

English and the Socio-cultural Semiotics of Identity in Selected Poems of Ojaide

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Abstract

Despite the overarching influence of English as the primary code of literary expression in the Kachruvian outer and expanding circles, diatopic ethno-cultural and socio-semiotic variables are carriers of identity that introduce meaning variegations in African literature with profound interpretive influences on meaning evaluation. This paper examines how Tanure Ojaide manipulates ethno-cultural totems and aspects of the socio-semiotics of the Nigerian space to project meaning in *One Day in Warri* and *Agbogidi*. The analyses indicate that the depth of meaning in the text derives from two factors. The first is the interpretive elasticity of the poet's choices, which stretch surface meaning into semantic inter-connections enmeshed in contexts of substrate folklore and religio-cultural motifs. The second lies in the poet's manipulation of lexicosemantics of Standard Nigerian English, Pidgin, and the exploitation of the socio-semiotics generated by contemporary Pentecostalism to address prevalent social and moral anomalies in modern-day Nigeria.

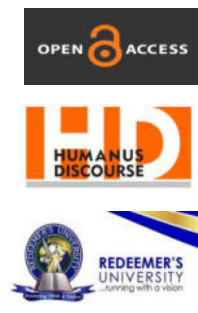
Keywords: socio-semiotics, lexicosemantics, the context of culture, ethno-religion, diatopic influences

Introduction

The English language is unmatched regarding the depth of its implantation in diverse Western and non-Western multilingual settings worldwide. Cemented by globalisation, the place of English as the world's most dominant linguistic code in global communication, international business, socio-cultural relations, and international trade is unarguable. Arising from the hegemonic influence of English, it is unsurprising that the language has generated sustained debates on its role in politics, socio-cultural relations, literary creativity, and pedagogy. Accordingly, debates on the native/non-native divide, the problem associated with cross-cultural communication across the diatopic continuum, the choice of a model for English language teaching, and the link between English and identity have stimulated unprecedented scholarly research¹. Consequently, the sociolinguistics literature is inundated with diverse accounts of these issues, and a plethora of linguistic models have been propounded to capture the spread, variation, and use of English worldwide².

¹M. Mowarin and E.O. Emama, "Linguistic Devices and Rhetorical Strategies in Nigerian Stand-up Comedy", *Abraka Humanities Review*, 10, no. 1 (2020) 1-19.

²E.O. Emama, "The utility value of English, Urhobo, and Pidgin in selected rural Urhobo communities", *Abraka Humanities Review*, 7, no 3(2017) 42 - 50



Many linguistic and nonlinguistic variables in Africa complicate the sociolinguistics debate about the ideal language for literary expression. The intimate link between language and identity and the vestiges of Africa's colonial experiences has led to a post-colonial clamour for using aboriginal languages as the primary code of literary expression. For instance, the post-independence academic climates of many leading African tertiary institutions instituted practices that tended to consign African identities to obscure corners of the curricula. Additionally, the sociolinguistic literature on the debate on native/non-native variants of English and the dismissive mindset against the international acceptability of the diatopic variants created fertile grounds for opposition to the adoption of English during the post-independence years. Apart from the pervasive socio-cultural and political experiences that European pre-colonial and colonial activities engendered, two experiences, about thirty years apart, contextualise some of the underpinnings that later gave birth to some African writers' ideological resistance to the use of English for literary expression. The first was the dismissive attitude of Eurocentric scholars towards the value of no-native varieties of English and the literature they engender, and the second was those who questioned the worth of African literature as a proper subject suitable for intellectual rumination.

Literature Review

The historical hostility towards using English to express African literary experience is embedded in the account of the pre-colonial and colonial interactions between English and the substrate languages. Recounting his decades-long academic experience garnered teaching at the University of Ibadan from 1950, provides an eyewitness account of the relegation of Nigerian literary traditions, identity, and the overarching influence of British academic and fictional traditions on the curriculum planning. He states, "In Nigeria, the university was an instrument of colonialism. It proclaimed its 'mission' to 'maintain British standards'. It deliberately tried to produce a Nigerian elite with British tastes and living standards. Neither Nigerian history nor Nigerian literature was considered worth teaching. In 'English Literature', the students were given a solid grounding in Anglo-Saxon and Middle English. The English literature course seemed designed to overawe the students with the masterpieces of a foreign civilisation". The primary reason Beier left the University of Ibadan for the University of Papua New Guinea in late 1960, even though it would mean a downgrade from a professor to 'ordinary lectureship', was the opportunity to design a curriculum for literature under propped by the oral literary traditions of the aboriginal people without 'regard for British academic traditions'. His proposals were revolutionary in many ways. First, it emphasised the fundamental value of a people's oral literary traditions, entrenched knowledge of indigenous oral forms through ethno methodological approaches, and finally, a comparative examination of other African literatures written in English devoid of the shadow of the native speaker's 'allegedly superior culture'. Second, his acknowledgement that African writers have "demonstrated that it was possible to adapt a foreign language to one's own needs" was especially significant when many reject the ontological status of non-native varieties of Englishes and the propriety of their use in intellectual discourse.

The study of new varieties of English as a serious topic of linguistic research and a new sub-discipline of English linguistics dates to the early 1980s³. However, the tradition of treating established varieties of non-native English as mere inter language, classified as varieties that are growing towards maturity based on English-as-Mother-Tongue standards, lingered on. One of the immediate consequences was the tendency to regard and portray Britain and other countries as ideological 'centres' of Standard English. Arising from the preceding, they claimed the sole right to establish norms of correctness. Thus, New Englishes were viewed as peripheral, considered deviant, and evaluated negatively. The preceding is somewhat surprising considering that the sociolinguist literature, in the decades immediately following the 1980s provide sound linguistic evidence in support of the pluricentric and inclusivity of non-native varieties of English.

Ironically, and against the grain of sociolinguistic leaning, Quirk (1990) provided the intellectual cannon fodder that prolonged the debate on the superiority of native varieties over diatopic ones. Quirk questioned the usefulness of non-native varieties of English in functional domains of international communication and formal pedagogy and sought to perpetuate the research imperative of the past decades primarily directed towards identifying at what point and to what extent these varieties of English deviate from the native varieties with the sole aim of dismissing their value. That intellectual mindset classified new Englishes as the product of inter-language and restricted the linguistic investigation of these varieties to the levels of interference. Investigative parameters were limited to exploring the degree of deviation from English-as-Mother-Tongue (EMT) or English-as-Native-Language (ENL) varieties and the influence of substrates. The preceding explains why Kachru's claim that the new Englishes be instituted as a medium of instruction was dismissed by Quirk (1990) 'as half-baked quackery'.

Arising from the preceding, it is hardly surprising that Wali⁴, Fanon⁵, Chinweizu, Jemie and Madubuike⁶(1980), and Ngugi⁷ argue that only African languages should be employed to express the African literary experience. In *Decolonizing the Mind* Ngugi's⁸ argues against using colonial languages are hinged on two pedestals. The first is the mother tongue's importance in dispersing and entrenching all aspects of communal socio-semiotics: folktales, moral values, and its role in socialisation and identity. Here, he argues that the perpetuation

³D. Hymes, [Foreword]. In C. A. Ferguson & S. B. Heath (Eds.), *Language in the USA*. (1981). London: Cambridge University Press

F. Penalosa, *Chicano sociolinguistics*. Cambridge, MA: Newbury House, (1980).

Braj B. Kachru, *The Indianization of English: The English language in India*, New York: Oxford University Press, (1983).

⁴O. Wali, "The dead end of African literature"? *Transition* 10, no 1(1963)13-15.

⁵F. Fanon, *The wretched of the Earth*. Harmondsworth: Penguin(1973).

⁶Chinweizu, I. Madubuike and Ihechukwu, J. Madubuike. *Toward decolonising African literature: African diction and poetry and their critics*. Enugu: Fourth Dimension Publishing Company (1980).

⁷Ngugi, Thiong'o wa. *Homecoming: Essays on African and Caribbean literature, culture and politics*. 384-288), London: Heinemann(1986).

of a people's culture lies in preserving all its meaning-making resources because "language has a suggestive power well beyond the immediate and lexical meaning". Secondly, Ngugi opines that English disrupts the established symmetry of his Gikuyu socio-cultural knowledge system and the dismissive attitude of English/colonial-centred education towards his aboriginal worldview. The clash between worldviews was exacerbated by the projection of English as the only language that matters, and other Kenyan languages were "compelled to "to bow before it in deference". His experiences, and those of others, provide the ideological underpinnings that influenced the call for adopting substrate languages in creative writing. It is significant to note that despite Ngugi's protestations, his literary genius was cemented by his novels written in English because the language provided reach to a global audience. It is unarguable that Ngugi's *Weep Not Child*, *The River Between*, *A Grain of Wheat*, and *Petals of Blood* would have remained relatively obscure if the author had expressed himself in Kikuyu or Swahili.

Diatopic socio-cultural semiotics

Effective communication is a crucial component of any social group. Language, the principal communication means allows speech community members to exchange ideas and achieve a shared understanding and consensus. This consensus is essential, enabling people to act in concert and make reasonably accurate predictions about each other's behaviour. In essence, language is the foundation for all social interaction among human groups, without which such interaction would be impossible. Thus, society imposes nuances of meaning variegations during intercultural encounters. Following Saussure⁹, Malinowski¹⁰, Firth¹¹, Hymes¹², and Halliday¹³ have collectively established the influence of society on meaning-making. Although Malinowski, Hymes and others coin many terms, the Hallidayan term "Social semiotics" has become an umbrella term for the field study that focuses on how meaning is created and communicated through social interactions and cultural practices. It is an interdisciplinary field that draws on linguistics, anthropology, sociology, psychology, and other related fields to analyze how people use language, images, and other forms of communication to convey social and cultural meanings. Social semiotic analysis involves examining the different signs and symbols that people use to communicate, as well as how different groups of people interpret these signs and symbols. This approach can be applied to various contexts, including advertising, media, politics, and everyday social interactions. The implantation of English in non-native contexts, the resultant evolutionary nativisation and the adaptation of the language have created a synthesis between it and the non-English semiotic resources primordially

⁹De Saussure Ferdinand. *Course in General Linguistics*. Heinemann: London (1916).

¹⁰B. Malinowski, The Problem of Meaning in Primitive Languages, Supplement in C.K. Ogden and I.A. Richards' *The Meaning of Meaning*, (1923), pp. 296-336

¹¹John, R. Firth, "Ethnographic analysis and language with reference to Malinowski's views. *Culture - An evaluation of the work* Keagan Paul: (1957), 93-118

¹²D. Hymes, Models of interaction of language and social and social setting. *Journal of Social Issues*. 23, no 2, (1967), 8-28

¹³M.A.K. Halliday, *Language as social semiotic: the social interpretation of language and meaning*. London: Arnold, (1978).

embedded in the peculiarity of Africa's culture and social systems. The blend has broadened the meaning-making resources of diatopic Englishes.

Contemporary sociolinguistic realities and the global cultural hybridity that English continues to engender have rendered native/non-native superiority debate vestigial attractive only to those who seek to perpetuate Eurocentric racial superiority¹⁴. There is a strong leaning towards examining English outside the constraints of its aboriginal underpinnings towards one that sees the language as the totality of all the socio-cultural, linguistic, cross-cultural hybridity, and lexico-semantic influences that make the language the primary linguistic code internationally¹⁵

Consequently, pedagogical principles and strategies for teaching English as an international language¹⁶, the dynamics of English-underpinned intercultural communication¹⁷, and the challenge of cross-variety intelligibility, arising from the native varieties' monopoly of the English lexicography are topical investigative issues in the literature of English sociolinguistics. Given that English in the outer circle and expanding circles has become the preferred alternative code of substrate communal and personal identity projection¹⁸, coupled with the fact that features of diatopic identity naturally seep into intercultural communication and literary expression in English, this paper examines the impact that the Nigerian socio semiotics and ethno-cultural space exert on aspects of meaning in Ojaide's *One Day in Warri* and *Agbogidi*.

¹⁴Gov.UK Commission on Race and Ethnic Disparities: The Report.

https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/974507/202103March (2024)

¹⁵J. Blommaert, *The Sociolinguistics of Globalization*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, (2010).

M. Clyne, and F. Sharifian, English as an International Language. Australian Review of Applied Linguistics. 7, no 2(2008).98-112

A. Kirkpatrick, *World Englishes: Implications for International Communication and English Language Teaching*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, (2007).

¹⁶I. Vodopija-Krstanović and M. Marinac, "English as an International Language and English Language Teaching: The Theory vs. Practice Divide". *Iranian Journal of Language Teaching Research*. 7 no 2 (2019).19-38

C. Wallace, Principles and practices for teaching English as an international language: teaching critical reading. In: Alsagoff L, McKay SL, Hu G, Renandya W (eds) *Principles and Practices for Teaching English as an International Language*. New York: Routledge, (2012). 261-81

¹⁷E.O. Emama, "Folklore, cohesion, and meaning in Ojaide's Agbogidi". *KIU Journal of Humanities*. 5, no 3, (2020).,191-198

O. Alo, "Lost in transfer? Exploring the influence of culture on the transfer of knowledge categories" *Africa Journal of Management*, 6 no. 4, (2020). 350-376.

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J. House, "The impact of English as a global lingua franca on intercultural, communication. In A. Curtis & R. Sussex (Eds.), *Intercultural communication in Asia: Education, language and values* (2018), 97-114). Springer.

http://dx.doi.org/10.1007/978-3-319-69995-0_6

¹⁸A.H. Marckwardt, English as a Second Language and English as a Foreign Language. *PMLA*, (1963).25-37

Materials and Method

Two poems by Tanure Ojaide, *One Day in Warri* and *Agbogidi*, provide the primary data. The paper is a semiological analysis of aspects of meaning inspired by the poet's socio-semiotic, ethno-religious, and cultural background. The meaning import of the poet's use of culturally loaded words and expressions, ethno-religious symbols, and their roles as identity markers are examined. The semiotic influence of folklore and the communicative function of English/Pidgin code-mixing is also explored.

Data presentation and analysis.

Sociosemiotics in (XIV) One day in Warri

1 One day in Warri is more than enough
2 However humanly pious or patient
3 To transform you into a barbarian
4 If you come to Warri
5 At two o' clock, despite curfew,
6 Many prophets of Pentecostal dawn
7 Stab your sleep with jeremiads
8 Worse on Friday nights when all-night vigils
9 Exorcise evil spirits that refuse to leave.
10 Teenage boys and girls psalm madly
11 And afflict the night with insomnia:
12 "If you go from church to church,
13 know say you be complete ashewo!"
14 By six, already rattled by the night's noise
15 And aches, the day begins a wreck.
16 A voice tears through the dawn's air;
17 "You wan carry my name go witch,
18 why you call am so loud?"
19 Nothing's straightforward here,
20 Every gesture or action suspected -
21 The foetus fears its mother's womb!
22 By eight, frayed nerves kindle
23 And the stampede of animals
24 Wearing clothes begins -
25 Jostling, nobody gives way
26 And everybody stands still.
27 The foulest mouths infect others
28 With acidity, everywhere toxic with rage
29 & the transformation begins
30 "You dey craze? A pastor belches
31 Out of his white robes.
32 "Thief, thief man" rattles back
33 A pre-teen smarting from last Sunday's collection
34 "Go fuck your mama," a Benz chief
35 Spits at a French-suited young man
36 Who fires back "your wife naashewo!"
37 There is none left with a smile,
38 Only temper-creased faces.

39 In the melee, desperate-faced 'area boys'
 40 'tie neck' a fat and middle-aged woman for
 41 Heavy jewels, her lover's generous pay-back
 42 A bullion truck with an escort of sirens and whips
 43 Clears the road that soon snap its trapdoors.
 44 Out of their posts and indifferent,
 45 traffic wardens negotiate for bribes –
 46 Old habits die hard in the stifling streets.
 47 By four, my townsfolk begin to wind up
 48 The day's demanding business, and broken,
 49 they head for unlit homes that further
 50 flare already frazzled nerves.
 51 At seven, homes fill up with mosquitoes.
 52 Early in bed, couples have their nightly
 53 Dishes of quick and stale sex
 54 To breed more for the thronged mess.
 55 Soon after, sleep comes to their rescue,
 56 To dream like ants with giant strides;
 57 Only to be disabled in another false dawn
 58 Of Pentecostal prophets and psalmists.
 59 Nobody will tell you to flee Warri
 60 Before you become worse than a barbarian.

In recent times, social commentators and researchers have examined the role of religion in entrenching negative societal values in the Nigerian space. In northern Nigeria, Boko Haram and ISWAP's innumerable acts of terrorism have been blamed partly on harmful religious ideology. The Almajiri syndrome and the spate of religion-instigated extrajudicial killings – fueled mainly by rumours of verbal sacrilege and desecration of religious literature—are also underpinned by virulent demagoguery¹⁹. While religion-motivated acts of terror are comparatively less prevalent in the Southern part of Nigeria, religion-especially contemporary Pentecostal churches, has been blamed for the entrenchment value system that pander to crass materialism and the gradual erosion of the communal instincts in traditional African societies²⁰.

Socio-semiotic meaning in Tanure's (XIV) *One day in Warri* derives predominantly from the discourse of aspects of Pentecostal Christianity. Although the text also dwells on other extant social, economic, and moral ills: crime, corruption, and police brutality, a critical examination of the diatopic lexico semantics asserts that (1) the dogma of Pentecostalism is directly

¹⁹E.A. Oghuvbu, "Boko Haram insurgency and the interplay between religion and politics in Nigeria". *International Journal of New Economics and Social Sciences*, 15, no 1, (2022), 245-254.

D. E. Agbibo, "No retreat, no surrender: Understanding the religious terrorism of Boko Haram in Nigeria". *African Study Monographs*, 34, no 2, (2013). 65-84.

²⁰J.O. Magbadelo, "Pentecostalism in Nigeria: Exploiting or edifying the masses?" *African Sociological Review*, 8, no 2, (2004). 15-29

D.O. Omonijo and M.J. Nwodo, "The Proliferation of Churches and Moral Decadence in Nigeria: The Socio-Economic and Religious Implications". *Scholars Bulletin*. 2, no 11, (2016). 637-648

responsible for the entrenchment of those social and moral challenges and highlights the failure of that brand of Christianity to act as a promoter of positive communal conscience; and (2) the poet's diatopic lexico semantics constitute critical clues to the fullest appreciation of the communicative intent of the text.

The negative influence that Warri, a city in the Niger Delta region, exerts on residents and visitors, which **transforms** the **pious** into a **barbarian**(lines 1&2), derives from two negative influences that religious practices induce. The first is the debilitating, invasive, and disruptive effects that the timing of the religious services of virtually all Pentecostal churches have on the biology and psychology of nighttime rest and the effect on behaviour day time behaviour. The second is much more sinister. It dwells on the paranoia that the manipulative messages that Pentecostal dogma and doctrines entrench and the disruptive effect on the fabric of African communalism.

Many city dwellers, especially in the southern part of Nigeria where the Pentecostals have a strong following, will instinctively relate to the feeling of helpless annoyance and resignation that the hostile hours during which those churches commence their nightly worship (**two o'clock, despite curfew**, line 5), the culprits (**prophets of Pentecostal dawn**, line 6), and the disruptive consequences on sorely needed restorative rest (**Stab your sleep with jeremiads**, line 8; **and afflict the night with insomnia**, line 11). Noise pollution is defined as a stench to the ears²¹. The inimical health effects of the acoustically amplified nightly noise pollution are well documented in medical literature, and it has become a constant feature of urban spaces in southern Nigeria. Many social commentators note that violence (**siren and whips**, line 43), robberies (**tie neck**, line 41), and a predilection for abusive and uncouth language (**you de craze**, line 31; **ashewo**, line 13; **go fuck your mama**, line 34; **your wife na ashewo**, line 36) are defining features of Warri. The underlying sociosemiotics of the poet's usages seem to confirm the preceding. Some of the lexical choices – 'tie neck', a method of robbery characterised by the near-strangulation of the victim- are not only a forensic marker of locational identity but also indispensable to understanding the meaning of aspects of the poem.

The phrase **despite curfew** (line 5) encodes other aspects of attitudinal and behavioural sociosemiotics and provides the social context for why churches flagrantly disregard governmental rules when conducting religious services. Arising from the Warri crises of the late 1990/2003 and the recent COVID-19 pandemic, curfews and restrictions were imposed to enhance policing and rapid countermeasures by security operatives and to prevent the spread of the virus. Many Christian churches flouted those restrictions primarily because of financial benefits ("**Thief, thief man**" **rattles back a pre-teen smarting from last Sunday's collection**, lines 32/33). In the socio-semiotics of Pentecostalism,

²¹T.O.Iyendo, (2016).Iyendo TO."Exploring the Effect of Sound and Music on Health in Hospital Settings: A Narrative Review".*International Journal of Nursing Studies*. ;63(20168) 2-100. doi: 10.1016/j.ijnurstu.2016.08.008. Epub 2016 Aug 20. PMID: 27611092.

the lexical item '**collection**' has evolved to become a marker of specific money-generating activities in Pentecostal churches, as shown below.

Table 1: Socio-semiotic web of collection (Emama, 2024)

COLLECTION	TITHE
	OFFERING
	SEED SOWING
	THANKSGIVING
	FIRST FRUIT
	PROPHET OFFERING
	FAITH SEED
	BUILDING OFFERING
	YOUTH OFFERING
	EVANGELISM OFFERING
	BELIEVERS OFFERING
	VOW OFFERING

In the Nigerian context, some of the terms in Table 1 also have polar nuances of social and contextual meanings specifically engineered to instil fear and coerce obedience. The collective voice of Pentecostalism, especially in southern Nigeria, constitutes a formidable force that shapes social reality for millions of Nigerians. Consequently, statements like "Prosperity, not just wealth, is impossible without tithing, because when you are not paying your tithe, you are under a financial curse."²²made by one of the most revered personalities in the Pentecostal fold, define the pecuniary metrics of Pentecostal spirituality and the meaning potentials of the term **tithe**. Thus, **tithe** has, over time, acquired positive sociosemiotic attributes for those who routinely pay. These meaning features, which have become identity markers of the lexicon of Pentecostalism and the ethnography of that speech community, include the following positive and negative collocation.

Table 2: Sociosemiotics of Tithe ((Emama, 2024)

TITHE	Positive collocations	Assurance of material prosperity
		Protection from malignant forces
		Guarantee of going to heaven
	Negative collocations	Poverty
		Vulnerabilities
		Eternal damnation.

The influence, spiritual functional value, and the domain of influence of clerics of the Pentecostal are elastic. In the Nigerian Context, the titles of clerics – Apostle, pastor, Bishop, prophets – have acquired layers of sociosemiotics values. The expressions of **many prophets of Pentecostal dawn** (line 6) **exorcise evil spirits that refuse to leave** (line 9) encode many of the meaning variables that those clerics have acquired. Arising from the myriads of social-political and economic problems bedeviling the Nigerian State, Pentecostalism

²²<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=wNN9SqqJ70I>

has assumed the toga of a cure-all wonder drug. Aspects of the cultural and religious belief systems underpin the collective religious experience: ancestor worship, witchcraft, deity worship, provide the psychological tentacles that the term **prophet** has and explain the ironclad grip that prophets exert on the outlook of many worshippers. In the Nigerian context, the term has acquired new collocational relationships with 'generational curse', 'ancestral covenant', 'witchcraft', 'family altar', 'spirit husband', 'demonic possession' because of the tendency to ascribe most medical, economic, and academic challenges to the influence of witches and other manufactured supernatural forces. Arising from the preceding, the expression **exorcises evil spirits that refuse to leave** subsumes a variegation of negative social meanings that have become markers of the identity of the term **prophet** to a growing number of English language users in the Nigerian diatopic space. Arising from the legion of fake Pentecostal prophesies of divine victory for a particular presidential candidate leading to the 2023 general elections, experiential forces within the Nigerian space continue to expand the damaging underpinnings of communal socio-semiotics associated with the prophet.

Apart from the negatives in the diatopic sociosemiotics, *One Day in a Warri* explores much more insidious social-cultural reconditioning that the dogma of Pentecostalism continues to entrench and the corrosive influence those creeds exert on African communalism, neighbourliness, and identity. A core aspect of the creed of Pentecostalism is the militant disposition against evil forces: ancestral, witchcraft, generational curses, evil family members and family altars) during all-night vigils (**Worse on Friday nights when all-night vigils**, line 8) considerable energy, accompanied by dramatic body movement, devoted to invoking death and destruction on evil forces and persons with evil intent (**Psalm Madly**, line 10). The concept of 'enemy' in the lexicon of Pentecostalism has become so elastic to cover individuals from virtually all categories of kinship and social linkages in addition to malignant spirit beings. As a result, innocuous actions, something as mundane as calling someone's name, are viewed with suspicion and interpreted as a ploy to bewitch or harm (**You wan carry my name go witch**, line 18; **why you call am so loud?**; line 19). Social and kinship connection, a defining feature of communal African cultures, is also being weakened by the mantra of a ubiquitous enemy. The constant invocation of death on enemies in my 'fathers and mother's house' (a synonym for all maternal and paternal relationships) has spawned suspicion of, and alienation from, ethno-cultural origins of many adherents (**Nothing's straightforward here; every action here is suspected -; the foetus fears its mother's womb**, lines, 19-21) and has resulted in the weakening of the bonds between the urban and rustic. Thus, the concept of 'enemy' has assumed a spectre of an all-encompassing malignant force in the psyche of the average Pentecostal, which has significantly undermined interpersonal relationships. As a result, the Pentecostal creed is assessed negatively because it has failed to act positively on the collective moral mindset of members and passive audience of **Pentecostal prophets and psalmists**(Line 58).

Pidgin Lexicosemantics in *One Day in Warri*

Code alternation, specifically English/ Pidgin code-switching, is the text's peculiar sociolinguistic and socio-semiotic feature. The city of Warri is at the

heart of the complexly multilingual Niger Delta region. It has profound historical linkages with the foundation and evolution of Nigerian pidgin in southern Nigeria. In contemporary terms, the Warri variety of Nigerian pidgin is the most recognisable linguistic export of the region to many urban centres in southern Nigeria, arising from its overarching role in interethnic communication and as the favoured language in Nigerian stand-up comedy. It is, therefore, one of the strongest markers of geographical sociolinguistic identity, evidenced by the fact that it is the only variety of pidgin in southern Nigeria that has creolised. During cross-cultural encounters, pidgin is central in code-switching and mixing by bilinguals and multilingual speech in the Warri speech community. It is driven by the need to assert group identity or convey specific language-specific thoughts and concepts. Thus, using pidgin is an appropriate assertion of the sociolinguistic profile of language use and a marker of diatopic identity.

Additionally, pidgin lexicosemantics provide contextual clues for a better understanding of aspects of the text and foreground the etymological geographical identity of the language user in addition to other discourse functions. Some examples in the text include:

Tie-neck (line 40) is etymologically a coinage of the Warri variety of Nigerian pidgin. It is one of the favourite methods of robbery invented in Warri metropolis. The tactic involves the near-strangulation of the victim using a chokehold applied from the rear. The fear of asphyxiation compels the victim to part with money and other valuables (**'tie neck', a fat and middle-aged woman for Heavy Jewels**, line 40-41). **Area boys** (line 39). This phrase was coined by the users of the Warri variety of pidgin and, at other times, seeped into general pidgin sociosemiotics. It used to mean 'neighbourhood gang'. **Ashewo** (line 12, 35) is a pidgin word for prostitute. It is etymologically Yoruboid (Yoruba) and is an example of many pidgin words borrowed from Nigerian substrate languages that eventually evolved to become part of the sociosemiotics of cross-ethnic identity that Nigerian pidgin produces. In the Nigerian context, those lexical items perform the same identifying roles as "kangaroo," "outback," and "veld" in Australian and South African English.

Socio-cultural meaning *Agbogidi*

1 I, Agbogidi, deflected lightning,
 2 from the umbrella tree I sat under;
 3 in the clash with thunder I doused it
 4 with a deluge-palm oil ablaze
 5 drew rain, not smoke, from the sky.
 6 When lost in the forest of night,
 7 I witness an antelope transform
 8 into a beauty – that's how I married
 9 a sorceress, we owe each other
 10 what we can't repay in a lifetime
 11 now my fan's become a matchet
 12 & I clear ailments out of my way
 13 I was captive of the chief ogre
 14 and in the seven-day trial

15 lived only on fingers of chalk
 16 instead of delicacies of bondage –
 17 my prayer flew directly to the sky
 18 and I landed at the outskirts of town,
 19 where journeys begin and end.
 20 This world isn't home enough
 21 until the other world savages
 22 and gives you up from its depth.
 23 Where animals talk and you
 24 heed the multitude or mute wits,
 25 you'll have enough counsel
 26 to bypass death's many paths.
 27 I, Agbogidi, always returns home.
 28 This light specially held out for me
 29 to see ahead comes with a price
 30 I am glad to pay with a thousand denials –
 31 sacrifice will open its own way through tangles
 32 to the craft of putting the leopard to sleep

Sociolinguistic realities have made English the preferred linguistic code for expressing non-native literary experiences. However, socio-cultural semiotic forces continue to impose meaning nuances that serve as identity markers and provide contextual platforms for meaning evaluation. Thus, no amount of inner circle meaning norms can filter out the lexicosemantics of the diatopic environment. The interpretive influence that substrate sociosemiotics bring to bear stems from the intricate connection between language, culture, and literature, which compels English to carry the meaning nuances embedded in the ethno-cultural landscape of the diatopic user. Again, the Conradian narrative provides additional motivation for the deliberate projection of the African identity by harnessing the meaning potentials of aspects of culture and other ethno-religious symbols and motifs. In **Agbogidi**, the ethno-cultural belief systems of the Urhobo people, many of which resonate with the larger Edoid and Southern Nigeria socio-cultural subset, provide the bulk of the semiotic materials on which meaning evaluation and identity are anchored.

In the text, the description of the activities of the folk hero, Agbogidi, encapsulates components of the belief system of the Urhobo people. In the first five lines of the text, Agbogidi, the main character, performs three superhuman feats. First, he neutralises destructive lightening (**I, Agbogidi, deflected lightning**); douses thunder with palm oil (**in the clash with thunder I doused it with a deluge-palm oil ablaze**); and commands rain to fall (**drew rain, not smoke, from the sky**). Lightning, thunder, and palm oil are important ethno-cultural symbols in the belief system of the Urhobo people. Thunder and lightning are considered symbols of dark magic, one of the favourite death-dealing instruments employed by witches (*Friedan*) and evil medicine men. Thus, death by lightning or thunder is automatically ascribed to those sources. The ethno-cultural contexts underlying Agbogidi's ability to perform those superhuman feats are couched in several ethno-religious symbols in the text. An understanding of the significance of **palm oil** (line 4), the connection between **fan** and **machete**(line 11), and the religious symbolism of **fingers of chalk** (line 15).

Aside from its commercial value in the disparate nationalities of the Niger region, components of the palm tree ((botanically known as *Arecaceae/Palmae* synonymous) have ritual and medical uses in the disparate cultures in Sub-Saharan African ethno-medicine. As a result, textual references to the palm tree or its constituents often encode ethno-religious contextual meanings. Among the Akan, Kakomba (Ghana), Luo, Suba, Camus, Mijikenda (Kenya/Uganda), Fon, Yoruba, Urhobo, Esan, Bini(Benin/Nigeria), Ovambo (Namibia), Thonga (South Africa), Mano, Poro (Liberia), Luda, Ba-Ila, Mwila (Zambia) components of the palm tree have various value in traditional African medicine, ritual healing, and in aspects of traditional belief systems (Gruca et al, 2014). For instance, the seeds are used for divination, the palms are used for ritual offerings, and the oil is used to blend various ingredients into a cohesive mixture. In the Urhobo ethno-religious belief system, palm oil is considered a powerful antidote to poison. For someone with the requisite ritual knowledge, it is a potent tool for warding off and neutralising the harmful effects of evil medicine. In the text, Agbogidi is cast in the mould of a powerful medicine man (**obo**), versed in arcane incantations and rituals required for weaponising palm oil to counter the destructive forces of evil medicine.

The phrase, **fingers of chalk** (line15) symbolizes indigenous chalk used in various aspects of ethno-religion in southern Nigeria. Referred to as Nzu(Igbo), orhuen (Bini), or Orhen (Urhobo), the native chalk features prominently in ancestor worship, initiation rites, divination, oracular clairvoyance, and deity worship. It also symbolises hospitality and purity. In Urhobo ethno-religion, purity (**evuefu**) is defined as an individual's goodwill towards all. Being pure in this sense is considered the most formidable form of protection because of the belief that **Osonobrugwe** (the Supreme God), the pantheon of lesser gods, and the ancestors instinctively protect one whose mental and behavioural inclinations bode goodwill towards all. Thus, only those with that pacifist disposition can use **Orhen** in all its ethnic-spiritual domains without suffering punitive consequences. Following the preceding context, a better understanding of Agbogidi's ability to survive supernaturally-induced vicissitudes (**I was captive of the chief ogre**, line 13) by subsisting on **seven fingers of chalk** (line 14) becomes socio-semiotically and ethno-religiously meaningful.

Aside from the copious use of Urhobo/Sub-Saharan Ethno-religious symbols in *Agbogidi*, aspects of the folklore and oral narratives of the Urhobo people appear to provide additional contextual meaning, as well as aspects of the narrative material that glues components of the ethno-cultural motifs together. African folklore is a fascinating literary genre deeply intertwined with African people's lives. Primarily oral, the art form constitutes one primary medium through which sub-Saharan traditional belief systems are preserved and perpetuated. *Agbogidi* contains adaptations of twofolk tales of the Urhobo people. Tales about hunters witnessing the transformation of animals into beautiful maidens, and vice versa, the romantic liaison that emanates from such encounters Delta (**When lost in the forest of the night**,

I witness an antelope transform/into a beauty - that's how I married/a sorceress, lines 6-9), the bestowment of some supernatural powers to the human party (**now my fan's become a matchet/ I clear ailments out of my**

way line 11-12) abound in the oral literary repertoire of the ethnic nationalities of the Niger. Similarly, there are also variations of tales that centre on capture and escape from supernatural forces that crisscross the oral tradition of the ethnic nationalities of the Niger Delta (**I was captive of the chief ogre**, line 13). These oral forms constitute a core component of the religio-cultural socialisation instrument in traditional African settings as recently as the 1990s. Sadly, aggressive Western globalisation has made the form of oral tradition moribund. The poet's creative adaptation of the oral and socio-cultural agencies creates layers of interpretive contexts necessary for a richer evaluation of the meaning of *Agbogidi*.

The poet's use of **fan** and **machete (now my fan has become a matchet**, line 11) is another instance of the interpretive challenges posed by synthesising oral traditions and aspects of the Urhobo people's belief systems and ethno-religious symbols. By compelling **fan** to share the same collocational space with **machete**, the poet appears to weaponise fan thereby creating semantic perplexity and interpretive ambiguity. The meaning imports of the poet's lexical choices are resolved by examining the ethno-cultural and religious symbolism embedded in **a fan** and how it can become a weapon. As used in the text, **the fan** is used to mean a hand-crafted object and not an electrical fan. It is made using various animal or plant materials: hide, palm fronds, and reeds. It is hand-manipulated to generate air to cool the user. Apart from generating cooling air, the fan (**adjudju**) is ethno-religiously symbolic. In many worship systems in Urhoboland, the fan is one of the many objects that can be specially imbued with supernatural powers by the adherents' patron god. In the hands of the chief priest(ess), the **fan** becomes a spiritual machete used to perform astounding acts of curative miracles. These include eliminating all obstacles to the safe delivery of a foetus plagued by medical and spiritual complications (**& I clear ailments out of my way**, line 12) and neutralising all malignant psychic forces (**I, Agbogidi, deflected lightning**, line 1).

The creative admixture of other aspects of the belief system of the Urhobo people further enriches the semantic elasticity and the interpretive complexity of the text. The reference to **the outskirts of town** (line 18), **where journeys begin and end** (line 19), encapsulates the Urhobo belief in the defining role of the ancestors in the activities of the living. **Outskirt of town** is that mythical transit point where the unborn negotiate entrance into the human world and the dead into the realm of the ancestors. The belief in the overarching influence of the ancestors in determining the fate of humans is captured in **this world is not home enough** (20) and **until the other world savages** (21).

Conclusion

The sociolinguistic variables that empower English are overwhelming. The language is expected to continue to serve as the favourite code of international discourse because it bestrides the core elements of contemporary cross-national interactions: economy, ICT, entertainment, cultural exchange, and imaginative creativity. However, variegations in the use of English in the diatopic context provide fascinating avenues for examining the endless meaning potentials that diatopic Englishes bring to the fascinating discourse of English as an international language. Socio-semiotic and socio-cultural influences will

remain an endless source of semiotic materials for the projection of non-native identity in literary and non-literary texts. These forces will undoubtedly play significant roles in the debate about the international intelligibility diatopic Englishes.