

## ABSTRACT

The dominance of European languages in African literature has been a persistent and controversial issue in African literary discourses. However, writers and critics have generally focused on the relative merits and demerits of writing either in a European or an indigenous African language. This study takes a different dimension. Defining language as an epistemological code that reifies the manner in which people view their world, the study examines Ngũgĩ wa Thiong'o's experimentation with language and narrative and the effect of Gĩkũyũ oral poetics on his aesthetic quest. It shows how Ngũgĩ's aesthetic choices change at the interface of language and ideology as he seeks for an aesthetic of representation of a social reality that is constantly changing. The study is anchored on postcolonialism, Bakhtinian dialogism, and Marxist class analysis. It examines Ngũgĩ's formation as a writer in order to show the effect of Gĩkũyũ gnosis, Kenya's history and colonial culture – Christianity and the Great Tradition of English literature – as well as Fanonist-Marxist social analysis on Ngũgĩ's quest for an aesthetic that would adequately represent his social vision. This quest is traced from his English language writings to his Gĩkũyũ works. The study focuses on Ngũgĩ's involvement in the Kamĩĩĩthũ community participatory theatre project as an important threshold in his development as a writer and an intellectual. This is when Ngũgĩ came to appreciate the potentiality of Gĩkũyũ as a literary language, a development that finally settled the problem of language choice for him. Ngũgĩ's decision to write in Gĩkũyũ led to the production of highly innovative novels. My study of his Gĩkũyũ novels examines the aesthetic effects of the shift from English to Gĩkũyũ as his preferred literary medium. Literature is a cultural discourse. Writing in Gĩkũyũ privileges not just the language but also its inherent cultural and aesthetic codes. The study examines the issue of translation, showing the limits of the translatability of culture. Whereas conventionally translators have tended to be "invisible" especially when translating the works of such overarching authors as Ngũgĩ, the study highlights the agency of the translator and shows how a translator can shape the meaning of a text. In addition, the study shows that it is possible to translate indigenous African-language literature into English without compromising on the way Africans view and represent their world. While Ngũgĩ's advocacy of African languages has been viewed as somewhat inflexible, the study comes to the conclusion that whether writing in English or Gĩkũyũ, Ngũgĩ is a most pragmatic and creative user of language.