

Research
Based
Curricula



Sociolinguistics: The Study of Language in Society

Key Stage 4

English Language

Resource 2

2019



Resource Two Overview



Topic	About Language and Identity
GCSE Modules	Critical reading. Writing for impact.
Objectives	<p>By the end of this resource you will have:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">✓ A clearer understanding of an influential 20th century piece of postcolonial African literature✓ Considered the history and a critical reflection on the impact of colonisation on language, culture and people.✓ An enhanced awareness and knowledge of techniques of writing for impact
Instructions	<ol style="list-style-type: none">1. Read the data source2. Complete the activities3. Explore the further reading
Context	<p>Decolonizing the Mind - about the author:</p> <p>Born in 1938, Ngũgĩ wa Thiong'o is an award-winning, world-renowned Kenyan writer and academic who writes primarily in Gĩkũyu, one of the 2 official languages of the country. His work includes novels, plays, short stories and essays, ranging from literary and social criticism to children's literature. He is known for his work on the impact of colonisation on the languages and cultures of African nations. He is the founder and editor of the Gĩkũyu-language journal Mũtĩĩrĩ. He studied at Leeds University and wrote his first texts in English. He was initially called James Ngugi then he changed his name in 1967 and started writing in Gĩkũyu.</p>



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Decolonizing the Mind

Extract



I was born into a large peasant family: father, four wives and about twenty-eight children. I also belonged, as we all did in those days, to a wider extended family and to the community as a whole. We spoke Gikūyu as we worked in the fields. We spoke Gikūyu in and outside the home. I can vividly recall those evenings of storytelling around the fireside. It was mostly the grown-ups telling the children but everybody was interested and involved. We children would re-tell the stories the following day to other children who worked in the fields picking the pyrethrum flowers, tea-leaves or coffee beans of our European and African landlords.

The stories, with mostly animals as the main characters, were all told in Gikūyu. Hare, being small, weak but full of innovative wit and cunning, was our hero. We identified with him as he struggled against the brutes of preylike lion, leopard, hyena. His victories were our victories and we learnt that the apparently weak can outwit the strong. We followed the animals in their struggle against hostile nature— drought, rain, sun, wind— a confrontation often forcing them to search for forms of co-operation. But we were also interested in their struggles amongst themselves, and particularly between the beasts and the victims of prey. These twin struggles, against nature and other animals, reflected real-life struggles in the human world.

Not that we neglected stories with human beings as the main characters. There were two types of characters in such human-centred narratives: the species of truly human beings with qualities of courage, kindness, mercy, hatred of evil, concern for others; and a man-eat-man two-mouthed species with qualities of greed, selfishness, individualism and hatred of what was good for the larger co-operative community. Co-operation as the ultimate good in a community was a constant theme. It could unite human

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beings with animals against ogres and beasts of prey, as in the story of how dove, after being fed with castor-oil seeds, was sent to fetch a smith working far away from home and whose pregnant wife was being threatened by these man-eating two-mouthed ogres.

There were good and bad story-tellers. A good one could tell the same story over and over again, and it would always be fresh to us, the listeners. He or she could tell a story told by someone else and make it more alive and dramatic. The differences really were in the use of words and images and the inflexion of voices to effect different tones. We therefore learnt to value words for their meaning and nuances.

Language was not a mere string of words. It had a suggestive power well beyond the immediate and lexical meaning. Our appreciation of the suggestive magical power of language was reinforced by the games we played with words through riddles, proverbs, transpositions of syllables, or through nonsensical but musically arranged words.

So we learnt the music of our language on top of the content. The language, through images and symbols, gave us a view of the world, but it had a beauty of its own. The home and the field were then our pre-primary school but what is important, for this discussion, is that the language of our evening teach-ins, and the language of our immediate and wider community, and the language of our work in the fields were one.

And then I went to school, a colonial school, and this harmony was broken. The language of my education was no longer the language of my culture. I first went to Kamaandura, missionary run, and then to another called Maanguuu run by nationalists grouped around the Gikūyu Independent and Karinga Schools Association. Our language of education was

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still Gĩkũyu. The very first time I was ever given an ovation for my writing was over a composition in Gĩkũyu. So for my first four years there was still harmony between the language of my formal education and that of the Limuru peasant community.

It was after the declaration of a state of emergency over Kenya in 1952 that all the schools run by patriotic nationalists were taken over by the colonial regime and were placed under District Education Boards chaired by Englishmen. English became the language of my formal education. In Kenya, English became more than a language: it was the language, and all the others had to bow before it in deference.

Thus one of the most humiliating experiences was to be caught speaking Gĩkũyu in the vicinity of the school. The culprit was given corporal punishment – three to five strokes of the cane on bare buttocks – or was made to carry a metal plate around the neck with inscriptions such as I AM STUPID or I AM A DONKEY. Sometimes the culprits were fined money they could hardly afford. And how did the teachers catch the culprits? A button was initially given to one pupil who was supposed to hand it over to whoever was caught speaking his mother tongue. Whoever had the button at the end of the day would sing who had given it to him and the ensuing process would bring out all the culprits of the day. Thus children were turned into witch-hunters and in the process were being taught the lucrative value of being a traitor to one's immediate community.

The attitude to English was the exact opposite: any achievement in spoken or written English was highly rewarded; prizes, prestige, applause; the ticket to higher realms. English became the measure of intelligence and ability in the arts, the sciences and all the other branches of learning. English became the main determinant of a child's progress up the ladder of formal education.

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Activities



- Activities**
1. Re-read the extract. Highlight the following:
 - Interesting words or vocabulary you don't recognise
 - The following literary devices: rhyme, repetition, alliteration, lists
 - Short sentences.
 2. Look at what you have highlighted and annotate with thoughts about the following questions:
 - Why do you think the author choose to use these words?
 - The effect of these language devices on the reader
 - The effect of the sentence length on the pace and rhythm of the text
 3. Can you identify any other literary devices used in the extract? Name at least 3.
 4. What do you think the characters feel in the extract? Why do you think this?
 5. What other senses come into play?
 6. What pictures come into the reader's head and why?
 7. Reflecting on the author's style, his choice of vocabulary and language devices, and the rhythm and pace of the story, what do you think the author wanted to communicate to the reader? Was he is successful in doing so?
 8. Write a mini essay answering the following question:
How does this extract affect your ideas about English being the official language of so many countries around the world?
Consider this: based on the extract and on your own experience, how do you think this affected the first generations who had to study in English?

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Further Reading



Explore



1. Further reading:
<https://www.theguardian.com/education/2002/mar/22/tef>
2. Extension Work: Read the article and reflect on the issues raised in the article about the importance of Creole/Patois. Would you agree with the article? Discuss this with your classmates.



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