

## THE PIDGIN LANGUAGE AS A TOOL FOR POETIC REFLECTIONS IN ECHEZONA IFEJIRIKA'S *SONGS OF INITIATION*

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### Abstract

This work focuses on how Echezona Ifejirika uses Pidgin English in his text, *Songs of Initiation*, to depict some societal ills and follies in the Nigerian system. These societal ills, such as fraud, joblessness, squandering and misuse of public funds, economic and political instability, poor standards of education, examination malpractice, embezzlement, bribery and corruption, sheer wickedness, and other forms of irregularities, are frowned upon by the poet, primarily to correct them through his work. The poet's use of an alternative language reflects his opinion that poems can also be written in a manner that can be easily understood by ordinary people and not only by the elites in society. This implies that the research exposes the poet and his poems to a wider audience with a view to sharing the contents and lessons of the poems. The theoretical framework of this work is sociological theory because of the contemporary issues discussed in the text. The data for this study were obtained through literary research from different textbooks, library materials, journals, dictionaries, internet sources, and the primary text, *Songs of Initiation*. However, this work aims to caution society through Pidgin English poetry, while also advising Nigerian politicians who have taken governance as an avenue for private enrichment to retrace their steps.

**Keywords:** Pidgin, Society, Poem, Follies, Alternative, Layman

### Introduction

The efforts by Nigerian writers to correct the leaders' attitude, the citizens' mindset through the use of criticism, irony and satire cannot be ignored. They do that through their literary works because they sit at the forefront of the social conditions bothering in mind of their people thereby agitating for positive change and social reconciliation. Ernest Emenyonu agrees with that when he says that "a writer is the eye of his people" (3). Charles Nnolim asserts that "every generation of writer confronts the burning issues in his society and wrestle with them" (10). Ngozi Chuma-Udeh is of the opinion that "a writer is a developer of alternative rules, norms, and the procedures as well as avenues through which positive transformations can be engineered" (7). With the opinion of the above scholars, one strongly agrees that a writer has a lot to do in the society he finds himself.

However, poets throughout history have waged war social ills and crime against humanity in their society through their poems. In every corrupt society, poets find their voice and write revolutionary poems on papers, walls, and any place where the message of hope could be communicated. Echezona Ifejirika belong to the third generation poet who writes on societal decay. The poet witnessed the decay and putrefaction that are evident in the political system of the country. Social vices much as fraud, corruption, bribery, nepotism, over ambitious, tribalism, and so on have bedeviled the contemporary Nigerian society. These vices have eaten deep into the fabrics of the nation and because of that Echezona Ifejirika captures them in his alternate language poems: *De Thing Wee De Worry Nigeria and Wetin We Dee Pursue*.

Pidgin English springs from the template of grammar, syntax, idioms and semantics of African languages, especially West Africa. As such, it is natural suited to nourish and express the African thought patterns without adulteration. It is best suited to retain the open-mouthed laughter, the throbbing drums, the alluring dance, the proverbs, the ancestral spirit and the folktales, indeed all the natural and social forces that enable Africa to survive the pressures under which some races crumbled and disappeared. Pidgin English is the language of West Africa urban cities where millions of Nigerians from various linguistics backgrounds dwell on eke out a marginal living. It is obviously the high way to Nigerian urban poor audience most of whom do not know how to read and write.

Again, Nigerian Pidgin is English based Pidgin and Creole language spoken as a *Lingua Franca* across Nigeria. The language is commonly referred to as "Pidgin or Broken". It is distinguished from other Creole language since most speakers are not true native speakers, although many do learn that at early stage. It can be spoken as a Pidgin or Creole or a decreolized acrolect by different speakers, who may have switched over to these forms depending on the social settings. Variation of pidgin are also spoken across West Africa countries such as Sierra Leone, Ghana, Cameroon, etc. Pidgin English despite it common use throughout the country has no official status.

According to Peter Onwudinjo, "Pidgin poetry yields it meaning without undue tasking of the intellectual resources" (vii). Just as the rendition of a folktale captures the attention of an audience in the hands of an experienced contour, so does a creative performer of Pidgin poetry captures the attention of the listening audience in nooks and cranny, simply because Pidgin is so powerful and reaches a wider local audience. Pidgin poetry is aesthetically refreshing. Tap on a clip to paste it in the text box. The thrust of this work is to prove a point that Pidgin is as rich as standard English in terms of expression. It is also a known fact that Pidgin English has gained wider acceptance in Africa. This is because Pidgin English is more original to Africa and therefore, communicates to the African people. Time has passed when academic works cannot be written in Pidgin English especially in the area of poetry. One can say that today, poems in Pidgin English and legitimate literary creations in the most African societies because Pidgin is an acceptable vehicle for social criticism. It is also a bold step that ideological poets promote Pidgin English poetry in contemporary African Literary works. Of course, poems in Pidgin have their own aesthetics. The digression of some ideological poets who see Pidgin as a good medium to bring literary pieces to the masses is a credit to them because they are bringing poetry to the grassroots.

This work is viewed through sociological theory in that it captures contemporary issues which the poet, Echezona Ifejirika is reacting to. The poet portrays the social problems of his society through his writing. Of course, a writer is a member of his society; and cannot be excluded from it. Therefore, a writer stands as a social critic, advocate and agitator of any given society he finds himself. The relationship between sociological approach and literature is inseparable since it is the society that provides the materials which literature uses to analyze the social ill and follies in the area of socioeconomic life of the masses. This approach views a work of art on its premise of social determinants and these determinants could be economical, political, religious, cultural and so on. Sociological theory emphatically views the writer as a social crusader and mobilizer, and in doing so, does it accurately with the historical values of the society from which his theme emanates.

#### **Echezona Ifejirika's Pidgin Poems: "De Thing We De Worry Nigeria" and "Wetin We De Pursue" as Tools for Social Criticism and Poetic Expression**

One of the most importance of poetry in general is the ability to criticize and expose the negative practices by man. According to Echezona Ifejirika, poems are meant for criticism when he succinctly states that:

Poems apart from the Aesthetic beauty, often achieved through the application of figures of speech the capability to criticize, satirize, and expose Man in the society. The essence of the criticism and exposure is not just to mock but to correct man and reconcile him why his environment, his fellow man and his creator (185).

The above statement shows that poetry corrects man in his society and at the same time acts as a medium of social criticism. Echezona Ifejirika who is a Nigerian poet is aware of social and economic situation in Nigeria and so satirizes such in the poem: "De Thing We De Worry Nigeria". The poet talks on the natural resources that are overflowing in Nigeria and cries over the mismanagement of their dividends as he laments that:

De thing wee de worry Nigeria  
No bi say im no get mineral Resources bokwu bokwu  
No bi say Nigeria no get  
People wee sabi book well well  
De thing wee de worry Nigeria  
No bi say God no bless her  
With plenty level land plus good weather  
De trouble for Nigeria no bi  
Earthquake plus landslide  
No bi say Nigeria no get seaport  
Plus water ways  
De thing wee de worry Nigeria  
Na greed plus corruption  
By people wee dee up and down (lines 1-14).

The above lines show that the poet acknowledges the presence of great intellectuals in the country, good weather conditions and viable lands and good water supply. In the poem, the Echezona Ifejirika also points out at the seaports that are products of the country's waterfront and concludes that it is a credit on the country's part. Despite these, the poet frowns at the country's inability to harness these gifts and say that it is caused by greed as in line 13. He also talks about bribery, corruption from individuals, government, politicians and every sector in our country Nigeria. The poet talks about the people that have churches, and the attitude of their leaders. He calls them "unrepentant greedy masters" (line 16). To he, they are unrepentant greedy souls who extort their members under the umbrella of pastor hood. The poet also laments over the political system and really frowns at the

politicians who share the care among themselves without putting the masses in consideration. As he succinctly captures it thus:

People wee dee politics  
Greed begin their surnames  
People in government don follow  
Greed make am private property (17-20).

Here, the poet criticises civil servants who have turned public property to private business. They falsify their ages and present false affidavit, these people hardly retire to create room and opportunities for the younger ones to come up. The education sector is not left out, according to Echezona Ifejirika, is also eaten by the cankerworm. The failure of the public has given rise to so many private schools that are not often affordable to the general public especially, the "common man" in the society. When the poet says that they eat bribe from beggars, really shows how bad it is, hence the satirical statement. Indeed, the havoc has gone a long way in devaluing education in the country and the poet puts it thus:

People wee de run school  
Chop bribe from beggers,  
People wee dee police,  
Wear corruption for uniform,  
People wee dee army  
Don forget their guns plus uniform  
De eye Aso Rock(lines 21-27).

The above lines show that corruption has eaten deep into the fabrics of our society and it is the root of our country's problem. Here, it is observed that the "uniform men" are polluted and corrupt as they have always turned the roads to money collection centers. While some see the twenty naira as a national tax and go as far as shooting people who refuse to pay it others like the army prefer politics to their army job because of the quest for money. The poet concludes that all these boil down to greed.

Oil sector is not spared, Echezona Ifejirika says that Nigeria is blessed with crude oil yet it is not being used well. He further points out that the workers only enrich their pockets thereby betraying the trust of the masses as he states thus: "De enjoy life so tee God, Begin jealous dem" (29-30).He also ridicules the power supply system in the country. It is a known fact that the acronym that represents its name has changed several eral times yet, they are unable to supply power instead the citizens are living in darkness and the poet states thus:

People wee dee power holdings  
Dem de hold power true true  
De collect people money  
De supply plenty darkness, (lines 31-34)

Here, the poet shows that the bills go on not minding whether they supply the power or not. The activity of Nigerian judiciary is being exposed too. To the poet, Nigeria Judiciary is not even independent because of the attitude of denying justice to the poor. They are corrupt as they collect bribe from their rich clients as against the poor. And so, the poor clients suffer injustice because they cannot afford to pay. The poet decries that: "Democracy don become democrazy"(line37), due to the fact that things are not going properly.

Another epidemic is bad government as such resulting in the suffering of the masses. According to Echezona Ifejirika, the leaders tell many lies to the citizens and the people have no words of their own. He rightly captures it thus:

De leaders de tell plenty lies  
To the people dem de lead  
De people go praise leaders  
For morning  
For evening dem go shout  
"Remove them"  
"Crucify them"  
De people no get shame  
Dey just de follow de wind (lines 40-48).

The above lines show that the leaders are not truthful to their people. And the citizens in turn have no say of their own. They are just like pendulum, following the wind which ever direction it goes and it is a problem on its own.

They elect the leaders today, tomorrow, they will shout remove them. To this end, Echezona Ifejirika says that the problems of Nigeria are many such as bribery, corruption plus fellowship and so on.

### **Wetin We Dee Purse**

Indeed, the quest for money, power and fame has turned Nigeria to behave inhumanly. The poet through this poem frowns at the inappropriate ways and illegal practices people indulge in order to acquire money. Unfortunately, majority of our youths and adults are caught in this web. The act is serious that the poet captures it thus:

Early in the morning, late at night,  
People go de waka up and down.  
Some de run, some de walka  
Some motor de go up, some de come down  
Some de walka slow, some de walka fast.  
Some de too serious to respond to greetings, (lines 1-6)

The poet shows that every is always on the move for one thing or another. Even children go to school. Adult are either in the market or at the office because they want to accomplish something as Echezona Ifejirika succinctly puts it "We know de thing wee dem de pursue, or de thing wee de pursue them" (lines 12-13). Though that thing has no leg, no hand, it flies without wings, it has no mouth but it speaks loudly in the occasion (power of money)

He goes further to portray some politicians who see the government house and governance as their prerogative. They see politics as do or die affair as they want to remain in power till death. With this ideology, he talks about the problems money has cause in the society, in different families between husbands and wives, friends and even in the churches as he says thus:

De thing the cause trouble everywhere  
In de cause trouble between husband and wife  
I m de bring wahala for friends  
I m de bring division and palaver for churches,...  
I m de make sane man sleep with mad woman  
I m de make girls sleep with dogs  
I m de make man kill his mama and papa  
De thing de make President die for office  
De thing no bi beer, no bi wee, wee  
But I see too alcohol (lines 26-40).

The above shows the practical money rituals of all sorts people engage in order to acquire wealth. All of which the poet sees as irritating because these are not acceptable and do not conform to society code of conduct. Cases of armed robbery have also escalated for the same reason. The youths travel abroad and indulge in all manner of atrocities for the same reason of which most at times create negative impressions of our country. He goes further to say that the pursuit of money makes people behave wild and insane once they get it as he rightly puts:

Im go shift land boundary  
Give am to a pastor im go pray for you  
Give the thing plenty to a mother  
Im go give im daughter to a thief  
Give am plenty to a judge,  
Im go turn justice upside down...  
Give am plenty to a teacher  
You go be first for exam wee you no take (lines 65-85).

The poet did not mince words in condemning all atrocities and behavioural ills in the country through his poems. He also wants every individual especially those holding one position or the other that people are watching and seeing every of their action. This awareness is basically for criticism. To this end, he advocates for a better Nigeria.

### **Conclusion**

The poems of Echezona Ifejirika show that the poet uses Pidgin English as an avenue for the expression of emotions through which he critiques and corrects society. Echezona Ifejirika touches on all sectors of society, pinpointing the anomalies occurring within them. This is because he desires positive change. To him, a new dawn is possible if only people behave accordingly. Wealth is good, but the wrong pursuit of it is discouraged.

Again, the poet follows the tradition of alternative poets who believe that the purpose of poetry is to be understood and enjoyed by all and sundry. Obviously, Pidgin English in this work has served as a tool for social criticism. It has created awareness among the masses about the issues affecting the country.

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