

Ngugi wa Thiongo's Postcolonial Language

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### **ABSTRACT**

The purpose of this research paper is to explore how African writer Ngugi Wa Thiong'o establishes the relationship between the language and power. Ngugi, one of the most prolific of the contemporary Kenyan writers, has been an outspoken critic of colonial rule, Christianity and neo-colonial abuses of Kenyan authorities. Ngugi wa Thiong'o began his literary career in English, but then he resolved to reject English and write solely in Gikuyu, his mother tongue. This paper will highlight the grounds for his rejection of English speech and will explain why he switched to his native language Gikuyu.

He gives farewell to English as vehicle for his writing; he has started writing in Gikuyu and Kiswahili language. The choice of language and the use to which language is put is central to a people's definition of themselves in relation to their natural and social environment indeed in relation to the entire universe. Every language has a dual character; it is both a means of communication and a carrier of culture. The call for the rediscovery and the resumption of our language is a call for a regenerative reconnection with the millions of revolutionary tongues in African and the world over demanding liberation.

**Keywords:** Language, Postcolonialism, Conflict, Neo-colonial

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Post-colonial writers can play a key role in bringing unity among the people. Colonised people are emerging out of the slavery and inhuman behaviour that the colonisers had towards them; so the writers from these nations can encourage them and affirm them with a good and bright future by promoting unity. The writes can also remind them of their glorious history and the wonderful life they had before the colonisation and thereby help them to remove the inferiority complex infused by the colonisers. Thiongo is an internationally acclaimed African writer and human rights activist. Kenyan Novelist, his novels particularly, seem to present a consistent revision of thought, style, content and characterization. He is a radical thinker and commentator, Ngugi was a progressive and socially engaged intellectual. He has frequently been regarded as a likely candidate for the Nobel Prize in Literature. His works stand out for their unequivocal criticism of colonialism, the subjugation of African cultures by the imperial west and the oppression of the African masses by the ruling neo-colonialist elite. Post-colonial literature is a synthesis of protest and imitation. It blends revolt and conciliation. This duality permeates its stratagem, its style, and its themes in a manner that is not always readily perceptible to critics. This has practical didactic implications for the contemporary literary endeavor in Africa. The central concern of this article is to assess the extent to which African protest literature seems to have imitated European and colonial literary discourse in matters such as thematic concerns, aesthetics, and methodology. The relationship of imitation, exchange, and hybridity is presented with the view to highlighting the thematic, methodological, and aesthetic differences between some aspects of African literature on one hand and the Western literary tradition on the other. The concept of African literature has been intensively debated among African writers. Among the most popular topics are the imposed influence of European elements on Africans writers and the usage of English and other national languages when writing about African culture and literature. The official language of Kenya is English, the European language of the former colonial power. Its use is limited to the educated upper class. English is considered by many as the literary language of the country. Ngugi laments that Kenyan languages were associated with negative qualities of backwardness, humiliation, inferiority and under development. In this way, English becomes the measure of a child's progress and the ladder of formal education. This systematic suppression of African languages and literature and gradual elevation of English is leading them to holocaust as "school trains him to look down upon what is national and Kenyan, and to look up to what is foreign even it is anti-Kenyan" (Ngugi, Writers 43). As Ngugi puts it, "language and literature were taking us further and further from ourselves to other selves, from our world to other worlds...English became more than a language: it was the

language, and all the others had to bow before it in deference” (Ngugi, Decolonizing 11). Ngugi wants African children to transcend colonial alienation by linking themselves to their mother language. He thinks that separating an individual from the native language is like “separating the mind from the body so that they are occupying two unrelated linguistic spheres in the same person. Ngugi categorizes the African writers writing in English as “petty bourgeoisie” who are the product of colonial education. No doubt, their literature helped the petty bourgeoisie to confront the racism of Europe and explain Africa to the world from a new perspective. Their literature is based on the anti-colonial, anti-imperialist upheavals and political awakening and on the proverbs, fables, stories, riddles of the peasants. African literature has grown out of the rupture created within our indigenous history and way of life by the colonial experience, which is naturally expressed in the tongue of our former colonial rulers. The concept of African literature has been intensively debated among African writers. Among the most popular topics are the imposed influence of European elements on Africans writers and the usage of English and other national languages when writing about African culture and literature. The official language of Kenya is English, the European language of the former colonial power. Its use is limited to the educated upper class. English is considered by many as the literary language of the country. African literature has grown out of the rupture created within our indigenous history and way of life by the colonial experience, which is naturally expressed in the tongue of our former colonial rulers. It is through the African languages that the African writers can reconnect themselves to the revolutionary traditions to defeat imperialism and bring socialism. So, Ngugi emphasizes that no foreigner can develop African indigenous languages and that it is not possible to develop an African culture through borrowed tongues. Only by returning to their roots, the Africans can create the patriotic African literature that would be the envy of many foreigners and the pride of the Africans.

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