

PIDGIN, 'BROKEN' ENGLISH AND OTHERING IN GHANAIAN LITERATURE

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Abstract

*This paper looks at the manner in which speakers of pidgin and 'broken' English are 'Othered' in four Ghanaian literary texts: Kobina Sekyi's *The Blinkards* (1918), R.E. Obeng's *Eighteenpence* (1942), Cameron Duodu's *The Gab Boys* (1968) and Kofi Anyidoho's *Earthchild: with Brain Surgery* (1985). In these works, ethnicity, education and class status are tied to language, so that the (usually male) speaker of pidgin and 'broken' Ghanaian English (GhaE) is cast as the 'Other' whose use of non-standard English prevents him from entering the mainstream of Ghanaian society. The non-standard English speaker typically comes from a background that is geographically and culturally removed from southern Ghana (for example, he may be a foreigner or of northern Ghanaian extraction), and is often a semi-literate or illiterate servant attempting to communicate with his 'master'. He is childlike, inarticulate, lacks intelligence and/or refinement, and is generally an object of ridicule. Thus a social boundary is created based on these linguistic representations of belonging and exclusion, many of which border on cultural essentialism.*

Introduction

This paper focuses on the negative 'Othering' of speakers of pidgin and 'broken' English in the Ghanaian imaginary. In the four texts that we examine— Kobina Sekyi's *The Blinkards*

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(1918), R.E. Obeng's *Eighteenpence* (1942), Cameron Duodu's *The Gab Boys* (1968) and Kofi Anyidoho's *Earthchild: with Brain Surgery* (1985)— Standard English is the preferred variety and is spoken by those with Western education, while pidgin and 'broken' English are undesirable forms associated with the illiterate, who are also of the low class. The speaker of Standard English is credited with linguistic and cultural competence as well as refined manners. By contrast, the (usually male) speaker of non-standard English lacks intelligence, competence or refinement. He is inarticulate, a source of humour and an object of ridicule—he is the Other. He is alienated or excluded from "mainstream" society because he is "defective" in his use of English and is thus a threat to the "desirable" way of speaking the language.

Although linguistic alienation of the non-Standard English speaker is the most obvious level of "Othering" in these literary texts, it seems to be inherently linked to a deeper level of exclusion which is based on class and ethnicity. Thus, in all instances the illiterate or semi-literate pidgin speaker is either of northern Ghanaian extraction or a foreigner; he is typically a low class worker or a servant whose "master" is a European or a southern Ghanaian who speaks Standard English. In the world of these texts, ethnicity, education and class status are tied to language.

It is therefore worth noting that all the four authors whose works are dealt with in this paper are Western educated men from southern Ghana. Their background varies, as do the texts they have created, but the authors have some aspects in common. They all write in English. Three of them have an Akan dialect as first language: Sekyi has Fanti as first language, Obeng and Duodu have Twi as first language and Anyidoho has Ewe as first

language, but he also speaks Twi. Kobina Sekyi was a lawyer in Cape Coast, a coastal Fanti-speaking town. He had been called to the bar in Britain. In Cape Coast he would have heard pidgin spoken by Liberian and Sierra Leonean workers who thronged the harbour as deckhands and were also employed as domestic servants.

R.E. Obeng, the author of *Eighteenpence* was a school master from Kwahu in the Eastern Region who first taught in Basel Mission schools in the Eastern Region and later joined the Government Teaching Service. He retired as headmaster of Juaso Boys' School, Asante-Akim, which he had started. Living in an inland Twi-speaking area, he would not have been exposed to much pidgin, but he was many times called in as translator in the colonial magistrate courts and would therefore have been familiar with the way the police spoke English when giving evidence. He would have heard escort policemen speak pidgin or 'broken' English. Obeng became a pensioner in the 1930s and that is when he started to write. He has written and published in both Twi and in English.

Cameron Duodu is a journalist from Akim in the Eastern Region, but a couple of generations younger than R.E. Obeng.

He worked as a journalist in the magazine, *New Nation* and later with *Drum*. He left Ghana when he was editor of *The Daily Graphic*, Ghana's biggest selling newspaper. Duodu would have heard pidgin spoken by escort policemen, and also by labourers in Accra, where he worked early in his career. *The Gab Boys* is his only novel. Duodu has worked as a freelance journalist from London since he was compelled by political reasons to leave Ghana in the early 1970s.

Kofi Anyidoho is Professor of English at the University of Ghana. He is a well-known poet and has published many collections of his poems. Anyidoho hails from Whetta in the southern part of the Volta Region. Whereas his earlier works have distinct socio-political themes, his recent collections have been more sociocultural in praise of his heritage and tradition.

As standard English speaking men who also wrote in English, the four authors possess the power of representation in fiction. As Rabinow (1986: 234-61) observes, “Representations are social facts”; they do not simply “reflect” existing realities but actively participate in the construction and understanding of such realities and the category of “reality” itself. What the individual can know is shaped by representation which provides positions and invites, “interpellates” the individual to locate himself/herself in them as a subject capable of cognition and consciousness of distinctions between the “self” and the “non-self”, the “same” and the “different”. To be in control of representation is therefore to be in a position of power; that is, to be in control of the production, promotion and circulation of subjectivities. In the southern Ghanaian contexts represented in the literary texts under study, English is the means for the manipulation of power and relative social status. In these texts the “self” and the “non-self” are mapped onto the positions of the privileged and the marginalised, the master and the servant.

In short, unlike the standard, to which everyone should aspire, pidgin is spoken by marginalised groups. Pidgin used to be called Kru Brɔfo in Ghana, that is, the English of the Kru people who were itinerant labourers from Liberia, and who did menial jobs in the urban centres and also worked on the cocoa farms.

Pidgin has always been regarded as substandard and a distorted approximation to a standard, and anything short of Standard English [SE] is not considered worthy of the printed page in Ghana. Boadi (1971:52) is thus right when he observes that “Pidgin very seldom occurs in written form in Ghana.”

Yet, as can be seen from the literary texts examined here, pidgin and broken Ghanaian English have appeared in Ghanaian literature since before Independence in 1957. Ghanaian fiction has, however, not raised the status of pidgin; instead, it has reinforced negative attitudes towards pidgin and its speakers. The general Ghanaian attitude to speakers of pidgin is also captured in Ama Ata Aidoo’s short story, “In the Cutting of a Drink”, where the illiterate male narrator refers to pidgin as “that kind of white man’s language which everyone, even those who have not gone to school, speak in the city” (Aidoo, *No Sweetness Here*, 1970:35).

This type of linguistic “Othering” in itself is not a new phenomenon in literature. For example, white American writers like Mark Twain, Joel Chandler Harris and Thomas Nelson Page deployed “Negro dialect” as a sign of stereotyping. However, such Othering does not typically occur with regard to pidgin and ‘broken’ English in the literatures of Africa and the Diaspora. Indeed, in fictional works across the Black Atlantic, and also in politics and the media, pidgin and ‘broken’ English tend to be valorised. Nigerian pidgin literature and the Jamaican dub poets are cases in point (see also Ezenwa-Ohaeto, 1994; Joseph McLaren, 2009). As Ezenwa-Ohaeto (1994: 48) has noted in a discussion on Nigerian fiction, pidgin is not only used to create humour and demonstrate wit, but also, and more importantly, to “enhance the creative focus of the work”. Similarly, in a paper titled “African Diaspora Vernacular Traditions and the Dilemma

of Identity”, McLaren (2009: 104) observes that for the Jamaican dub poets “Africanized” English is a libratory voice for the dispossessed.

The representation of non-standard English speakers in the Ghanaian fictional texts differs markedly from that which pertains elsewhere in African literature and in literature of the Diaspora. In the Ghanaian literary texts examined in this paper, the portrayal of speakers of pidgin and ‘broken’ English suggests the crucial role that the language of representation plays in discursively assigning to a marginalized “minority” traits that are viewed with disdain by the “respectable” society of the dominant group. It is in this respect that the theoretical concept of ‘Othering’ formulated by Stuart Hall (2003: 258) becomes a useful analytical tool for reading the selected texts. According to Hall, Othering “is part of the maintenance of social and symbolic order. It sets up a symbolic frontier between the ‘normal’ and the ‘deviant,’ the ‘normal’ and the ‘pathological,’ the ‘acceptable’ and the ‘unacceptable,’ what ‘belongs,’ and what does not or is ‘Other’”.

In the four selected texts, the policing of language use by the Other reveals more about projections of the self than about the Other. By tying ethnicity and class status to language, all four texts take for granted the existence of a “mainstream” society consisting of educated standard-English speakers who originate from southern Ghana, a society from which non-standard English speakers are excluded. Further justification for the latter’s exclusion is provided by their being portrayed as inarticulate, as lacking intelligence and refinement, and therefore as objects of ridicule. In this context, and using Hall’s

conceptualization, pidgin and non-standard English represent the ‘deviant’, the ‘unacceptable’, what does not belong, the ‘Other’. The ‘Other’ is an unsettling reminder of the unsavoury part of the ‘self’.

In addition, if, as Said (1978) and Foucault (1972) have posited, the process of Othering is about knowledge, then in the texts we examine, it is the knowledge of the English language that signals power and serves as the instrument used to marginalise the Other. The ostracizing agent is a member of the dominant group, for our purposes the southern Ghanaian who sets the agenda for inclusion in a perceived educated southern commonality, and therefore also determines the basis for the exclusion, from this perceived commonality, of any speakers whose geographic origin can be considered as foreign, or whose inability to conform to the Anglophone way marginalises them and makes them objects of derision. The colonial mindset of class and social structure, as revealed in the educational system where English is accessed, has permeated Ghanaian middle class attitudes and is given legitimacy in Ghanaian literature. “What, after all, is an education system, other than a ritualisation of speech, a qualification and a fixing of the roles for speaking subjects, the constitution of a doctrinal group, however diffuse, a distribution and an appropriation of discourse with its powers and knowledges?” (Foucault, 1972: 251).

What we call pidgin in Ghana is a West African Pidgin; its substrate is Kwa and its superstrate predominantly English. It has two distinct manifestations: GhaPE (Ghanaian pidgin English), as described by Huber (1999), and Student Pidgin (SP) as described, for instance, by Ben Forson (1996, 2008). Huber (1999: 140) refers to SP as an acrolectal manifestation of GhaPE. These two varieties serve different functions: whereas GhaPE is mainly spoken as a contact language in multilingual urban settlements, SP is a sociolect spoken by predominantly male

students in secondary and tertiary institutions. Whereas GhaPE is a low prestige code, SP is an in-group variety spoken by a defined age-group. SP is prestigious because of the status of its speakers, though GhaPE is still largely an ‘inferior’ language.

Broken English is defined by Fergusson and Debose (1977) as short of target and described by Criper (1971) as Type IV in her classification of Ghanaian English. We use the term ‘broken Ghanaian English’ to indicate an interlanguage short of target, as ‘brokenness’ in English’ (Huber and Görlach, 1996:239). Broken English lacks the structure and stability of pidgin.

Ghanaian English can be defined as a New English as described by Platt, Weber and Ho (1974), a member of the Outer Circle as described by Kachru (1984), and according to Schneider’s (2003) Dynamic Model, in the process of Nativisation. Based on evidence from some of the texts we are looking at in this paper, it can be argued that Ghanaian English is a variety that has been in the making for well over a hundred years. Even today many Ghanaians will not easily acknowledge that the English spoken and written in Ghana is a distinct variety. For a very long time Ghanaians prided themselves on speaking what was called Standard English and anything else was considered unacceptable, although definite characteristic features have now been identified to systematise the variety spoken and written in Ghana. These perceptions about English in Ghana help to explain attitudes towards ‘broken’ English and pidgin.

Huber (1999: 159-160) argues that one of the causes of the considerable stigma attached to pidgin in Ghana is that it has been associated with non-indigenes, outsiders, who were marginal in Ghanaian society. This is because it is generally thought that an English pidgin did not develop independently in the Gold Coast

(Boadi 1971, Sey 1973, Kropp Dakubu 1997, Huber 1999). An English pidgin may not have developed because the coast was fairly monolingual. From Axim, near the Ivorian border to Accra, Fanti was the lingua franca; in Accra Ga was spoken and further east, Ewe. In addition, a Portuguese trade jargon appears to have been widely used as a commercial language along the coast (Christophersen 1953, Kropp Dakubu 1997).

Today GhaPE is essentially a hybrid of Liberian pidgin, Kru Brɔfo, and Nigerian pidgin. Kru Brɔfo sounded like English because it contained English words but was non-standard since it did not conform to the grammar and idiom of Standard English and because it was associated with low-class labourers, sanitation workers as well as casual labourers on inland cocoa farms who had had no formal schooling. And then there were probably at least two Nigerian pidgins. There was Abongo Brɔfo, the English of the military, as many Nigerians were found in both the army and the police. Then there was another kind of pidgin spoken by the many other Nigerians in Ghana, especially Ijaw, Yoruba and Edo traders. GhaPE thus developed from a mixture of the pidgins of illiterate foreign labourers (the Kru) and illiterate Nigerian men in uniform, and it is also often associated with uniformed men from Northern Ghana.

In the texts we are studying, lack of education appears to be central in typing the speaker of pidgin and broken GhaE, who is portrayed as a legitimate object of ridicule. We thus have an illiterate Kru ‘houseboy’ and a Kwahu farmer as pidgin speakers in Sekyi’s play and Obeng’s novel respectively. But in three of the works—*Eighteenpence*, *The Gab Boys* and *Earthchild*—a

Northern Ghanaian is also typically associated with pidgin. The first two works portray escort policemen as pidgin speakers, while the last features an illiterate, pidgin speaking Muslim. It is significant to note that southern Ghanaians typically conflate the northerner with the Muslim and associate both with non-standard English.

Such attitudes can be explained by looking at how Northern Ghana came to be associated with GhaPE and broken speech. During the later colonial period, i.e., in the early 1900s, the Gold Coast consisted of three distinct administrative areas: The Gold Coast Colony, Ashanti and The Northern Territories. These three areas were administered differently. Since the colonial administration viewed The Northern Territories as a hinterland void of natural resources worth exploiting, this vast area was on the whole neglected. Whereas, for instance, the colonial administration encouraged the establishment of mission schools in both the Gold Coast Colony and in Ashanti, this was discouraged and actually worked against in the Northern Territories, which today constitute the Northern, Upper West and Upper East regions. The policy was that the North was to be a labour pool for the South, to supply manpower for the building of the railways and labourers to work on cocoa farms. Men from the North were also taken into the army and police, and there carved a highly respected role for themselves by gaining the reputation of being highly disciplined and loyal in the execution of their duties.

The Escort Police are one outstanding group of policemen from the colonial era who are still remembered in Ghana. They were big men, mostly of Northern extraction. They had not been to school. The Escort Police wore a distinct uniform consisting of a red fez, a dark blue jersey, a heavy leather belt, dark blue shorts, puttees and highly polished black boots. One of their duties was to

escort prisoners from one station to the next or to court—a duty that put them in contact with the general populace. On the one hand, the general public feared them because the escort policemen were incorruptible—they are still remembered for following orders, as is evident in their frequently used phrase, “Massa say’ (*Gab Boys* 48). On the other hand, people sought to ridicule them because they did not speak English properly and also had an accent when they spoke the languages of the South. Today’s military and police barracks are still to a large extent pidgin speaking, even though most personnel have at least secondary education.

We first encounter non-standard speech in *The Blinkards*, a comedy set in Cape Coast among the Anglo-Fanti, a class of British trained professionals and others aspiring to associate with them. Sekyi chooses a ‘Krooboy’ as his pidgin speaker. That he is an outsider is apparent not only in his not speaking English or Fanti, but also because he does not have a proper name. The ‘Krooboy’ has been given the name Half-crown, intimating that he is merely half in worth when compared to a Fanti and that he has no identity that needs naming. A half-crown was two shillings and sixpence, suggesting that the ‘Krooboy’ was not worth much. As is typical of “Krooboy” of his time, Half-crown is a servant, although he works for the most sympathetic character in the play: Mr Onyimedze, a British trained lawyer.

Sekyi’s play purports to ridicule the group of Fanti who fail woefully in their attempt to ape the British in manner and speech, typified by Mrs. Brofosem. The antagonist of the play, Mrs. Brofosem becomes synonymous with this tendency, a character to be held up for ridicule both in the way she behaves and the way she speaks, for her English is not the best, and

her idea of the proper English mode of behaviour is totally skewed. Yet despite her affectation, Mrs. Brofosem is regarded only with bemusement by the educated class, and with admiration by the lower classes, particularly those among them who have not been abroad.

Perhaps it is plausible to see the lower class as the most ludicrous people in the play. Such a reading contradicts the view that the purpose of *The Blinkards* is to criticize Africans like Mrs. Brofosem who are not “at ease” in their own culture and who should be condemned for their ridiculous affectation. It opens a window for viewing Sekyi’s play as a work that is based largely on the assumption that there is nothing wrong with the European culture as a standard to be imitated—an assumption that would explain the negative attitudes towards speech and manners that fall short of the British standard.

Half-crown, a lowly “Krooboy”¹, is unable to attain the British standard. He is depicted as a character to be laughed at for being a nameless nobody with ‘a quaint lingo’ (135), but also because although the lowest of the low in Cape Coast society, he has assumed some of the attitudes of the Anglo-Fante. In the following excerpt, an attempt by Half-Crown to describe a male visitor comes out as a fascination with clothes and shoes:

Act I, Sc. 2. Mr. Onyimedze: What kind of man?

Half-crown: *E get plenty fine clo’es, big collar, boots shine all same glass. E shine for true.*

Mr. Onyimedze: Lawyer or big man?

In this, our first meeting with Half-crown, we can laugh at his description of ‘fine’ clothes, but then we also realise that he has acquired the Fanti attitude towards social graces as indices of

sophistication, which is really that of the British whom they so desperately attempt to copy. Half-crown announces the young man wearing his fine clothes and perceives that the man is not in the same class as Mr Onymedze (i.e., not a ‘big man’) because he works in ‘trade’ for Chutney & Co. (27). Moreover, as the name suggests, Chutney & Co is not a British company, but an Indian company. But Half-crown is illiterate, and as we demonstrate in the discussion of the other texts, illiteracy is despised in Ghana and indeed ridiculed.

Quite often, illiteracy is manifested as ignorance, or as an inability to make simple distinctions. For example, when presenting the visiting cards of two ladies to his “master”, Mr. Onyimdze, Half-Crown says “Two man come gi’ me dem book say make I gi’ you” (29). In Half Crown’s vocabulary, anything printed, even a visiting card, is a ‘book’.

He also conflates women with “man”, drawing from Onyimdze the expression, “You *are* droll”—the kind of reaction Sekyi likely expected from his audience. At other times, the drolity stems from Half-crown’s misuse of words. For example, in one of his utterances in Act II, Scene 3, ‘humbug’ is used wrongly and becomes ‘hambog’:

Act II, Sc. 3. {Door to the right opens and in rushes Nã Sompā struggling with Half-crown.}

Half-crown: *Massa live here. He no want hambog.* (83)

We meet Half-crown again in Act IV, Sc.1. where he announces the parson to Mr Onyimedze:

Half-crown: *God jujuman come, sah.*

Mr. Onyimdze: What are you talking about? What is “God-juju-man”?

Half-crown: *E be dem man way 'e get small collar for 'e neck, sah.*

Mr. Onyimdze: I see what you mean. So 'God-juju-man' is 'Minister' in your quaint lingo? *Tell him say 'Come'.* (135)

A reverend minister becomes '*God Jujuman*' and one wonders whether Sekyi ever heard this description used, as it sounds utterly contrived. Apparently, the lawyer can speak "the quaint lingo" as well—or is this an attempt by Mr. Onyimdze to treat his "servant" in a child-like manner reminiscent of relations between the colonial master and the colonised servant? It is also curious that Half-Crown's duties seem to revolve around his announcing visitors to his 'master', as again occurs on the arrival of a Fanti Chief with his retinue:

{Enter Half-crown with a visiting card}

Mr. Onyimdze: Well, Half-crown, why, do you knock?

Half-crown: *I knock plenty, you no hear. So I come gi 'you dem book.* (Handing card) (139).

Half-crown: *Plenty man come, sah. All get white cloth.*

Mr. Onyimdze: White cloth? Oh! Nana Katawerwa's people. Where are they?

Half-crown: *Three men live for clerk office. 'E lef' plenty man outside.* (140).

As with all the other visitors he tries to describe to Mr. Onyimdze, Half-Crown depicts Nana Katawerwa and his retinue in simplistic terms. Half-Crown, therefore, is that Other from whom the Fanti will do all to distance themselves because he is so like themselves: he is the character the Englishman sees when confronted with an African and this is the image the Fanti so desperately need to expunge.

In *Eighteenpence*, we find broken English with pidgin elements spoken by two characters. The protagonist, Akrofi, a hardworking young farmer, obviously illiterate, speaks broken GhaE with pidgin elements to the British horticulturist at Aburi gardens. In many ways we could describe Akrofi's speech as a basilectal GhaE.

"Sir," he began, "me I come again. I make fine plantation, I plant all trees you give me. The cocoa begin grow fine, but it spoil. Some small small animals e bite the trees, water from the trees dey come out. If I go say I go catch the animal, e fall down quick. If I look look, I no see am. This animal be plenty in my farm... Dey eat all the trees, they put plenty dust down. If I cut the tree to catch am, I see dey go up plenty that I must cut half of the tree away, and sometimes the tree fall down. Sometimes too, I no see the animal that bite the tree nor the one that live in the tree but I see that the leaves of some trees become red and fall down. So all my cocoa farm entirely spoil, I get debt plenty too much. People say I must leave the farm; some say I must work for some time. Me, I don't know what to do, so I come see you, and ask you what I must do." (97-98)

The excerpt is mostly broken GhaE with a few pidgin features, but Obeng is not consistent in the forms he has chosen. On the one hand he uses plural forms in nearly all the nouns, whereas his verb forms are pidgin and do not conform to accepted usage. Sometimes he also slips into Standard English:

I go catch (pidgin future time)

I no see am / I no see the animal (pidgin negative construction)

I don't know what to do. (Standard English)

This animal *be plenty* in my farm (common pidgin construction for 'a lot')

The cocoa *begin grow fine* (pidgin serial verb construction)
me I come again (Ghanaian English – left branching)

In Akrofi's speech Obeng also uses *Dey* for 'they' to indicate uneducated speech that does not use dental fricatives. The rest is mostly broken English with the exception of the use of plural noun forms – a feature which is neither pidgin nor broken language. The general impression is that the speaker has not been to school to learn how to speak English correctly. Akrofi's Othering is made all the more obvious by his being placed before a colonial horticulturalist, the Curator at Aburi Gardens. After Akrofi struggles to explain the problem on his cocoa farm to the latter, we are told "the Curator laughed", a laugh that the reader is expected to recognise and interpret as patronising. The idea here is that it is funny to hear people speak pidgin or broken English; that there is something childlike about the language, and about an adult sounding like a child learning how to speak. And so Obeng smugly allows Akrofi to be laughed at by a foreigner. Obeng has English, while Akrofi falls short.

At Obuasi where Akrofi had worked as a head gardener, before he turned to farming, the illiterate labourers revolt against him with:

"Hoooooi to-day be to-day..." (105) (pidgin copulative form)

Thus Obeng introduces humour even in a serious situation such as a workers' protest. And when the General Manager interrogates him, Akrofi speaks SE and pidgin and broken English:

"My master then asked me, 'have you worked at the pit before?'" (105)

This is Obeng speaking and using the GhaE *before* as *ever* [have you ever worked at the pit?]

"Yes, yes, Sir. I came here once and go home and come again." (105) [inconsistent verb - SE and pidgin forms in the same utterance].

"Did you work in the pit, blasting with dynamite when you were here at first?"

"No the one be my brother, he resemble me too much." (105) [*be* is pidgin as is *too much*]

"Have you never worked at these mines before you came to be my gardener?"

... "I say I come here before I came to work for you, Sir." [inconsistent verb forms]

"With what name did you work at first?"

"In my country I bear several nick-names, and those who knew me there used to call me anything they liked, Sir." (105) [here again Obeng changes to Standard English]

Akrofi is projected sympathetically throughout the novel, so one wonders why Obeng undermines him here and makes fun of him through his speech, except perhaps to suggest that as an illiterate, non-standard English speaking labourer he is the 'Other'. Akan society is very hierarchical, so that employed as a gardener ('garden boy' in the Gold Coast) for a European, Akrofi is obviously a nobody. Because he has no status he has lorded it over his underlings and they have revolted and caused his

downfall. In order to extricate himself from a difficult situation, he tells lies and contradicts himself. This scene is obviously put there as comic relief – Obeng in a way punishes his protagonist for his folly and allows him to be publicly disgraced.

The second pidgin and broken English speaker in *Eighteenpence* is an escort policeman, Ali Bida. The name suggests he is from the North and thus an outsider in the southern setting of the novel. Ali Bida is deranged and accuses a shopkeeper falsely of breaking the law in the sale of liquor. When asked to present a case in court, Ali Bida contradicts himself:

My name is Ali Bida. I am police constable (which he is not). For days ago, I went for patrol in the street where dam man sell rum. I saw two men go there buy rum. I look, look and saw plenty people go there buy rum. I count them and I see twenty-ten men. All buy rum from dam store. The time be twelve o'clock in the night. I have no witness, so I say I go buy some myself. I was in mufti. I go there and see a woman in the store. The man no day. I ask the woman to give me rum to buy. He (she) bring this one. He tell me say ebe ten shillings so I pay am ten shillings and take am for house. I report the case to the Softener (? Superintendent) who tell me say make me bring him for court. This all I know. ... (141).

"You lie, plenty dey for your store. Your wife took this one from a case and plenty there just now." ... (141-142).

Here we have an escort policeman who speaks a mix of pidgin and broken English with some SE in between. From the name we know he is not a southern Ghanaian, and his English indicates that he has not been to school. He can thus be ridiculed and as he contradicts himself, the verdict is that he is "medically unfit", and he is referred to as "the demented constable" (144). It must have been exceedingly lonely for these migrant policemen

to work so far from home and breakdowns did happen². The dislike Gold Coasters had for the colonial police is reflected in Obeng's creation of the policeman as ignorant, stupid, unreliable and unable to speak English properly. He is incoherent, not to be trusted and can therefore be ridiculed.

Policemen are also the speakers of non-standard English and therefore the subject of ridicule in *The Gab Boys*. The young narrator, Kwasi Asamoah, says of them:

We didn't respect such policemen for their authority did not go far even their dress showed it: whereas the government's 'general police' wore trousers, these fellows only wore shorts and puttees, like the government's illiterate 'escort police' ... (12).

In Duodu's novel, a man named Yaovi who is accused of stealing cocoa from his 'master's' farm is also portrayed as the Other because he is not a Ghanaian. He declares, "*I am an Ewe from Togoland who came to the Gocos to work ...*" (9), and following his speech,

There was a spontaneous outburst of laughter in the court for in spite of the change from the name 'Gold Coast' to 'Ghana', the thing hadn't reached this man. There he stood, a good year after independence, still saying his good old 'Golcos' (9).

The court proceedings on Yaovi's case are presented as one big joke, with the accused asserting that he is not guilty because he "took only very little of the cocoa. And also, I was not caught stealing it" (11). Here again we have an outsider who, due to his illiteracy, stands in sharp contrast to the gab boys (so called because they wear gabardine trousers) who consider themselves educated because they have completed primary school. Not

surprisingly, the Ewe man's statement is punctuated with laughter from a courtroom full of Akyem people. His story is as incoherent as it is incomprehensible; Yaovi constantly digresses from his report to make comments such as "a bicycle is the most treasured thing in Togoland" (11) and "we Ewes don't eat snails" (9), ramblings that suggest an unstable mind or ignorance about the law and court procedures.

Not only is this foreigner portrayed as an ignorant manual labourer, but also he is inarticulate, as he cannot pronounce words like 'Gold Coast' properly—a trait he shares with the escort police constable on duty in court who articulates 'order' as 'worler':

The constable on duty shouted 'WORLER! WORLER! in a heavy, bull-dog voice whenever our laughter bubbled to the surface, but so funny was this, his version of 'ORDER'! that instead of making us stop, it goaded us to laugh more. (10).

This policeman is described a few pages later as "the burly policeman of 'WORLER' fame" who, together with "a second, equally tough" one, is instructed by the Office Book Keeper to escort Kwasi Asamoah away because the latter had failed to pay his land poll tax (14). The narrator continues:

...as I have already intimated, their English was fabulous. But they were lovable only when you were looking at them from the right side of the law. If they caught you, they didn't fool around with you at all. They simply said: 'Master say, me plus you, come. You go go, or you no go go?' ... 'dis boy here, ino pay lampoll [land poll tax]. Make you take am for office.' (14).

Here we have an example of GhaPE – the future tense *go go*, the negative clauses '*you no go*' and the negative construction '*ino pay*', [d] for [T], '*i*' for 'he' and '*am*' for 'him/her'. Ironically, despite Kwasi's claim that the policemen's English "was fabulous", he goes on to deploy their 'inferior' language as a basis for an essentialist construction of their identity. They are the stigmatised Other, accorded no respect among the community of educated southern Ghanaians.

Then we meet Mr Akporley, the illiterate train driver who is also an Ewe from Togo. He is not exactly enthused about meeting our Gab Boy, Kwasi Asamoah, who has now been given a job as cleaner on his train:

Na who dis? ...Dey giiv you cleaner dey no tell you self make you see de man. Dey jost bring am.

We recognise Akporley's speech as GhaPE in its verb forms, lack of linking verb, and the use of *self* /sef/as complementiser. Mr. Akorley interviews Kwasi and later offers his view on Akim, the area the young man comes from. Not only does the train driver speak pidgin, but also he mispronounces Akim place names, so that, for example, Koforidua becomes *Komfredua*. Duodu also lets the speaker confound [r] and [l], which is not a feature of Ewe, but of Twi and Ga. Therefore, when, for example, he says '*diff lens*' instead of 'diffrens', such confusion seems intended primarily to attract ridicule.

Hoh, all de same, Akim people. Ibi people's heads dey de cot³. I stay for Komfredua for ten years; I sabe you peoples. You cot people's head like something."

“Don’t talk bolos for me. Asante and Akim, who diff lens dey for inside? Kibi, Komfredua and Kumaasi, ino bi people’s head dey de cot? All de same. (151)

Once again it is othering stereotyping a foreigner as speaking neither English nor the local language properly. While the speaker makes a valid point (that the Asante, Akim, Kwahu etc are Akan people), his thoughts are presented as based on ignorance and hasty generalisation (that these Akan peoples are “all de same” because they cut the heads of people who will accompany their dead chiefs to the next world). He does not distinguish between similarity and sameness on the matter of “head cutting” and seems unaware of this shortcoming. His speaking pidgin, a language associated with the illiterate, combined with his mispronunciation of words (“diff lens”, “Komfredua”), suggests that he is triply ridiculed: he is depicted as illiterate, inarticulate and incapable of making important distinctions. Yet later in the novel, this hard-working man is shown as a thinking man, a man who has opinions on the state of the country and one who shows kindness towards the main character who obviously considered himself superior to him earlier in the novel. It is therefore plausible to conclude that this mockery of the railway man is done simply to make the main character, a so-called ‘educated’ man who can only obtain work as a cleaner on a train, feel good about himself.

Political opinion on the state of the country is also evident in the final text discussed in this paper. The text is taken from Kofi Anyidoho’s collection *Earthchild* and is the testimony of the seventh witness in his poem “In the High Court of Cosmic

Justice”. The poem has seven witnesses who testify before the “High Altar of the Lower Deities” to ascertain who was behind the attempt to kill Kwame Nkrumah, when a bomb was thrown at him in 1963 at Kulungungu.

Anyidoho lets the seventh witness, Malam Mama Tulale speak pidgin. Our first reaction was to query why the poet put pidgin in the mouth of the Malam, when Hausa might have been his language of choice. But according to the poet, Malam Mama Tulale is a person in history, and he did speak some form of non-standard English at his trial. Anyidoho transmuted his interpretation of the Malam’s testimony into pidgin. The poem goes thus:

*Salaam aleikum
Me I be Malam
And Malam no fit tell lie
Som bigi bigi men – you sabi dem name
Dey dey for back
Dey put Malam for flont
Dey put hot bomb for Malam back pocket
So dey push Malam
and push Malam
and push Malam
Now see which side Malam Dey!*

*Our Bigi Man the Masita imsef
De one who now idie
Me I say ibi strong man proper
Dat bomb we throw ino fit killam*

*Some buga buga mans come take Malam for contaback
De bigi bigi afraidmens dem all run away
But the Bigi Masita imsef icatchi dem sharp sharp*

*he put dem all for detention
So today me Istand Isay
Lak somebody tell you say
our Masita im head I strong too mush
I putu plenty big people for detention for noting
Me I tell you say dat man im head ino collet
All dem be lie lie tief men
Ibi so so chop chop dem wan chop
And so derefore lak you ass me jus now
wetin we go do for Bigi Masita and im dead body?
I go say make you bringam home one tam
Me alone I fit digi digi hole and buryiam proper
Palavar finis.
Ibe mea. Malam Mama Tulale. (88-89)*

In a private conversation with Anyidoho in January 2012, he remembered that this was actually Malam Tulale's opening statement, but as is so clear from the malam's testimony, a malam is quite capable of lying. After this initial statement, Anyidoho creates the pidgin that he puts into the mouth of the malam, yet at the same time adhering to the essence of the testimony. Anyidoho could tell that he wrote this poem when he was still a student, at a time when it was still believed by many in Ghana that Malam Tulale was actually the person who threw the bomb that was meant to kill President Nkrumah. Today it is generally accepted that the bomb was thrown by somebody in Nkrumah's security apparatus. But when the trial of the then suspects began, this

insignificant Islamic cleric attained national notoriety by being accused of attempting to murder the president. He actually admits that he committed the crime and grandstands in front of his audience so that he 'has his day in court'. The Malam is thus a person in history whose testimony in court the poet interpreted but also transmuted and transliterated. Even though the Malam spoke his own type of English in court, short of standard, a broken variety probably close to pidgin, it is the poet's pidgin creation that is put in the mouth of the Malam.

The poet obviously shows disdain, not only for the man himself, but also for the religious function he proclaims. The Malam confesses to being used to commit a violent crime, yet he opens his testimony with *Salaam aleikum* 'peace be with you'. Thus, again, the pidgin speaker is ridiculed in Ghanaian literature. The tone of the poem is not just comic but crude, in that, as with Half-Crown in *The Blinkards* and Akrofi in *Eighteenpence*, the voice of an adult is rendered as inarticulate, repetitive, childlike and lacking the vocabulary necessary to narrate his evidence. Mama Tulale is an object of derision because even though he allegedly confesses to the murder, he claims other people, 'bigi bigi afraidmens' made him do it. As a child often refers to itself by its name – so the Malam has been assigned this mode of speech:

*And Malam no fit tell lie; Dey put Malam for flont ; Dey
put hot bomb for Malam back pocket ; So dey push Malam;
and push Malam; and push Malam; Now see which side
Malam Dey; Some buga buga mans come take Malam for
contaback.*

Not only does he use childish language, but also he speaks a pidgin that contains ludicrous features:

Dey put hot bomb for Malam back pocket; Some buga buga mans...; De bigi bigi afraidmens...; All dem be lie lie tiefmen.

As with Akporley in *The Gab Boys*, Malam Tulale confounds [r] and [l] so that ‘for front’ becomes ‘for flont’. Yet as has been noted before, this is not a feature of Northern speech; it is in Akan and Ga that /r/ and /l/ are allophones of the same phoneme. The effect is the association of this character with a child learning to speak. ‘Big men’ becomes *bigi bigi mens* and ‘soldiers’ become *buga buga mans*, with the Hausa word ‘buga’ [‘to beat’] used to suggest military brutality. While this Witness was supposed to be the voice of an ordinary man who claims he had been used by those who sought to assassinate Nkrumah, we end up laughing at him, belittling him. Foucault talks of “procedures for controlling and delimiting discourse” which “function as systems of exclusion.” (243). Anyidoho’s Malam is the pidgin speaker that attracts the most ridicule, a figure to be derided and made fun of. No other character who speaks non-standard English that we have encountered in the texts we are looking at has been so misrepresented, caricatured and lampooned.

It can be concluded that even though there are many Ghanaians whose only hope of reaching an audience beyond their traditional limited linguistic space lies in pidgin, the Ghanaian author has determined that these Ghanaians are not worthy to be heard. And shaming and ridiculing are the most effective ways of shutting them up.

Notes

¹That he is a foreigner is seen in the reference to Kru – i.e. he is from Liberia

²Mr. E.E. Obeng, a son of R.E. Obeng, could tell that there were cases of escort policemen who had psychological problems and that often this condition was exacerbated by excessive use of alcohol. There was also excessive pressure on both the policemen and the soldiers because the police barracks were not built to accommodate the families of the men. It was not till 1920s that accommodation was provided for the families of policemen or that their wives were allowed to stay with them.

³The reference here is to murders in the form of beheadings that occurred at Kyebi in Akim Abuakwa in the 1940s in connection with the death of the Okyenhene, Ofori-Attah.

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