived sociolinguistic relevance and political function. Note in addition that the one feature of ethnicity that is invoked is the emotional aspect which primordialism considers given and undeniable.

Moreover, in spite of the juxtaposition of Bette-Bendi and Hausa, most Bette-Bendi items such as *agugo* (watch), *agodo* (bed), etc are drawn from Hausa, and the novelist has loaned just two items from Hausa. Here, the use of Hausa words does not connote anything positive, for instance, the Hausa item, *wahala*, is used in a negative sense thus:

“Now tell me,” Ugbong went on oblivious of the teacher’s response, “the community has been fighting for the past three days. On which side of the wahala do you belong?” (p.121)

The question that readily comes to a reader’s mind is why the preference for *wahala* which translates as trouble/problem? Why not just *trouble* or *lina*, a Bette-Bendi word for trouble? Significantly, the choice of *wahala* in this context is a deliberate construction of a negative identity for Hausa and a positive identity for the Bette-Bendi. The loaning act thus satisfies Betiang’s ethnic identity construction goal: a promotion of his ethnic identity, indicating that an ethnic group can be mobilised for political action by writers who see ethnicity as an important instrument in accomplishing sociopolitical goals.

It then follows that Betiang is intent on rejecting the political formation of the languages mentioned above as Nigeria’s national languages. In Nigerian political reality, not all ethnic groups that enjoy equal rights and the same political and economic status. This politico-economic imbalance therefore creates room for the suppression of members of minority ethnic groups. And as a corollary, the aspirations of minority ethnic groups are frequently thwarted by the recognition of Hausa, Igbo and Yoruba as Nigeria’s official languages, obviously imposing a rigid and immutable conception of federalism on the minorities.

Furthermore, the Nigerian federal character ideology that is meant to give primacy to “Nigeria” over ethnic origins or consciousness has failed to eliminate a strong sense of ethnic consciousness. This ethnic consciousness finds expression in the works of writers who are legally described as minorities. The discussion of ethnicity, however, is severely constrained by the federal ideology. Yet, despite political and economic segregation and suppression, ethnicity remains a powerful and attractive marker of identity in Nigeria. And thus, the above justifies the claim that primordialist sentiments cannot be ruled out in national political development.

Conclusion

Betiāng’s preponderant linguistic strategies of loaning words from his Bette-Bendi language shows language to be an essential tool that writers use to construct and maintain their cultural and ethnic identity. These words reconstruct a certain cultural matrix that defines Bette-Bendi existence as an ethnic group. The loaned items are deployed to express the ideas intended but, most importantly, they are meant to enable the novelist to project his Bette-Bendi ethnic identity. The reasons for loaning, as reflected in this paper, vary from a genuine reason to fill a linguistic gap to the novelist’s deliberate choice to use indigenous forms in place of English forms in a effective practice of ethnic identity construction.

Specifically, the loaned words are preferred to their English equivalents because of the local, cultural and political information inherent in them. The loaned words also perform a wide-range of discursive functions, and are much more dynamic than English forms in the processing of the writer’s cultural thoughts, and serve as communication conduits to connect the novelist to his people, and hence, his ethnicity. And finally, the use of loaned words enables the novelist to express his primordial sentiments in a language that personifies his Bette-Bendi ethnic identity which to a large extent, his ideological identity, even when there is no need to do so, except as a way to express his resistance to the dominance of other languages over Bette-Bendi.

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