

**Language Ideological Practices in Samuel Selvon's *The Lonely Londoners*****Thomas Michael Abah<sup>1\*</sup>; Gbenga Julius Joseph<sup>1</sup> & Jonathan Luka Yiljep<sup>1</sup>**<sup>1</sup>Department of English, Federal College of Education, Pankshin, Plateau State, Nigeria**\*Corresponding Author**

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**ABSTRACT**

Language ideology is a social practice which has entered into literary discourse. This paper explores the theme of language ideological practices in Samuel Selvon's *The Lonely Londoners* in order to identify the language ideological blocs and describe the practice of language ideology in the text, as well as explain the link between language ideology and social identity. The paper adopted the descriptive research method and drew on corpus from the primary text, while discussion of the corpus was done using the conceptual framework of language ideology and M.A.K. Halliday's social semiotic view of language. The paper found two competing language ideologies being practiced in different ways by the participants and showed that there is a strong correlation between language ideology and social identity in the novel.

**Keywords:** *Language, language ideology, Samuel Selvon, the lonely londoners***INTRODUCTION**

The 'melting pot' of language use is discourse. Language and the various ways it is used, according to Akwanya [1], is best encountered in conversations and during interpersonal exchanges. This is because during conversations, speakers draw on the different language options available to them to express their thoughts. Some of these forms include the standard and the non-standard, slang, pidgins, creoles, archaism, jargons, esotericism, and the likes. The preponderance of all this allows discourse participants to choose from as many varieties as is available to them to achieve their communicative purposes in conversations.

However, the choices that people make between the various language forms or varieties during conversations depend on a number of sociolinguistic factors some of which include ethnic background, social class, education, age, sex, and so forth. For instance, Labov [2], in a study, observed some differences between the language choice of men and women; he found gender as a strong determinant of language choice and pointed out that men's speeches were often characterized by direct, non-standard and aggressive forms while those of women were less harsh, emotional and standard.

In another study, Okombo [3], after studying many age-related patterns in the use of Kiswahili in Busia town, found that the youths of the town preferred slangy and other sub-standard forms of Kiswahili while adults enjoyed some standard forms of Kiswahili. The study also revealed that the elderly preferred their vernaculars to Kiswahili. Thus, there were variations in the choice patterns among the three different age categories. Some discourse participants may also be of different ethno-linguistic backgrounds which normally reflect on the linguistic inputs of interactants in conversations.

In other circumstances, speakers' choice of language may not have anything to do at all with social variation but influenced mainly by some other underlying factors. One of them is ideology. Some speakers, before any conversation, have predetermined what language they want to use and how they want to use it. In other words, such speakers already have foreclosed ideas about particular languages, thereby making any attempts at correction a futility. This kind of attitude is usually caused by deep-rooted divisions along various lines.

The reasons underlying people's prejudices for particular types of languages by discourse participants sometimes get into the discourse of the society. It is as Leeuwen [4] states that social practices are represented as discourses in texts, which helps to clarify the relationship between micro and macro discourses. A lot of other real social practices, like language ideological practices, are also found in literary texts; however, language ideological practices in literary texts have been understudied. It is for this reason that the present study aims to look at language ideological practices by the discourse participants in Samuel Selvon's *The Lonely Londoners*.

**Empirical Review**

The *Lonely Londoners* by Samuel Selvon, over the years, has attracted numerous scholarly attentions from different parts of the world. In one of such articles, Mgbeadichie and Asika [5] examined Selvon's portrayal of the disillusionment

that followed the 'idealized London to the 'real' London. They argue in the paper that, despite the tone of disenchantment and despair that pervade the novel, it nevertheless, ushers in a way of acceptance and adaptation through which the immigrants will make the best out of London, thereby setting down the novel as one that facilitates and promotes the emancipatory narrative of black immigrants in London. According to the authors, there are both constructive and reformative images of London, in the sense that, its reflection of the London metropolis is its representation of London, while its construction of London is a message of regeneration, hope and social change, made possible through the characters of Galahad and Harris.

Ellis [6] explored the social and narrative construction of immigrant identity and diasporicity in *The Lonely Londoners* by relying on the scaffolding of the narratives by Moses and sees him as depicting the experience of movement as part of a larger lyrical analysis of exclusionary practices embedded in language practices that the men defy in order to claim London as home. They argue that the construction of London as a site in which inclusion is negotiated and the centre becomes the eccentric reverses conventional configuration of space whereby men's stories become the elocutionary point of view in which adaptation and contingency become the locus of life and living. According to her, the novel offers an aesthetics of modernity and migration located in speech acts and conclude that this literary creation of a diasporic imaginary calls attention to the conflicting ways in which the idea of home can be invoked.

In a review of *The Lonely Londoners* as a postcolonial novel, Dizayi [7] examined the plight of the Caribbean migrants in London where they feel despised and hated. The paper uses the frameworks of mimicry and hybridity by Homi Bhabha and explains how some of the characters use them as survival strategies in order to fit in well with the London society. The migrants, according to the paper, hybridize and mimic the native Londoners through which they are able to navigate the entire city and giving them access to places where they previously were not allowed.

Liu [8] also employed Bhabha's theory of hybridity to explain the formation of cultural identity and presented the dilemma in which the Trinidadians found themselves. He laid bare the confusion facing them as they struggle to hold on to the dignity of their own culture in the face of foreign cultural encroachment. According to him, the Creoles experience the process from identity crisis to the construction of hybrid identity and concluded that different cultures could influence one another. Hence, he suggested that the effective way to solve identity crisis is by building a hybrid or a space between the two cultures

Herald [9] argued in "The Black", Space and Sexuality that theoretical notions of resistance and agency are inadequate for considering the complexities of the treatment of Selvon's Trinidadian characters. He posits that to proceed from a binary logic of resistance and oppression could universalize those seen as oppressed and overshadow other important complications in the novel, pointing out that the novel grapples with individuals and liberal values. He adds that, though the title of the novel draws attention to a group, the narrative details the individual lives of its characters, which stand in tension with their supposedly shared group identity. While arguing that these categories should be interrogated alongside the novel's depiction of metropolitan geography, he suggests also that such analysis should be done by treating a key concept that might be taken for granted with the same complexity and diligence.

Sherwani and Dizayi [10] investigated the manner of resistance of the immigrants to cultural dominance of London society in *The Lonely Londoners*. Using the text as the primary source of data through the instrument of critical discourse analysis, they show that the immigrants demonstrate their resistance by using events and language. The paper points out that, though the novel is stained with countless situations of extreme racism meted out on the black people of London, this practice is counteracted by slow, but successful resistance as driven by the intellectual thinkers that have established solution to every problem. They conclude by urging the practice of raising one's voice in the most peaceful manner.

### **Statement of the Problem**

One has seen from the foregoing that issues bothering on racism, racial discrimination and resistance have been the dominating research attention on *The Lonely Londoners*. Previous studies on the novel could be seen to have been constructing a hybrid identity for the participants who are trying to fit in well with the native Londoners. In other words, most of the papers have used identity as their main framework to discuss the novel; a few, though, have also used critical discourse analytical tools. One needs to understand that the West Indies in the novel do not merely resist the attempt to suppress their homeland culture or build a hybrid from the native culture, but are also trying to project their own identities through other means, one of which is language. Regrettably, language ideology has not yet been thoroughly explored as a weapon of resistance in the novel, which is the strongest basis for this article.

### **Objectives of the Study**

The aim of this paper is to undertake a study on language ideological practices in Samuel Selvon's *The Lonely Londoners*, but the objectives of the study are:

- a. to identify the competing language ideological blocs in the novel;
- b. to describe the language ideologies of the discourse participants;
- c. to explain the link between language ideology and social identity in the text.

## Methodology

This paper is a description of textual evidence of language ideological practices among the characters in Samuel Selvon's *The Lonely Londoners*. To carry out the study, the primary text was read and issues bordering on the language used by the discourse participants were noted and underlined for analysis. The textual analysis is based on the three objectives stated for the study. Discussion of the corpus evidence combines the conceptual framework of language ideology with M.A.K. Halliday's social semiotic view of language use.

## Language Ideology

Ideology is a key concept in critical discourse analysis. Gal [11] explains ideology as meaning not only ideas, constructs, notions or representations, but also practices through which those notions are enacted. In other words, ideologies are also the practice of those ideas. According to Silverstein [12], speakers' awareness of language and their rationalizations of its structure and use were often critical factors in shaping the evolution of a language's structure, while Razfar [13] explains that when human beings use language, they are simultaneously displaying their beliefs about language as well as other worldviews. In his opinion, language ideologies make explicit connection between language use and the interests of the nation-state power structure.

Language ideology, according to Piller [14], is one of the sub-fields under critical analysis; the others being critical discourse analysis and language sociology. Many scholars [12,14,15] see the concept of language ideology as resulting from a narrow intellectual tradition, especially that of the North American Linguistic Anthropology, which had described the linguistic consciousness of the natives as producing nothing of analytical values. According to these authors, linguistics of the early and mid 20<sup>th</sup> century was only interested in the language system rather than the meaning produced by it. In their view therefore, political discourses tend to be monopolized by western social sciences which usually reflect hegemonic ideologies based on cultural and linguistic imperialism that view the European Standard languages of the former colonial powers as being superior to the indigenous languages in order to satisfy the European 'Project Nation'.

Piller [14] defines language ideology as beliefs, feelings and conceptions about language that are socially shared and relate language and society in a dialectical fashion. For Mallikarjun [16], language ideology is the intersection of language and human beings in a social world. This means that it separates human beings according to their language practices. Kroskrity [15] has equally explained that the whole notion of language ideology is meant to circumscribe a body of research which simultaneously problematizes speakers' consciousness of their language and discourse, as well as their personality in shaping beliefs, proclamations and evaluations of linguistic forms and discourse practices. Accordingly, he uses language ideology to mean beliefs, feelings and conceptions about language structure and use which often index the political and economic interests of individual speakers, ethnic and other interest groups and nation-states. In a nutshell, language ideologies are simply one's prejudices about particular language forms and functions.

Language ideologies serve a variety of purposes. As Piller [14] points out, social divisions are always multiple and operate along intersecting lines of gender, age, race and so forth. Hence he draws attention to the fact that the purpose of language ideologies is not really linguistic but frequently social. As I shall demonstrate shortly in this paper, language ideology is not only used to promote group interests, but also to assert social identity and show resistance.

Ideologies about language operate at different levels or fronts. For instance, at the global level, the concern is not so much on promoting a language dialect or varieties but rather about developing consciousness about a language generally. A global language ideology from a neoliberal standpoint seeks to promote the internationalization of particular languages such as English, French, Chinese, and so forth. The appeal is usually on the ideological ground that the world needs them for different reasons more than other languages. Therefore, an ideology of English makes a case for a global use of the language based on the belief that using it for international business and education would increase global interactions and stimulate competitiveness among the various actors [17].

At national levels, however, ideological lines are usually drawn between different language forms, leading to the emergence of exclusive and inclusive approaches. According to Beaugrande [18], the exclusive approach, in the case of English, advocates 'standard English' described as a form or 'a pure medium with stringent rules and precise boundaries'. In this situation, BBC English would be preferred to Scouse or Cockney. Hence any references to national varieties such as Nigerian or Indian English are usually negative in evaluation. In other words, they are 'non-authentic' varieties. This approach, according to Beaugrande, considers non-standard usages and variations as errors which are negatively impacting on the presumed standard language. Consequently, remedial measures such as teaching and learning of the language as TESOL and TEFL are embarked upon to improve the use of the standard.

On the other hand, an inclusive language ideology, according to Beaugrande [18], views a standard language as only a variety which is interrelating with other varieties. Hence, any non-standard usage is not an error but a variation which needs to be understood from its social, historical and geographical motivations. In this case the standards are understood to be undergoing 'diversification' due to the increase in the number of users. In the case of English, for instance, one can

only talk of “a family of ‘world Englishes’” which requires that the standard be taught as either a second or a foreign language to help people understand the family resemblances and peculiarities.

In a nutshell, language ideology refers to the positive and negative feelings or beliefs that show up between interlocutors during conversations. These feelings may be covert or overt, but the bottom-line is that users of language allow them to shape their behaviour when they are using or talking about other languages. I hypothesize that such feelings about language are also probable in Samuel Selvon’s *The Lonely Londoners* which is just the aim of this study.

### **The Social Semiotic View of Language**

Another analytical approach adopted for this paper is Halliday’s social semiotic view of language. The association of language with group or community dates back to early Saussurian linguistics in which Saussure [19] describes language as a ‘social fact’. In the social semiotic idea of language, Halliday [20] submits that language both symbolizes and expresses social structures and systems. He clarifies that, people in their linguistic exchanges, act out the social structure, affirm their statuses and roles, establish and transmit the shared systems of value and knowledge. Language, according to him, does not consist of sentences, but of texts or discourse. In the theory, Halliday distinguishes between dialect variation and register variation. The former, as explained by him, expresses the diversity of social structures, while the latter expresses the diversity of social processes.

Fairclough [21] clarifies that seeing language as a social semiotic means that whenever people speak or listen or write or read, they do so in ways which are determined socially. According to him, language varies according to the social identities of people in interactions, and according to their socially defined purposes, as well as their social settings and so on. Therefore, he argues that the relationship between language and society is not an external one but internal and notes that ‘even when people are most conscious of their own individuality and think themselves to be most cut off from social influences...they still use language in ways which are subject to social convention’. The social convention meant here refers to normative language behaviours according to social groups.

Fowler [22] succinctly states that to talk about the social semiotic character of language is to mean as well that ‘the individuality and the identity of the writer are irrelevant to the communicative situation’. The individual fades out and what is of utmost concern in this view is the social group. Therefore, it includes also the idea of ‘linguistic solidarity’ among the group members. It ‘marks a group’ as well as embodies ‘a characteristic representation of experience’ (p. 41). The solidarity, according to Fowler, is seen in how vocabulary patterns reflect the concerns of a register and its users and how it is characteristic of the meanings a culture assigns to itself and its components.

For Bezeemer and Jewitt [23], social semiotic is concerned with meaning makers and meaning making. The central thing in this definition is the negotiation of meaning through language. Thus, in their opinion, social semiotic studies the media of dissemination and the modes of communication that people use and develop to represent their understanding of the world and to shape power relations with others. To them, what Halliday means is that the semiotic resources of language are shaped by how people use them to make meanings, or the kind of social functions they are used for.

In summary, therefore, the social semiotic idea sets language down as a group property by which the *group* negotiates meaning in their day-to-day conversations. It is this view of language that this paper will combine with language ideological principles and apply them to the choice of linguistic forms by discourse participants in Samuel Selvon’s *The Lonely Londoners*.

## **DISCUSSION OF THE FINDINGS**

### **Language Ideological Blocs in the Novel**

Samuel Selvon’s *The Lonely Londoners* may be constructed in terms of a contestation between two linguistic groups; it identifies two dominant language standards that appear to be standing in opposition to each other. Interestingly, they are both varieties of the same language—English. The first bloc consists of users of the educated variety of English promoted by the Reporter, the Police, the Austrian Lady and Daisy. Each of them can be seen to be championing the promotion of this particular variety wherever they are encountered in the text. This claim may be confirmed in the press interview between the Reporter and Moses:

Reporter:	Excuse me sir, have you just arrived from Jamaica? Would you like to tell me what conditions there are like?
Moses:	The situation is desperate. You know the big hurricane it had two weeks ago?
Reporter:	yes?
Moses:	Well, I was in that hurricane. Plenty people get kill. I was sitting down in my house and suddenly when I look up I see the sky. What you think happen? (P. 5)

The Reporter can be seen here as one of the advocates of the standard variety, described by Beaugrande [18] as an ‘exclusive variety’ which advocates ‘Standard English’. Standard English, according to him, is that form or ‘a pure medium with stringent rules and precise boundaries’. Quirk and Greenbaum [24] view standard dialect as that used by

any institution that must attempt to address itself to a public beyond the smallest dialectal community. In the above conversation the Reporter does not hide the fact that he has an obligation to protect the Standard variety of English.

The second language bloc in the novel is made up of the immigrant population of people of West Indian origin for whom London has become another home, sort of. Members of this bloc are very strongly attached to their Jamaican Patois, chiefly promoted by characters such as Moses, Tolroy, Tanty, Galahad and Cap. Although some of these characters have had their English transformed a great deal by their long stay in London, features of their native Creoles are nevertheless present in their language. For instance, West Indian creoles are very prominent in Galahad's speech when he and Daisy engage each other in a conversation:

Galahad: Come and go in the yard.  
Daisy: What?  
Galahad: The yard where I living.  
Daisy: Is this your room?  
Galahad: Yes, you like it?  
Daisy: Yes, is that how you make your tea?  
Galahad: Yes. No foolishness about it...fix up. You get that raise the foreman was promising you?  
Daisy: What did you say? You know it will take me some time to understand everything you say. The way you West Indians speak!  
Galahad: What wrong with it. Is English we speaking.

The form of English adopted by Galahad in the above conversation aligns with the 'inclusive' idea of language, which Beaugrande [18] describes as one that tries to mainstream the non-standard dialects of the language. Non-standard language, according to Abah [25], is often used by linguists in apparent reference to the local varieties, such as regional and uneducated dialects considered by formal grammar as ungrammatical, or incorrect and so unacceptable. Beaugrande [18] does not see non-standard language as errors but only as varieties which needs to be understood from their social, historical and geographical motivations. Hence, this particular form, in his view, belongs to 'a family' of other 'Englishes'.

### Language Ideology of the Characters

Language ideology refers to a person's attitude and position about language or language variety. It is all about one's attitude with regard to language and language types. Silverstein [12] sees language ideologies in terms of speakers' awareness of language and what they think about its structure and use, while Razfar [13] describes language ideology as a display of speakers' beliefs generally about language. Moreover, Piller [14] defines language ideology as beliefs, feelings and conceptions about language that are shared socially while Kroskrity [15] conceptualizes language ideology as the problematization of speakers' consciousness of their language and discourse.

Following from the above understanding of language ideology, one may state reasonably that the discourse participants in *The Lonely Londoners* display covertly and overtly different levels of consciousness about the language varieties in the text. According to Akwanya [26], 'language arranges human beings into communities in opposition to one another'. The kind of choice that they make from the available language options suggests some cold antagonism between them. To instantiate this claim, let us pay attention once again to the following conversations:

Reporter: But tell me sir, why are so many Jamaicans immigrating to England?  
Moses: Ah, that is a question to limit, that is what everybody trying to find out. They can't get work. And furthermore, let me give you my view of the situation in this country. We can't get no place to live, and we only getting the worst jobs it have.

Halliday's social semiotic view, to Fowler [22], includes also a notion of 'linguistic solidarity' among the group members. The reporter is not unaware of the socio-linguistic background of Moses and the limitations imposed on him as a result of that; yet, he would stick to his educated variety of English without putting into consideration the social constraints imposed on his listener. He probably expects Moses to understand that his variety is unacceptable in the environment, and therefore to attune himself to this particular variety. Moses, we are aware, is not new in London, and expectedly, his English would have been influenced a great deal by the London environment; however, he demonstrates language ideology by refusing to pretend about his preference for his West Indian creolized variety of English. In other words, he brushes aside the stigma that goes with Patois in London and adopts it in the exchange.

Another context where language ideology manifests overtly in the text is in the conversation between Galahad and Daisy:

Galahad: Yes. No foolishness about it...fix up. You get that raise the foreman was promising you?  
Daisy: What did you say? You know it will take me some time to understand everything you say. The way you West Indians speak!  
Galahad: What wrong with it? Is English we speaking.

The above conversation is no less an open negotiation about language. The interlocutors are both speaking English but in different ways. One can understand with Daisy the fact that she is into a relatively new relationship with Galahad. Initially, Daisy affected lack of intelligibility and politely asks for Galahad's understanding. Nonetheless, she is betrayed by her open protestation against the speech habits of the West Indians! This is quite uncomplimentary, for it is no longer about Galahad alone but a whole people! But in a swift and polite manner, Galahad raises an objection to the innuendo about their language variety and stoutly defends his use of Patois by equating it with other English varieties.

### Language Ideology and Social Identity: The Connection

One of the basic functions of language is to identify individuals because people are known by the kind of language that they speak. Halliday [20] emphasizes that language symbolizes and expresses social structures and systems and points out that people, in their linguistic exchanges, act out the social structure and affirm their statuses and roles. According to Crystal [27], language shows our belongingness and carries with it an insignia of public and private identities. Samuel Selvon's *The Lonely Londoners* separates its characters neatly according to their social identity. In other words, the language behaviour of the interactants groups them into two social categories. Thus in this text, language becomes a rallying point for other social activities. The West Indians, for instance, are identified by their Jamaican Patois, which is cherished and used by all of them of that socio-cultural background, notwithstanding whom they are conversing with as we see in the context below:

- Reporter: Excuse me, lady. I am from the Echo. Is this your first trip to England?  
 Tolroy: Don't tell that man nothing.  
 Tanty: Why you so prejudice? The gentleman ask me a good question, why I shouldn't answer? [to reporter] yes mister, is my first trip.  
 Reporter: Have you any relations here? Are you going to live in London?  
 Tanty: Well my nephew Tolroy in this country a long time, and so he send for the rest of the family to come and live with him. not so Tolroy? Tolroy is a good boy. I mind him since he was small.  
 Reporter: yes, but how can you tell me why so many people are leaving Jamaica and coming to England?  
 Tanty: Is the same thing I say. I tell all of them who coming. Why are you leaving the country to go to England? Over there is so cold that only white people does live there. But they say that it have more work in England, and better pay.  
 Reporter: Tell me madam, what will you do in London?  
 Tanty: Who me? Why I come to look after the family. All of them was coming; so I had to come.

Halliday's social semiotic idea is explained by Fairclough [21] as meaning that language varies according to the social identities of people in interactions, and according to their socially-defined purposes, as well as their social settings. For instance, the above excerpt is projecting two social groups: the immigrants from the West Indies and the educated middle class of London. The West Indies population is represented by Moses, Tolroy, Tanty and Galahad; on the other hand, the educated class is represented by the Reporter, the Policeman, the Austrian and Daisy. What is playing out between these characters is iconization, a process by which the linguistic varieties in use by the speakers themselves become an icon of their social identities [28]. In the above scenario, each social group is seen to be connected to the language ideology of their members, such that membership of a group imposes on all the members the language ideology of the group as well. For the West Indians in the above context, their patois becomes an icon of their social identity in the same way that Standard English is an icon for the educated Londoners. Hence, Woolard [29] hypothesizes that language ideologies connect language to identity and underpin not only linguistic form, but also give an idea of the person and the social group; while Piller [14] states that language ideology has linguistic, socio-cultural and anthropological importance.

### CONCLUSION

Language ideology is a social practice that has entered into literary discourse. It is both a belief and an attitude with regard to language. This paper has been exploring the theme of language ideological practices in Samuel Selvon's *The Lonely Londoners* in order to identify the language ideological blocs and describe the practice of language ideology in the text, as well as explain the link between language ideology and social identity. The paper adopted the descriptive research method and drew on its data from the primary text. Discussion of the corpus was done using the conceptual framework of language ideology and M.A.K. Halliday's social semiotic view of language. The paper found two competing language blocs in the text and found many language ideological practices by the participants. Finally, it demonstrated that there is a strong relationship between language ideology and social identity.

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