

Language and Dictatorship in *A Play of Giants* by Wole Soyinka

Patrice C. AKOGBETO* & Paul-Marie HOUËSSOU
Université d'Abomey-Calavi

Abstract – This article uses new criticism as an analytical tool to give deeper understanding of Soyinka's use of language to achieve his overall purpose in *A Play of Giants*. Language in this play serves as the pencil with which the playwright draws the portraits of dictators. Thus, through an effective use of language, Soyinka shows how physical traits combine with psychological and ideological dispositions to determine the monstrousness of dictators. This study also suggests that dictatorship rests on foundations which impoverish not only the dictator himself but also the people s/he has the responsibility to lead.

Key words: language, language use, grammar, diction, dictatorship, dictator, identity, cultural background.

Résumé – Cet article a recours à la nouvelle critique comme approche analytique pour offrir une plus grande compréhension de l'usage de la langue par Soyinka pour atteindre l'objectif global de sa pièce *A Play of Giants*. La langue dans cette pièce fonctionne comme le crayon avec lequel le dramaturge dessine le portrait des dictateurs. Ainsi, à travers un usage efficace de la langue, Soyinka montre comment les traits physiques s'associent aux tendances psychologiques et idéologiques pour définir la monstruosité des dictateurs. Cette étude suggère également que la dictature repose sur des fondements qui appauvrissent non seulement le dictateur lui-même mais aussi les populations dont il/elle à la charge.

Mots-clés: langue, usage de la langue, grammaire, langage, dictature, dictateur, identité, culture.

1. Introduction

Wole Soyinka's manipulation of language has always been a source of controversies among readers and critics. While some are mesmerized by the density of the Nigerian playwright's verbal texture, others claim that Soyinka's use of language is overdone and only tend to add to the obscurity his style is often dubbed with. Sierra Leonian critic Eustace Palmer, one of the most vociferous critics of Soyinka's style, writes about his use of language in *The Interpreters*: "Verbal dexterity and linguistic sophistication almost become ends in themselves. Soyinka rejoices in his power over words but this power is not always related to meaning."⁹⁴

Language is central to literature. It is the medium through which the writer makes meaning. In that sense, a writer always tailors his diction to tell all about his characters and to fulfill the ultimate goal of his work. Soyinka's prolific literary works definitely bear witness to that and more even so *A Play of Giants*. The play is actually a moral, ideological and aspiration-based portrait of four African dictators at bay in the New York - based Bugara embassy. Field-Marshal Kamini, leader of the imaginary country named Bugara, entertains three fellow leaders in the embassy as they flock into the American city to attend a General Assembly of the United Nations. On the occasion, Kamini, a man of the two extremes, suffers setbacks in his plans for a loan from the World Bank and for a sculpture in his honor to be positioned at the UN. As a consequence, his brutal self bursts out crashing and

* Corresponding author, e-mail: akopat17@yahoo.fr

⁹⁴ Palmer, Eustace, *An Introduction to African Novels*, London : Heinemann, 1972, p.xiv

victimizing the Chairman of the Bugara Central Bank, the Sculptor, two representatives of the Russian delegation and even his fellow leader guests. In the meantime, back in Bugara, he is toppled by a coup and appears to be blowing everything up in a desperate attempt to keep control or to say 'after me it is chaos.'

This paper is concerned with how language actually contributes to achieving the writer's literary purpose. By 'language' in this work, we mean the words in the play and not the 'language of the theatre'. The 'language of the theatre' is a more general term "which can include set, lighting, costumes and the other elements that go into making a complete production [of the play]"⁹⁵, writes Simon Cooper and Sally Mackey. The focus of this chapter is therefore on words as they feature in the corpus of the play. Analyzing the language Wole Soyinka uses in this play will help have, on the one hand, more assessment of the theme and related issues through further exploration of character and, on the other hand, of the playwright's style and his attitude in relation to the theme under consideration.

The methodological approach intend to use is new criticism. New criticism falls within the ranks of formalist critical approaches. It lays emphasis on the text. According to Booth et al (2006):

The text in a fundamental way refers to itself: its medium is its message. Although interested in ambiguity and irony as well as figurative language, a New Critical reader establishes the organic unity of the unique work. Like an organism, the work develops in a synergetic relation of parts to whole⁹⁶.

As a mode of reading, New Criticism therefore "minimizes" in Booth et al's terms, "consideration of both the source and the receiver, favoring the intrinsic qualities of a unified literary work"⁹⁷. As such, new criticism provides us with adequate literary tools to carry out a text-based reading of the work. We are thus able to dig meaning and interpretation out not only of the figurative language and the overall style of the writer but also of the synergetic relation of parts to whole.

Indeed, though the texture of *A Play of Giant* breaks with the poetic texture largely common in most of Soyinka's other plays, the work under study retains all the poetic and rhythmic elegance as well as the elaborate and scholarly figurative language style, characteristic of Soyinka's plays in general. Thus, the new critical approach allows us to explore and interpret the work from text and stylistic perspective.

This article will examine Soyinka's use of language in four parts. The first part considers the language of the play. The second part focuses its linguistic features proper. In the third part, we look at how the grammar and the diction of the play contribute to unveiling the dictator's education and personality traits. The fourth part concentrates on how language is used to uncover the dictator's Identity and Cultural Background.

⁹⁵ Cooper, Simon, and Mackey, Sally, *Theatre Studies: An Approach for Advanced Level*, Cheltenham (England) : Stanley Thornes (Publishers) Ltd, 1995, p.9

⁹⁶ Booth, Alison, Hunter, J., Paul and Mays, J., Kelly, *The Norton Introduction To Literature*, 9th ed., New York, London: W. W. NORTON & COMPANY, 2006. p.1752

⁹⁷ Idem p.1752

2. The Language of *A Play of Giants*

A Play of Giants is written in prose, in an accessible style that facilitates its understanding, breaking away from most of the previous dramatic works by the playwright. In effect, most of Soyinka's plays preceding the work under study are drama of essence in nature. The dramatic technique in a drama of essence mainly relies on contrast and juxtaposition of different rhythms and moods making the message a bit hard for the reader to navigate. Language in the drama of essence quite much retains those features that entertain obscurity in the play. But the language in *A Play of Giants* is built on a pattern of naturalistic conversation rid of sophisticated stylistic devices and fantasies peculiar to verses and a drama of essence. This chapter examines the linguistic format specific to the play, by considering the narrative structure and not just the plot. Emmanuel Ngara (1982) indicates that the difference between the narrative structure and the plot resides in the fact that the former takes into account the 'point of view' while the latter does not. That aside, both terms refer to the arrangement of the episodes which make up the story, the ordering of incidents in a pattern⁹⁸. Emmanuel Ngara (1982:17) further notes that the linguistic format is the sum total of minute linguistic choices which include both the 'para-linguistic affective devices' (commonly known as figures of speech) and the 'linguistic features proper' (consisting in levels of description among which the grammatical level, the lexical level, the level of tenor of discourse, etc...)⁹⁹.

3. The Play's Linguistic Features Proper

In terms of language, the author portrays a realistic world where people intersperse speech with silence. The reader ushers the actions of the play through a premonitory silence which utterly contrasts with the deafening blasts and noise through which he exits the play's actions. As the dramatist describes that hollow silence, the reader could easily imagine the pulsating rhythm of nature nurtured by the working noise of the Sculptor. That is the language of nature in its simplest but most effective expression. In actual fact, it is a posing session and the playwright tries to feed the reader's imagination with as much natural references as it required for the latter to get embarked on the journey of the play. And even the outbreak and the content of the opening conversation exemplify the writer's approach, especially as they represent samples of speech by idling minds when we consider that the interlocutors are on the eve of an important meeting in the UN where the future of the world is going to be discussed:

The ground floor is a lounge which has been turned into a studio. A SCULPTOR is working at a life-size group sculpture of the three 'crowned heads', on which any likeness is hardly yet apparent. When the sitters speak, they do so stiffly, in an effort to

⁹⁸ Ngara, Emmanuel, *Stylistic Criticism and the African Novel: a Study of the Language Art and Content of African Fiction*, London: Heinemann, 1982. 150

⁹⁹ Idem

retain their poses. But first the tableau is revealed in silence, the SCULPTOR adding putty here and there or scraping away.

GUNEMA. Ah, *el poder, amigos*, to seek the truth of the matter, these subversives, *guerilleros*, they do not really seek to rule, no, not to administer a space, not to govern a *pueblo, comprendo?* No, mostly they seek power. Simply power.¹⁰⁰

In terms of speech, the work looks quite balanced when we consider the distribution of actors' speeches scene after scene; yet it displays an overall edge to Kamini who eventually does the most talking without monopolizing the floor. This simply corroborates his status as the central and dominant character in the play. Also, it must be noted that while trading speeches the four heads of state scarcely interrupt one another. For example, it happens when Tuboum breaks into a conversation between the Secretary-General and Kamini to remind the latter that he too is part of the statue scheme. This confirms the strict observance of the mutual respect principle within the fraternity of heads of state. On the contrary, Kamini easily gets impatient with people outside the circle of his brother heads of state and this often leads him to interrupt their speeches especially when he feels offended by them. For example, the Sculptor has a hard time to give any further explanation after he says Kamini does not understand how carving statues works:

SCULPTOR. Dr President sir, Your Excellency, there is something I have to explain. I mean, you just don't understand!

KAMINI. (KAMINI *freezes*). You say what?

SCULPTOR. I know how it is, I mean, I don't expect a layman to understand. You see, there are so many stages to making that kind of statue you see in Trafalgar Square or in Times Square if you like. If I may just explain, as I was saying to that lady...

KAMINI. You are telling me I can't understand? You tell His Excellency, Field-Marshal El-Hadj Dr Kamini he can't understand! You telling me I stupid.

SCULPTOR. Mr President, I swear, I did not mean any such thing. As God is my witness, if I cans just explain...

KAMINI. You say I cannot understand. That means you call me stupid! Me, you common Makongo carver, you call head of state a stupid man. In Bugara own embassy. On Bugara sovereign territory!

SCULPTOR. (*resigned*) Well, Your Excellency, I cannot deny that charge more than I have already. I very humbly apologise, sir. You have taken the wrong meaning, I swear to that. It could happen to anyone. You are more powerful than me, I know you can report me and get me sacked ...

KAMINI. Report you? Report you? To whom, you Makongo carver?¹⁰¹

The excerpt exposes well enough Kamini's anger at being told he doesn't understand. He appears quite irritated by the statement. And this is not the first time that he has had such a gut reaction in similar circumstances. The reaction is the same when the Chairman of the Bugara Central Bank tries to explain to him that the

¹⁰⁰ Soyinka, Wole, *A Play of Giants*, Ibadan: Spectrum Books Limited, 1997. p.1

¹⁰¹ Idem. p.30

Bugara bank note does not have much value. The reaction certainly denotes a bad-tempered leadership which tolerates no discussion. Moreover, the reaction uncovers inferiority complex on Kamini's part. In effect, this is illustrated by his use of the modal 'cannot', which in the sentence 'You say I cannot understand.' refers to a structural inability to understand, instead of the modal 'don't' used by the Sculptor in the sentence 'I mean, you just don't understand!', which merely refers to an incidental failure to understand what is being considered. Whatever the case, the writer's style is unambiguous; he attempts to recreate the haphazard dialog of real life, revealing to the reader the actual nature of the character. This stylistic approach constitutes the backdrop for Soyinka's case throughout *A Play of Giants*. The grammatical level of sentences, the level of tenor of discourse and the repeated use of languages other than English by the protagonist and other characters even tell more about the dramatist's attempts to recreate the haphazard dialog of real life.

4. Grammar, Diction and the Dictator's Education and Personality Traits

As far as the grammatical level and the level of tenor of discourse are concerned, it is a fact that sentences in the speeches clearly make sense whatsoever. Speeches display a good mixture of short, average length and long sentences that make it a pleasant variety. But though the utterances clearly make sense, much can be said about their grammaticality. Let's consider for example Kamini's utterances in the following excerpt:

KAMINI. I know. Is dirty capitalist plot all over. World Bank belong to everybody. Why they are discriminating against Bugara alone? Why they give Hazena loan? You tell me Hazena still owe them more money than Bugara, not so?

CHAIRMAN. That is a fact Your Excellency. I pointed it out to them.

KAMINI. Aha! So what they say? What they say to that enh?

CHAIRMAN. They replied that Hazena had been paying interest regularly Your Excellency.

KAMINI. (*angrily*) What I care about rotten interest, Bugara promised to pay everything all at once, in five years. So what I care about stupid interest enh? Taking interest and taking interest and finishing up all Bugara foreign exchange.

GUDRUM. Bugara has more than contributed its quota to the World Bank, that is a fact, Your Excellency. When the economy was buoyant Bugara never missed a payment.

KAMINI. Is what am saying and is all discrimination and dirty imperialist plot. I make complaint to Secretary-General today and raise matter in General Assembly. Let World Bank tell us once for all if it is just for rich countries and neo-colonial bastards like Hazena or it belong to Third World countries who need loan. As for you, get back to Bugara right away and start printing more Bugara bank notes. I show the bastards at least they can't control Bugara.¹⁰²

¹⁰² Idem. p.5-6

Many language patterns emerge from the above excerpt and deserve to be analyzed because they are a representative sample of Kamini's utterances throughout the play. The patterns 'Is dirty capitalist plot all over' and 'Is what am saying and is all discrimination and dirty imperialist plot' are notable because they are elliptical of the pronoun 'it'. This denotes a highly informal style peculiar to conversational situations. Indeed, it is a conversational situation but this one in particular is taking place between the president of a country and the chairman of the central bank of that country. And they are discussing business, which means that the context is formal.

Prior to the arrival of the Chairman, the discussion between Kamini and his colleagues is informal, the atmosphere is relaxed and the style of utterances is loose, with some strong moments of dip into the abysses of informality. For example, in Kamini's utterance, "I catch any *kondo*, I make him smell his mother's cunt."¹⁰³, the word 'cunt' is no less than slang. Another example is Gudrum's speech as she tries to characterize those whom she calls 'Bugaran runaways': "They spread the most disgusting libel against the Field-Marshal. They are pouffes, most of them. Faggots."¹⁰⁴ The word 'Pouffe' is also slang while 'faggot' is very informal. And the Oxford Advanced Learner's Dictionary of Current English defines slang as "very informal words, phrases etc. commonly used in speech, especially between people from the same social group or who work together, not considered suitable for formal contexts and often not in use for long."¹⁰⁵ The use of slang therefore confirms the great social rapport among the Heads of State as described in previous paragraphs and corroborates the claim that they share the same values and worldview. For as the saying goes, birds of a feather flock together.

The arrival of the Chairman, however, changes the speech context as Kamini himself announces: "(He turns to his companions.) You excuse me while I talk some business. Is my chairman of Bugara Central Bank."¹⁰⁶ Here again the ellipsis of 'he/it' is remarkable and confirms our claims that the patterns of speech noted in the excerpt above are representative of the general trend in the play. But most importantly, the expectation from a leader in Kamini's rank is that language suits status especially in a business context, *noblesse oblige*.

Such is not the case with *A Play of Giants'* protagonist. Rather the Bugaran leader carries on, unmoved by the change of context and strongly faithful to the same language style that introduces him to the reader throughout the work. The informal style or slang is not the only feature of Kamini's utterances.

Grammatically and structurally, Kamini's utterances stand a step away from standards. Let's consider the following utterances for example: "Why they are

¹⁰³ Idem. p.2

¹⁰⁴ Idem. p.2

¹⁰⁵ Hornby A. S., Oxford advanced learner's dictionary of current English, Oxford: Oxford University Press, 4th edition, 1989

¹⁰⁶ Ibid. p.4

discriminating against Bugara alone? Why they give Hazena loan?"¹⁰⁷ The structural problem lies in the inversion of auxiliary and subject in line with the rule of interrogative sentences. The grammatical rule is that in an interrogative sentence after the interrogative word (why, as in the first sentence) the auxiliary (are) must come before the subject (they) and then the predicate (discriminating against Bugara alone). In other words, a structurally correct sentence would have been: "Why are they discriminating against Bugara alone?" Same thing with the second sentence but this sentence displays a bit more complicated structure for a mind that cannot invert the subject and the auxiliary in a sentence where the latter is apparent. In fact, in the second sentence a member of the auxiliary do's family is hidden and must become apparent when making an interrogative sentence. Thus, a better utterance would have been: "Why do/did they give Hazena loan?" The structural issue discussed in this paragraph can be noted in Kamini's speech throughout the work.

Another illustrative example features in the following excerpt. This time, the Bugaran leader is speaking business with the Secretary-General; the context, therefore, is even more formal than speaking business with the Chairman of the Bugara Central Bank.

KAMINI. Yes, good idea. It was your idea in the first place, you agree? You make request of all nations.

SECRETARY-GENERAL. For the international gallery Dr President, for the United Nations international gallery. I invited all permanent delegations to bring with them one work of art representative of their culture, one work of art only, to be exhibited in the international gallery.

KAMINI. So why now you making problem? Our three brother countries ...

TUBOUM. Four.

KAMINI. I am sorry, now four. Four of our countries have come together to present your United Nations with one work of art. What now your problem Mr Secretary-General?¹⁰⁸

Kamini's grammatical problems are not limited to the formation of interrogative sentences. Much could also be said about tenses and other grammatical rules in Kamini's utterances. Let's now consider the last part of the excerpt under study. It reads:

KAMINI. [...] I make complaint to Secretary-General today and raise matter in General Assembly. Let World Bank tell us once for all if it is just for rich countries and neo-colonial bastards like Hazena or it belong to Third World countries who need loan. As for you, get back to Bugara right away and start printing more Bugara bank notes. I show the bastards at least they can't control Bugara.¹⁰⁹

¹⁰⁷ Ibid. p.5-6

¹⁰⁸ Ibid. p.38

¹⁰⁹ Ibid. p.5-6

The first and the last sentences should normally be in the future instead of the present tense. In the second sentence, the definite article is missing before “World Bank” in the first part of the sentence and then, in the second part, the mark of the third person in the present tense is missing with the verb “belong”.

In sum, in spite of his status as a head of state, Kamini speaks slang, informal and grammatically incorrect English regardless of the context. He simply is unable to change language register to meet expectation when the context requires so. This gives us more hints on the education and background of the protagonist. Indeed, the reader is made to know about Kamini’s military background right from the beginning of the play. And, the language register clearly suggests that Kamini’s background is that of a military of ranks with very little education. His failure to keep up with grammatical rules can be paralleled with his failure to take in elaborate explanations which often results in a harsh and brutal treatment of his interlocutors. In other words, through the use of language the playwright portrays a dictator who grapples with any issue or problem that requires a bit of brain work, an input of the intellect. This can explain the strong inferiority complex which smolders in him and which makes him take on so many titles and demand to be called by them. The following conversation between him and the Russian delegation highlights such an attitude:

KAMINI. No, you not go anywhere. This matter come first.

2ND RUSSIAN. (after quickly conferring in a low voice). I regret Dr President...

KAMINI. You regret only if you insist you go.

2ND RUSSIAN. Without meaning any disrespect Mr President ...

KAMINI. Dr El-Hadji Life President!

2ND RUSSIAN. Without any disrespect, Your Excellency, this is getting ridiculous.

KAMINI. Ridiculous? I am ridiculous you say?

2ND RUSSIAN. Not you, Mr President ...

KAMINI. I, Dr El-Hadji Field-Marshal...¹¹⁰

A legitimate question that arises to the mind of the reader after Kamini’s lack of education is so blatantly exposed is how come a person with such little education and discernment assumes leadership and presides over the destiny of a people. The answer is that he seizes power through a military coup as Gunema puts it: “I envy you three, *amigos*. Warriors. You take power through army. You fight. You conquer...”¹¹¹ In short, the language Kamini speaks best is the language of force and violence. It is that language that has helped him climb the ladders of power. Whatever the case, Kamini’s language style once again points out Soyinka’s

¹¹⁰ Ibid. p.49

¹¹¹ Ibid. p.21

relentless effort to paint characters and situations ever closer to real life, natural in their attitudes and utterances, throughout this work.

5. Language and the Dictator's Identity and Cultural Background

Another aspect of language worth examining in this work is the repeated use of French words by Kasco and Tuboum and of Spanish by Gunema. The amount of Spanish and French available in the play is quite amazing. Take the following excerpt for example:

KAMINI. You think Papa Doc can put voodoo on somebody like me?

GUNEMA. Impossible! *Jamas*, never! My friend, you are not *un hombre ordinario*. Like me and our *camarade* the Emperor Kasco, we are not *oridnario*. Why you think we rule our people? Some people are born to power. Others are – cattle. They need ring in their nose for us to lead.

KASCO. Oui oui. There are persons, individuals who are born with the imperial sign here (*He taps his forehead.*) on head. Me, I think – de Gaulle. Robespierre. But the prime, the leader of them all in history, in all the world history – the *sans pareil* of all time is Napoleon Bonaparte!

GUNEMA. No, is Franco.

KASCO. Franco is like midget in history when you compare with Bonaparte. Fanco! Franco was – he did not even have a presence. No command in personality

GUNEMA. Is Franco, is Franco. You do not know history, you only know French.

KASCO. My friend, to know French is to understand history. In Napoleon Bonapare you have the entire history of modern Europe and its civilization ... even North Africa entered history with Napoleon.

KAMINI. My brothers, what are we fighting avout? What about our very own brother, Chaka. For me Chaka is greatest. Only Hitler can compare to Chaka. Even then, if Chaka had aeroplanes and flying bomb, he would have conquered Hitler. I know because I am descended from the great Chaka.¹¹²

The utterances clearly indicate that Kasco is a ruler from a French speaking African country and Gunema is a ruler from a Spanish speaking African country. Through such an artistic maneuvering of languages, not only does the writer draw the reader's attention to the linguistic panorama of Africa, a continent divided between foreign languages French, English and Spanish, but also and mainly he points a finger at the cultural context marked by a devastating alienation and colonization of minds of which African leaders are victims. And this leads us to a brief analysis of a few para-linguistic affective devices used by Soyinka in this work.

Three major para-linguistic devices that require attention in this research work are: allusion, symbolism and situational irony. In fact, much allusion is made in the above excerpt to European historical leaders like France's Napoleon Bonaparte and

¹¹² Ibid. p.11

Spain's General Franco. What can be seen in the above excerpt is African leaders adulating each a ruler of the European power that colonized the country he leads. The allusion is quite significant as it exposes the damage done by each colonial system to the minds and psyche of Africans in general and their leaders in particular. France and Spain practiced the direct rule with the policy of assimilation which E. A. Ayendele et al depict as follows:

As a result of the famous French Revolution which started in 1789 Frenchmen had come to believe that all men were equal. They had also made a declaration which conferred the right of French citizenship on every inhabitant of a French colony. This latter measure derived from the fact that France believed that her culture and civilization were the best in the world and that it was her mission to admit her colonial peoples into this rich heritage of her culture.¹¹³

One of the consequences of such a system is the falsification of African heritage, the sapping and plundering of its culture leading to a sheer mental slavery of which the elite, taking over leadership from the white colonists after independence, suffer. Soyinka's criticism, here, targets African leaders, assimilated citizens of European powers, whose fight over whom of the Spanish Franco or the French Napoleon is the greatest leader only sends out an image of ridiculous irresponsible children. Indeed, the playwright sounds bitter about the negative self-perception that results from the slave mentality displayed by those African leaders. Kasco confesses that: "No, Pap de Gaulle, the savior of modern France. He was like a Papa to my people. I wept when he died."¹¹⁴ Mental slavery actually accounts for a large part in the course things take in Africa since independence for it has devastating impacts on the progress of human beings both as individuals and as a community. Sybil James (1993:20) observes that: "When we are schooled to be obedient unto death and live merely to follow blindly, we can never emerge from mental slavery because we are trained not to think, but to obey; not to be resourceful, but to be totally dependent, not to show initiative, but to follow blindly"¹¹⁵

Moreover, Napoleon Bonaparte, General Francisco Franco, Chaka Zulu and Adolph Hilter are quite strong icons and symbols of dictatorship. All four leaders were of military background and became illustrious not only by ruling their respective countries with iron fist but also by embarking on military campaigns aimed at expanding their powers to larger territories. The names of those historical leaders evoke bloodshed, bloodthirstiness, brutality and violence in their primitive state. The dramatist's use of such strong symbolism in which the African leaders of the play avow their adulation for those icons of the evil whom they emulate is a

¹¹³ Ayendele, E. A., Afigbo, A. E., Gavin, R. J., and Omer-Cooper, J. D., *The Growth of African Civilisation The Making of Modern Africa Volume 2: The Late Nineteenth Century to the Present Day*, London: Longman Group Ltd, 1971. P. 148

¹¹⁴ Ibid. p.10

¹¹⁵ James, Sybil, *Effects of slavery on the African psyche*, in *A celebration of Africa's roots and legacy a review workshop*, ed. Andah, Bassey W. & Bolarinwa, Kunie, Ibadan: Fajee Publications Ltd, 1993. p.20

warning that far from benefiting humanity, the leadership of *A Play of Giants'* protagonist and his allies can only lead mankind into chaotic and dehumanizing finalities tantamount to what the human species experienced in the course of history under the leadership of the afore-mentioned rulers.

Finally, throughout the play, Soyinka maintains Kamini in a situational irony that eventually makes him look like a stupid leader. In an irony of situation, sometimes referred to as irony of circumstance, "the playwright creates a contrast between what characters think is the case and what in reality is actually the case."¹¹⁶, writes Kofi Agyekum (2007: 84). Kamini believes he is in total control of Bugara. Contrary to his colleagues he displays an unruffled confidence in his power and authority when he says: "I used to have subversives too. The Western Press like to call them guerrillas. I say, I have no guerrillas in my country. Only bandits. We call them kondo. I catch any kondo. I make him smell his mother's cunt."¹¹⁷ He navigates the play's rising action asserting that confidence. But the situational irony here is that of the four heads of state he alone ends up being toppled by a military coup before the play comes to a close. Another situational irony lies in Kamini's confidence in getting his statue positioned in the United Nations. For him, the major obstacle is the Secretary-General. But he quickly finds himself in the middle of a power struggle in which he actually has to face superpowers. In those situations, the reader is made to see the simplistic approach and view that Kamini presents facing any issue. Such a contrast between the complexity of issues and the simplistic view and approach mirrors at best the stupidity of a man who assumes control of all powers in a nation.

6. Conclusion

On the whole, Soyinka's use of language in *A Play of Giants* is quite effective and very far away from Palmer's claim that "Verbal dexterity and linguistic sophistication almost become ends in themselves". It is adapted to suit the purpose of the play and to reveal characters in their natural self. Thus, the reader is brought in the intimacy of the utterances by heads of state far away from official pronouncements like speeches. Such a linguistic approach helps the reader know more about the personalities of the actors, their backgrounds and their cultures. Also, for this satirical work to achieve expected impacts on the reader, the playwright uses figures of speech that play to perfection the role they are assigned.

A Play of Giants is both a reminder and a wakeup call for those who hastily label the political systems currently underway in Africa 'democracy'. By putting on stage four African dictators and leading the reader into the intimacy of what they tell each other off the record, the dramatist gives them no choice but to trust the reader with confessions and revelations on their personalities, behavior traits, belief systems and ideologies. Thus, the reader is made to assess, through his reading experience, the

¹¹⁶ Agyekum, Kofi, *Introduction to Literature*, Ghana : MediaDESIGN, 2007. p.84

¹¹⁷ Ibid. p.2

full measure of the leaders' power bulimia, their sources of emulation and motivation, their belief system or ideology, the values they cherish and their backgrounds.

Bibliography

- Agyekum, Kofi, *Introduction to Literature*, Ghana : MediaDESIGN, 2007
- Ayandele, E. A., Afigbo, A. E., Gavin, R. J., and Omer-Cooper, J. D., *The Growth of African Civilisation The Making of Modern Africa Volume 2: The Late Nineteenth Century to the Present Day*, London: Longman Group Ltd, 1971
- Booth, Alison, Hunter, J., Paul and Mays, J., Kelly, *The Norton Introduction To Literature*, 9th ed., New York, London: W. W. NORTON & COMPANY, 2006
- Cooper, Simon, and Mackey, Sally, *Theatre Studies: An Approach for Advanced Level*, Cheltenham (England) : Stanley Thornes (Publishers) Ltd, 1995
- Hornby A. S., *Oxford advanced learner's dictionary of current English*, Oxford: Oxford University Press, 4th edition, 1989
- James, Sybil, *Effects of slavery on the African psyche*, in *A celebration of Africa's roots and legacy a review workshop*, ed. Andah, Basse W. & Bolarinwa, Kunie, Ibadan: Fajee Publications Ltd, 1993
- Ngara, Emmanuel, *Stylistic Criticism and the African Novel: a Study of the Language Art and Content of African Fiction*, London: Heinemann, 1982
- Palmer, Eustace, *An Introduction to African Novels*, London : Heinemann, 1972
- Soyinka, Wole, *A Play of Giants*, Ibadan: Spectrum Books Limited, 1997
- Krampah, D E K, *Helping with Literature*, Ghana: Ghana Publishing Corporation, 1979