

National Integration and Language Nativization in Edward Brathwaite's *The Arrivants: A New World Trilogy*

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Abstract: Language as a means of communication, culturally denotes a vehicle for achieving ontological wholeness - a sense of connectedness and seamless relationship amongst individuals in a community; a means towards the creation of an essence in a people. Even though the Caribbean society is inherently culturally and politically disparate, cultural sociologists and linguists have sought to create the basis for unity through the medium of language. Despite the colonialist's separatist policies in the Caribbean, language remains the most significant feature of ethnic identity. Edward (later called Kamau) Brathwaite's novel concept of 'Nation Language' is a linguistic initiative towards the achievement of the sense of cultural and political wholeness in a people. This study identifies and establishes the socio-cultural link that exemplifies the import of language as an indispensable tool of National integration.

Keywords: Communication, Ontological wholeness

1. Introduction

Critics have come to appreciate linguistic Nativization within the diasporic discourse as artistic stratagems of the writers; their attempts to represent the nature of a culture and their method of devising a poetics. Within this framework and perspective, language is at the centre of the struggle to create a genuinely indigenous literary idiom. Caribbean poetics evolves primarily as a channel for the exploration of language as a salient feature of Caribbean culture. Language in Caribbean literature is more than a means of communication; it is a vehicle to building an ontological wholeness.

Roger Andersen defines Nativization as:

The individual's mental capacity to construct such a linguistic system that makes

it possible for a new 'native' language to arise, as in the case of the creation of the Creole language. Each individual has the potential for creating his own (language) system This process of creating an *individual* autonomous system I call *nativization* (Qtd. by Carolyn Allen, 58).

Nativization is thus a creative process where distinctive and peculiar features of a language are evolved to situate an experience within its own context. This process goes down the line with an adaptation to land, race, time and other socio-cultural indices that facilitate the definition of identity in a multi-lateral society.

If the Caribbean can be conceived as a single cultural community, this claim cannot

be confirmed on the basis of a commonly shared language. Indeed, the single most potent and evident factor that fragments the region into discrete clusters of cohesive activities is language. Gordon Lewis' assertion reaffirms the import of dispersal of the colonialist's disintegrative policy on their colonies: "Each colonizing power imposed its language on its colonial subjects, thus leading to a disabling linguistic fragmentation in the region. It produced the well known trait of *insularismo*" (12). The society is so disparate that the English-speaking people hardly know their Dutch, French, Spanish-speaking geographical Caribbean counterparts, or vice versa. Yet, language as salient divider of Caribbean peoples is not a source of any major ethnic conflict in any part of the Caribbean. While a few academics are genuinely concerned with introducing Creole as the national language so as to effect better performance in schools and promote development efforts, yet language has not generated any strong bitter bickering in social circles amongst the contemporary Caribbean society.

Language however is a critical marker of identity in the Caribbean. Contingent upon the separatist policy of the colonialist, language undoubtedly constitutes the singular feature of ethnic identity. In places where language has emerged as a significant marker of ethnic identity formation and group assertiveness, official boards and commissions are established to guide against language 'impurities'. In this regard, language assumes the stature of a fixture with deep historical roots. Significantly, this strikes a responsive chord at what 'nationalist mythology' is supposed them to be, namely, "the primordial foundations of national cultures and the matrices of the national mind" (E. Hobsbawm, 54) In Papua New Guinea, in the Southwest Pacific, the leader of a separatist movement asserted her claim to a distinctive Papuan identity and her demand for a separate state in

part because of the threat of New Guinea 'Pidgin Imperialism' (Ralph R. Prembas, 1993).

Yet, however as Eric Hobsbawm remarked drawing from the colonialist's deliberate infringement on local dialects, "National languages are almost semi-artificial constructs and occasionally virtually invented" (54). In the Caribbean, the methodical decimation of the aboriginal peoples and the mass importation of laborers from different language communities in Africa and Asia left a big linguistic vacuum which was filled by the superimposition of the imperial languages as the local idiom, imported as part of the colonial burden.

The language of the metropolis however was a minority medium and was in strong contest with varieties of reconstituted pidgins and Creole, which were the language of the masses. In the end, a duality has persisted with the metropolitan language coexisting with the local Creole. What establishes the distinction between the metropolitan language and the local Creole in the Caribbean is the peculiar usage that gives them a particular local blend. This means that even the metropolitan language looks the same on paper as its overseas' counterpart, but it is not the same on live verbal communications, where the cadences and intonations and the lexical peculiarities give it a rendering that is ethnically distinctive and exclusive. It is in the act of forging an indigenous Creole that Caribbean peoples have appropriated the metropolitan language and mixing it with local idioms/experiences and twist in dialect have constructed a veritable new repertoire of national languages.

West Indian languages are 'living and developing languages' (Gerald Moore, 130) that are used strongly and proven and essential element in full realization of a typically West Indian life in literature. These evidences lend credence to the contention that the West Indians have a language of their own. Based on these facts, Gerald Moore rebuffs the

spurious charges of some speculative analysts, and reaffirms much strongly that these "... instances make it clear that the representation or creative rehandling of a particular texture of West Indian sound (be it speech or song) is not some sort of verbal decoration, ... but, the very material out which the new literature or drama are being wrought" (130).

Language performs a crucial function as a medium of power relation in post-colonial writings. This fundamental function demands that the secondary language of the colonial subjects seizes the position of the one at the centre, thus replacing it as the fully-adapted medium of communication in the colonized territory. This process of linguistic supplanting takes place through the processes that the trio of Bill Ashcroft *et al* term 'abrogation and appropriation with reconstitution' respectively. They are mutually exclusive

The first process of abrogation or cancelling of the use of English involves the conscientious effort to denigrate the influence of the use of English language as a means of communication, thus replacing it with another acceptable language. The second method appropriates and re-moulds the dominant language of the centre to match with indigent cultural usages and precepts that are relevant to one's cultural experience. Raja Roa, in his 'Author's Foreward' to *Kanthapura*, puts it more succinctly:

... One has to convey in a language that is not one's own the spirit that is one's own... We can not write like the English. We should not.... Our method of expression therefore has to be a dialect which will some day prove to be as colourful as the Irish or the American, ... (vii).

This effort achieves and re-directs attention away from the site of colonial oppression. The following lines indicate the trauma of this linguistic suppression:

a foreign
anguish

is english
another tongue
my mother (32).

These lines from a Trinidadian poet, Marlene Nourbese Phillip's "Discourse on the Logic of Language" point to the importance of language in the literatures and cultures of the Caribbean writer, which has its roots in the region's historical and cultural reality. This view informs Michael Dash's summation on the critical need for an indigenous tongue to achieve the need for individual identity. He indicates in his introductory essay to Edouard Glissant's *Caribbean Discourse* that:

Language for the black writer was, not a neutral, transparent instrument, but the determining medium of thought itself. In his pursuit of self-definition, the black artist saw the inherited colonial language as a pernicious symbolic system used by the European colonizer in order to gain total and systematic control of the mind and reality of the colonized world (xx).

With the emergence of post-colonial literatures, Caribbean, as well as African writers unanimously rebelled against such a system. They quickly understood that the control of language is one of the primary aspects of colonial oppression: language as a site of power control – who names, controls. This situation denotes the dependency of the periphery upon the center. Maryse Conde in her essay entitled "Creolite without the Creole Language?" attests that:

The politically and economically alienated colonized are first colonized linguistically. In their attempt to gain freedom and self-determination, the colonized must put an end to the pre-eminence of the colonial language" (102).

This summation is sufficient grounds for all colonized writers, be they Anglophone or francophone to see the need for linguistic subversion.

Unlike other parts of the post-colonial world, very few aboriginal languages survived in the Caribbean due to the decimation of the Amerindians in the early centuries of colonization. Although, the slaves brought their own languages from Africa, they lost the memory of these languages relatively quickly (some critics suggest through a deliberate policy of language suppression in order to prevent the possibility of slave rebellions). Consequently, “the transplanted Africans found that psychic survival depended on their facility for a kind of *double entendre*” (Ashcroft et al, 146) with regard to the language of the slave master: “they were forced to develop a skill of being able to say one thing in front of “massa” and have it interpreted differently by their fellow slaves” (146). Out of this radical subversion of the meanings of the master’s tongue, has evolved a new language, which, although different from that of the former slave master, and indigenous to the Caribbean, still retains a European base. This region’s quest for decolonization, therefore, often takes place at a cultural level first and foremost in the ‘battle for language’ (Torres Saillant, 7).

2. Brathwaite’s Adaptive Innovation of Language in his Poetry

West Indian English has long been considered a debased dialect, and West Indians who have aspired to any form of advancement at home or abroad were forced to adopt the standard language. With the advent of the Black power consciousness in the early 1970s, West Indian intellectuals have denounced this subtle, but damaging, form of imperialism. They resolved to uphold the validity of the West Indian form of English as a language in its right (echoing the arguments of proponents of Black English in United States) and have taken to calling it the “Nation Language”. This nascent concept of language form became a potent symbol of a consciousness identity, separate from the old colonial ‘metropole’. Brathwaite’s tireless

pursuit of cultural authenticity and a common future of wholeness have cohered around the effort to bring a genuinely Caribbean language to prominence.

Kamau Brathwaite in his *The Development of Creole Society in Jamaica 1770-1820*, points out in the chapter entitled ‘The “Folk” Culture of the Slaves’ that language was the area in which the enslaved Africans most successfully rebelled against their masters, refusing to speak as they were taught but instead using – and abusing – English in ways which made it their own. This is evident in his (Brathwaite) vernacular recasting of the Standard English – a linguistic experimentation – which he calls ‘Nation Language’.

In *The Arrivants*, ‘nation language’ is most preponderant in individual poems as “Wings of a Dove” pp. 42-45, “The Dust” pp. 62-69, “Rites” pp. 197-203, and “Cane” pp. 225-229. In an interview with Stewart Brown in 1989, Brathwaite emphasized the critical need for experimentation, nay, adaptation of the English language to suit local situations in a polyglossic or ‘poly-dialectical’ environment: “I think the real challenge for the artist who knows his English and mediates between the two languages is to develop an English which reflects the nature of nation language” (85).

As indicated earlier herein, the context of the evolution of ‘nation language’, nay, dialect, portends protest against the imposition of Standard English language on the Afro-West Indians. In the poem, “Rites”, Brathwaite uses the deep cadences of nation language to show the complexities implicit in the relationship between Black West Indians and their White over lords, in a cricket game. Gordon Rohlehr adjudges this context to be “a metaphor of the early phase of the struggle for self-Government and Independence in the West Indies” (227). In this instance, Brathwaite shows the deep instinct for protest in the Blacks: “when things goin’ good, you cahn touch/ we; but leh murder start/ an’ ol

man, you cahn fine a man to hold up de side....
(203).

In the current stage of development of Caribbean poetry, sensitivity and deep links to the rhythms of the people abound. These connections would not have been possible were it not for the innovative works of Kamau Brathwaite in 'Nation Language' as a means to psychic re-orientation. This premise underscores W. H. New's statement about the essence of linguistic creativity in the literatures of nations advancing against cultural and political oppression: "Literature which uses the actual language – the sounds and syntax – of the peoples, becomes, then, an arena in which the people's political and psychological tensions can find expression (305). In his poem "Cane", Brathwaite identifies his people's desire to rebel:

for too

long now we was 'fraid to speak
for too long frighten an' weak.

But the time is come

when you got to speak
when u got to face fac's
when u got to ax
for an answer
for we tired o' laws
that still sayin' 'No,
time isn't come yet'; (227).

Nation Language here is the medium of raising the consciousness of the people because Brathwaite desires to sing "... the songs of rebellion and revolution in the speech of his people" (June Bobb 123/24). Art sometimes offers a way of seeing reality which may be left out of account in other kinds of investigations. When a poet uses language in his works, he makes it his own. It is in this way

also part of the conscious process of repossession, especially in situations and societies where people suffer deprivation.

It is in the light of above premises that critics appreciate dialect as an aesthetics tool for the exploration of the socio-cultural history of the Caribbean. In the poem "Wings of a Dove" Brathwaite localizes the context of the poem in "ethnic terms" (Torres, 101). Here, the speaker identifies himself as Rastafarian. Herein, where the speaker recounts the experiences of his people (New World African), the text begins with stanzas spoken in Standard English, but as he reproduces the voice of what he calls "my people", the tone is heightened, and drastic changes occur in the morphology of the words:

Rise rise

locks-

man, Solo-

man wise,

man rise

rise rise

leh we

laugh

dem, mock

dem, stop

dem, kill

dem an' go

back back

to the black

man lan'

back back

to Af-

rica." (43).

Herein certainly is an instance of what Louis James refers to as Brathwaite's deliberate breakage and re-orienting of "the conventional English cadences", basically to

achieve the noble vision of reawakening readers' attention to "the cadences of Caribbean speech" (41). This practice has stylistic and thematic implications. In style, it presents language as being closer to the expressions and instincts of the folks; further from the standard forms of the schools and the upper class. Thematically, it insinuates that the folks utter their wish for liberation in more militant terms, than those in the higher sectors of society. The possibility of the switch in linguistic codes from Standard English to Creole forms in the quoted lines above signify the accentuation of the cultural markers, to emphasise the Caribbeanist's drive for identity and a backward glance for authenticity.

3. Conclusion

Caribbean forms of language are usually referred to as Creole or *patois* in the Franco- and Anglophone parts of the region. However, some writers such as Barbadian poet and critic Kamau Brathwaite, and the Jamaican

poet, Mutabamka prefer the term 'nation language' to *patois*, as the latter is sometimes perceived as derogatory and the language it designates as merely derivative of the standard language. Moreover, whereas Creole is spoken by white, mixed-race and black West Indians alike, 'nation language' mostly designates Afro-creole, focusing on the African heritage of the Caribbean. Since the grammar of creole or *patois* is different from that of the standard European languages, these new forms are now recognized as languages in their right, rather than 'dialects'. Creole is in this sense, no longer a "foreign anguish" but a mother tongue in the West Indies.

The fact that there are many forms of Creole indicates that it is not one monolithic language, but a conglomerate of dialects or speech patterns, ranging from Standard English to forms that use European words but have grammar structure similar to those found in West Africa. This range of speech patterns is often called the 'Creole Continuum.

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