

Postcolonial language debate

[Linguistics](#), [Language](#)



The postcolonial language debate about African culture has become a big issue in determining if the African culture is actually being taught to younger generations. Some African writers believe that the culture of the African people is disappearing because all of the history books and novels written about African history and culture are in the English language. Other African scholars believe that they can finally break free from the postcolonial era by using English as a weapon.

Chinua Achebe and Ngũgĩ Wa Thiong'o are great examples of African writers who take different sides about the English language and the postcolonial writings of African culture. Ngũgĩ is a firm believer that the English language is not how African culture should be viewed by outside countries and that the only way to know about African culture is to have it in its native language. He refuses to write any of his books in English and wants people to learn the native language because that is the only way African culture can really be learned.

Language is very powerful and Ngũgĩ believes was a way the English got rid of African culture. "By removing their native language from their education they are separated from their history which is replaced by European history in European languages". Ngũgĩ can recall growing up that he learned his culture and heritage through oral story telling by elders and the children would retell the stories to others. By being forced to learn English and being punished for acting or speaking in their native way, language was used as spiritual subjugation. Language carries culture and culture carries the entire body of values by which we perceive ourselves and our place in the world". If this is true how can the African culture be

expressed in a different language? Chinue Achebe took a different approach to the English language and the postcolonial language debate. He chose to learn the English language as a way to “infiltrate the ranks of the enemy and destroying him from within”.

He feels there is no point in fighting a language but by using the language forced upon him he can show others how culture really is in different African cultures. Using abrogation, meant to change the English language to suit their needs, because people accept different forms of English. There are many different villages and languages in Africa, an example he gives is his people the Igbo who have many different dialects about different things. He states that the standardized Igbo is due to Christian missionaries desire to translate the bible into indigenous tongues.

Therefore he does not believe there is one Igbo language that all Igbo can understand so he refuses to write translate his book about the Igbo culture and people in its native language, but has translated it to over thirty different languages. By having thirty different languages able to read about the Igbo Achebe believes the African culture can be spread and shared with the world around it. The language debate in Africa has become a problem because people do not know whether or not they are learning the African culture or reading the African experience.

Both Ngugi and Achebe present different ways the African people can begin to identify themselves and regain their culture that was taken from them by the colonizing European nations. Both stand at different ends of the spectrum by either using the English language as a way to inform others of

the real African culture, or refuse to write in English so the reader is forced to learn the native language, because that is the only way to really understand and see the way African culture is.