



Linguistic Hybridity and Social Demarcation: The Sociolect of the Campus in *The Chronic Disorder* by Oliver Ortserga Jutu

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Abstract: This article examined the intricate relationship between linguistic hybridity and social demarcation in Oliver Ortserga Jutu's play: *The Chronic Disorder*, focusing on how the playwright deployed multiple linguistic registers to construct a sociolect that simultaneously reflects and critiques the stratified social order of the Nigerian university. Drawing on Mikhail Bakhtin's theory of heteroglossia and dialogism, the study analysed how Jutu orchestrated a polyphony of voices, formal academic English, Nigerian Pidgin, cultist argot, bureaucratic jargon, and youth slang, to demarcate class, morality, and institutional power. The play's linguistic architecture revealed that language functions not merely as a medium of communication but as a site of ideological struggle, where characters' linguistic choices index their social positioning, moral standing, and access to institutional authority. Through close textual analysis of key scenes, the Vice Chancellor's address, the cult initiation, the lecturer's fable, and the interrogation at the police station, the article demonstrated that Jutu's dramaturgy of linguistic hybridity offered a profound critique of the systemic failures that produce what the play diagnoses as a "chronic disorder" in Nigerian higher education. The study contributes to scholarship on Nigerian English in literature, campus drama, and the sociolinguistics of postcolonial African theatre.

Keywords: Linguistic hybridity, sociolect, heteroglossia, code-switching, Nigerian Pidgin, social demarcation



Introduction

The Nigerian university has long been a fertile ground for literary imagination, serving as both setting and subject for narratives that interrogate the intersections of education, power, corruption, and youthful aspiration. From the early campus novels of the 1980s to the contemporary dramatic works that populate the Nigerian literary landscape, the university emerges as a microcosm of the nation itself, a space where the promises of postcolonial modernity collide with the realities of systemic decay, where the ideals of intellectual pursuit are compromised by the pragmatics of survival, and where language becomes the primary medium through which social hierarchies are both enacted and contested.

Oliver Ortserga Jutu's *The Chronic Disorder* occupies a significant place within this tradition, the play offers a searing dramatisation of the Nigerian university crisis at the turn of the twenty-first century. The play's central thesis, that the "chronic disorder" of the title refers to the systemic dysfunction that has rendered Nigerian universities "more or less glorified secondary schools.

What distinguishes *The Chronic Disorder* from earlier campus narratives, however, is not merely its thematic scope but its sophisticated deployment of linguistic hybridity as a dramatic strategy. Jutu orchestrates a remarkable range of linguistic registers, from the Vice Chancellor's measured bureaucratic prose to the cultists' incantatory mumbo-jumbo, from the Lecturer's folkloric storytelling to the students' irreverent Pidgin, creating a polyphonic text in which language itself becomes a primary vehicle for social commentary. The play thus exemplifies what Nigerian literary scholars have identified as the characteristic linguistic inventiveness of contemporary Nigerian literature, wherein writers "take greater liberties in their reconstitution of English" to reflect the multilingual realities of Nigerian life (Adejunmobi, "Limits of Transliteration" 21).

The significance of linguistic hybridity in African literature has been a subject of sustained scholarly debate since the early post-independence period. The foundational question, whether African writers should write in European languages or indigenous African tongues, has



given way to more nuanced investigations of how writers navigate the multilingual ecology of their societies through creative linguistic practices. As scholars have observed,

“the multiethnic and multilingual character of Nigeria compelled the country’s writers to use some form of English, but standard imperial English was not long acceptable to patriotic Nigerians” (Adejunmobi 8-9).

This imperative has produced a rich tradition of linguistic experimentation wherein Nigerian writers “devised the strategy of ‘transliteration’, introducing ethnic-language tropes and idioms into the English text” (Adejunmobi 15-16), thereby creating a distinctively Nigerian literary English that reflects the country’s linguistic diversity while maintaining accessibility to a wider readership.

Jutu’s dramaturgy represents a significant contribution to this tradition, particularly in his use of the dramatic form to stage the social meanings embedded in linguistic variation. Unlike the novel, which can employ narrative commentary to gloss linguistic choices, drama relies on the immediate interplay of voices, requiring the audience to interpret linguistic variation as an index of character, social position, and moral orientation. *The Chronic Disorder* exploits this aspect of theatrical form with considerable skill, using the stage as a space where the sociolect of the campus, the distinctive linguistic repertoire of university life; is performed, contested, and ultimately revealed as a symptom of the deeper disorder afflicting Nigerian education.

Despite the growing body of scholarship on Nigerian English in literature and the extensive sociological analyses of campus cultism and academic corruption, there remains a significant gap in the critical literature regarding the *linguistic* dimensions of Nigerian campus drama. While studies have examined the thematic concerns of campus narratives, cult violence, sexual harassment, strike actions, and examination malpractice, relatively little attention has been paid to how these narratives *use language* to construct, critique, and complicate their representations of university life.

This gap is particularly striking given the centrality of language to the campus experience itself. The Nigerian university is a site of intense linguistic negotiation, where students from diverse ethnic and linguistic backgrounds must navigate the official language of instruction



(English) alongside the informal lingua franca of peer interaction (Nigerian Pidgin), while also contending with the specialised jargons of their disciplines, the coded languages of secret cults, and the ever-evolving slang of youth culture. This linguistic ecology is not merely a neutral backdrop to academic life but a dynamic system through which social hierarchies are constructed, maintained, and contested.

The Chronic Disorder offers a particularly rich site for investigating these dynamics, as the play self-consciously stages the linguistic diversity of the Nigerian campus and invites reflection on the social meanings embedded in linguistic choice. The play's characters are sharply differentiated by their linguistic registers: the Vice Chancellor speaks a formal, bureaucratic English; the cultists deploy a mixture of Pidgin, incantation, and ritualised speech; the students alternate between Pidgin and informal English; the lecturers oscillate between academic discourse and colloquial storytelling. These linguistic choices are not arbitrary but carry significant social weight, indexing characters' positions within the institutional hierarchy, their moral orientations, and their relationships to power. The present study addresses this gap by providing a systematic analysis of linguistic hybridity in *The Chronic Disorder*, examining how Jutu's deployment of multiple linguistic registers functions as a strategy of social demarcation and ideological critique. The study aims to contribute to a more nuanced understanding of how contemporary Nigerian drama uses language not merely as a medium of communication but as a site of social meaning-making, ideological struggle, and cultural critique.

Literature Review

Conceptualising Linguistic Hybridity, Sociolect, and Heteroglossia

The concept of linguistic hybridity occupies a central position in postcolonial literary studies, referring to the creative mingling of linguistic codes that characterises much writing from formerly colonised societies. As Ashcroft, Griffiths, and Tiffin argue in *The Empire Writes Back*, postcolonial writers "abrogate" the authority of the imperial language by appropriating and transforming it, creating hybrid forms that reflect the cultural and linguistic complexity of postcolonial societies (38-39). This hybridity operates at multiple levels: lexical, syntactic,



discursive, and generic, encompassing everything from the incorporation of indigenous words to the adaptation of oral narrative structures.

In the African context, the language question has been particularly acute, given the continent's extreme linguistic diversity and the enduring legacy of colonial language policies. As scholars have observed, the choice of language for literary expression involves not merely aesthetic considerations but profound political and cultural implications (Ngũgĩ 4-5). The "language debate" in African literature, whether writers should write in European or African languages, has generated extensive scholarly discussion, with figures such as Ngũgĩ wa Thiong'o advocating for the use of African languages while others defend the strategic use of English as a pan-African and global medium.

A more recent development in this debate is the recognition that African writers writing in English are not simply "using" a foreign language but are actively participating in the creation of distinctive national and regional varieties of English. As Adejunmobi notes, Nigerian writers have long "sought a more respectable English literary medium" than the stigmatised Nigerian Pidgin, leading them to "devise the strategy of 'transliteration', introducing ethnic-language tropes and idioms into the English text" (15-16). This strategy, while imperfect, "served the desired goal by demystifying standard English" and paved the way for more radical linguistic experimentation (Adejunmobi 19).

The concept of sociolect; a variety of language associated with a particular social group or class, provides a complementary framework for analysing linguistic variation in literary texts. Drawing on the sociolinguistic tradition associated with William Labov and others, sociolectal analysis examines how linguistic features correlate with social variables such as class, education, occupation, and age. In the Nigerian context, research has demonstrated that "regional factors lead to phonological and intonational variation influenced by local languages; ethnicity happens due to the variation from code-switching and lexical borrowings; and social-class differences are reflected in accent, vocabulary, and grammatical preferences" (Ugwu 15-16). Nigerian English thus emerges "not merely a deviation from Standard English but an ordered variety shaped by history, culture, multilingualism, and social structure" (Ugwu 17-18).



The concept of heteroglossia, developed by the Russian literary theorist Mikhail Bakhtin, offers a particularly powerful framework for analysing linguistic hybridity in literary texts. In “Discourse in the Novel,” Bakhtin argues that the novel (and by extension, other literary forms) is characterised by the “internal stratification” of language into “social dialects, characteristic group behaviour, professional jargons, generic languages, languages of generations and age groups, tendentious languages, languages of the authorities, of various circles and of passing fashions” (262-63). This stratification is not a defect to be overcome but a constitutive feature of language itself, reflecting the fundamental dialogism of human communication.

Heteroglossia, for Bakhtin, describes “the co-existence of many languages in one social language” (Vice 20), while dialogism describes “the way languages interact” (Vice 20). The literary work, particularly the novel, is a site where these multiple languages encounter one another, generating meaning through their interaction, conflict, and mutual illumination. As Bakhtin writes, “The novel can be defined as a diversity of social speech types (sometimes even diversity of languages) and a diversity of individual voices, artistically organised” (262). This diversity is not merely ornamental but fundamental to the novel’s capacity to represent the complexity of social reality.

Critiques of Bakhtin’s framework have noted its tendency toward utopianism, particularly in its assumption that heteroglossic interaction necessarily produces productive dialogue rather than domination or erasure. As some scholars have observed, Bakhtin’s “sense of love and sharing is, in effect, adopted by ecofeminists due to the domains it opens if applied to literary criticism and even to life in general” (Donovan 84-86), suggesting a certain romanticisation of linguistic diversity that may not adequately account for the power dynamics that shape linguistic interaction. Nevertheless, Bakhtin’s framework remains invaluable for analysing literary texts that self-consciously stage linguistic diversity, as it provides a vocabulary for describing the social meanings embedded in linguistic variation and the ideological work that such variation performs.

Nigerian English in Literature: Historical and Contemporary Perspectives



The use of English in Nigerian literature has evolved significantly since the early post-independence period. The first generation of Nigerian writers, including Chinua Achebe, Wole Soyinka, and Cyprian Ekwensi, worked within a broadly standard English idiom while incorporating elements of Nigerian speech patterns, proverbs, and cultural references. Achebe's famous assertion that he sought to "Africanise" English rather than merely "use" it captures the ambivalent position of these early writers, who sought to create a distinctly Nigerian literary voice while maintaining intelligibility to an international readership.

Subsequent generations of Nigerian writers have taken increasingly radical approaches to linguistic experimentation. As Adejunmobi observes, "Nigerian Pidgin is coming into its own as a literary medium, and Nigerian writers are taking greater liberties in their reconstitution of English" (21). This trend is evident across genres, from the poetry of Ezenwa-Ohaeto to the novels of Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie, from the drama of Femi Osofisan to the popular fiction of contemporary Nigerian writers. The result is a vibrant and diverse literary landscape in which linguistic hybridity is not merely an occasional feature but a defining characteristic.

In the specific context of campus literature, narratives set in Nigerian universities and colleges linguistic hybridity takes on particular significance. The campus is, as noted earlier, a site of intense linguistic negotiation, where students must navigate multiple linguistic codes and where language becomes a primary marker of social identity. As research on Nigerian youth languages has shown, "the Nigerian youth language phenomenon has often been labelled, albeit reductively, as Pidgin or Pidgin-based, to the exclusion of other varieties which co-constitute the ecology of youth argots in the country" (Ogunyemi 4-5). This diversity reflects the broader sociolinguistic complexity of Nigerian society, where "youthfulness, conviviality, in-groupness, camaraderie, etc." are indexed through distinctive linguistic practices (Ogunyemi 13-14).

Studies of slang in Nigerian universities by Aboh and Okpo have identified a range of morphological processes involved in slang formation, including "abbreviation/acronym, clipping, borrowing, calquing, reduplication, compounding, back-formation, and blending" (21-23). These processes reflect the creativity and dynamism of student language, which constantly evolves to meet the expressive needs of campus life. Importantly, research has established that



“slang expressions can also be borrowed from languages within a country and not necessarily from outside” (Aboh and Okpo 28-29), highlighting the endogenous character of much Nigerian youth language.

Code-Switching and Identity Construction in Nigerian Universities

Code-switching, the alternation between two or more languages or language varieties within a single conversation or discourse, is a pervasive feature of Nigerian university life and a central concern of sociolinguistic research on Nigerian education. Studies have demonstrated that code-switching serves multiple functions in campus communication, including the expression of solidarity, the negotiation of identity, the marking of in-group membership, and the management of social distance.

Research on code-switching in Nigerian universities by Acka et al. has revealed that “domains of discourse and pragmatics, language use and meaning-making have significant impact on the Nigerian university students” and that “the use of English language for a meaningful dialogue was almost impossible by students as result of the frequent code-switching” (24-27). This finding underscores the extent to which English, despite its official status, is not the unmarked language of student interaction but rather one code among several, deployed strategically in relation to communicative context and social relationship.

Studies have also examined the social meanings attached to different linguistic codes. As one investigation found, “some university students who maintain their cultural dialect, language, and accent are viewed as ‘stupid,’ ‘inferior’ or ‘rudimentary’ by their peers” (Acka, Abdul Rasheed, and Saminu 12-13), revealing the evaluative dimension of linguistic choice. Conversely, the use of Nigerian Pidgin “signals intimacy among the speakers” and serves as a marker of in-group solidarity (Ogunyemi 9). The sociolinguistic landscape of the Nigerian university is thus characterised by complex negotiations of status, identity, and belonging, mediated through linguistic choices that carry significant social weight.

Recent research has extended this analysis to digital communication, examining how Nigerian students use language in departmental chatrooms and social media platforms. Studies have found that “code switching” functions as “a central humour strategy” in these contexts, with



students deploying multiple linguistic codes to produce humour, express solidarity, and manage social relationships (Osisanwo and Agunbiade 25-26). These findings suggest that the linguistic hybridity characteristic of Nigerian campus life is not limited to face-to-face interaction but extends to all domains of student communication.

The Nigerian Campus Novel/Drama: Genre and Language

The campus novel and campus drama constitute a significant subgenre of Nigerian literature, with a tradition extending from the 1980s to the present. Works such as Eghosa Imasuen's *Fine Boys* (2019) exemplify the contemporary campus narrative, offering "a coming-of-age tale told from the perspective of Nigeria's Generation X, caught amid the throes of a nascent pro-democracy movement, demoralising corruption, and campus violence" (Imasuen, back cover). These narratives typically feature a distinctive linguistic style, "very typical of the flippant young: fast, colloquial, and gutter, and sometimes confusing to adults" (review of *Fine Boys*), reflecting the linguistic vitality of Nigerian youth culture.

The linguistic features of campus literature have received some scholarly attention, though much remains to be done. Research has identified the use of "Nigerianisms"—distinctively Nigerian expressions and usages, as a characteristic feature of the genre, with "code-switching, semantic shift/extension and Nigerian pidgin (NP) expressions" serving as primary mechanisms for constructing authentic campus voices (Ogunyemi 23-25). These linguistic strategies allow writers to represent the multilingual reality of campus life while also performing cultural identity and resisting the hegemony of standard English.

The dramatic form presents particular opportunities and challenges for linguistic representation. Unlike the novel, which can employ narrative voice to contextualise linguistic choices, drama relies on the immediate interplay of characters' speech, requiring the audience to interpret linguistic variation in real time. This immediacy makes drama a particularly powerful medium for staging the social meanings of linguistic variation, as the audience directly experiences the contrasts between different linguistic registers and the social positions they index.



Jutu's *The Chronic Disorder* participates in this tradition while also extending it in significant ways. The play deploys a wider range of linguistic registers than many campus narratives, from the formal bureaucratic language of institutional authority to the ritualised incantations of cult initiation, from the folkloric storytelling of the lecturer to the casual Pidgin of student interaction. This linguistic range is not merely decorative but structurally integral to the play's critique of the Nigerian university, as it allows Jutu to stage the full complexity of the campus sociolect and the social hierarchies it embodies.

Empirical Studies on Language and Social Stratification in Nigerian Education

A growing body of empirical research has examined the relationship between language and social stratification in Nigerian educational contexts. These studies provide valuable context for understanding the sociolinguistic dynamics that Jutu dramatises in *The Chronic Disorder*.

Ugwu investigated "regional, ethno-linguistic, and social-class sociolinguistic variation in Nigerian English, exploring how linguistic choices serve as markers of identity and social positioning" (6-7). Drawing on Labov's variationist theory and Kachru's nativisation model, the study examined phonological, syntactic, and lexical differences across social groups. The findings indicate that "social-class differences are reflected in accent, vocabulary, and grammatical preferences," with upper classes "inclined towards standardisation as a means of mobility whereas lower classes adopt the hybrid forms as a means" of expressing identity (Ugwu 15-16, 28-31). This research establishes that linguistic variation in Nigerian English is not random but systematically correlated with social position.

Aboh and Okpo provided a detailed analysis of "slang expressions used by students of the University of Nigeria, Nsukka," identifying the morphological processes involved in their formation and the semantic strategies through which their meanings are derived (14-15). The study found that "slang expressions used by students in the study population are formed using these morphological processes: abbreviation/acronym, clipping, borrowing, calquing, reduplication, compounding, back-formation, and blending" (21-23). The study also revealed that "the meaning of slang words is manipulated through generalisation, particularisation, and



pejoration” (24-25). This research demonstrates the linguistic creativity of Nigerian university students and the systematic nature of their slang formation.

Acka et al. examined “code-switching and the fluctuation of societal language meaning and social meaning placed on codes of two or more conventional languages and their dialects in a conversation” among Nigerian university students (8-9). The study found that “domains of discourse and pragmatics, language use and meaning-making have significant impact on the Nigerian university students” and that students’ frequent code-switching reflected their greater “proficiency in Nigerian languages compared to English language” (24-30). The research also documents the stigmatisation of certain linguistic practices, with students who “maintain their cultural dialect, language, and accent” viewed negatively by their peers (12-13).

Osisanwo and Agunbiade investigated “how students spiced up their conversation in the departmental chatroom with purposefully composed humour through language manipulation in academic communities” (18-20). The study found that “code switching” is “a central humour strategy,” with students deploying multiple linguistic codes to produce humour and manage social relationships (25-26). The research identified “promiscuity, obligation of vigorous prayers, high consumption rate, and socio-cultural identity” as the thematic preoccupations of student humour (27-29), revealing the cultural and social concerns that animate campus discourse.

Schreiber and Nwadigo examined “the position of English varieties in the complex multilingual ecology of the Nigerian metropolis of Lagos,” focusing on “social factors, including class, ethnicity, and economic activity” (14-15, 23-24). The study investigated “whether H varieties of English constituted a major factor in social transformation and entrepreneurial orientation” and provides “insight into whether the SMEs sector of Lagos should be regarded as a domain in which ‘levelled’ English emerges continuously as a marker of an economic middle class” (32-37). This research extends the analysis of language and social stratification beyond the educational context to the broader economic sphere.

Ogunyemi offered a conceptual framework for understanding “Nigerian youth languages,” arguing that the phenomenon has been “reductively” labelled “as Pidgin or Pidgin-based, to the exclusion of other varieties which co-constitute the ecology of youth argots in the



country” (4-5). Drawing on the notion of indexicality, the article presents “a range of Pidgin and non-Pidgin exemplars and illuminates their linguistic as well as discursive strategies” (6-8). The study defines Nigerian youth languages as “a cluster of linguistic (and paralinguistic) practices with indexical links to youthfulness, conviviality, in-groupness, camaraderie, etc.” (13-14), providing a framework for understanding the social functions of campus language.

Adejunmobi examined “the multiethnic and multilingual character of Nigeria” and its implications for literary language, arguing that “Nigerian Pidgin is coming into its own as a literary medium, and Nigerian writers are taking greater liberties in their reconstitution of English” (8-9, 20-21). The study traced the evolution of Nigerian literary English from the “transliteration” strategies of early writers to the more radical linguistic experimentation of contemporary authors, providing historical context for understanding the linguistic practices of writers like Jutu.

Research on Nigerian Pidgin in university contexts has examined its role as “a more acceptable language of communication among the student population” than standard English, with “its acceptability in the university further enhanced by the heterogeneous nature of the campus’s sociolinguistic space” (Ogunyemi 15-19). This research establishes that Nigerian Pidgin functions as a lingua franca that facilitates communication across ethnic and linguistic boundaries while also serving as a marker of in-group identity and solidarity.

Studies on language and social cohesion have investigated “the role of language and literacy practices in promoting social cohesion among undergraduate students at a University in Nigeria” (Language Use, Literacy Practices 4-5). The findings indicated that “multilingual practices strengthen cohesion more than they hinder it,” with “informal literacy practices involving code-switching” helping to “build close social bonds” (24-25). This research challenges assumptions that linguistic diversity is necessarily divisive, suggesting instead that multilingual competence can foster social integration.

Research on attitudes towards Nigerian Englishes has examined “the ethnic categorisation of speakers of Hausa, Igbo and Yoruba Englishes” and the factors influencing these categorisations (Aboh, “Attitudes” 6-8). The study found that “Yoruba English (YE) was



rated more favourably on status and quality of language than Igbo English (IE) and Hausa English (HE) varieties,” with HE “rated as the least attractive” (9-10). These findings reveal the evaluative hierarchies that structure attitudes towards different varieties of Nigerian English, providing insight into the social dynamics that Jutu dramatises in his play.

Together, these empirical studies establish that language in Nigerian educational contexts is not a neutral medium but a site of social meaning-making, identity negotiation, and stratification. They provide a robust foundation for analysing how Jutu’s *The Chronic Disorder* stages and critiques these dynamics through its deployment of linguistic hybridity.

This study draws on Mikhail Bakhtin’s concepts of heteroglossia and dialogism, most fully developed in his essay “Discourse in the Novel” (1930s, translated 1981). Bakhtin’s framework illuminates how literary language, especially in the novel, is composed of multiple, conflicting social voices.

Bakhtin argues that language is inherently stratified. Every word carries the “taste” of a profession, genre, generation, or social group. Instead of a unified system, language is an “internal stratification” of social dialects, professional jargons, and tendentious languages. These diverse languages do not merely coexist; they enter into dialogic relationships. The novel, in Bakhtin’s view, artistically organizes these social speech types and individual voices, staging their intersection and mutual illumination. This interaction is not harmonious but a struggle where languages “interanimate” one another, generating new meanings through confrontation. The novel uniquely embraces this heteroglossia as a constitutive formal feature, orchestrating multiple voices into a polyphonic whole. Unlike the epic hero, the novelistic hero exists within intersecting discourses, shaped by their dialogic clash. Crucially, this dialogic structure has ideological significance: by representing linguistic diversity, the novel reveals the centripetal forces that seek to unify language as ideological projects, making heteroglossia a form of resistance to authoritarian discourse.

Bakhtin’s theory has faced several critiques. Some see a utopian romanticization of dialogue that underestimates real-world power imbalances, where linguistic encounters often involve domination and erasure rather than productive exchange. Critics also challenge his



privileging of the novel over poetry and drama, noting that drama directly stages confrontations of multiple voices without narrative mediation. The framework neglects material and institutional conditions shaping language, focusing on ideology over the economic and political forces that sustain linguistic hierarchies. Postcolonial scholars, like Homi Bhabha, question whether it adequately addresses the specific histories of colonial imposition and resistance central to postcolonial hybridity.

Despite these limitations, Bakhtin's framework is highly relevant to analyzing *The Chronic Disorder*. The play is self-consciously heteroglossic, deploying distinct social dialects, the Vice Chancellor's bureaucratic English, cultists' ritual incantations, students' Pidgin, the Lecturer's storytelling, police jargon, each indexing a specific social position. These registers clash dialogically, as in Act Three's interrogation scene where the D.P.O.'s authoritative English, Nightmare's defiant Pidgin-inflected speech, and the Dean's bureaucratic language create a polyphonic confrontation revealing the ideological stakes of linguistic choice. The play's linguistic hybridity critiques the Nigerian university's "chronic disorder" as a system of both linguistic and institutional stratification, exposing connections between speech and social power. Dramatic form intensifies this effect by forcing audiences to experience linguistic diversity directly, without narrative mediation. Additionally, the campus setting reflects Nigeria's multilingual ecology and colonial language legacies, situating the play within a tradition of Nigerian literary linguistic experimentation. Thus, Bakhtin's heteroglossia and dialogism, adapted for postcolonial context, provide a productive lens for examining how the play's linguistic architecture performs ideological critique.

Analysis

The Linguistic Architecture of *The Chronic Disorder*

The Chronic Disorder presents a remarkably diverse linguistic landscape, encompassing at least six distinct linguistic registers that correspond to different social groups, institutional positions, and communicative functions. These registers are not merely decorative but structurally integral to the play's dramatic and ideological work, as they enable Jutu to represent the full complexity of the campus sociolect and the social hierarchies it embodies.

The Register of Institutional Authority: The Vice Chancellor and Bureaucratic English

The play opens with the Vice Chancellor addressing the student body in a register that exemplifies what might be called institutional bureaucratic English. This register is characterised by formal vocabulary, complex sentence structures, and a measured, authoritative tone that indexes the speaker's position at the apex of the institutional hierarchy. The Vice Chancellor's speech is marked by such features as:

“For the past nine months, both the students and lecturers of this great institution had remained at home due to the strike action embarked upon by the Union of Academic Staff, which has just been called off on compassionate grounds through a circular issued by the leadership of the union yesterday.” (Jutu,1)

The language here is notably impersonal and abstract, with the passive construction (“had remained at home,” “has just been called off”) effacing agency and presenting events as inevitable processes rather than products of human decision. The vocabulary is formal (“embarked upon,” “compassionate grounds,” “circular issued”), and the sentence structure is complex, with multiple subordinate clauses embedding the key information.

This register serves several dramatic functions. First, it establishes the Vice Chancellor's authority and distance from the student body, marking him as a figure of institutional power rather than personal connection. Second, it reflects the bureaucratic character of the university administration, which operates through official channels and formal procedures. Third, it creates a contrast with the more informal registers that will dominate the rest of the play, highlighting the gap between institutional rhetoric and lived experience.

The Vice Chancellor's register also carries ideological significance. His language presents the university as a well-ordered institution operating according to rational procedures, even as the content of his speech, the nine-month strike, the “crash programme,” the threat of future disruptions, reveals a system in crisis. This disjunction between form and content is characteristic of bureaucratic language, which often maintains a facade of order and rationality in the face of chaos and dysfunction.

The Register of Campus Youth: Student Pidgin and Informal English



In marked contrast to the Vice Chancellor's formal English, the student characters speak a register that combines Nigerian Pidgin with informal, colloquial English. This register is characterised by simplified grammar, lexical borrowings from Nigerian languages, and a casual, irreverent tone that indexes the speakers' position as young people navigating the challenges of campus life.

Gabriel's speech exemplifies this register:

"O boy things dey rough o! Campus don become jungle my brother. Guys don axe down one boy for History Department o! Smasher now. Yes, he is one of the Red Scorpions and this time he was stung by the Black Scorpions." (Jutu 17)

The Pidgin features are immediately apparent: the use of "dey" for the copula, the particle "o" for emphasis, the omission of the copula in "things dey rough," the use of "don" as a perfective marker, and the lexical item "axe" (to kill). The register also incorporates campus-specific vocabulary ("Red Scorpions," "Black Scorpions") that indexes the speakers' insider knowledge of campus culture.

This register serves several functions. It establishes solidarity among the student characters, marking them as members of a shared community with its own linguistic norms. It creates a contrast with the formal language of authority figures, signalling the students' distance from institutional power. And it conveys the vitality, creativity, and irreverence of youth culture, which finds expression in linguistic innovation and play.

The student register also carries ideological weight. By representing student speech in Pidgin and informal English, Jutu challenges the hegemony of standard English and asserts the legitimacy of non-standard varieties. The students' linguistic choices are not presented as deficiencies but as creative adaptations to the multilingual reality of Nigerian campus life. This representation participates in the broader project of Nigerian literary linguistic experimentation, affirming the value of indigenous linguistic resources.

The Register of the Underworld: Cultist Argot and Ritualised Language

The cultists in *The Chronic Disorder* speak a distinctive register that combines **Pidgin** with **ritualised incantation** and a specialised **cult vocabulary**. This register is

characterised by formalised speech patterns, archaic or pseudo-archaic vocabulary, and a performative quality that indexes the speakers' membership in a secret society.

Nightmare's speech at the cult meeting exemplifies this register:

“Rock of wisdom, we plead at your feet in the name of your diligent servant Ronny Eagles, who sincerely completed his sojourn in this world of wisdom according to your scrolls. He served you diligently for years and later in his life he was imprisoned for your name's sake. It was so because your laws have to be fulfilled.” (Jutu,11)

The language here is notably different from both the Vice Chancellor's bureaucratic English and the students' casual Pidgin. It employs a formal, almost biblical syntax (“we plead at your feet,” “who sincerely completed his sojourn”), archaic vocabulary (“sojourn,” “scrolls”), and a ritualised structure that echoes religious or liturgical language. The content is a founding myth that legitimises the cult's existence and authority.

This register serves several functions. It creates a sense of mystery and exclusivity, marking the cultists as initiates with access to esoteric knowledge. It establishes the cult's authority through the invocation of tradition and precedent. And it conveys the cultists' self-understanding as participants in a sacred mission, which justifies their violent and illegal activities.

The cultist register also carries significant ideological weight. By representing the cultists' language as a distorted imitation of religious discourse, Jutu critiques the appropriation of sacred language for violent and criminal purposes. The cultists' incantations parody genuine religious practice, revealing the emptiness of their claims to spiritual authority. This critique is reinforced by the contrast between the cultists' exalted language and their sordid activities, which the play exposes in graphic detail.

The Register of Academic Discourse: Lecturers' Language and the Fable

The lecturers in the play speak a register that combines academic discourse with colloquial storytelling, reflecting the ambivalent position of academic staff in a dysfunctional institution. Mr Lecturer's speech in the lecture scene exemplifies this register:

“In our last discussion, we talked about grammatical units. Now, who can tell us the five units of grammar we have in descending order. ... A sentence can best be defined as a group of words or a single word that expresses a complete thought, feeling, or idea. It usually contains an explicit or implied subject and a predicate containing a finite verb.” (Jutu, 58)

The lecture begins in a recognisably academic register, with formal vocabulary (“grammatical units,” “descending order,” “explicit or implied subject,” “finite verb”) and a pedagogical structure that recalls the conventions of classroom instruction. However, this academic register quickly gives way to a storytelling mode, as the Lecturer launches into the fable of the ox and the ass:

“There lived a great farmer who could understand the language of animals. He always found his way behind their pens to listen to their conversation. One evening, he lingered in their pen again and heard his ox bemoaning to the ass the hardness of his labour.” (Jutu, 60)

The shift from academic discourse to folk narrative is marked by a change in vocabulary, syntax, and tone. The formal language of the lecture gives way to the simple, direct language of oral storytelling, with its characteristic opening (“There lived”), its concrete imagery, and its moral conclusion.

This register serves several functions. It reflects the Lecturer’s ambivalent position, caught between the demands of academic professionalism and the reality of a dysfunctional educational system. It also serves as a vehicle for social commentary, as the fable of the ox and the ass becomes an allegory for the students’ misuse of technology and the unintended consequences of well-intentioned help. And it highlights the tension between the university’s official mission of knowledge transmission and the actual practice of lecturers who have abandoned serious teaching for casual storytelling.

The Lecturer’s register also carries ideological significance. By juxtaposing academic discourse with folk narrative, Jutu critiques the degradation of Nigerian university education, in which lecturers “tell their students stories instead of giving lectures. The fable, while charming,

is a substitute for genuine instruction, a sign that the academic mission has been abandoned in favour of entertainment. This critique is reinforced by the student's protest: "You came into this lecture hall today and started very well with a flashback on the past lecture, suddenly you derailed into irrelevant storytelling" (Jutu, 62).

The Register of Law Enforcement: Police and Institutional Jargon

The police officers in the play speak a register that combines professional jargon with authoritative commands, reflecting their position as agents of state power. Inspector Jongol's speech exemplifies this register:

"None of you should move, you are all under arrest. You have the right to remain silent, anything you say or do will be used against you at the station. ... You are charged with three offences. One, carrying out occultic activities; two, trying to bribe diligent Police Officers during implementation of their duty; and three, possession of fire arms, which constitute criminal acts contrary to the constitution of this country." (Jutu, 68)

The language here is characterised by its formal, legalistic quality, with formulaic phrases ("You have the right to remain silent"), institutional vocabulary ("occultic activities," "diligent Police Officers," "implementation of their duty," "constitution of this country"), and a procedural structure that indexes the speaker's professional authority.

This register serves several functions. It establishes the police officers' authority and distance from the criminals they are arresting. It creates a contrast with the cultists' ritualised language, revealing the latter as a parody of genuine institutional authority. And it conveys the professional identity of the police, who operate according to established procedures and legal frameworks.

The police register also carries ideological significance. By representing the police as speaking in formal, legalistic language, Jutu presents them as agents of order and legality in contrast to the cultists' lawlessness and the university's dysfunction. However, this representation is complicated by the D.P.O.'s later interrogation of the examination officers and

his threat to “invade that institution to apprehend all the culprits,” suggesting that the police are not merely external agents of order but participants in the broader system of dysfunction.

The Register of Bureaucratic Corruption: The Examination Officer’s Double-Talk

The Examination Officer, Inyaregh Wua, speaks a register that exemplifies the double-talk of bureaucratic corruption, in which official language is deployed to conceal rather than reveal. His interaction with Nightmare in Act Two, Scene One illustrates this register:

“Don’t tell me anything about your papers, Ihyembeto. You have abused all the privileges you have got from me. I knew you to be a good boy but somewhere along the track, you derailed into an unknown beast. ... I have no business with you. Besides you are pregnant already; last year’s examinations have been forwarded to the Examination Records and Statistics Department, and with that even an abortion is too late.” (Jutu, 30)

The language here combines moralistic condemnation (“abused all the privileges,” “derailed into an unknown beast”) with bureaucratic jargon (“Examination Records and Statistics Department”) and colourful metaphor (“you are pregnant already,” “even an abortion is too late”). This combination of registers reflects the Examination Officer’s compromised position, caught between his official responsibilities and his corrupt practices.

The register serves several functions. It allows the Examination Officer to maintain a facade of moral authority even as he engages in corrupt behaviour. It creates a contrast between his official language and the reality of his actions, revealing the hypocrisy that pervades the institution. And it conveys the cynical manipulation of bureaucratic procedures for personal gain. The Examination Officer’s register carries significant ideological weight. By representing bureaucratic language as a vehicle for corruption, Jutu critiques the institutionalisation of dishonesty in Nigerian universities. The Examination Officer’s double-talk is not an individual failing but a symptom of a system in which official language has been hollowed out, serving as a cover for exploitation rather than a medium of honest communication.

Linguistic Hybridity as Social Demarcation



The deployment of multiple linguistic registers in *The Chronic Disorder* serves as a primary mechanism of social demarcation, marking the boundaries between different social groups, institutional positions, and moral orientations. The play's linguistic architecture creates a social map in which characters are located by their linguistic choices, and in which the movement between registers signals shifts in social position or moral status.

Hierarchical Demarcation: Power and Authority

The most obvious form of social demarcation in the play is hierarchical, with different linguistic registers indexing different positions within the institutional hierarchy. The Vice Chancellor's formal bureaucratic English marks his position at the apex of the university hierarchy, while the students' Pidgin and informal English mark their position at the bottom. The lecturers' mixed register reflects their intermediate position, caught between the demands of institutional authority and the realities of classroom practice.

This hierarchical demarcation is reinforced by the play's spatial organisation. The Vice Chancellor addresses the students from a "wooden lecture stand" (Jutu,30), physically elevated above his audience, while the students speak from the floor or from their rooms. The cultists meet in "a building under construction" (Jutu, 6), a marginal space that reflects their marginal social position. The police officers operate from the D.P.O.'s office, a space of institutional authority that contrasts with the cultists' hideout.

The hierarchical demarcation of language is also evident in the characters' awareness of linguistic status. When Nightmare enters the Examination Officer's office, he is immediately rebuked: "What are you doing here?" (Jutu,29). The question indexes the Examination Officer's authority and Nightmare's subordinate position, establishing the power dynamic that will structure their interaction. Similarly, when Chelsea enters Dr Kerewa's office, the Doctor's initial response "Good day. How may I help you?", maintains a professional register that indexes his institutional authority, a register that will later give way to predatory language as the interaction proceeds.

Moral Demarcation: Virtue and Corruption



The play also uses linguistic hybridity for moral demarcation, distinguishing between characters who speak truthfully and those who use language deceptively. Mfe Doo, the protagonist, speaks straightforward, unpretentious English that indexes his moral integrity, while the cultists' ritualised language indexes their moral corruption. The Examination Officer's double-talk indexes his hypocrisy, while the Vice Chancellor's bureaucratic English indexes his complicity in the system's dysfunction.

Mfe Doo's speech is characterised by its directness and honesty. When Maxwell asks what is wrong, Mfe Doo responds:

“Man, some hoodlums are toying with my freedom, they've got me confused, totally confused. In fact, I no longer have peace of mind. I can't move around freely. I always lock myself in here so that I can have rest of mind.” (Jutu, 29)

The language here is simple and direct, with none of the elaborate rhetoric that characterises the cultists or the institutional figures. Mfe Doo's honesty is indexed by his linguistic transparency; he says what he means and means what he says.

In contrast, the cultists' language is characterised by its opacity and indirection. Nightmare's address to Mfe Doo employs elaborate rhetoric that conceals rather than reveals:

“You are the lost sheep we're looking for. You must be converted if you need peace in your life. ... Your true talents must manifest and this is the only place you can stand shoulder high, very bold, with maximum security of life, to realise your full potentials and your capabilities.” (Jutu, 27)

The religious imagery (“lost sheep,” “converted”) and the promises of power and security (“shoulder high,” “maximum security”) are designed to manipulate rather than inform, concealing the true nature of the cult's activities behind a facade of spiritual and material benefit. The Examination Officer's language similarly conceals rather than reveals. His moralistic condemnation of Nightmare (“You have abused all the privileges you have got from me”) is belied by his willingness to accept a bribe, a contradiction that is immediately apparent when “InyareghWua is noticeably swayed by the sight of the crisp currency lying on his table” (Jutu,

31). The gap between the Examination Officer's moralistic language and his corrupt actions indexes his hypocrisy, marking him as morally compromised.

Generational Demarcation: Youth and Age

The play also uses linguistic hybridity for generational demarcation, distinguishing between the language of the young and the language of their elders. The students' Pidgin and informal English index their youth and their membership in a generational cohort with its own linguistic norms, while the Vice Chancellor's formal English indexes his age and his position in an older generation.

This generational demarcation is particularly evident in the contrast between the students' irreverent humour and the institutional figures' solemnity. When Gabriel reports the death of a cultist, the students respond with laughter:

"Yes, he is one of the Red Scorpions and this time he was stung by the Black Scorpions. (They all burst into uncontrollable laughter)." (Jutu, 17)

The laughter indexes the students' distance from the values and concerns of their elders, their ability to find humour in violence that the institutional figures would treat with solemnity. This generational difference is also evident in the students' linguistic creativity, their constant invention of new slang and new ways of speaking that mark their difference from the older generation.

The generational demarcation of language carries ideological significance. By representing the students' language as creative, vital, and irreverent, Jutu celebrates youth culture and its resistance to institutional authority. The students' linguistic innovations are presented as signs of life in a moribund institution, evidence that the younger generation has not been entirely corrupted by the system's dysfunction.

Spatial Demarcation: Public and Private Language

The play also uses linguistic hybridity for spatial demarcation, distinguishing between the language of public spaces and the language of private or clandestine spaces. The Vice Chancellor's address in the auditorium is a public performance that requires formal, official



language, while the cultists' meeting in the "building under construction" is a private ritual that requires its own specialised register.

This spatial demarcation is evident in the contrast between the cultists' public and private language. In public, the cultists may speak like ordinary students, but in their private meetings they deploy their ritualised register, marking the boundary between the visible and invisible worlds. The same character may speak differently in different spaces, indexing his or her awareness of the social rules that govern each space.

The spatial demarcation of language also operates in the contrast between the lecture hall and the cult hideout. The lecture hall, a public space of knowledge transmission, should be governed by academic language, but in Jutu's representation it has been degraded to storytelling and moralising. The cult hideout, a private space of secret knowledge, is governed by ritualised language that parodies religious discourse. The contrast between these spaces and their associated registers highlights the corruption of both public and private spheres in the dysfunctional university.

Dialogic Interaction and Ideological Critique

The play's linguistic hybridity is not merely a static representation of social diversity but a dynamic dialogic interaction in which different registers encounter, conflict with, and illuminate one another. These encounters generate meaning through their interaction, creating a polyphonic text that stages the ideological conflicts of the Nigerian university.

The Confrontation of Registers: The Interrogation Scene

The most dramatic instance of dialogic interaction in the play is the interrogation scene in Act Three, Scene Two, where multiple linguistic registers converge in the D.P.O.'s office. The scene brings together the D.P.O.'s authoritative police register, the Dean's bureaucratic language, the Head of Department's academic register, and the cultists' various responses, creating a polyphonic confrontation that reveals the ideological stakes of linguistic choice.

The D.P.O. speaks in a register of legal authority:

“I must thank you very much for honouring my invitation, you are welcome. ... I decided to deploy armed officers to investigate and arrest the situation. ... They will all spend not less than three calendar years in jail.” (Jutu, 70)

The language here is formal, authoritative, and final, indexing the D.P.O.’s power and his determination to exercise it. The register establishes him as the arbiter of justice, the figure who will restore order to the dysfunctional institution.

The Dean responds in a register of bureaucratic concern:

“D.P.O I must thank you very much for the job well done. You see, these boys have been terrorising us for long, we have received series of reports, but all the attempts we’ve made to stop these dreadful acts have proved abortive.” (Jutu, 71)

The language here is grateful and deferential, acknowledging the D.P.O.’s authority while also expressing the Dean’s own frustration with the situation. The register indexes the Dean’s position as an institutional figure who has failed to maintain order and now must rely on external authority.

The Head of Department speaks in a register of moral disappointment:

“Ihyembeto! So it’s true? Look at where you’ve landed yourself. ... Now you have seen your end. There is nothing I did not tell you in this world, I cited numerous examples for you to learn from, but you were too eager to be in the middle of the world.” (Jutu, 72)

The language here is personal and emotional, indexing the Head of Department’s sense of betrayal and his investment in the student’s welfare. The register contrasts with the D.P.O.’s official language and the Dean’s bureaucratic language, revealing the human cost of the institution’s dysfunction.

Nightmare responds in a register of defiant resistance:

“D.P.O, I am sure it will interest you to know that your son is also a victim of the ruins we are fighting to emancipate. How can students remain in an institution for six years with signs of staying even longer for a course which curriculum is

designed to be implemented within four years? What is expected of us other than becoming kings of the jungle?" (Jutu, 79)

The language here shifts from defiance to explanation, as Nightmare attempts to justify his actions by reference to the system's failures. The register indexes his attempt to claim moral legitimacy even in defeat, to present himself not as a criminal but as a victim of circumstance.

The dialogic interaction of these registers creates a complex ideological field in which no single register has the final word. The D.P.O.'s legal authority is challenged by Nightmare's moral claims, the Dean's bureaucratic concern is undercut by his admission of failure, and the Head of Department's disappointment is complicated by his recognition that the system has failed its students. The polyphonic structure of the scene prevents any simple resolution, leaving the audience to navigate the competing claims of the different registers.

The Parody of Authority: Cultist Language as Distorted Institutional Discourse

Another significant form of dialogic interaction in the play is the parody of institutional authority enacted through the cultists' ritualised language. The cultists' incantations echo religious and institutional discourse, but in a distorted form that reveals the emptiness of their claims to authority.

The cultists' founding myth, recited by Nightmare, parodies religious narrative:

"Rock of wisdom, we plead at your feet in the name of your diligent servant Ronny Eagles, who sincerely completed his sojourn in this world of wisdom according to your scrolls. He served you diligently for years and later in his life he was imprisoned for your name's sake. It was so because your laws have to be fulfilled." (Jutu, 11)

The language here echoes the Bible, with its invocation of a "Rock of wisdom," its reference to "scrolls," and its narrative of persecution and faithfulness. However, the content is absurd: Ronny Eagles is not a prophet but a criminal, his "sojourn" not a sacred mission but a life of violence and corruption. The parody reveals the emptiness of the cult's claims to spiritual authority, exposing them as a cover for criminal activity.

This parody is reinforced by the contrast between the cultists' exalted language and their sordid activities. The same characters who recite sacred narratives engage in drug use, violence, and sexual exploitation. The gap between their language and their actions indexes their moral corruption, revealing the hypocrisy that pervades the cult.

The parody also serves a broader critical function. By representing the cultists' language as a distorted imitation of religious and institutional discourse, Jutu critiques the appropriation of sacred and official language for illegitimate purposes. The cultists' incantations are a symptom of the broader corruption of language in the dysfunctional university, where official discourse has been hollowed out and turned to corrupt ends.

The Critique of Bureaucracy: The Examination Officer's Double-Talk

The play's critique of bureaucracy is enacted through the Examination Officer's double-talk, in which official language is deployed to conceal rather than reveal. The Examination Officer's interaction with Nightmare exemplifies this critique, as he alternates between moralistic condemnation and corrupt accommodation.

The Examination Officer's initial response to Nightmare is moralistic:

“Don't tell me anything about your papers, Ihyembeto. You have abused all the privileges you have got from me. I knew you to be a good boy but somewhere along the track, you derailed into an unknown beast.” (Jutu, 30)

The language here is condemnatory, positioning the Examination Officer as a figure of moral authority who has been betrayed by a wayward student. However, this moralistic language is immediately undercut by the Examination Officer's response to the bribe: “InyareghWua is noticeably swayed by the sight of the crisp currency lying on his table” (Jutu, 31).

The shift in the Examination Officer's register is immediate and dramatic:

“(Calmly) But tell me, what are these things I am hearing about you? ... Well, it is left for you, but all you have to note is that, you must be careful or else you will not perceive the breeze of graduation in this institution.” (Jutu, 31)

The moralistic language gives way to a conspiratorial tone, as the Examination Officer shifts from condemnation to complicity. The register indexes his recognition that the bribe has

changed the terms of the interaction, that he is no longer a figure of moral authority but a participant in corruption.

The critique of bureaucracy is reinforced by Nightmare's threat:

“Well, you’ve made me to believe that I am a desperate man, and you know a desperate man can do anything. Pray hard so that nothing goes wrong with my graduation from this institution because if anything goes wrong I will be left with no option but to retrieve from you what you have been collecting from me right from that day you knew me.” (Jutu, 32)

The language here shifts from request to threat, as Nightmare reveals that he has incriminating evidence against the Examination Officer. The register indexes the reversal of power that has occurred, as the student who came begging for help now holds the upper hand.

This scene exemplifies the play's critique of bureaucratic corruption, in which official language serves as a cover for exploitation and dishonesty. The Examination Officer's double-talk is not an individual failing but a symptom of a system in which bureaucratic procedures have been hollowed out, serving as a vehicle for corruption rather than a guarantee of fairness.

The Sociolect of the Campus: Linguistic Hybridity as Cultural Critique

The analysis of linguistic hybridity in *The Chronic Disorder* reveals that the play's linguistic architecture is not merely a dramatic technique but a form of cultural critique. By staging the diversity of campus speech and the social hierarchies it embodies, Jutu critiques the “chronic disorder” of the Nigerian university as a system of linguistic as well as institutional stratification.

Language as Index of Systemic Dysfunction

The play's linguistic hybridity indexes the systemic dysfunction of the Nigerian university. The diversity of registers reflects the fragmentation of the institution, the absence of a shared language that would unite the various stakeholders in a common project. The Vice Chancellor speaks one language, the students another, the cultists a third, and the police a fourth, and these languages do not communicate with one another but rather clash and conflict.



This linguistic fragmentation is a symptom of the institution's failure. In a well-functioning university, there would be a shared academic language that would enable communication across the institutional hierarchy. But in Jutu's representation, such a language does not exist. The Vice Chancellor's bureaucratic English is incomprehensible to the students, who speak Pidgin and informal English. The students' language is incomprehensible to the lecturers, who have retreated into storytelling and moralising. The cultists' language is incomprehensible to everyone except themselves, a secret code that marks their exclusion from the institutional order.

The linguistic fragmentation also reflects the institution's moral fragmentation. The various registers are not merely different but mutually hostile, each one serving as a vehicle for the interests of its speakers. The Vice Chancellor's language serves the interests of the administration, the students' language serves the interests of the student body, the cultists' language serves the interests of the criminal underworld, and the police's language serves the interests of state authority. There is no shared language that would enable the pursuit of common goals, no linguistic medium for the collective project of education.

Language as Site of Resistance

Despite the fragmentation and dysfunction, the play also presents language as a site of resistance, a medium through which the marginalised assert their agency and challenge the dominant order. The students' Pidgin and informal English, while marking their subordinate position, also serve as a vehicle for critique and resistance.

The students' language enables them to articulate their grievances and challenge institutional authority. When Mr Lecturer tries to end the class early, the Second Student protests:

“Mr Lecturer, you cannot just leave like that, you came into this lecture hall today and started very well with a flashback on the past lecture, suddenly you derailed into irrelevant storytelling. If you had continued, it could have been like a spur to us; but with your departure it seems you as well have no good plan for us because this has been the teaching method of you and your colleagues.” (Jutu,62)

The language here is direct and confrontational, using informal English to challenge the Lecturer's authority. The students' protest is effective, forcing the Lecturer to leave without a response. The scene illustrates how the students' language, despite its informal character, can serve as a vehicle for resistance.

Similarly, Mfe Doo's resistance to the cultists is enabled by his linguistic choices. His direct, honest language contrasts with the cultists' manipulative rhetoric, revealing the emptiness of their promises and the danger of their enterprise. Mfe Doo's linguistic integrity is a form of moral resistance, a refusal to participate in the linguistic corruption that pervades the institution.

The Play's Linguistic Experimentation and the Nigerian Literary Tradition

The Chronic Disorder participates in the broader tradition of Nigerian literary linguistic experimentation, contributing to the ongoing project of creating a distinctly Nigerian literary English. Jutu's deployment of multiple linguistic registers, his incorporation of Pidgin and informal English, and his representation of the linguistic diversity of Nigerian campus life all align with the practices of earlier and contemporary Nigerian writers.

The play's linguistic experimentation is evident in its representation of the full range of campus speech, from the formal language of institutional authority to the informal language of student interaction, from the ritualised language of the cult to the professional jargon of the police. This linguistic range reflects the multilingual reality of Nigerian society, where;

“the multiethnic and multilingual character of Nigeria compelled the country's writers to use some form of English, but standard imperial English was not long acceptable to patriotic Nigerians” (Adejunmobi 8-9).

The play's linguistic experimentation also reflects the broader trend in Nigerian literature toward greater linguistic freedom and innovation. As Adejunmobi notes, “Nigerian Pidgin is coming into its own as a literary medium, and Nigerian writers are taking greater liberties in their reconstitution of English” (21). Jutu's play exemplifies this trend, using Pidgin and informal English not as occasional colour but as structurally integral elements of the dramatic text.

The play's linguistic experimentation is also significant for its representation of youth language. The students' Pidgin and slang are not presented as deficient varieties but as creative



adaptations to the multilingual reality of Nigerian campus life. This representation affirms the legitimacy of non-standard varieties and challenges the hegemony of standard English, participating in the broader project of Nigerian literary linguistic nationalism.

The Chronic Disorder as Linguistic Diagnosis

The play's title, *The Chronic Disorder*, can be read as a linguistic diagnosis as well as a social and institutional one. The "chronic disorder" of the title refers not only to the dysfunction of the Nigerian university but also to the disorder of its language, the fragmentation and corruption that have rendered communication impossible and mutual understanding unattainable.

The play's linguistic architecture diagnoses this disorder by staging its symptoms. The Vice Chancellor's bureaucratic English, the students' Pidgin, the cultists' incantations, the Lecturer's storytelling, the Examination Officer's double-talk, these are all symptoms of a linguistic disorder that reflects and reinforces the social and institutional disorder. The absence of a shared language, the proliferation of mutually unintelligible registers, the corruption of official discourse, these are the linguistic manifestations of the "chronic disorder" that afflicts the Nigerian university.

The play's linguistic diagnosis also points toward a possible cure. The restoration of linguistic integrity, the re-establishment of a shared language, the purification of official discourse these would be necessary conditions for the restoration of the university's health. The play ends on a note of hope, with the Vice Chancellor expressing optimism that "the worst in the nation is over" and that "moral inadequacies must be swept away" (Jutu, Act Three, Scene Three). This hope is linguistic as well as institutional, a hope for the restoration of language as a medium of honest communication and collective purpose.

Conclusion

This article has examined the relationship between linguistic hybridity and social demarcation in Oliver Ortserga Jutu's *The Chronic Disorder*, demonstrating how the play deploys multiple linguistic registers to construct a sociolect that simultaneously reflects and critiques the stratified social order of the Nigerian university. Drawing on Mikhail Bakhtin's theory of heteroglossia and dialogism, the analysis has revealed that the play's linguistic



architecture is not merely a dramatic technique but a form of cultural critique, a diagnosis of the “chronic disorder” that afflicts Nigerian higher education.

The analysis has identified six distinct linguistic registers in the play: the Vice Chancellor’s institutional bureaucratic English, the students’ Pidgin and informal English, the cultists’ ritualised argot, the lecturers’ mixed academic and storytelling register, the police officers’ professional jargon, and the Examination Officer’s double-talk. Each of these registers indexes a specific social position and serves specific dramatic functions, creating a linguistic map of the campus sociolect.

The analysis has also demonstrated how the play uses linguistic hybridity for social demarcation, marking hierarchical, moral, generational, and spatial boundaries through linguistic choices. The Vice Chancellor’s formal English marks his institutional authority, while the students’ Pidgin marks their subordinate position. Mfe Doo’s honest language marks his moral integrity, while the cultists’ manipulative rhetoric marks their corruption. The students’ irreverent humour marks their generational difference from their elders. The cultists’ private language marks the boundary between public and clandestine spaces.

The analysis has further revealed the play’s dialogic structure, in which different registers encounter, conflict with, and illuminate one another. The interrogation scene brings together multiple registers in a polyphonic confrontation that reveals the ideological stakes of linguistic choice. The cultists’ ritualised language parodies institutional and religious discourse, exposing the emptiness of their claims to authority. The Examination Officer’s double-talk critiques bureaucratic corruption, revealing the gap between official language and corrupt practice.

Finally, the analysis has situated the play within the broader tradition of Nigerian literary linguistic experimentation, demonstrating how Jutu’s deployment of multiple linguistic registers participates in the ongoing project of creating a distinctly Nigerian literary English. The play’s representation of the full range of campus speech reflects the multilingual reality of Nigerian society and affirms the legitimacy of non-standard varieties, challenging the hegemony of standard English.



The study contributes to scholarship on Nigerian English in literature, campus drama, and the sociolinguistics of postcolonial African theatre. By demonstrating how Jutu's play uses linguistic hybridity as a strategy of social demarcation and cultural critique, the study illuminates the complex relationship between language, power, and identity in contemporary Nigerian drama. It also provides a model for future research on linguistic hybridity in Nigerian literature, suggesting avenues for comparative analysis with other campus narratives and other dramatic works.

The findings of this study have implications beyond the analysis of *The Chronic Disorder*. They suggest that linguistic hybridity in Nigerian literature is not merely a stylistic feature but a structural principle, a way of organising and interpreting social reality. They also suggest that the analysis of linguistic hybridity can illuminate the broader cultural and political concerns of Nigerian literature, revealing how writers use language to critique power, assert identity, and imagine alternatives.

The Chronic Disorder offers a powerful demonstration of how linguistic hybridity can serve as a vehicle for social critique. By staging the diversity of campus speech and the social hierarchies it embodies, Jutu reveals the "chronic disorder" of the Nigerian university as a system of linguistic as well as institutional stratification. The play's linguistic architecture is not merely a dramatic technique but a form of cultural diagnosis, a critique of the fragmentation and corruption that have rendered the Nigerian university a site of conflict rather than collaboration, of exploitation rather than education.



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