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## Exploring Multilingualism and Cultural Negotiations in Literary Narratives: A Comparative Analysis of the Role of Language in *Aké: Jahre der Kindheit* by Wole Soyinka and *Die Brücke vom Goldenen Horn* by Emine Özdamar

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### Abstract

This essay compares language and its role in cultural negotiation, focusing on Wole Soyinka's *Aké: Jahre der Kindheit* and Emine Özdamar's *Die Brücke vom Goldenen Horn*. By examining how language shapes multilingualism in these narratives and influences cultural identities, this comparative analysis presents the ways in which linguistic diversity reflects deeper cultural negotiations. Through the characters' interactions with language, readers are drawn into the complexities of communication as a space for both negotiation and conflict, particularly as characters navigate the expectations of different cultural and linguistic communities. Furthermore, this analysis explores how characters manage language differences and the broader societal attitudes toward multilingualism. By examining these renowned works from authors of distinct cultural backgrounds and experiences, this paper sheds light on the intricate connection between culture, identity, and language.

**Keywords:** Multilingualism; Cultural Negotiation; Cultural Hybridity; *Aké*; *Die Brücke vom Goldenen Horn*; Wole Soyinka; Emine Özdamar

### 1. Introduction

Within the context of cultural negotiation and identity formation in multilingual text, language plays an important role, as it is often a reflection of societal dynamics. This article presents a comparative analysis of linguistic and thematic elements in *Aké: Jahre der Kindheit* and *Die Brücke vom Goldenen Horn* to elucidate how multilingualism helps construct pluralistic yet contested cultural spaces in literature against the backdrop of colonialism and migration. Soyinka's memoir, chronicling his upbringing under British rule, employs the English language while integrating Yoruba phrases, words, songs, and proverbs, reflecting the uneasy postcolonial linguistic hierarchy that privileged the English language over indigenous languages. Meanwhile, Özdamar's semi-autobiographical novel depicts a Turkish migrant worker's cultural adjustment in Germany. Her experience as a Turkish guestworker in Germany accentuates her hybrid identity as she integrated into German society. Through a postcolonial, linguistic, and thematic analysis, this comparative study argues that the presence of multiple languages in both texts helps portray hybrid identities and cultural negotiations within the broader contexts of linguistic imperialism, migration, and cultural collision. The analysis provides extensive insights into how multilingual creative expression subtly exposes underlying power dynamics while championing cultural plurality in literary narratives.

By closely reading the linguistic and thematic elements in both texts, the analysis aims to elucidate how the texts' multilingualism helps construct hybrid identities while exposing underlying tensions, ranging from linguistic hierarchies created by English and German dominance to cultural dissonance faced by the protagonists.

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**NB:** *Aké: Jahre der Kindheit* was originally published as *Aké: The Years of Childhood in English*, while *Die Brücke vom Goldenen Horn* was originally written in German. The translation of *Aké* is based on its English version, whereas I have personally translated excerpts from *Die Brücke vom Goldenen Horn* into English.

## 2. Significance of Cultural Negotiations in Shaping the Characters and Plot in the Novels

Cultural negotiations play a significant role in shaping the characters and plot in both *Aké* and *Die Brücke vom Goldenen Horn*. The characters in these novels face a labyrinth of cultural identities and oscillate between cultures. In *Aké*, the protagonist navigates between the encounter of Nigerian and colonial cultural forces, whereas in Özdamar's *Die Brücke vom Goldenen Horn*, the protagonist wrestles between Turkish and Western values.

These negotiations of cultures not only inform the characters' actions and decisions but also contribute to the overall development of the plot. In *Aké* and *Die Brücke vom Goldenen Horn*, the role of language as a means of cultural negotiations is emphasized. Both narratives experiment with multi-layered complexities associated with multilingualism in multi-lingual societies. A microcosm of cultural negotiation is articulated through the characters functioning in and with these languages, showcasing how language intersects with culture to shape identities and offer a more complete comprehension of their complex lives in the broader society.

### 2.1. Multilingual Aesthetics in *Aké: Jahre der Kindheit*

*Aké* unfolds in the vibrant landscape of Nigeria, where linguistic diversity mirrors the multiplicity of cultural identities. Readers are made aware from the opening passages of this memoir that the world the protagonist, Wole, finds himself in a "complex hybridization of 'traditional' Yoruba norms and Western, Christian modernity." (George, 2008)

*All das überwucherte, hügelige Gelände gehört zu Aké. Wir empfanden mehr als bloße Loyalität gegenüber dem Pfarrhaus und daraus erwuchs- nicht ohne stillen Groll- die Frage, warum es Gott gefiel, von der profanen Höhe Itokos aus auf seine fromme zweigstelle, das Pfarreigelände, hinabzuschauen. Denn dort, fast auf dem Gipfel des Berges, gab es auch den geheimnisvollen Pferdestall des Chieffs mit seinen richtigen Pferden. Dahinter scherte dann der schwindelerregende Pfad ab, führte von einem lärm-erfüllten Markt zum nächsten und gab schließlich über Ibarapa und Ita Aké den Blick frei bis hinein in die tiefsten Schlupfwinkel des Pfarrgrundstücks.(S. 7)*

*The sprawling, undulating terrain is all of Ake. More than mere loyalty to the parsonage gave birth to a puzzle, and a resentment, that God should choose to look down on his own pious station, the parsonage compound, from the profane heights of Itoko. There was of course the mystery of the Chief's stable with live horses near the crest of the hill, but beyond that, this dizzying road only sheered upwards from one noisy market to the other, looking down across Ibarapa and Ita Ake into the most secret recesses of the parsonage itself. (P. 1)*

The excerpt illustrates the "complex hybridization of 'traditional' Yoruba norms and Western, Christian modernity" through its depiction of the parsonage compound and its juxtaposition with the surrounding Yoruba landscape. The parsonage, a symbol of Western Christian influence, embodies the intrusion of a foreign religious ideology into a traditional Yoruba setting. This is reinforced by the Wole's puzzlement that "God should choose to look down on his own pious station" from the "profane heights of Itoko," highlighting a Christian moral perspective that classifies spaces as sacred or profane. In contrast, the surrounding landscape with its "boisterous market" and the Chief's stable—signifies the lively and traditional Yoruba culture that sees social and economic activities intimately intertwined with amenities for community life. The coexistence of these elements—the parsonage as a marker of Western religious modernity and the bustling markets as a symbol of traditional norms—creates a dynamic, hybridized world in which Wole navigates and begins to form his understanding of the cultural and spiritual tensions around him.

Reading through the novel, readers are introduced to a world where English, Yoruba, and Pidgin languages are not mere linguistic tools but powerful conduits for cultural expression and negotiation. As Soyinka navigates the intricate sociolinguistic landscape, the use of Yoruba and English becomes a narrative strategy that transcends linguistic boundaries. One of the numerous examples is when Wole recounts Sanya's experience:

*Sanya wo niyen? Er war der erste, der Fersengeld gab. Bo o ló yà mi, odi kítipà kítipà! (S. 16)*

*Sanya wo niyen? He was the first to break and run. Bo o ló yà mi, odi kítipà kítipà! (P. 7)*

This demonstrates how different languages have different situational functions for the characters. Similarly, vernacular language appears in the confrontation scene between Paa Adatan and the messenger soldiers. Paa Adatan said:

*Ihr nix besser wie Hitler. Raus, raus da, ihr kämpfen wie Männer! (S. 172)*

*You no better pass Hitler. Commot for that shop make you fight like men! (P. 119)*

In another conversation with Wole's mother, Paa Adatan said:

*Ah, Mama Wole, Engländer die wollen Ruhm ganz nur für sich. Die nix wollen schwarzer Mann gewinnen Krieg und machen Schluß mit Hitler-Quatsch, zack-zack. Du sie nur ansehen. Hitler, der werfen Bomben auf Lagos und die nix können machen uns verteidigen (S. 169)*

*Ah. Mama Wole, this English people just wan ' the glory for den self. Den no wan ' blackman to win dis war and finish off dat nonsense-yeye Hider one time! Now look them. Hitler dey bombing us for Lagos already and they no fit defend we (110)*

Soyinka emphasizes the diverse nature and fluidity of post-colonial identity through context-specific linguistic shifts. His characters often show a linguistic and dialectical blending that signifies more profound cultural and personal transformations. These transitions become possible communicative avenues through which subtleties of belonging, alienation, and resistance can be expressed. By switching between languages and cultural references, Soyinka's characters manifest the tensions and contradictions in their experiences while drawing attention to the struggle for self-definition in a colonized world.

In addition, this oscillation between languages symbolizes the conflicting transition within the societies where they dwell, where tradition and colonialism cohabit and compete for influence. Soyinka utilizes this flexibility to critique the rigid categorization that has commonly been applied both by colonial powers and post-colonial narratives while at the same time advocating for a more comprehensive understanding of identity that appreciates paradox and change.

### *2.1.1. Language as a Representation of Culture*

In the novel, different languages connote cultural distinctions between characters. Yoruba, one of the native languages in Nigeria, often carries profound cultural connotations, serving as a marker of identity and heritage, which El Samad also views as a *"suitable medium to express resistance to preconceived impressions about the colonized."* (El Samad, 2014). Soyinka uses the Yoruba language to resist the hierarchy that Aristotle put forward between the *"civilized"* Greek and *"barbarian"* languages that lack precise terms for ideas. This served as an excuse to impose English across the British empire (Phillipson, 2008). English, a colonial legacy, represents a complex intersection of power and communication. With its informal and adaptable nature, Pidgin becomes a tool for characters to express shared experiences, challenges, and emotions that transcend traditional linguistic boundaries. The presence of pidgin in the narrative, thus, emphasizes the quotidian cultural negotiations happening within the lives of the other characters in the novel by providing a keen insight into the pliancy and flexibility of language as a vehicle for expression and communication. With its presence in the linguistic landscape of the narrative, Pidgin does not just acknowledge the historical and cultural layers of the interactions of Nigerian society; it also foregrounds the fluidity of language to reflect the continuing negotiations between tradition and modernity, identity, and assimilation. These linguistic elements are integrated as the foundation of multiplicity in cultural identity rooted in language.

### *2.1.2. Language and Cultural Borders*

The characters in Aké often use their language choices as a negotiating tool between cultural boundaries. The choice of language, therefore, becomes part of how relationships and interactions are characterized. For instance, the protagonist, Wole, moves seamlessly between languages, reflecting the fluidity of his cultural identity. Same as his father and mother. The exploration of language in the novel goes beyond a linguistic analysis; it becomes a lens through which cultural negotiations are enacted by shedding light on the intricacies of coexisting identities within the Nigerian context.

Moreover, The characters' language choices often reveal their social status, education, and emotional states. Language thus serves as one of the significant markers of identity. In times of joy, anger, or nostalgia, the characters select the language that authentically expresses their feelings and conveys their emotional state aptly.

## **2.2. Multilingualism and Cultural Hybridity in *Die Brücke vom Goldenen Horn***

Multilingualism in the story is not just an artistic choice; it is a central theme that essentially relates to the negotiations of identity by the protagonist. Özdamar explores the challenges of sustaining one's own cultural identity and adjusting to and absorbing another through the protagonist's journey. One of the ways she demonstrates this in the novel is by

playing with the idea of the destroyed Anhalter train station opposite her "Wonaym" (It sounds like *Wohnheim* in German, which means dormitory in the English language) in the context of the Turkish language. She said:

*Aus dem rechten Busfenster sah ich die Zeitung, aus dem linken Busfenster sah ich den Anhalter Bahnhof, der wie das Hebbeltheater gegenüber unserem Wonaym stand. Wir nannten ihn den zerbrochenen Bahnhof. Das türkische Wort für >>zerbrochen<< bedeutete gleichzeitig auch >>beleidigt<<. So heiß er auch >>der beleidigte Bahnhof<<. (S. 24)*

*As translated by me:*

*From the right bus window, I saw the newspaper; from the left bus window, I saw the Anhalter Bahnhof, which stood opposite our apartment, like the Hebbel Theater. We called it the broken station. The Turkish word for "broken" also meant "offended." So it was also called "the offended station."*

By contesting the definitions of German, Turkish, or foreign identity, Özdamar delves into her linguistic and cultural origins. (Hall, 1996, p. 4). She proposes a linguistic alternative like a *Third Space*, where German and Turkish voices intermingle and coexist. The novel shows how language shapes our perception of the world and contributes to our personal and cultural identity. In her coming-of-age story, the young girl moves from a monolingual environment into a German-speaking world, where she doesn't understand any German and must learn to express herself in new ways, literally and figuratively.

The protagonist begins her cultural integration journey in her *Wonaym* in Berlin as a Turkish guest worker in Germany who can communicate in English and also tries to acquire the German language by memorizing newspaper headlines.

*Ich konnte kein Wort Deutsch und lernte die Sätze, so wie man, ohne English zu sprechen, >>I can't get no satisfaction<< singt. Wie ein Hähnchen, das Gak gak macht. Gak gak gak konnte eine Antwort sein auf einen Satz, den man nicht hören wollte. Jemand fragte zum Beispiel >>Niye böyle gürültüyle yürüyorsun?<< (Warum machst du soviel Krach, wenn du läufst?), und ich antwortete mit einer deutschen Schlagzeile: >>Wenn aus Hausrat Unrat wird.<<*

*Vielleicht lernte ich die Schlagzeilen auswendig, weil ich, bevor ich Arbeiterin nach Berlin gekommen war, in Istanbul sechs Jahre lang Jugend-Theater gespielt hatte. (S 11)*

*As translated by me:*

*I couldn't speak a word of German and learned sentences the way one sings "I can't get no satisfaction" without speaking English. Like a chicken that goes "Gak gak." "Gak gak gak" could be an answer to a sentence one didn't want to hear. Someone, for example, asked, "Niye böyle gürültüyle yürüyorsun?" (Why are you making so much noise when you walk?), and I responded with a German headline: "Wenn aus Hausrat Unrat wird" (When household goods become rubbish).*

*Perhaps I memorized the headlines because, before I came to Berlin as a worker, I had spent six years acting in youth theater in Istanbul.*

As a Turkish immigrant in Germany, the protagonist must learn German to survive, and throughout the novel, we observe her language acquisition process. By making the protagonist multilingual, Özdamar explores the struggles and changes the protagonist undergoes within a foreign country's social and cultural environment.

Initially, the protagonist tries to use translation to guide herself through German society (Özdamar S. 17), however, she eventually comes to use German to complement her mother tongue, Turkish. The German language becomes part of her in addition to her Turkish heritage, evidencing her becoming and transformation in the new environment. With the protagonist's German skills, she becomes independent in the new country. Yet, by speaking Turkish, she retains a symbolic connection with her homeland. This diversity in identity shows her hybridity through the fusion of her native and foreign cultures and experiences. The protagonist's identity oscillates between Turkish, German, and sometimes English cultures. Her multilingualism and hybridity evoke a postmodern fragmentation and fluidity of identity.

Furthermore, the novel can be classified as a semi-autobiography because Özdamar herself had a similar experience of moving to Germany from Turkey. The narrative can be interpreted as subtly portraying her multilingual experience as she grows into adulthood. Insight from Özdamar's biography and the presence of multilingualism in the text allows readers to understand the use of language in the text as embodying the emotional landscape of displacement, migration, and self-discovery.

### 2.2.1. Language as a Channel of Cultural Hybridity

Soyinka portrays language as a borderline cultural difference, while Özdamar presents it as a vehicle for cultural hybridization. The characters in these two books are situated within a linguistic, social environment that is reflective of their dual identities. The two novels, thus, recount the way language operates as a dynamic force, molding, and remolding characters' experiences while traversing the crossroads of different languages and cultures.

Matthes (2005) states that it is the crossing of borders among countries, cultures, and languages that gives voice to the migrant writer. Matthes (2005) noted the intermingling of Homi K. Bhabha's concept of hybridity and the *Third Space*, which provides a theoretical framework for interpreting migrant texts. Hybridity, according to Bhabha, is not a resolution of the tension between two cultures but rather a strategy for overcoming the exclusivity of dominant discourses, allowing migrants to negotiate and translate their identities freely (Bhabha, 1994a). Bhabha sees hybridity as constant identification rather than a fixed identity (Bhabha, 1994a). The *Third Space* is the in-between where the negotiation occurs, characterized by intermingling the migrant's background, creating cultural and linguistic heterogeneity (Bhabha, 1994c). As a result, migrant writers develop what Bhabha calls the *double vision*, which is the merging of unique narrative perspectives that aren't simply a merger of past and present but a simultaneous existence of multiple cultural viewpoints.

## 2.3. Comparative Analysis: Crossroads of Multilingual Narratives

### 2.3.1. Comparing Linguistic Strategies in Both Novels

In analyzing the role of language and the use of multilingualism in *Aké* and *Die Brücke vom Goldenen Horn*, it is valuable to consider the backdrop of both works. Soyinka recalls his childhood in *Aké* when Nigeria was still under British colonial rule, which he compiled as a reflective memoir, drawing attention to why language operates on two major levels in the text. English is the language of education in Nigeria and also a symbol of colonial power that encroaches on the local culture. Soyinka, nevertheless, remains deeply rooted in the Yoruba language, a language of cultural observances, history, and identity. Multilingualism in *Aké* becomes, therefore, an articulation of a double reality struggle against the imposition of English and celebration of the capacity of native speech to preserve cultural integrity and resistance.

Soyinka's narrative is both an account of the personal experience of linguistic duality and, by extension, a microcosm of the linguistic landscape of Nigeria during the colonial period. It brings into contour the kind of multilingualism where languages counteract each other, with the indigenous one resisting assimilation and seeking to maintain its position. This dualism shows how language is a means of communication, a marker of identity, and a repository of collective memory.

On the other hand, *Die Brücke vom Goldenen Horn* captures the experience of a Turkish immigrant learning to navigate life in Germany during the 1960s. The novel presents multilingualism as a lived experience of an immigrant who can shift between her native Turkish and her adopted German language. Özdamar's protagonist enters the German language not through family or formal education, as Soyinka does with English, but through the necessity of pursuing her interest in acting and for daily survival and the instinct to adapt to a new cultural environment.

Özdamar illustrates the transformative power of language as her protagonist starts to discover new aspects of her identity through her engagement with German. Unlike in *Aké*, where English represents colonial domination, in *Die Brücke vom Goldenen Horn*, learning German is portrayed more as a personal journey and an expansion of the self. Multilingualism here is intertwined with migration and the reformation of identity. It includes the excitement of learning and creating a hybrid identity that neither remains purely Turkish nor becomes entirely German.

Both authors use language to develop their characters' sense of self and negotiate their social environments. The British imposed the English language in Nigeria, which is why Soyinka juxtaposed it with his Indigenous language to reflect national sovereignty and personal self-determination amidst colonial pressure. Özdamar's protagonist undergoes self-transformation and self-discovery, overwhelming the rigid postures of decisive cultural opposition with the fluid and dynamic interaction between cultures that define her migrant experience.

### 2.3.2. Impact on Character Development

Exploring multilingualism significantly impacts character development in the two novels. In these works, characters maneuver their cultural landscapes with language by providing readers with insight into the complexity of identity formation for multilingual individuals.

Specifically, the young protagonist in *Aké* utilizes his affiliation with the Yoruba tradition and exposure to colonial language and religion to understand his environment and himself to push back against an established norm throughout the narrative. Similarly, the protagonist in *Die Brücke vom Goldenen Horn* accumulates language skills while working in a radio factory, memorizing headlines, attending a language course at Goethe Institute, and living in Germany. Her linguistic journey parallels her political awakening and the development of self.

Both Soyinka and Özdamar reveal to what extent language shapes emotional inner lives in their works. The linguistic aspect enriches and adds a twist to the characterization, giving a feel of psychological realism in the novels. What the readers have in this instance is an understanding of how the world expands and contracts by the acquisition of language. Multilingualism makes the characters more human and more complicated. Their emotional attachment to different languages is similar to that of many people from multicultural backgrounds.

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### 3. Conclusion

#### *Summarizing Key Findings*

These two works share many similarities while also diverging in key ways. When juxtaposed, they reveal a striking emphasis on the interplay between language, culture, and identity. Both novels employ multilingualism as an artistic narrative device, allowing readers to witness how their characters navigate cultural realities through language. In many ways, language emerges as an active force in shaping their identities— both as a marker of cultural differences and as a tool for cultural integration.

#### *Broader Implications and Future Considerations*

Beyond the examples of these two novels, different aspects of multilingualism in literature become critical in articulating the importance of language in cultural negotiation and identity-building. In this age of globalization, this framing of language and its role in creating identity brings additional relevance to human experiences shared across the globe. Although this discourse unpacks the connections and divergences of these works, further explorations may examine new dimensions of linguistic landscapes in contemporary texts, which can deepen our understanding of how language, culture, and identity work together.

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